

MARIE LOUISE

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MIEKE

SUYKERBUYK

Tilburg

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Voor mijn maan

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I

PROLOGUE

The trouble is as follows. People have a set image of the person I am. And that image adds up most of the time, really. But when it doesn't it really does not. For I feel the pressure of living up to what people expect me to be. Letting down the ones I love isn't one of my hobbies as one can imagine. There's a lot at stake. I sometimes feel I am pushed into a life I haven't fully chosen. It fits the picture-perfect life many of us aspire to live. But perfect is never perfect up close. Life isn't a puzzle that magically falls into place. I am sorry to burst that bubble. I truly am. It hurts me more than people think. It's not enjoyable to see those broken faces, those disappointed grins when I tell them

what I really want. The only explanation for my actions I can give is a perpetual yearning for change. I am not one to conform to a certain group, a certain path. Do not call me a lost soul, for I know exactly what I want and need but I often try to restrain myself. My body, mind and heart want three different things.

Usually my mind happily takes charge. I feel responsible and happy when that part of me takes over. It's the most desirable way of living, really. I have a reasonable and caring mind. I am smart and practical. I love myself the most when my mind is in charge.

When my heart's in charge I still feel okay. I am a loving person and am perfectly capable of living for others. The drama sometimes takes over, and that can make me somewhat obnoxious. It annoys me sometimes, and at times like these I long for the simple times when my mind is in charge.

When my body takes the driver's seat the shit will hit the fan. Some people call me a nymphomaniac. I know I am not, for most of the time these other two parts of me control my way of living, but because we can't live in harmony, my body can't be tamed. It's a primitive part of me, a manly part even. And because I am a woman it is explained as nymphomania. My body can take me to great heights, heights higher than the highest buzz anything else can give you.

The trouble is that I can never enjoy the ways of my body with the people I truly love. I need anonymity to

fully get into ecstasy. It's when this part of me is in charge that mayhem appears. It's a destructive phase I usually go through. I honestly try to not repress my body's wishes to still keep some control over the brakes, but once every few years the brakes break and that's when I destroy everything I've carefully built. I am a very Catholic girl, and I identify with Eve whenever this happens. I am so fixated on this apple and it really doesn't matter if I do realize that taking the apple can destroy manhood or paradise; that apple must be mine and there's no one who can stop me. That scares me so much. I truly feel alone during these phases. I know what is coming, I try to hold on to everything I hold dear without any hope of a happy ending. I feel like I am in the dark, and I know exactly where I am heading. I feel the pain of everyone I love on my shoulders, and I try to punish myself. I stop taking care of my body, start drinking, enjoy the hangovers and the pain I feel in my throat of the many cigarettes I am not used to smoking. No one else will ever punish me, even when I come clean before the real mayhem occurs. They just cannot comprehend what I am telling them. That the dusk has fallen, that the lovely girl, woman, mother I am does not know how to turn the tide. 'Choose the right path' is what they keep on repeating. But they obviously do not know what it feels like to have no control over a part of yourself. I usually try to be as honest as words can put it. But I have learned that people will only hear what they want to hear. So here I am, yet again. On the run

MIEKE

from my former life. The dusk has gone, the dark has gone,
and all there is left is the smoking barrel of the gun that has
just gone off. The remains of my former life lie still when I
close the door.

Marie Louise, 10-09-1946

CHAPTER ONE

When Marie Louise – or Louise as she would be called later in life – was born, it stormed and thundered in an extremely loud manner. Her mother would forever add that the noise hasn't stopped since. Hardly the truth according to Louise, for she found herself to be a very responsible child. And grown-up, for that matter. Her mother just referred to the tantrums that would occasionally occur. And those outbursts were totally called for. As the oldest daughter of an umbrella factory director in Tilburg, an industrial town in the Catholic south of the Netherlands, Louise did grow up to be a smart and charming girl. But being eldest of three siblings meant

having a lot of responsibilities at an early age. And even before Louise was able to read her first word, her parents knew all too well that this strawberry blonde girl was brighter than most of her relatives. She struggled from the start to find anyone who would understand her and what she was saying. And that sometimes tired her, and tiredness made her aggressive. Later on, the aggressiveness slowly grew into something much subtler but also a lot more dangerous: She became a master manipulator.

