

BEHIND MY FRONT DOOR

BEHIND MY FRONT DOOR
Copyright © Truusje van Zanten

Cover design and layout: Studio Terebint

Biography
ISBN 978-818036-6-3

No part of this publication may be reproduced by print, photocopy, automated files or in any other way without prior written permission from the publisher.

Truusje van Zanten

Behind My Front Door

Inhoud

2001	11
introductions	11
beers	13
2002	19
pregnant	19
blood	23
pregnancy	28
bicycle	29
dog	32
midwife	33
unemployed	35
Freek	36
neighbour	38
nursery	41
picnic	45
raped	47
delivery	49
pain	50
holidays	56
2003	59
housing	59
loan	63
isolated	66

2004	67
koi	67
child health clinic	69
finances	71
parents	72
pregnant again	73
hospital	76
exhausted	78
barbecue	80
obese	81
2005	83
nesting instinct	83
birth	84
Child Protective Services	88
ikea	92
112	93
animal ambulance	96
kidnapped	97
back	99
December 18	101
knives	109
afraid	112
action plan	114
2006	120
birthday	120
Martijn	122
letters	124
disguise	125
court	127
escape route	129
free	131
restraining order	133

a plan	135
furniture	139
report	140
custody	142
visitation schedule	145
forum	147
Saint Nicholas	150
Christmas	151
2007	153
shop	153
spied on	155
advice	157
Joris	160
birthday	163
case closed	166
custody	168
media attention	169
2008	171
housing	171
ADHD	173
psychiatry department	176
debt free	178
kiss	180
moving	181
exam	182
crisis	183
rest	188
2009	190
voluntary	190
police academy	192
agressie	194

foster mothers	197
new plan	197
ignorance	199
whistling	201
reduced	202
wedding gift	203
2010	205
bailiffs	205
legal system	206
cake	208
black vodka	211
2011 – 2015	212
Afterword	216

Dedicated to all victims of domestic violence

2001

INTRODUCTIONS

Why does my phone keep vibrating? Who could possibly need me so urgently? I have been working as a pool cleaner for the past three months, and the last thing I want is to jeopardise this job by constantly checking my phone. It's ten o'clock now, just one more hour to go. Meanwhile, my phone keeps vibrating in my pocket.

Finally, it's eleven o'clock. I quickly head to the changing room to grab my things and walk to the smoking area for a cigarette. I take out my phone. I'm astonished; my jaw drops. 175 missed calls and messages? What's going on here? Whose numbers are these? I don't know any of them. I've read the first few messages, and I'm shocked by their content. These messages are from people looking for sex! I decide to delete them all and not respond. Once the break ends, I resume my tasks as normal, even as my phone continues to buzz in my pocket.

At the end of a tiring workday, I sink onto the couch. My mother sits beside me and notices me busy with my phone. 'What are you doing, Truusje?'

'Well, I've been getting weird messages all day and missed countless calls. I don't understand. I don't even dare let you read a message. I'll just delete them. Hopefully, I'll get rid of them quickly if I don't respond.'

I begin deleting all the messages except one. It says: 'You're on TV, what's the deal with that? Are you really looking?' WHAT?

My heart jumps to my throat. How am I on TV? In disbelief, I grab the remote and start searching on Teletext. Sure enough, my number is listed on the chat page. How is this possible? Who did this? Almost immediately, a name comes to mind. Pim, my ex. Furious, I call him, but there's no answer. I send him a message. 'Why did you put my number on the Teletext chat page?' Within five minutes, I get a reply: 'Haha, got you good.' What a jerk! I'm furious with him! There's no point in reacting more; the damage has already been done. Still, I decide to respond to the message from the person who alerted me to the personal ad. 'No, my ex put my number there, the bastard. Thank you for letting me know!' A minute later, I get a reply: 'Well, that's not cool. What a jerk.' And with that, slowly, an exchange of messages and calls with Ricardo begins.

For two and a half weeks, we have intensive contact. We get to know each other better, and a friendship gradually develops. He confides in me by telling me his relationship with his parents isn't going smoothly. One day, while we're talking on the phone, I hear his mother say, 'Then just pack your stuff and get out!' I can't believe what I'm hearing. On impulse, I say to him, 'Then pack your stuff and come to me.' There's a brief silence on the other end of the line. 'Yes, I'll come. If you're okay with that.' 'Of course I'm okay with that. Otherwise, I wouldn't suggest it.' He tells me he has to come by train since he doesn't have a car and will text me when he knows when he'll arrive at the station. We agree that I'll wait for him on the platform with a red rose.

