

Cultural Background: "Where you are from matters a lot for us." What my mom said when I asked why her friend wanted to know exactly where our family is from. For people out in the country, those families have been dirt poor for hundreds of years. After the war it only got worse, the entire countryside was destroyed so many families did what they could to earn money, including marriages. This is based on a real woman. The way she talks and thinks is the same, it is just translated into English which was a bit tough as many of our words and phrases don't translate well. Like mine, her family had many daughters, and what can a poor woman be but beautiful? (This is a saying used a lot among Dutch women in poverty) This is a true story! I am happy to give details about how everything went down if people want them.

Note: VMBO- easiest high school track offered in the Netherlands. It is four years, not six, and your placement is determined by your teachers and the government.

Basisschool- elementary school

The American Matrix

His name was Carl, he was an American traveling Europe after college graduation. I had also just graduated, VMBO was finally over. He was suntanned, a bit red and pink over his cheeks like John Travolta in Grease. Back then he was a pro tennis player. Back then I had a white bikini and a frontal lobe that would never develop.

We met on a beach in Turkey. The water was as rich and intoxicating as the blue curacao spilling over our hands and the green in his pockets.

The rest of my life began right there.

Giving birth was nothing like anything I have ever experienced before. That pain, the one that looms over a woman's head the day she is born. I believe it collects you see. Every scraped knee, bloody pad, every time a man wraps his hand around your neck in the name of intimacy, it collects.

It is held in this blood bank until it is needed to make a child, and when it does, all of that pain comes with it.

Disagree with me if you wish. It will tell me you either have a penis, never given birth, or your husband let you have an epidural.

When the nurse handed him to me, he was screaming, red. A perfect white haired blue eyed son, just as Carl wanted. I felt a moment of relief, I could rest. The quest for a son had been completed. It dawned on me then, as I held Lukaas for the first time, that I should never have a child with this man again.

Whether it was his impatient foot tapping the tile, or the sour expression he wore curling up in that chair, I felt a pit in my stomach that had nothing to do with my bleeding insides.

I had been told things about American men. That they were sharp, wealthy, hardworking, strong. These things were true, I just didn't realize that strength would permeate everything, every moment of supposed softness. I didn't realize that part of the work he would take credit for would fall on my shoulders. This family I had helped him construct would take his last name. He would take everything.

And so it was.

What could I do? Leave?

Without my marriage I could not stay in the States. I have never had a job. Carl is my job, the job I got after graduation. It pays well, his parents. His father was a Chevron tycoon. Oil.

I remember when the principal was the only man in town with a car.

We were skating on a pond before basisschool. The winter was cold. The air off the sea had been dry that year, not so many clouds to keep us warm. The pond was more like a ditch. Out here the ground is soft, moist, water flows beneath everything. It is not unusual for the ground to dip just enough for water to collect and freeze over.

On days like these my whole class would meet to skate. We would chase each other, spin about, stick our hands beneath each other's coats to keep the frost at bay; but that day I fell and hit my head, my knees were bleeding. Red blood on the white dust. Blue ice. Cold.

I don't remember how, that's not what's important. What's important is the car. The teachers gathered around and the principal was called to take me to the hospital. It was noisy, a commotion, but I loved it. When else can you be the center of attention so easily?

On the drive to the hospital I was quiet. The backseat was so large, a plush leather couch as soft as my mother's gloves. As I ran my fingers over the delicate seams I decided right there, I am going to have this life.

I liked Carl at first because I had never seen his type of money before. Sure, there were some old manors of fallen Dutch nobles scattered across the countryside, but not money like this. Carl had the money I could see at the cinema if I decided to bike there and spend 10 euros at all.

They had multiple houses, some for business, leisure, skiing. More houses than I had siblings, and that sure is a lot.

It was a golden opportunity, the kind a woman is offered once in her life, if at all. In dream I imagine myself picking someone else. I walk down that beach without looking at him and continue off into the sunset. Somewhere along the sand I will meet a movie star, a businessman, a doctor, a prince. I will take his hand and he will spin me away to his world, a better world than this, with perks better than his.

I feel floaty, high. The comedown of awakening into the same bed night after night collects in my blood bank. I fall pregnant again.

Another son, how wonderful. Another son with a Dutch name and an American accent. Another son I am allowed to speak to only in English. Another son just like his father.

So what can I do then? Leave?