That came in handy when she was sent off to a Catholic boarding school for girls, a few hours from where her parents lived. And although lots of girls of her age did not want to leave their parents and the life they knew behind, Louise could not wait to start this new adventure. It did not matter that this adventure meant living at a strict boarding school run by nuns. Louise thought anything new was worth experiencing. The year before she left, she wrote down stories in her journal about how she and other girls would escape through the windows to go about town and get into some trouble. The reality was that Louise was not as mischievous as her stories might have led others to believe. There were times when the butterflies in her stomach made her want to forget about all her manners, and rally up the girls in her dorm to just get up and leave; but then her conscience usually stopped her, for she did not want to hurt the nuns' feelings. As she got older and her hormones started to get the upper hand sometimes, she did get into some trouble. But she had built up enough

credits to get away with not making her curfew, or with wearing make-up in class.

Besides being a very charming and caring girl, academically she was like no other girl in school. There were other smart girls in her class, and in some subjects they even got higher grades. But Louise outsmarted them all when it came to exact sciences. Lucky for her for she was not the perfect little scholar. She read books like there was no tomorrow, but as soon as they were on her obligated reading list, she lost interest. And besides, she did not want to read Dutch books. Because what would perfect Dutch bring her? It was not common for a girl in the 1920's to explore other languages, but Louise had decided a while ago that she would not stay in the Netherlands for the rest of her life. And that's why she read French and English books instead of the obligatory Dutch ones. A solid favourite had to be 'La dame aux Camélias'. She found it hopelessly romantic. Anything that ended in death, longing and despair had Louise at the edge of her seat, she would often tell her fellow classmates. Who in return, would just giggle and tease her with her penchant for drama.

But Louise had a very practical side as well. She aspired to be a doctor. An unthinkable dream for a girl in that era. And although her parents were quite liberal, they did not allow Louise to study medicines. She would be the only girl to attend and besides, who would want to marry her? Their decision on her future devastated her and truly

broke her heart, for at least a couple of days. She was never the one to really put up a fight when things got hard. Mainly because she respected and loved her parents, and did not want to hurt their feelings – but maybe more importantly: There were so many other possibilities. So she would not become a doctor. Maybe she would marry one and take off with him to faraway countries to teach medicine there and help out local communities. She would not need a diploma there, and would attend as a doctor to the patients anyway. Louise was never really fussed when something did not work out the way it should have at first, as that just meant she could think of new and exciting ways to reach her goal: Never be boring.

After boarding school, her parents decided she should help out in her father's factory. Of course she threw a tantrum and swore not to set one foot into the prison that was this factory. But after a couple of weeks Louise managed to happily work her way up to general manager there. She turned out to be an immediate success. Mainly because she found out she liked working. That surprised her parents as much as it surprised her. Given the chance, Louise would rather crawl into her bed or the sofa and hide away with a book for days on end, than to go out for a walk or play any sports. They'd called her Lazy Louise before she started out in the factory. But she discovered that when she had a clear goal, she could stand on her feet for hours on end. She loved doing all sorts of jobs at once. One minute she would attend to a problem in the actual

factory, and the next she would crunch the numbers with her uncle. She loved wearing pants and tucking her long hair into a tight bun. All the running around even made her lose some weight, and at the age of 18, Louise had never looked better.

And she had never felt any better. It was time for her next dream, becoming director of the umbrella factory. As the oldest child of her father, who was first in line to take over the factory, and her younger brother being a terrible choice for a successor, the logical next step would be to leave her in charge. But of course even Louise knew that too would be an unrealistic dream. It would mean that she could not get married, and that was the one thing that never changed in her ever-altering dreams. To be swept away and find the love of her life, to find true passion and romance, to marry and live happily ever after. Louise could not wait. So no matter how much she loved working at the factory, she would never give up true love for anything.