After a while, I receive his message: 'Hey Princess, I'll be at the station at half past seven.' That's in half an hour! I grab my things and hop on the bus to the station. There, I buy a red rose and look at the information boards to see which platform the train will arrive at. Slightly nervous, I light a cigarette as I wait for him.

After fifteen minutes, his train pulls into the station. I look out for him. Why, though? I don't even know what he looks like, I scold myself. Then a slim young man in a blue and white jacket,

with short blond hair and golden earrings, approaches me. In his right hand, he holds a large sports bag. A smile appears on his narrow face. This must be Ricardo, I think; it can't be anyone else.

'Hi, are you Truusje?' He looks at me kindly but a little shyly. 'Yes, don't I have a red rose? Do you see any other woman with a red rose?' I reply rather briskly. 'Shall we go then?' We walk to the bus station and are soon engrossed in conversation. We talk about his parents' situation and how relieved he is to be away for a while. Throughout the bus ride, we discuss various topics, such as our home situations and childhoods. We're so immersed in conversation that we almost forget to press the stop button. Luckily, we are just in time, and with laughter, we get off and walk the last three hundred metres to my house.

'Welcome to my little abode,' I say enthusiastically as I open the door for him. 'Make yourself at home.'

Starting from that day in November 2001, we live together in my tiny studio, where the living room, kitchen, and bedroom form one space, and the bathroom stands alone. Furnished with just a few pieces and inhabited by my two pet mice, it had truly become a place I could call home.

BEERS

'Shall we go grocery shopping together?' Ricardo asks the following day. 'You probably haven't yet realised we're now living and eating here with two.'

'Uh, no, indeed. I'll tidy up the breakfast stuff, and then we'll go.' And so we go to the village together to do some shopping. 'I'll push the cart if you grab the items.' Well, that arrangement works fine for me.

'Let's grab a crate of beer, Truusje. I like to have a beer every so often in the evenings. How about you?'

'Yeah, a beer now and then in the evenings is nice.' I actually

never keep beer at home. Except for maybe a birthday or something. At the checkout, Ricardo puts the groceries on the conveyor belt and pays for them.

Back home, we put away the groceries together. I'm amazed that there are still such helpful men! Since Ricardo has yet to find a job, he takes care of the household while I'm at work. I have to admit, living with Ricardo feels pretty good. He takes good care of me and compliments my cooking skills. 'This is really delicious, Princess! I've never eaten so well.' We've only been living together for a week now, but I must admit I'm starting to fall in love.

When I come home from work in the evenings, we have a beer together on the couch after dinner. I struggle to keep pace with him, but I suppose that's alright. Perhaps men simply drink faster than women. One evening, we're sitting on the couch watching TV, each with a beer in hand, and I notice Ricardo slowly edging closer to me. I wait anxiously, trying to ignore the excited feeling in my body, which is very difficult. He puts a hand on my knee and looks at me with a penetrating, loving gaze.

'Do you know how beautiful you are?' he whispers, leans forward, and kisses me - a kiss I gladly return. Slowly, the kiss becomes more intense, and we explore each other's bodies. He gently pulls away from my grasp, looks at me with fierce love, and takes my hand. He leads me to the bed.

'You're so beautiful,' he whispers between kisses. I melt completely...

I wake up startled. Wow, was that a dream? I look beside me, and Ricardo is sleeping peacefully. No, that wasn't a dream. With a broad grin, I settle back onto the bed. What a wonderful evening. The sex was tender; he took his time to please me. Well, if it continues like this, I wouldn't mind if it lasted forever.

An hour later, I get up and start preparing breakfast. Not long after, Ricardo also wakes up.

'Good morning, Princess.' He wraps his arms around me and kisses my neck. I'm making coffee, and I've just set the table.

‘Good morning, love.’ I kiss him back. ‘Shall we visit my parents after dinner tonight? I’ll have to introduce you to them at some point, right?’ I look at him, waiting for his reaction.

‘Yeah, sounds fun! I’m really curious about your parents. But I’ll crawl back into bed for a bit. See you tonight, darling.’

