

Behind my Front door
Family

BEHIND MY FRONT DOOR - Family

© 2024 Truusje van Zanten

Photo author cover: K. van Zanten

Biography

Translation PurperhartVertalingen

ISBN 9789403787282

No part of this publication may be reproduced, using printing, photocopying, automated data files, or in any other way without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Truusje van Zanten

BEHIND MY FRONT DOOR

Family

Inhoud

An escalation - the year has just begun	8
Working	9
The old man and woman	9
A divorce in the family	11
Heart examination	12
The beautiful little girl	13
Loes	17
The same name	18
The baby	20
Parental Alienation	22
Stitching	23
A very thick layer of snow	26
The gentleman in the obesity refrigeration	27
Heart racing	32
General practitioner	33
Loes	35
My manager	36
Martijn and Karlijn	38
On the waitlist	39
The new kitchen does not arrive without a hitch	41
Martine and Ellen	43
Loes	44
Martijn and Karlijn	46
The intake	47
Pickling and working in the fields	49
Parents helping parents	51
Theater show	53
The first-time therapy at Marieke	54
Ouderpeil.nl	56
Martijn and Karlijn, own company	57
Child protection that really doesn't get it	58
Theater lessons	60
EMDR	60
Presenting a brochure	62
Martijn has a car accident and garage Harry moves	63
Doing a theater show for the first time	66
Loes and the mistreatments	67

Many more parents and my own business	69
Therapy: EMDR every week for five months	70
Less groceries and care products	72
Saving fish: again and this time a TV crew is coming	73
Official complaints procedure	76
Cleaning cars	78
Chronic Tennis Elbow	79
New pictures during the EMDR	80
Martijn	81
An out-of-home placement with Loes	83
The bottom of the bucket	85
Theatre lecture	86
Martijn and Karlijn	89
Refurbish the house and have it appraised	92
It's Joris's birthday	94
Also lost the youngest child	95
Aunt Annie's birthday	97
Lost racing engine.	99
Two funerals	104
On TV and a podcast	107
Panzertje	109
Cmex	111
Joris and his new work car	112
Still struggling with groceries	115
Stupid plans or not	117
A place I don't want to be	119
Disciplinary Board	122
When your daughter-in-law calls	125
Last therapy	128
To America	130
Epilog	137

An escalation - the year has just begun

It's Sunday, and Martijn and Karlijn are at home. Today, I'm on call, which means if things get really hectic at work, I could get a call to come in and help my colleagues. I usually dread these shifts because you can't do anything—at any moment, the phone could ring, and I find that really stressful.

There's some tension between my children today; they keep bickering and picking on each other. As I've done for years, I step in like a peacekeeper, trying to keep things under control. I never imagined it would escalate into the worst fight I've ever witnessed between them.

I manage to get to Karlijn to go to the kitchen. I tell her, "Get a cigarette for us, and we'll go outside to the veranda to smoke." Martijn is slouched in a chair in the living room, his face filled with anger. This separates them for now, and I hope it'll help them calm down. But Karlijn can't hold back and hurls another nasty comment at Martijn.

Before I can react, Martijn rushes past me, grabs Karlijn by her ponytail, pulls her head back, and slams it violently against the kitchen cabinet.

Karlijn screams and crumples to the floor. I grab Martijn by the arms and snap at him that there's no fighting allowed in my house. He's already taller than me, but I still think he respects me—at least, I hope he does.

He pushes past me and starts kicking Karlijn. I leap at him again, yelling for him to get outside. He looks at me, wild-eyed, then bolts toward the door.

BAM—the front door slams shut. I sit beside Karlijn, checking her head and body for injuries. All I can hear is her wailing because, in her mind, she's on the verge of death.

She cries, insisting that her brother is a jerk and can't get away with this, claiming she did nothing wrong. As calm as I can be, I remind her that I've told her many times to keep her mouth shut and not react to everything. I don't condone Martijn's behavior in the least, but she can't just blame him—she needs to take responsibility for her own actions too.