But true love was a tricky thing to find. Louise got distracted from it a couple of times, solely because of the excitement other boys brought with them. She had not been around boys as much as she would have liked. And frankly, the world was a safer place for it. The one time she did encounter a man who was not a relative or friend of her brother's, Louise projected all the moves she had learned from her books she'd read and the plays she had seen with her parents.

She did not know she would have the guts to actually

act the way she had done with this man, who happened to be her Latin teacher. She was used to her mind wandering off to great heights and taking her body with it, but in real life she usually chickened out. Whenever a man or boy came near, she lost interest. But when Mr Gijzen started to teach at her school she was shocked. Shocked, like the rest of her peers and teachers that a school like hers would employ such a young and handsome, male teacher. But also shocked as to what power her body had over her. Ever since he had entered the premises Louise seemed to have one goal. And that was to be alone with him. It spiked up her Latin grades and her interest for anything to do with the Roman Empire. She even tried to read the six volumes of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and although she had put in a solid effort, by the time she came to two thirds of the first part, she had already lost any interest in this young, but rather dull teacher. There was no point in finishing it now, Louise thought bitterly, and exchanged the three thick books for *The Undying Fire* by H.G. Wells, seeing as though she was a bit fed up with school and teachers at that point.

Before losing interest, Louise did get her way with him. She sneaked out with him on more than one occasion. It never occurred to her to feel guilty or bad about it. Why would she? He was not married and just a few years her senior. But even if there would have been a reason in her mind to feel guilty, there wasn't any time to think about it. Stunned by what a simple look could do, Louise had

just let life wash over her without really thinking about it. It exceeded her expectations, that first encounter with a man. No matter how romantic and dramatic her mind worked, the rational part had prepared her for a long courtship. But instead it seemed that the speed in which the Lord and Ladies wooed each other in her Jane Austen novels was not that fictional after all.

The first time they got together, Louise had subtly eyed him up during one of the school dances. At least that was the way she described their first encounter in her diary. She imagined him being mesmerised by her shy look and strands of her hair coyly falling around her pale face. According to her diary he had immediately understood and taken her into the shed at the back of the garden of the convent. Reading back over these passages as a grown woman, Louise smirked at the interpretation of a young and hormonal girl. In fact she had had to lure him away by telling him that she had spotted a fox in the shed.

She did wonder about his intentions, but the adult Louise understood better than anyone the effect she could have on men. Even at an early age. And besides, Mr Gijzen had been just over 20 years old. He did go on to explain his actions later on to her. He was not the type of man that would take advantage of an innocent young student. He had explained it a decision his body had made for him; his mind had not had a say in it, for he knew all too well that it was in fact very wrong to take one of his pupils away solely

for his pleasure. In fact, at first he had not even dared to kiss her. He had begged her to stop.

“Louise, stop. We should not be doing this. Let us just go back.”

“Oh Mr Gijzen, let us just go for it. I am sure God would not have given me this yearning to kiss you just for me to ignore it? Or do you not find me attractive?”

Finally Louise could use the words that her heroines had huskily sighed to their freshly found lovers. This was what it felt like to be alive!

“I do, Louise. Very much so. But I am your teacher. This just feels wrong.”

Him denying her at first just made her want him more. Love should never be easy. There should be some sort of fight, some sort of conquest.

“Well, I do not agree. In fact, it feels better than good.”

God would never leave her side. This deeply Catholic girl did not make a single decision without consulting her spiritual leader. A surprise to most, for almost anyone would have made other choices with Him in their head. But Louise always had her own views on religion, God and what was right or wrong. He was her companion, her guide through life. And she was very certain that He wanted her to lead her life using her intuition and sense, and not rules set by men.

“Come Mr Gijzen. Touch me.” She giggled.

