

Where Quiet Once Lived
Uncovering Pain, Reclaiming Self

First edition 2025 © Priscilla Sapulette

Author photograph: © Tamarah Dalsheim

ISBN: 978-94-653-1234-7

Published by Brave New Books
www.bravenewbooks.nl

Disclaimer

Where Quit Once Lived is a work of fiction. Names, characters, events, and situations are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or deceased, or to real-life events, is purely coincidental. While the story explores themes that may feel familiar to some readers, it is not based on the personal life of the author

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Where Quiet Once Lived

Uncovering Pain, Reclaiming Self

Priscilla Sapulette

Foreword

Writing this book was a journey in itself. Not because it tells my own story, but because it touched a place where humanity, pain, and hope meet *Where Quit Once Lived* is a work of fiction, yet the themes woven throughout—trauma, loss, resilience—are a reality for many.

This book is an ode to the strength that lives within us, even when that strength feels invisible. It is written for anyone who has ever felt lost, trapped in fear or uncertainty. This story seeks to show that even in the deepest silence, a voice can rise. And that even after the darkest night, a new dawn is possible.

Though this story grew from imagination and observation, I wrote it with deep compassion and respect for those who see themselves reflected in it. It is not a testimony of my own past, but a space for experiences that often go unseen.

To everyone who is struggling, healing, or recognizing themselves in these pages: you are not alone. May this book be a small light along your path.

With connection,
Priscilla Sapulette

Introduction

Every person carries a story, hidden in the folds of silence. Some stories are whispered, others scream in stillness—waiting for a place to land, a moment to be seen. *Where Quit Once Lived* is one of those stories. Not mine, but a voice shaped by fragility, resilience, and the quiet power of survival.

The world brought to life in these pages is not real—and yet, it is deeply true. It is a landscape built from fiction, but nourished by what is real: the longing for safety, the scar of loss, the invisible battle many fight in the shadows of their lives.

This book tells of a childhood without anchors, of pain that had no words, and of the slow, tender journey toward self-liberation. Not to shock, not to judge, but to build a bridge between what is felt and what so often goes unspoken.

To those who recognize themselves in these lines—know that you are not alone. To those who simply read and listen—may your understanding deepen. And to all who have suffered in silence: this story is for you. Not to hold on to the past, but to make room for a new beginning.

Content Warning

This book contains sensitive themes, including child abuse within the family, trauma, psychological vulnerability, loss, and emotional abuse. These topics may be distressing or emotionally triggering for some readers.

If you are sensitive to such content, please read with care. Consider seeking professional support if the material evokes difficult emotions.

Part One

It all began in a house where the silence was so heavy, it felt like you couldn't breathe. Sometimes it wrapped itself around my body like a blanket that suffocated me. It was the silence of unspoken words, of things that were never allowed to be said. And that silence—that was all I knew.

My mother often looked at me with an expression I couldn't quite understand. At times, it seemed as if she knew everything, but lacked the courage to ask. Or maybe she was simply afraid. I could feel her sadness—that much was clear—but she never spoke of it. It was as if she, too, was trapped in the same silence. When we sat together in a room, it felt as though the air itself pressed down on us, as if each breath grew heavier.

My father was a shadow in our home. He was always there, but never truly present. I would sometimes feel his gaze on me, but I didn't know what it meant. He was not a man of words. And his silence—that frightened me most. But the things he did—those were not words, yet they struck harder. I didn't understand why he did what he did. I didn't know how to stop it, or even how to think about it. Was it my fault? Why was he doing these things? What had I done to deserve them? I felt torn apart, so small, as if my entire being wasn't worth protecting.

My brother Lucas had no idea. He was just a child, like me, but he didn't understand why I was always so quiet. Why I turned inward. He didn't see me—or maybe he chose not to. Maybe I protected him by saying nothing. Because what could I possibly tell him? How do you explain what's happening to you when you don't even understand it yourself?

The moments I spent with my uncle were confusing and frightening. His touch wasn't one of love, but something far darker. The time he placed his hand on my leg, it wasn't the hand of an uncle who loved his little niece. It felt wrong. But I didn't know how to speak up, how to make it stop. I wanted to scream, but my voice was trapped in my

throat. I wanted to run, but there was nowhere to go. My body didn't feel like mine—it belonged to him. And that thought, that I had no control over my own body, was what hurt the most.

And then there was my grandfather. He used to give me a French franc for a kiss, a simple kiss I didn't understand. But over time, it changed. It began with a kiss on the cheek, but soon it became something else. I had to kiss him back on the mouth. Was it a game? Was it normal? I didn't know. I felt uncomfortable, but said nothing. I didn't dare. It happened again and again, more and more. And I kept accepting it. But deep down, I knew it wasn't right. This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

In those moments, I felt a mix of fear and confusion. My body told me it was wrong, but my mind wanted to believe it was okay. What I felt wasn't love—not the care a child is meant to feel. It was something else, something I couldn't fully grasp, yet couldn't escape. I felt trapped in something beyond my control. Something that was slowly changing me, pulling my world into a chaos of silence and pain.