Self-reflection is something both of my teenagers struggle with. Blaming others has become second nature to them. They just can't see their part in things. No matter what happens, it's always someone else's fault.

Meanwhile, Martijn calls Bianca because he knows he messed up.

Shortly after, Bianca calls me, asking how I'm doing. What does she think?

We decide I'll take Martijn to the station so he can take the train home, and later I'll bring Karlijn home. I don't want her to travel alone on the train just yet, even though she's sixteen.

On the way back, I'm on the phone with Bianca, and I can't help but cry uncontrollably over what just happened. I'm reminded of my past with Ricardo, seeing traces of him in Martijn, and it fills me with overwhelming sadness. Suddenly, I'm back in time, flooded with painful flashbacks. I'm thankful I wasn't called in to work today.

Working

Of course, with the ongoing COVID-19 situation, it's no surprise that work is particularly hectic. I want to be as supportive as I can to my colleagues, so I make sure to send my supervisor a message every day, letting them know I'm available to be on standby. From what I gather, my willingness to help is really appreciated, especially during such a difficult time with so many deaths. I'm learning quickly and intensely. We work with a dispatch center that directs everything to the right team. Once I get a call, I know which mortuary I need to go to. Our team is responsible for four mortuaries, so we spend a lot of time driving from one to the next.

I'm fortunate to be shadowing a colleague, but that won't last long.

Eventually, I'll be expected to handle the mortuaries on my own. You're pretty much on your own unless the workload becomes overwhelming, and you need to reach out for help.

I have some reservations about having to handle this job solo. There's no support, no assistance, nothing. You're entirely on your own, responsible for caring for a deceased person, placing them on a clean sheet. I won't go into all the details, but honestly, doing it all alone just doesn't feel right. Sometimes, we encounter situations where working together would be far more efficient. And sometimes, the deceased can be quite heavy. Even in those cases, they still need to be turned and cared for, and having an extra set of hands makes all the difference.

The old man and woman

At the beginning of my shift, I receive a notification: I'm needed to be on the top floor of the large hospital to pick up a deceased person. With the necessary paperwork for the department and the stretcher in hand, I walk through the hospital corridors with my colleague. On the one hand, I feel a sense of power, yet at the same time, I feel so small. Everyone who sees us coming with the

special stretcher understands exactly why we're there we only come when someone has passed. People step aside respectfully to let us pass or allow us to go first in the elevator. The respect of the hospital staff is palpable. When we arrive at the department, we check in and wait for the nurse who will escort us to the room. It turns out to be the COVID ward, so both the nurse and we need to put on full protective suits, goggles, and masks. Every time we suit up like this, I feel a certain distance between us and both the family and the deceased. We look almost alien, hidden behind suits and masks. As we walk to the room, we encounter the husband of the deceased woman. He's an elderly man, struggling to walk. A nurse is already with him, and then my colleague and I enter with another nurse. Together, we stand in the small room, preparing the man for what comes next. Since his wife passed away from COVID, we must place her in a body bag necessity, though we all find it deeply unfortunate.

After explaining the next steps to the man, we give him a moment alone with his wife. He slowly walks over, caresses her cheek, and whispers, "Our story ends here, my love, but soon, up above, our story will continue." He gently kisses her and tenderly strokes her face. We stand at a respectable distance, our heads lowered, hands folded. It's hard for all of us to witness this moment. That poor man, who had been by his wife's side for days, watching over her, now missing her final breath. His grief is overwhelming. The nurse quietly leads him out of the room so my colleague and I can begin our work. We proceed with the first care procedures: carefully washing her face, adjusting her hair, placing the eye caps, removing the IV, and sealing any wounds with special glue and dressings. We always try to treat the deceased with the utmost respect, so that once we reach the morgue, no further care is needed. Not because we don't want to, but because she passed away from COVID. We aim to minimize all risks in the most respectable manner. Once she's fully prepared and placed in the body bag, we gently move her onto the stretcher. Together, we drape the special deep red cloth over her, making sure there are no wrinkles, and everything looks neat. Now, we're ready. Slowly, we move toward the door, the nurse was already waiting outside. The husband watches us from a distance, quietly crying as we take his wife away.