When he finally grabbed her and leaned in for a kiss her skin felt electric. Every hair in her body had risen and

her blood plunged in such a hurry from her head to her legs that for a short while, she was sure she was going to faint. When he kissed her while stroking her strawberry blonde hair, Louise was frantically looking for places to put her hands. She wanted to touch him everywhere at once. His broad shoulders, his chest still safely unexposed, his face, his thick black hair. She was fighting for air and worried again about her health, but was reassured by her shivering body. She enjoyed it so much, this is what being in ecstasy must mean, she thought. When he carried on kissing her neck and collarbone she thrust herself onto his body, and together they crashed onto the floor. She lay on her side to break free from him for just a short moment, and stared him right in the face. That frightened him and he immediately let her go.

“Are you all right, Louise? Why did you stop?”

His face was all pale except for the marks from her pink lipstick she had secretly applied in the dark, when she had followed him to the shed. He panted heavily and started to crawl up when she stopped him.

“I just want to savour the moment,” she remembered saying.

Louise looked into the eyes of the man who had taught her all about Augustus and Brutus, and she felt older already. She realized that when it comes to intimacy a woman is always more powerful. Probably the only time a woman is more powerful than a man. That was the moment she really wanted to savour. She loved the fact

that this time she was in charge, and she could decide whether they would or would not go through with it. She smiled and slowly crawled towards him. She made sure not to kiss him on his lips, but proceeded to unbutton his shirt while looking up at him. But not in the way she used to look up at him. This time she was pulling the ropes.

“Are you sure?”

“Ssssh,” she replied huskily.

When she was done exposing his chest, she stood up in front of him and took off her dress very slowly. She had borrowed the dress from her friend Gertrude, who was slimmer than she was. Her breasts were therefore pushed up slightly and she was all too aware of that. She saw him looking at her, mesmerised, while she slipped off her dress. The soft chiffon fabric brushed her hips when it fell down, and she was now dressed in nothing but her underwear. But she did not feel naked at all. She had never felt more at ease than at this very moment. Louise stepped out of the little pile of fabric and draped her body against his chest. She nodded and let him touch her bare skin. When he bent over for a kiss she took off her bra and gently pushed him on his back. She crawled on top of him and started kissing his bare chest. When she reached his trousers she looked up at him once more and smiled. She undid his zipper and slowly removed his pants. She kissed his briefs slowly and crawled up again.

“Now you can have your way with me.”

She lay on her back and put her hands behind her head.

She smiled when he started kissing her all over, and she kept on smiling until he removed her panties to have his way with her. She closed her eyes for a second and breathed heavily through the initial pain. She lifted up her legs, and after what seemed just a few seconds, she felt him shiver all over. He moaned a few times and fell on top of her. When he looked at her after a while, she felt like she had found out the secret of life.

~

Her first fiancé was a fine man from a city a few kilometres farther down south in the Netherlands. He was a friend of the family and very fond of Louise. They had known each other for ages and Louise trusted him like no other. For some reason she had never really treated him like a boy, or later on, a man. She knew she was not really in love with him, but for some reason she forgot about her oath to fall madly in love. She felt as though she did not have too much time to lose. It had become clear to her that as an unmarried woman she did not have that many options, and at least she trusted Fons to give her the freedom she so yearned for. Her family was happy too. Fons was from a fine family who shared their values and Catholic views. It was a match that seemed to please all involved parties. And Louise liked being in Fons' company. Although she wasn't coy or timid at all, she was impressed by the kind of people Fons introduced her to. He took her to all kinds of gatherings where she would encounter respectable and distinguished people.

Definitely not a stranger to merrymakings as her parents loved hosting dinner parties like no other family in Tilburg. But their guests usually were other factory owners, and once every blue moon the mayor came by for a cup of tea. The people Fons introduced her to were almost royalty, or at least they came across that way. Louise felt right at home. Not because she was into appearances – she was not at all really – but because these people usually had seen so much more than she had. These were the Roaring Twenties, and there was no limit as to what was possible. Aeroplanes were not used solely for fighting anymore. Charles Lindbergh had crossed the Atlantic Ocean just two years prior, and many more adventurous pilots followed afterwards. Passenger flights were no longer a Utopia. Holidays to America and cruises to Australia became the fashion. And Louise was intrigued. She wanted to experience everything everywhere. So far she had only seen France, Germany and Belgium – which was not a too – bad travelling experience for a girl her age in that time. Her parents loved going on holidays. It meant that they could take their Leica with them. Making photos was an expensive hobby but Louise and her parents were well-off, so they could afford to capture their adventures abroad. Louise's visits to France and Germany had left her wanting more. She dreamed of exotic places and handsome men who would show her the way.