That evening, we walk together to my parents’ house. They live just around the corner from me.

‘Mom, Dad, this is Ricardo.’ Ricardo shakes hands with my parents. ‘Hello, sir and madam. Nice to meet you.’ With a warm smile, my mother takes his hand. ‘Please, just call me Adriana. My husband is Cobus.’

Only now do I realise I was actually a little nervous about my parents’ reaction. Now that I see them warmly greeting him, all my nervousness disappears.

‘You really like him, don’t you?’ Mom whispers in my ear, looking at me with big, inquisitive eyes. I blush a little and nod. The rest of the evening flies by. After coffee, we enjoy a beer and some snacks together. I’m so glad Ricardo gets along well with my parents and vice versa. Ricardo has even promised to help my parents around the house. My father had a stroke not long ago and can’t do much around the house anymore.

‘I’ll help you guys; at least I’ll have something to do in my free time,’ Ricardo says.

The first thing Ricardo does when we get home is grab a beer. ‘Want a beer too, Princess?’

I thank him for the gesture and say I want to go to bed. I have a busy day tomorrow. ‘Are you coming too?’ I try to gently coax him into bed; maybe this time he won’t drink beer because, at this rate, that crate will be empty in no time, and we really can’t afford to keep buying his beers.

‘No, I’ll have a beer first and then come to bed later.’ Hours later, I wake up to cold hands on my body. Ricardo has crawled into bed. I smell his alcoholic breath, and I suspect he’s had more than just one beer.

‘You’re so delicious, so beautiful. Be intimate with me, Truusje,’ he says, half-drunk in my ear.

‘No, Ricardo, I want to sleep.’

‘But I want you, Princess, I crave you so badly.’ I try to push his hands away, but he holds them firmly on my body. Something inside me tells me I better not oppose him. I don’t want any trouble because he doesn’t deserve that either. He’s trying his best to help with the housework and find a job. It’s not his fault he hasn’t found work yet. I turn around and smile at him. He starts kissing me, and his hands roam all over my body.

‘That’s it, Princess. You’re so fine,’ he whispers. I resolve to talk to him tomorrow about his drinking habits, and I then give in to him.

The following day, I’m having coffee, and Ricardo sits down next to me. ‘I think I’ll call my mother. She might be worried. That argument has been going on for too long now.’

‘If you want to, love, then you should,’ I reply. While Ricardo is on the phone, I realise I don’t dare mention his drinking habit.

And so, contact is restored between Ricardo and his parents. From that moment on, they have daily phone calls.

‘Truusje and I will come to visit next weekend, Mom. I’ll also pick up my stuff because I’ll need that here from now on.’ Ricardo winks meaningfully at me.

I wonder what they’ll think of me and hope I’ll get along with them well. But something is nagging at me, the events of the previous evening. I’ll have to tell Ricardo how I feel about his alcohol use. I make a suggestion.

‘Darling, how about next time we go shopping, we first see how much we have left and then buy a six-pack or crate of beer with that? You know we’re not well off, and having a beer in the evening is fine. But you actually drink much more than just a beer. Sometimes, we go through two crates a week. Don’t you think that’s a bit much?’ He looks at me, surprised.

‘Princess, I cherish being able to have my beer every evening.

That's not something we'll cut back on; you enjoy it too, don't you? I'm not an alcoholic if that's what concerns you.' He gives me a comforting kiss. Actually, he's right. It's not as if he drinks excessively every night like he did yesterday. And he does have a point. I do join him for a beer occasionally. Maybe if I stop doing that, he'll drink less, too. He's such a sweetheart; I feel at ease, safe, and secure with him. I love him. Perhaps I shouldn't complain so much.

Today, we're taking the train to his parents. I must say, I'm really looking forward to meeting his parents, brother, and sister.

'Dad, Mom, Vera, Gerrie, this is Truusje,' he says, looking at me affectionately. We exchange handshakes.

'Just call me Sien. And this is Cor,' his mother said warmly. Instantly, I feel at ease. After coffee, Ricardo suddenly took my hand.

'I want to show you something, Princess, my greatest hobby.'

'What's that?' I asked curiously.

'You'll see. Hopefully, you'll like it too,' he laughed led. He leads me through the backyard into the shed.

'Tada!' he says as he opens the door.