As we reach the department's door, my colleague steps out first, quickly removes all the protective gear, and disposes of it in the designated containers. Then, I gently push the stretcher through the door and step outside myself. My colleague stays with the body while I remove my protective suit. We walk to the elevator together and take her downstairs. We enter all the required details into the system, and less than four hours later, the funeral director arrives to take her.

A divorce in the family

As I do every day, I call my sister Dineke. She's mentioned a few times now that one of our cousins has separated from his wife—well, actually, she left him. Dineke keeps updating me on how things aren't going well, and there's a lot of drama surrounding the divorce settlement. With my sixth sense for sensing when things are off, I can already feel my neck hairs standing on end. I've told Dineke more than once: "Let her call me, maybe I can help her." Let me make one thing clear—I really don't care about most of my family, including my cousin.

I haven't spoken to or seen him in years, and I have zero interest in doing so. I just can't deal with spoiled people who think they're better than everyone else, and I have no patience for those who pass judgment without knowing the full story. I'll get into the family dynamics later.

I search for his ex-wife on Facebook and send her a message.

I tell her I've heard bits and pieces from Dineke, and I want her to know I'm here for her.

The stories I've heard about the divorce already tell me this is going to be a complete disaster. And you know what? The mess itself isn't even the worst part. I just hope, with everything I have, that the children won't suffer too much and won't become the real victims of all of this.

It takes a while for her to respond, even though Dineke had already messaged her to let her know I'd be reaching out. Soon enough, I discover why she was hesitant to talk to me at first. The moment she tells me that my cousin and his parents have spent the last 18 years badmouthing me, brainwashing her into thinking I'm a drug dealer and a terrible person, I know it for sure. Yup, my family's a mess. Well, except for a few of us.

Getting through to Loes takes real effort, but eventually, I manage. And before long, I uncover the full extent of the chaos in this divorce. We exchange numbers, and before I know it, we're texting for hours. The more she tells me, the angrier I get!

I promise her I'll do everything I can to help. I already knew some of my family wasn't right in the head, but now I'm absolutely sure of it. They all know our story—how Ricardo abused me and my children for years. And now, this is happening. How is that even possible?

Heart examination

Last year, I underwent a series of heart tests. This came after we found our mother's journals following the passing of our parents. What we read was shocking and disturbing. Our mother had essentially lied about everything. We had known for years that Dineke was a surviving twin, but we were always told that Anneke had died from sudden infant death syndrome. The journals revealed that our mother had been drinking and taking pills during her pregnancies. We don't know what kind of pills they were; that wasn't mentioned.

Dineke decided to request her medical records from the hospital, as well as Anneke's, last year.

What we had been told for years turned out to be one big lie—none of it was true. Anneke didn't die from sudden infant death syndrome, but from heart failure. Both Dineke and Anneke were born underweight and had various defects, about which we were never informed.

I've always been told that I was just a "band-aid" for the wound our mother had after Anneke's death. From the journals, I learned that I was only born as a way to fill the emptiness caused by Anneke's passing.

If Anneke hadn't died, I wouldn't have been born. Only now do Dineke and I understand why our mother always treated me so strangely, hugging me and affectionately calling me "mom's band-aid."

Since we no longer trust anything, and my medical records have disappeared due to expiration, I've had a series of tests to see if something was wrong with my heart.

My heart often beats irregularly, sometimes feeling like it's about to jump out of my chest. It's an awful feeling.

After the tests, I was told it's something with which I can live. Apparently, my heart just decides to "bounce" on its own. I've been prescribed medication to take when it happens too often, like during stressful times.

I need to get used to it and learn to manage it. It's true—under stress, my heart acts up more frequently. So, it is medication.

Fortunately, I can continue working and doing everything I enjoy, just with the help of a pill.

At work, I feel at home. My job gives me so much energy, and I do it with love and dedication. I even have whole conversations with the deceased, caring for them with love.

