

LEFT OUT

WHEN THE TRUTH DOESN'T FIT IN



a memoir

TARA READE

*foreword by
Rose McGowan*



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LEFT OUT: WHEN THE TRUTH DOESN'T FIT IN

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CHAPTER 1: Tara-rized: Scandal in a Pandemic

“May you have an interesting life.”
—Chinese blessing and curse

There is a beach in Morro Bay, CA, where I used to ride my dappled grey Arabian horse, Charizmaa. When her hooves pounded the sand, her lope made me feel like I was floating. I would lean forward and drop my hands down, brushing the surf with my fingers, skimming the foamy wetness of the waves, as Charizmaa stretched her stride. Our mutual trust was so complete that I could relax into the ride completely. This singular memory carried me through years of struggle and grief.

The day before I left for Washington, D.C. in 1993, I struggled to say goodbye to Charizmaa as I brushed her mane and fed her treats. I knew it would be months before I could see and ride her again. I felt the fluttering of my unknown future pulling at me as I prepared to pack. I had just landed a position with Senator Joseph Biden as a Staff Assistant. I could not have known that what I anticipated as the beginning of a new career would turn out to be the end.

April 2020

Years later, I stood staring out my kitchen window at a mother turkey with her babies trailing and beeping behind her. The neighbor's wisteria was beginning to fade in the spring. I methodically ground my coffee for the pour over, savoring the nutty smell, my cats demanding their food -- when my trance was broken by my phone buzzing then ringing at the counter. My daughter's name popped up, so I answered it.

“Mom... Mama... I can't, oh my god... have you seen?” my daughter, Michaela, incoherently shrieked out from the other end of the phone.

I had not yet turned on the radio or looked at the Internet that day, and I did not own a TV.

“Mom, they are talking about you and... oh my god... they... it’s...” she was sputtering in a high pitch that she used when she was angry.

“Hold on, Michaela, what is going on?” I remained calm.

“People online and in the media are calling you names and a liar!” She was on the verge of tears. “I keep getting calls and messages on my phone asking for you.”

I gazed out the window as I listened to her on speaker. The mother turkey was now herding the smallest baby away from the driveway. I watched her weave and expertly keep her little flock together.

I reluctantly looked at my twitter feed and the flood of articles on the Internet. *Liar, Bitch, Whore* and worse were scattered throughout my direct messages and emails.

“Kiks, we knew this might get difficult.” Kiks is my special nickname for Michala.

“Difficult?! Ma, this is unreal what they are saying about you. Are you okay?”

I replied, “Give me a minute, sweets, and I will call you back.”

“Okay,” she responded sadly.

I sighed as I told her how much I loved her before I hung up. My history with Joe Biden that had once been a secret between my family and me, along with a few select friends, was now fodder for the world.

Later that morning, a strident female voice with an East Coast twang called.

“Tara?” she asks.

I answered “Yes?”

“This is Beth Reinhard from *The Washington Post*. You have come forward with a sexual assault allegation against Joe Biden. Don’t you realize this will hurt his campaign?” She is almost shouting at me.

I was stunned and silent for a second. I had talked to reporters before, including *The Post* in 2019, when I discussed the sexual harassment I endured in Joe Biden’s office. However, this was the first time I was scolded. She continued her questions that sounded more like statements. I stayed on the phone to answer all of them.

“I was too scared to come forward with everything, and I have been trying to come forward for a while!” I sounded defensive even to myself.

She launched into a demand to hear my entire story.

“I spoke about it all on the Katie Halper podcast.” I answered with a sigh.

“I need to hear it from the beginning from you,” she insisted.

I am not in the entertainment business. I’m a “civilian” to the media, and I did not realize that it’s entirely plausible to say “no” to reporters or not respond at all. At this particular moment, I had no public relations guidance and no lawyer. I thought it may be poor form to not answer, even impolite. Also, I was isolated in my studio house, like most of the country, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Sheltering and isolating were still new terms in our collective lexicon—with a very uncertain future to come.

