

SOFTEN WHERE
IT HURTS

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Foreword

This isn't my story.

And yet, it's woven through every line of it.

I wrote Fenna's journey from what I witness and feel every day in my practice, from the stories people share with me. Stories of patterns we all know: people-pleasing, old wounds, the search for love, the longing to come home to yourself.

I was born in South Africa and have lived, with my family, later with the father of my children, and eventually on my own, in several countries: the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, England, Italy, Spain, and now once again, back in the Netherlands. Each country, each language and culture, awakened something different in me.

I'm a mother of three sons, and I think life itself has shaped me more deeply than any training ever could. My path toward inner depth began when I found myself a young single mother, trying to rebuild my life with three small children. That period marked the beginning of a long journey back to myself and to life.

I studied family constellations, traveled to India to complete my yoga teacher training in Rishikesh, immersed myself in Reiki, became a holistic therapist, and later a somatic therapist and somatic educator. I trained as a kundalini facilitator and

traveled to Egypt, where I could feel, deep within the ancient temples, how old wisdom lives inside the body.

Today, I work as an energetic bodyworker, somatic educator, and coach. I guide people to return home to their bodies, to their rhythm, to their truth. Nothing I write about is foreign to me. I've learned to embrace life in all its facets — the pain, the silence, the joy, and the love.

This book is a story. A novel.

But I hope you recognize something of yourself within it. That it touches you. That it reminds you that you are not alone in your search, and that you can always find your way back home.

Manon Simone Hanraets

NURAYA COACHING

Chapter 1 — Waking Up in a Life That Doesn't Fit

He was already there.

Just like in the photo, but somehow completely different.

The sweater, the hair, the café table by the window. That all matched.

But his energy didn't.

He glanced around nervously, and I already knew:

Turn around, Fenna. He's not the one.

But I kept walking.

Not out of excitement. Not curiosity.

More like politeness. Or pity. Or something in between.

He stood up and shook my hand.

"Nice to meet you."

Kind eyes, friendly smile. Nothing wrong with him.

Just... not my guy.

We sat down on the terrace.

He ordered a beer; I asked for sparkling water.

He talked about his job at the city council, his dog, his five-year-old nephew.

And all I could think was: *good for you — just not for me.*

He was nice.

A little simple, maybe. But not unpleasant.

I asked questions, nodded at the right moments, laughed when expected.

Meanwhile, a different movie was playing in my head.

What am I doing here?

Why can't I just say he's not it?

Why am I wasting both our time?

Shit. I'm still not over Jay.

I felt my face slip into that socially acceptable mask.

Polite, smiling, while my body was screaming: get out.

"Want another drink?" he asked, looking at my empty glass.

"Uh, no thanks," I heard myself say.

"This was really nice, but I have to get back... to work."

It was seven-thirty in the evening, and I'd already told him I work in marketing, so it wasn't exactly believable.

But it could've been.

He asked for the check.

I automatically reached for my card.

"No, absolutely not. This one's on me," he said.

"You sure?" I asked weakly.

"Yeah, no worries."

I took that advice surprisingly fast.

"It was really great meeting you, Fenna.

Maybe we can grab dinner sometime?"

"Yeah, sounds fun!" slipped out.

And I gave him an awkward hug.

Yeah, sounds fun? I thought, walking back home.

Pathetic.

Back on my couch, I deleted the app.

This just isn't for me.

Fenna — thirty-eight, and a not-entirely-honest profile picture.

Jay and I had broken up for a few months now.
He already had someone new — or something that looked a lot like it.
And still... he kept showing up.
A text here, a like there.
A “how are you?” around eleven at night.
And me? I kept replying.
A little too often.
Maybe that’s why I downloaded the app.
Curiosity. Or pride.
Or some unconscious attempt to prove I was further along than I really was.
But no.
No more half-yeses.
No more polite conversations.
No more compromises at the cost of my own gut feeling.
I looked outside.
The sky was dark, the city soft.
And somewhere deep down I knew:
I can’t keep living like this.

Chapter 2 — Nothing's Wrong, Really

I was at the office, behind my laptop, when my screen barked at me.

“EOD reminder — presentations tomorrow at 9:00 sharp!”

EOD. End of Day.