If so, I have no choice but to return to Holland. I will leave my sons with a father who doesn't know how to make a bottle or even clean it. He will hire a nanny to do all the housework and care for his sons. He will hire a maid with big breasts so that when he squints he can see me scrubbing his floors all over again.

And so I don't.

I adjust my plan. I must wait for my blood bank to refill, it will not take long, his tongue is sharp, cuts deep.

Lukaas is in a high chair clipped to our kitchen island and Lars is in my arms, he needs to be burped. The morning is quiet, sun is streaming in through the windows, no longer obscured by the holly branches. This is our new house. Carl's parents bought it for us. He's an English teacher

now, but with the way he goes to work you would think he is an Army General. The needs, the complaints. On the first day of kindergarten I will pack him a lunch that shows I have been making lunches for my children for a long time. I am an expert. I am a perfect wife.

And he

will tell me I forgot the mayo.

I could never forget the mayo. I am mayo. He only likes it because of me. When I order it with fries he always cracks a joke and then eats some too. Somehow it is only funny when I say it, when I eat it. But that's how everything is, isn't it?

I must say Carl, you have a knack for making me hate things.

The list begins with educators like you.

I am no stranger to being laughed at by a teacher. The class may chuckle too, my face will burn bright pink, and my friends will laugh about it for a week, then it's gone.

But educators like to remind us that they are smart, they remember. They remember better than you. So when the car keys are lost and I offer to look you will shout no because you look better. And because you look better, you will look, and as you look you will get frustrated because. Because even if you do look better your patience is conditional. Because you are smart you have never waited, things about you happen fast. The idea of stopping to think doesn't cross your mind because your mind has no flaws and therefore no reason to slow down. But if you were to slow down, slow down to my level, perhaps you would say less and look more. But you don't, so you tear the couch cushions apart with so much force you don't notice the keys hit the floor.

But I will because I'm slow. So slow I don't think better of picking them up and handing them to you. You were looking first, you were looking better. Mistake.

Men have a blood bank too. It's shallow, fills easily. Like how a few sprinkles are enough to be called rain. A few drops, little pain, becomes storm, anger explosion.

So explode American man. Explode like the bomb you are. Show me the damage you have done the world all in one night and do it in my living room. Do it while I hold our son. Do it while our other son hides behind my leg and then behind the couch. Do it until I tell you I am leaving. Do it until you tell me I can have 10,000 more this time if that's what I really want.

Do it all over again. Tomorrow.

So I hold out. I hold out for a daughter. My blood bank is full and I am blessed with a daughter. Blessed with a daughter that picks you and the house and the dog and the cars and the clothes, just like I did. But I don't know that yet.

Because I don't know that yet, I raise you with love and an American name. You will know of Queen's Day, but you won't know it changes based on who rules. You will know Amsterdam as a vacation to another land. You will see my home and think of it as boring. You will see that life looks differently based on what and who you choose, and you will make the same choice I would've. Because in the end, you are we.

But I don't know yet,

that you will have to choose.

After dinner at the Smith's I will drive home drunk. It's only about a mile, and I know these roads. After dinner at the Smith's I will forget to text. I don't thank people. You will be sitting quietly in the passenger seat, you are saving loud for later. You are saving loud for home.

I love to bring you with me to these things. None of the other husbands like you. That should be hard to do shouldn't it? Among men friendship is easy. You laugh when you should and take a sip of beer when you shouldn't; but you don't, you make a fool of yourself by being a dick, and I get to bring it up later at a wine night. You make it easy for me this way.

You can't help yourself can you? You have to be the best in every room. So tonight I explode. I am the loudest.

You would think after so many years with an English teacher my English would be great right? It's great right? I learned it in school so it should be great shouldn't it. But if it's great, why do you laugh? Why do you laugh when I say "rural"? My accent isn't sexy anymore? Is that it?

And what about that dog? I told you we don't raise our children with pets. It encourages laziness. American children are lazy. So lazy their dog becomes my new son. I have four sons now, Lukaas, Lars, Cody, and you.

Amy? What about her? Sure, she's not what I had hoped, far from it. You see a daughter can be as valuable, if not more valuable than a son. A smart son is nice, but a smart AND beautiful daughter can catch a smarter son and that's better. A smart son can improve his parent's circumstances just a bit, but a smart and beautiful daughter can change their lives. Look at you, the smart son. You drain the pockets of your parents with the ungratefulness that leaks from the

mouths of every smart son. It gets everywhere, all over your smart son and your stupid son and your beautiful but stupid daughter.