Men to Louise were more than objects of lust, they were her gateway to a better life. That trait alone did not make

her stand out in a crowd. Many girls knew that their chances in life were heavily linked to the man they were to marry. The fact that Louise could not imagine just picking out one to spend the rest of her life with was what made her a bit odd from time to time. She was completely frank about it, which made anyone around her kind of uncomfortable. Her parents were convinced it was just her age. Other, less liberal souls blamed the literature Louise had been reading from an early age. A lot of the novels had not been translated into Dutch, so no one exactly knew what she was reading.

Unfazed by any of the snide comments Louise received when rolling out her plans, she carried on her new role as worldly fiancée soon to be wife of Fons. He had already been helping her to expand her horizons. In the few months she had spent as his fiancée, she had seen and heard more about life than she had in the 19 years before being his. And what she had not expected beforehand: She enjoyed being someone's girl in every possible way. Of course she enjoyed the physical aspect of being in a steady relationship, even though she did wonder if she had not interpreted God's path for her too freely by consummating a relationship before she was legally married, but she shushed her conscience by telling it she was sure God would not have given her this urge to be led on by her bodily wishes.

But more importantly, she discovered a lot about herself by simply being someone's girlfriend. There was this other

urge that grew stronger as their relationship progressed. She found out that she loved to take care of Fons. All of a sudden her mother forcing cooking lessons onto her did not cause as much mayhem as before. She even began to look for foreign recipe books during her monthly visits to several flea markets, looking for foreign books. She even picked up a British book for housewives, the articles describing how to find your own home decoration style. It would always come in handy, Louise thought. She had never expected this side of her to appear. Of course, as an older sister she had always felt responsible, and maybe even tempted to take care of her younger siblings from time to time, but her lazy nature stopped her from really following through her aspirations to be a true surrogate mother. To be honest, these urges only appeared after reading about strong, independent women with a child, which made their heroism even more admirable. Not a stranger to making fun of herself and the countless plans she had made for herself, it was incredibly funny that this softer side appeared without no actual motive. And like always, whenever Louise saw the purpose of perfecting certain skills, she would do anything in her power to do so.

And boy was there a purpose. It surprised her, the simplicity of men. These creatures who had conquered multiple worlds, invented machines with unlimited possibilities, and had written the most incredible stories that had lasted more than one lifetime, how could they be so incredibly simple? It was like opening a steel fort with

numerous safeguards and extra locks by just saying: I want to come in. No matter how intelligent, strong or creative, as long as one was able to feed them and give them some physical attention, every man's shell would crack open like an egg tapped with a butter knife. That knowledge dazzled and disappointed her at the same time. She had expected more. After all it was men that had introduced her to the most magical secrets in the world. How was it possible that they were so easily manipulated?

Shakespeare had taught her about the complexity of relationships, Pythagoras had shown her how to do wonderful things with numbers, and she had a special interest in anything Descartes had to teach her about the power of the mind over the body. A theory that frankly made her insecure. Because somehow she was never really strong enough to ignore the weaknesses of the body, and rely solely on the infinite power of her mind. 'Cogito, ergo sum' on good days, she sometimes sighed and started to wonder if Descartes himself had ever been served the way Fons had by Louise. Maybe his mind would not be as powerful anymore, Louise thought bitterly to soothe her own shortcomings.

Yet ever since she had been with Fons, she'd had less trouble overpowering her body, and that soothed her and affirmed her decision to marry Fons, although not in love. It was the sensible thing to do.