In my head: *So... another late night, Fenna.*

But I dutifully typed back: “All good!”

With an exclamation mark, because a period feels too cold,
like I’m not being enthusiastic enough.

That’s what I do.

Everything’s always fine.

Until it isn’t.

But we don’t like to talk about that.

My coffee was cold. My lunch forgotten.

My focus everywhere except work.

That afternoon, I went to the bathroom.

I looked at myself in the mirror and thought:

Who even are you?

Eyes that looked like they’d fought with a bad dream.

Hair that had given up following orders.

And deep in my chest, that tight, cracking feeling —
like something was about to break,
but I was still holding it together.

I did what I always do.

I smiled at my reflection and whispered,

“Come on. Just an off day. You’ll be fine tomorrow.”

That night, I was supposed to go to a workout class with Sanne.

Hot yoga, barre, pilates — it changed every week, depending on who felt more guilty about her lifestyle.

But she texted:

“Drinks instead? Bad day.”

And me?

Of course I said yes.

Saying no sometimes feels like letting people down.

And letting people down feels scarier than forgetting myself.

We sat outside at a bar.

Wine. Always wine.

Sanne talked about her boyfriend, her job, her parents.

I nodded.

I listened.

I gave advice.

Once again, I was the safe net.

And somewhere, halfway through her story,

I thought:

I want to lean on someone too.

Just fall back and know someone will catch me.

Is that allowed?

But I didn't say it.
I smiled.
I ordered another glass.
We went home too late.
I slept too little.
My mind too full.

The next morning: presentation.
PowerPoint open. People at the table.
My voice started shaking by slide three.
And by slide five... everything went black.
Literally.
Ears ringing. Heart racing.
Like my head was spinning inside a washing machine.
Sweat broke out.
My hands trembled.
My mouth was still moving,
but I couldn't hear myself anymore.
Shit, everything's spinning. I'm going to pass out.
I stopped talking.
The silence was brutal.
Everyone stared.
I forced a laugh.
"Haha, wow. Total brainfart. Embarrassing."
And I kept going.
No one asked if I was okay.
And honestly, I was relieved.

Because if they had,
I might've had to tell the truth.

That night, I curled up under a blanket.

Netflix on. Glass of wine in hand.

My heart was still racing.

But I calmed myself:

"Nothing's wrong. Everyone's tired.

Just a weekend and it'll pass."

And yet... quietly, underneath it all,

a small voice whispered:

This isn't normal. This isn't fine. This isn't you.

I turned up the volume.

Chapter 3 — If I Touch Him, Maybe I'll Feel Myself Again

I'd promised myself: no wine, no texts, no him.

Tonight I'd go to bed early.

Maybe try that book I'd restarted three times, or put on a meditation I'd never finish.

Rest. Breathe. Boundaries.

The sound of a message.

"Was thinking about you. Was in the neighborhood. Just had to see you."

My whole body tensed.

I knew what this meant.

I'd lived this scene before.

And yet... something in his words hit me.

Like his attention was proof that I still existed.

"I won't stay long."

"I just want to feel you."

He called to say he was outside.

I didn't want to open the door,

but my legs were already moving,

my hand already turning the handle.

There he was.

The smell of his cologne filled the hallway.

It was like my body remembered him before my mind could forget him.

Familiar — in a body that hadn't felt safe for a long time.

We were on the couch for less than five minutes.
I asked if he wanted a drink.
He shook his head.
Then came the line:
“I miss you.”
My throat tightened.
My heart wanted to run, but my hands wanted to stay.
And before I knew it, we were lying against each other.
His breath on my neck.
My need to feel something — anything — stronger than my
boundaries.
The sex was, as always, functional.
I gave. He took.
I laughed softly. He finished.
And as he held me, I held my breath.
As if — if I stayed still enough — I might mistake it for love.
But I felt nothing.
Except the ache of what wasn’t there.
He pulled away. Clothes, shoes, jacket.
“I’ll text you tomorrow, okay?”
Ouch. Straight through the chest.
The door clicked shut.
And there I was — in my own home,
feeling completely uninhabited.
Shit. Now I’d earned that glass of wine.
One became two.
It felt like numbing myself —
a short break from realizing I’d abandoned myself again.