But even now you can blame me. Lukaas is ugly because of you, and Lars and Amy are stupid because of me. What's worse? In the Netherlands we say ugly, because a smart mouth won't get you a place to sleep, but some red lips will.

I will paint my lips red every morning from now on,
and you will treasure your ugly son, because being born first is the most important thing in the red-white-and-blue.

Lukaas has graduated from Boulder and Lars is at SDSU, Amy is still in high school, and you want to move to LA. "It's something about the palm trees" or "something about the sun" but I don't want the sun. I like it here. I have friends here. Everyone I know for 1,000 miles lives here.

I am not sure what to do with myself, so I ask the only person who would know. Sanne Smith. She is the same as me, but not as good. I am much more beautiful, with a richer husband and a bigger house. She is the only other Dutch woman here. She doesn't get an allowance like I do, I bet she's jealous.

The only thing she has is a smart daughter, which I need, a daughter smart enough to hear me in Dutch and give me an English plan.

I want new dick and a new purse. What I have is no longer enough. Carl has been pushing back, I want 20k more this year and he thinks that's not fair. Money is meant to be spent and he has so much he will die before he sees his last ten million.

So her daughter gives me a plan. Let him move to LA alone. We have more than enough for another house, so say yes, the good wife. Once he is there with an empty bed, he will find someone to pick up his socks and suck him dry in no time.

I must wait, but my lips have been painted red for years.

May 27, 2023

He is here, playing in Dogstar at Bottlerock. All of us wives are here. Us wives with our husband's wallets and our mother's time and four bars of shroom chocolates. They won't leave to go to another set, but I want to see Dogstar.

Kirsten's friend from high school just died so her friends are here too. I want to see Dogstar, so I tell her I can hear her dead friend saying she doesn't like this set and wants to go see Dogstar.

I took a class once from a psychic in Nijmegen.

As I sit beside Sanne on the grass I can't hold it in anymore. I am having an affair with a man much more beautiful and wealthier than my husband. We met on Instagram, he couldn't resist. We have been talking everyday for weeks. He tells me everything about his band, his movies, his life. I want it. He is here right now, looking for me in the crowd as he strums the bass. The women scream, they want him so badly, but they don't know who's tits he looks at pictures of at night. She turns to me like she can't believe what I'm saying, but what would you expect from a woman who knows nothing of men?

He wants to help me leave Carl. He knows how much I hate him, how mean he is, how stingy he is with his money. I have told him Carl needs to leave me first, I want the money; but he's impatient, he wants me that badly.

So he gives me a plan better than Sanne's daughter ever could have, a plan to make money myself. He can turn my 50k of leftover allowance into 1.2 million overnight, so I make the arrangements. It is bitcoin, I try to explain it to Sanne but she's too stupid. So much for her smart husband in finance, she's learned nothing.

To get the million back I need another 50k, but I don't have any. I will get my check of 120k for Christmas from Carl's parents, but I can't wait seven months. Luckily I manage the money around here and there is plenty to pull from. I drain our joint savings and replace it right away with a check. I have to pull the same amount from Carl's trust before he notices.

That night Keanu says he can't wait to fuck his soulmate.

"Carl is such a prick he hasn't even noticed I don't fuck him anymore"

"I haven't loved him in five years"

"I can't wait to taste your cock"

Carl was waiting in the kitchen when I got back from my lip flip. The bank called him about the trust, he never approved the transaction. He's read everything too, my computer is open before him.

Luckily this is his fault for being abusive, my friends all know it, I tell them every day. I am prepared. We fight and he shoves me, I call the police and give him a night in jail. What does it matter where I got this bruise? It looks big enough doesn't it?

That was my only mistake, he doesn't want to give me anything now. If I retract my statement I can get even more, so I do. Stingy until the end. I have to move to a one-bedroom and find a job, but nothing pays like Chevron. So I get my meager two million, and I leave to go back without you like I always planned.

I live in Laren now and am renting a house. I quit the awful job I had in the States, twenty hours a week was too much. I barely call my friends, but when I do I tell them how small my house is. I tell them about my red bike, how I miss my white Audi.

I miss my children too, I left the second we divorced. They live with him and I live here. I only got that two million from him in the end. I deserved more, half of the hundreds of millions he has.

Sanne will tell me I could have if I wasn't so stupid.

If I bike North for a while I will come to the edge.

I can see the sea from here,

it is so very blue.