I didn't know who I was supposed to be. The Anna Claire that others saw wasn't the real me. I felt like a mask, a shadow of myself, invisible to the world around me. And in that silence—in that prison of unspoken words—I kept asking myself: Why am I so unhappy? Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve it? Why is no one seeing it?

But I was too afraid to speak. Too afraid of what would happen if I broke the silence.

1

The scent of her grandfather's aftershave still lingered in the air when Anna Claire gently closed the door to her room. The room was large and empty—too large for her small body, too dark for any sense of safety. The furniture loomed like heavy shadows in the corners, still and imposing. It felt as if the room itself was always watching her—silent, alert, like an eye that never blinked. This was where she often found herself. Not because she spent much time in bed, but because the room offered something she couldn't find anywhere else—a sense of escape. A place to disappear.

Anna Claire sat down on the edge of the bed. Her hands clutched the blanket, the edges of the mattress always cold, as if she wasn't allowed to warm herself in the space she had been given. Everything in her life felt like too much and not enough, all at once. The silence around her was too vast, too heavy to carry. Her thoughts were tangled, a mess of unspoken emotions. She closed her eyes and tried to shake them off, but it was impossible not to think about that afternoon—the way her grandfather had touched her, his hand lingering just a little too long on her shoulder. The spot where his skin had met hers still burned. The uneasy knot in her stomach refused to loosen. What did it mean? What had she done wrong? It was a question that haunted her, but one she never dared to ask aloud.

“You should learn to smile a little sweeter,” her grandfather had said, his voice as rough as ever. The remark had always confused her. Her smile was never real—it was a hollow gesture, something expected of her, something she had learned to perform without understanding. She remembered the way his eyes looked at her—not with love, but with something else. Something darker. It had always felt that way, but she had no words to make sense of it. No words to name her fear.

The scent of that old aftershave and the coffee he always drank still clung to her senses. It was so strong, it felt like he was still there, inside her room. The smell of coffee, the smell of his hands, the smell of something that haunted her—even in his absence. She looked down at the floor, at the blanket still clenched in her hands. Her eyes followed the pattern in the fabric, but it did nothing to quiet the unrest inside her. There was always that tremble in the air. The tension that lingered, the feeling that the ground beneath her feet could give way at any moment. Her heart pounded in her chest, but she remained still—too afraid to even move.

Then came a sound from downstairs—her father’s voice, loud and sharp. Étienne was angry again.

Anna Claire felt her heartbeat quicken. It was always the same when he lost his temper. The walls seemed to close in, the space around her growing smaller, as if there were no escape from the sound of his rage. Her mother, Élise, always tried to stay calm, her voice soft—but Anna Claire could hear the fear beneath her words, even when she said nothing. It was as if she lived in a state of constant dread, always afraid of what her husband might do.

“Étienne, please,” her mother said, her voice barely above a whisper, edged with panic. “The children...”

She always spoke that way—gentle, as if her tone could somehow make things better. But Anna Claire knew better. She had seen the way her mother tried, the way she struggled to fix what was broken, only to fail every time. She had seen her mother fall for her father’s promises, the ones where he blamed his anger on her and swore it would never happen again. But it always did.

Anna Claire’s eyes turned to the door of her room, as if her father’s shadow could reach through the thin walls. She didn’t want him to see her, to call her, to punish her. Her fingers dug deeper into the

blanket. She stared at the wall across from her. The room was always too big, too dark, as if it held her captive. There was no escape.

Why did her mother stay? It was a question Anna Claire had asked herself so many times it had become a whisper inside her mind. She never dared to say it aloud. Something inside her held her back—guilt, maybe, as if the question itself was wrong. But the unspoken words gnawed at her, restless and raw.

One evening, while the rain tapped softly against the windows and the house sat still in its usual dread, Anna Claire sat at the table with her brother Lucas. Their mother stood by the sink, her back to them, hands gripping the edge of the counter. She turned slowly and looked at them.

“If he touches me one more time,” she said, her voice low but steady, “I’m leaving. I promise you that.”

The words landed heavy in the room, impossible to ignore. Anna Claire looked at Lucas, but he didn’t react. He stared at the table, as if trying to erase the moment.

“Do you really promise?” Anna Claire’s voice was thin, almost breakable.

Her mother nodded, tears glistening in her eyes. “I mean it. I won’t let him hurt us again.”

But even as she said it, something inside Anna Claire twisted. Something whispered that the promise was hollow. That the fear would never leave. She wanted to believe her mother—but it was hard.

Lucas sighed and stood up. “Come on, Mom,” he said, tired. “You’ve been saying that for years. It never happens.”

“Lucas!” her mother snapped, but her expression softened quickly. “It’s harder than you think. You don’t understand.”