I'm greeted by the smell and feathers of numerous pigeons. My eyes widen, and my mouth falls open in surprise. He's a pigeon fancier!

'How cute,' I say with feigned enthusiasm. I'd rather not immediately upset him by saying I consider them filthy creatures that will never set foot in my home.

'I take care of them here with my father; it's really a shared hobby,' he says proudly. As long as it's here, I'm fine with it, I think to myself.

After dinner, we say goodbye to his family and walk back to the station. On the way, we encounter a group of three guys and two girls. The guys give me a strange look and stare at me as they pass by.

'What are you looking at?' Ricardo asks one of the guys.

‘I’m allowed to look at a hot chick, aren’t I?’ he says.

‘No, you’re not,’ Ricardo responds.

Suddenly, ‘Ricardo is jealous!’ crosses my mind. There’s a brief exchange of words, and before I know it, Ricardo gets punched in the face. His nose starts bleeding, and my boyfriend lunges at the guy, who, of course, immediately gets help from his friends. I want to help Ricardo, but then the two girls come charging at me. Fortunately, they both have long hair, and before they realise it, I’ve tightly wound their hair around my hands and smashed their heads together. They’re knocked out. Suddenly, someone comes running out of his house to help us.

‘Ricardo, let go!’ this man shouts. And as quickly as the fight started, it was over. Ricardo takes me by the arm, and we continue walking to the station.

‘Who was that?’

‘My cousin,’ Ricardo says curtly.

When we’re back home, I take care of Ricardo by washing the blood off his face, immediately putting his clothes in the washing machine, and cooling his nose. He looks at me somewhat guiltily.

‘I don’t want other guys lusting after you. You’re mine,’ he says.

I melt a little at these words; he wants to protect me. ‘Could you grab me a beer?’

With some reluctance, I give him his beer. Actually, I want to sleep and forget about this miserable evening. Still, I realise he deserves to relax after such a violent fight. I’m just afraid that it won’t stop at just one beer...

Sure enough, not long after, he comes over to me and begins his exploration with his hands on my body. I simply give in; he’s had such a hectic evening, and I really don’t want any arguments right now.

2002

PREGNANT

The new year has only just begun, and I notice that we're falling into a routine of sorts regarding our daily rhythm. I go to work, and Ricardo stays at home. When I come home, I prepare dinner, we clean up together afterwards, and then it's time for a beer on the couch. If Ricardo is in a good mood, he genuinely seduces me into bed, but if he's in a bad mood, I know it's better not to argue with him. He can be very demanding for his satisfaction. I'm stuck in a rut. Our daily routine drains a lot of energy, leaving me tired all day. My appetite disappears, and so does the desire to do things. After work, at home, I prefer to go straight to bed to sleep. Unfortunately, Ricardo disagrees. To keep the peace, I give in because I don't want to waste my last bit of energy on arguments. And why should I? Ricardo is an angel; he supports me where he can and still helps with the household chores. He often helps my parents with various tasks, too. I'm actually quite lucky to have a guy like him. So, I should probably do something for him in return, even though I'm not always in the mood.

Mid-January, as I'm brushing my teeth in the evening, I suddenly feel such intense nausea that I vomit everything. Where is this coming from? Why am I so nauseous? Paired with a panicky feeling, a lightbulb suddenly goes off in my head. When was I last menstruating? I can't seem to remember. With an uneasy feeling, I go to bed. What should I do now? There's nothing else to do but to take a pregnancy test; then, I'll know for sure. I hear Ricar-

do mumbling as he gets off the couch. He comes to bed. I hope he wants to sleep right away, but to no avail. His alcohol breath grazes my neck, and his hands seize my body. Reluctantly, I turn on my back. As long as I lie still, it'll be over soon, and he'll go to sleep.

The next morning, I get up early to go straight to the drugstore. Various thoughts race through my head. 'Please, let it not be true.' But secretly, I'm also hoping for it; I've always wanted children. I purposefully enter the drugstore and go to the shelf where the pregnancy tests are. There are so many different ones, which one should I take? I just pick one randomly and pay at the counter. Daydreaming, I continue my stroll and light a cigarette to calm down. My thoughts go in all directions.