But my colleagues... where do I even start? The team I'm stuck with is like a venomous pit of lies and deceit.

They steal things like face masks and gloves and gossip about each other constantly. And they lie straight to the manager, who's so oblivious, they believe it all.

I'm still learning and doing my best, but I can't stand the dishonesty. It's really starting to get to me. Then a colleague calls me, yelling at me from here to Tokyo, completely putting me down.

Apparently, I hadn't dried the floor and didn't clean up properly. I tried to explain that I did, and I'm sorry if it wasn't up to her standards, but I also had four reports to finish, so I was in a rush. She didn't care at all—she was furious and hung up on me.

Then, I hear from my manager that this job is too much for me.

More terrible comments follow, and I recognize them instantly!

They're all lies from one of my colleagues. I know exactly who's behind it, and I feel so small. In my head, I hear a voice screaming, "You're nothing, you'll never achieve anything in life."

Dineke and I heard these words constantly throughout our childhood from our father. I also hear him scream, "You're too stupid to even dance for the devil!" We've heard this our whole lives, and now it's echoing again. I get in my car and drive home, my heart pounding harder and harder.

I feel terrible. I roll down the car window, letting the cold wind blow in my face, as tears stream down my cheeks. I just don't understand why. This isn't new, right? I'm used to being told I'm worthless.

I arrive home pale, and Joris immediately notices something's wrong.

I pretend everything is fine and start preparing dinner. Afterward, I clean up and take a hot shower, hoping to calm my heart, but nothing works.

All I can do is take a pill.

The beautiful little girl

With a heavy heart, I head to work, finding it increasingly difficult to deal with the toxic people around me.

We have a new colleague, and even though I haven't met or spoken to her, I've already heard all sorts of rumors: that she's terrible at the job, that she sneaks her boyfriend in during night shifts, and countless other awful things.

If I were to believe everything I hear, she'd practically be the devil. I decide to try and ignore it for now. I'll meet her eventually and make my own judgment.

I proceed as usual to the cold storage rooms and take a look.

The papers on the doors indicate the names and birth dates of the deceased, so I know exactly who is inside. As I read the names, one catches my eye.

When I reach the last storage unit, I freeze. I remove my glasses and put them back on. Am I seeing this correctly? Two years old.

I slowly open the heavy door. Inside the room, the cold metal plate where the deceased lies is two meters long and one meter wide. At the far end of the cooling room, on this large plate, is a small bundle wrapped in a sheet.

So tiny, so fragile. I stand there for a moment, just looking. I can't see the face, can't see anything except the bundle.

Suddenly, my phone rings. It's the dispatch center.

"You have a call," they say. It's the hospital. Relief washes over me because that means I don't have to go to another mortuary.

I grab the necessary equipment and stretcher and head to the designated department.

Once there, I help the family lay the deceased in a beautiful red sheet for the final care. Before I leave, two people rush over to thank me, hugging me tightly. They are so incredibly grateful. At that moment, I'm not concerned about COVID. I hug them back, reassuring them that I'll take good care of their loved one, then solemnly walk down the hall towards the elevators.

As I step into the elevator, my phone rings again. It's the dispatch center.

They need me to forward the information to the funeral director.

I can barely understand the man, but I gather he plans to come at 2:00 p.m. to pick up the little child. I check my watch and realize I have enough time.

Once I'm back in the mortuary, I haven't even had a chance to catch my breath before the next call comes in. I quickly place the deceased in the cooler, prepare the stretcher, and head to collect the next body.

This time, I'm lucky. The body is on the bottom floor in a special department, securely locked. The bell rings, I press it, and soon enough I'm let in and shown the room where the deceased is lying.

Well, sitting, actually. I'm confused—has this man really passed away?

I check the papers: he passed away at 7:00 a.m. this morning, and it's now 11:30 a.m. Two nurses approach me, asking how I'm doing.

"I'm fine, thank you," I reply, but internally, I'm thinking, what's going on here?