Anna Claire’s stomach tightened. “We don’t understand because you never tell us anything,” she said softly.

Her mother turned away again, back to the sink, shoulders tense. The rain hit harder against the windows—a rhythm full of warning. And there they sat, trapped in silence and words left unsaid.

Anna Claire knew her mother’s promise was meant to bring comfort. But it felt like a lie. A lie she had to believe, again and again, just to keep hope alive.

The silence in her room was deafening, filled only by the sound of her own breathing, which now seemed too loud. The smell of cigarette smoke, always clinging to her father’s presence, mixed with the scent of old furniture. It made her stomach turn. But it was fear that paralyzed her most. The fear of what was coming. The fear of shouting, of violent outbursts always just a step away.

Lucas. Her brother. He had always been different. He never seemed afraid. He never appeared to feel what Anna Claire felt. He was their grandfather’s favourite. He did everything right. He had friends, played outside, while Anna Claire hid in her room. A sharp pain tugged at her belly whenever she thought of him. He was always with their mother, always the sunshine in a house full of storms. But even Lucas had his secrets. He had his own way of hiding. Anna Claire couldn’t see it then. She only saw the distance between them. He always seemed to have it easier. And when he hurt her, somehow, it was always her fault.

“Come on, Anna Claire,” he would often say, his voice cold, his brows furrowed like he couldn’t understand her. “Just act normal.”

But what was normal? What was normal in a house where nothing ever was? What was normal in a home filled with shouting, where the air itself felt heavy with threat? What was normal when you never knew what the next minute would bring? When you couldn't tell if your father would embrace you or explode?

The question never changed: When would it end? When would the fear finally leave? Why couldn't she just be a normal child, without this ever-present sense of darkness?

One night, as the rain slammed against the windows and the sky felt ready to break, there was a knock at the door. Soft—but enough to send her heart racing. Her mother stood, her movements quick and nervous. Anna Claire could see the tension in her shoulders, the way she braced herself for what might be behind the door. Her smile was too fast, too forced. It wasn't real. Anna Claire felt it. Her mother was afraid. Just like she was.

And in that moment, wrapped in silence, Anna Claire knew: there was no escape from the world of secrets and shadows she lived in. A world that held her tight and wouldn't let go.

She knew Lucas didn't have it easy either, but he hid it better. He lived as if the world outside their house could save him, as if the chaos inside disappeared the moment he closed the front door behind him. For her, there was no such door. Even in the quiet moments, when the storm seemed to pass, she could feel the invisible hands of fear and guilt dragging her back down.

That night, when their father once again unleashed his fury on the walls of their home, she heard her mother soothing, pleading—as if it ever made a difference. Anna Claire stayed in her room, clutching her pillow tightly to her chest. She listened to the voices echoing through the house, the harsh words replaced at times by silence—the kind of silence that was worse than noise. Then came the slam of the

living room door. Heavy footsteps, slow and determined, began to climb the stairs.

Anna Claire froze. Her breath quickened as she pressed the pillow even closer. The steps grew louder—closer—then suddenly stopped. The silence that followed was deafening. Somewhere below, she could hear her mother crying, but it sounded like it came from another world. Anna Claire wanted to go to her, to hold her—but something held her back. Fear. Powerlessness. Or perhaps the sense that it wouldn't change anything.

The hours crawled by. Sleep wouldn't come—not while the silence in the house weighed so heavily. And when she finally closed her eyes, it felt as though invisible hands were holding her down, trapping her in a world she couldn't understand, and couldn't leave.

2

The next morning, everything was back to the way it always was. Her mother acted as if nothing had happened, her father had left early, and Lucas wore his usual disarming smile. But for Anna Claire, something inside her had cracked. It wasn't something visible, not a scratch or a bruise, but something deeper—something that was slowly tearing her apart.

That afternoon, when her grandfather dropped by unexpectedly, Anna Claire felt the tension rise the moment he entered. His presence filled the room, his voice a mixture of feigned warmth and something that made her skin crawl. He kissed her mother on the cheek and tousled Lucas's hair. But when he turned to Anna Claire, her stomach twisted. It was that same look again—the look she could never quite place, but that always filled her with dread. His smile was friendly, but something in his eyes took her breath away.

“How are you, sweetheart?” he asked, his voice low and sing-song. Anna Claire could do nothing but nod. Her voice failed her, caught in the silence that always clung to her.

His hand rested briefly on her shoulder—an innocent gesture to anyone else, but to her it felt like a weight dragging her under. Anna Claire glanced at her mother, hoping for a sign, a reaction. But her mother had already disappeared into the kitchen, too busy preparing coffee and cookies for the visit. And Lucas? He had slipped outside, like he always did.

Anna Claire was left alone with her grandfather. The room shrank around her, the air thickened. His voice broke through her thoughts, but she barely heard the words. All she felt was the urge to run—to flee this room, this house, this life.