On the one hand, I deeply feel like I don't want this. Still, on the other hand, the thought occurs to me that Ricardo might stop drinking and take more responsibility for our life together. Before I know it, I'm back home at the doorstep. Now, it's time for me to take the pregnancy test. Ricardo is still asleep. He had a lot of beer the night before, so I leave him be and go to the bathroom. I open the packaging and read the instructions. It says I have to pee on the stick and wait two minutes for the results to show. I set a timer on my phone. Restlessly, I pace around, from the bathroom to the kitchen, from the kitchen to the room, and back to the bathroom. I just can't find any peace, and my head is spinning. Two minutes have never felt so long. To pass the time, I smoke a cigarette. I jump in surprise when the timer on my phone goes off. I hurry to the bathroom and pick up the stick. To my shock, amazement, and wonder, I stare at two beautiful blue lines. I'm pregnant.

Slowly, a wonderful feeling envelops me. I'm going to be a mom. A smile appears on my face as I stare at myself in the mirror. I'm snapped out of my daydream by a noise from the room. Ricardo is awake. The nerves come rushing back; I have to tell him I'm pregnant. With a heavy heart, I walk to the room. I slowly push open the door.

‘Good morning, honey,’ I say cautiously.

‘Good morning. You’re up early,’ he says sleepily. ‘I went to the village for a bit.’

‘So early?’ He looks at me questioningly. ‘What’s going on, Princess?’

I sigh deeply, trying to gather the courage to tell him what I consider to be good news.

‘I haven’t been feeling well for a while, you know. Very tired and nauseous. That’s why I went to the village for a pregnancy test.’ Ricardo looks at me, surprised. He says nothing, patiently waiting for me to continue. ‘I took the test as soon as I got home.’ I take a step forward, and cautiously and shyly, I hand him the stick with the two blue lines. He takes the stick, looks at it incomprehensibly, and then back at me.

‘Does this mean that...’ His voice trails off. I nod, tears now welling up in my eyes, unsure whether to be happy or cry. Ricardo remains silently staring at the stick, then back at me, and then back at the stick. Slowly, I see a smile appear on his face, and a great relief washes over my body. I cry and laugh at the same time. We’re going to be parents! While unplanned, this baby is incredibly welcome! We decide to inform our parents of the good news the same day. Since my parents live around the corner, we go there first.

Feeling somewhat nervous, we arrive at my parents’ house.

‘Mom, Dad, Ricardo and I have something to tell you.’ Suddenly, the living room falls silent. My parents look at us with wide eyes. I exchange a brief glance with Ricardo, who slightly nods, indicating that I should just say it.

‘We’re expecting a baby,’ I say with a nervous smile. There’s a moment of silence, and a slight sense of fear creeps over me. Then, both my mother and father warmly embrace and kiss me.

‘Oh, how wonderful! A grandchild on the way!’ We’re all overjoyed.

When we’re back home, Ricardo is eager to inform his parents

immediately over the phone. Since we have to travel an hour by train, we can't visit them right away.

'Yes, go ahead and call them,' I tell him, 'but put the phone on speaker, I want to hear their reaction!' He picks up the phone and dials his parents' number. Nerves creep up on me again. His mother answers.

'Truusje and I have news we wanted to share with you right away.'

'Oh?'

'Yes, we're expecting our first child!' Ricardo smiles at me. There's a moment of silence on the other end of the line, and I feel nauseous with anticipation.

'Oh darling, what wonderful news!'

Phew, what a relief. Ricardo promises his mother we'll visit next weekend to celebrate the good news.

The next morning, I immediately call my doctor for an appointment, and luckily, I can get in at half past eight. Feeling a bit nervous, I sit down in the waiting room and wait my turn.

'Ms van Zanten?' I enter the examination room. 'What can I do for you?' the doctor asks. I explain that I took a pregnancy test and hand him the stick.

'Yes, according to this stick, you are indeed pregnant. But you're not here for nothing, so we'll do another test.' He gives me a container to pee in. Once back in the examination room, the doctor dips another stick into my urine.

'Now we wait for the result to show up. Do you have an idea of how far along you might be?'

'I've been feeling exhausted for a few weeks now, and my appetite has decreased during those weeks. Reflecting on it now, I suspect I may have already been pregnant.'

Finally, the doctor retrieves the stick from my urine.

'Indeed, Truusje, you're pregnant. Congratulations.' He warmly shakes my hand, and I can't help but grin. He gives me the midwife's phone number, and I head back home. I immediately call