As I started telling her my memory of what happened with Joe Biden, Beth continued to interject, abruptly at times.

As I approached recounting the assault, my emotions swirled, and I felt that dizzying dread wash over me. I hadn’t told the story too many times; in fact, I’d spent most of my life trying to erase it and its effect on my whole self.

“Did he move his hand upwards?” she asked.

I felt a sharp intake of my own breath. *What does she mean?* I wondered.

Finally, in a more assertive tone, Beth asked, “Did he touch your clitoris?”

I stammered as I acknowledged he had moved his hand upwards after he pulled out his fingers. *Was she implying that I experienced pleasure? Or was she trying to make it sound consensual? What did this even mean?* She repeated her question, which I heard as an echo.

The conversation ended with my sobbing. “Oh, Tara. I will call you back,” she stated impatiently in that discernable Eastern affect. She hung up. There was a double click as she disconnected.

I went to my bathroom and retched. I had not eaten, so I mostly was dry-heaving. I knelt and cried on the bathroom floor. My cat wandered in, his little nose touched me with concern. I picked him up and held him tight until he finally wiggled free from the intensity of my emotions.

Is this how reporters talk? Was this normal for them to cause more traumas with interviews? Why was she asking me about my clitoris? I felt ashamed by my lack of courage to put her in her place and to back off.

Not too long after, I realized why she was asking. I watched as the strange conversations began to unfold on social media.

Later the same day, I found myself on the phone with another reporter asking for my opinion.

Then I came across this tweet from one of the reporters I spoke with:



I read and reread the offensive post. I read many responses to the awful post. I started to feel numb, as my private parts had now become public discussion and debate.

“Mom, are you doing okay? I saw the latest,” Michaela asked during another phone call.

“No... Yes, I am trying to move though this, but wow!” I replied.

“I just cannot believe they are discussing you in this way.” She sounded incredulous and angry.

I decided to lighten the conversation, “Well, I guess that man in the article claims he is an expert on consent-based positions, like a vagina whisperer or something.” I laughed at the absurdity of my own joke.

I received horrified silence from Michaela, who soon broke her own silence to remind me, “Mom, you are using humor as a defense mechanism again. You need to process this trauma.” Wise beyond her young age.

“It is only a mechanism if you laugh,” I answered, and Michaela finally chuckled.

“Anyway, honey, I know this is super cringe.”

“Mom, don’t say cringe,” she interrupted.

I laughed, remembering her as a teenager scolding me or rolling her eyes at friends when I said things like “lame” or “sketch,” as if they were still popular expressions.

“Quit trying to be cool, Mom,” she would say as I took her to school.

“Perhaps my vagina wanted to say something to the world,” I said philosophically.

“Oh, MY GOD, Mom. THAT is cringe. Do not say the word vagina before coffee.” She finally laughed, and the tension and sadness evaporated.

I made a mental note, adding that word to my forbidden-terms list.

”Have you heard from Collin?” she asked me about my younger brother.

“Yes, he didn’t know what to say, and he’s absorbed in the new stay-at-home guidance. His gigs are cancelling out through June,” I responded.

“Wow,” Michaela answered.

“Love you, honey.”

“Love you, Mama, I have to go to work. Call me later.”

For all my bravado and jokes, I was deeply humiliated by the posts and articles. None of the recent events felt amusing. It all brought to the surface the deep and painful trauma that I had denied for a very long time. However, I also did not want to stay in a perpetual state of angst. I wanted to come forward with dignity, and the reality was that I felt quite undignified.

I went to sit outside my little studio house, thankful for the quiet and the nature all around me. The old doe I call Babushka, with white hair around her face, walked near me as I scattered carrots on the ground for her. She is wild and timid. With her wise eye fixed on me, she lay

down quietly at the fence, demonstrating her trust while munching on the snack. I set down my phone and deeply breathed in the warm air. Feeling the deer's quiet presence always soothed me in the morning. My cat lay down by my legs while also staring at the deer. I braced myself for the coming days.