



Refuse ^{To} Be Silenced

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Chapter 1: How did I get here?

*There are many times
 When I have sought to retell
 Another's story as my own
 Inspired by the words
 And actions that talent and love provide
 Even if but just a fantasy,
 So it is no wonder
 That I have continued to be disappointed
 For I am not those characters
 Nor am I my neighbor.
 I am me,
 And this is my own story
 Never told before now
 And never to be finished
 Until my soul parts from my flesh.
 I hold the pen.
 I control my tale.
 Though I do not control the tale of those
 Who enter my book,
 Invited or not,
 They have their own pens
 And if they so choose that our stories
 Shall not be one,
 Then that is how it must be.
 I am not afraid of the end,
 But I am afraid of the journey.
 I fear when I am told to fear not
 Because I cease to stop comparing
 My story to the others.
 So forever disappointed will I be?
 No, no, no
 There is a plan for me.
 I may not know what it is
 Or who is in it and who is not,
 But the story is mine
 And somehow,
 Regardless of the fact that I am not a princess
 Waiting on my knight in shining armor,
 I just know that the journey,
 And the ending,
 Will be fantastic.*

It is a Monday morning. I grab my toothbrush and my toothpaste from their containers. I squeeze the paste ever so gently as to not release too much onto the frayed bristles. I brush my teeth back and forth, back and forth - a task so ordinary and done multiple times everyday that it almost becomes mindless. My trance is broken when I rise from rinsing my mouth and catch my reflection in the mirror. I can barely stand to look for more than a second for I cannot face the girl staring back. This past year has changed me more than I would have liked. Before now, I was the girl who always smiled, who always saw the good in the world and in herself, a girl who loved her family and friends and Jesus with such passion, a girl with hope for tomorrow and strength for today. This face looking back at me now tells a different story. I am weak. I am worthless. I am scared. I am ugly. I am voiceless. I am powerless. I am alone. I am a victim of verbal, emotional and sexual abuse. *How did I get here?*



I grew up in the small, country town of Alvin, Texas located on the outskirts of Houston. The city hotspot is the local Walmart and we all thought we had made the big time when we got an Olive Garden, if that gives you any indication of how little there is there. We are famous for being the hometown of pitcher Nolan Ryan, who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1999. He is the crowning glory of good ole Alvin. His old house where he raised his three children with his high school sweetheart, Ruth Holdorff, is just a few miles down the old county road where my grandparents have lived for nearly 40 years. A local family just recently sold the

property to somebody who tore the house down, though they left the private tennis court and baseball diamond.

It's a close community, one I have called home for 21 years. My family and I like to ride our bikes around the high school, and we rarely make a trip without seeing someone we know. It's sort of an everybody knows everybody place, just like everyone knows Stanton's Grocery is the best place to go get a BlueBell chocolate ice-cream shake before they close the diner at 3 p.m. In the spring, just as you can see summer approaching, we all make our way out to Froberg's Farm to pick some fresh, locally grown strawberries, and maybe sneak a few bites of the sweet fruit before taking our baskets to the register. If you want to enjoy the best barbecue baked potato you've ever eaten, it's a known fact you must go out to Joe's Barbeque and order yourself a plate. Life is simple in Alvin. It's easy. It's comfortable. It's home.

For 21 years I have known the same people, and the same people have known me. My name is Kelsey Elizabeth Purcell, daughter of born and raised Alvinites John and Melinda Purcell, and twin sister of Elyssa. Some have called us the "All-American family." My parents married back in July of 1991. They've beaten the odds and have stayed married for more than 26 years.

My parents have never been overly affectionate with each other, but they don't have to be to show their love for one another. You can tell by the way they do little things like when my dad randomly buys my mom new snowman or gingerbread man decorations for her Christmas collection, or when my mom packs my dad some lunch when she knows he's going to have a long day at work. Of course, like any couple does, they've been through their fair share of trials. The biggest trial came in 2005 when my family went through the hardest time we've ever faced.

I will get to that later, but it was during that horrible time that I watched my mother stand by her husband when he needed her most, when she saw he was hurting. That is love. *In sickness and in health.*

Their relationship has always been based on trust and love, though my dad loves to poke fun at my mom just to get a few laughs from my sister and me. They dated for six months before getting engaged, during which time they dated other people throughout the beginning. Both of them made the conscience decision to remain virgins until marriage, so their wedding night was the first time either of them had experienced sex. They've always set such a good example, and I've always wanted to be just like them.

We were raised in church. As children, we attended Sunday school at the First United Methodist Church, then later moved to Alvin Bible Church when my parents decided they wanted my sister and me to come to accept Christ on our own time instead of through confirmation. Alvin Bible Church was a little white church on Rosharon Road and had a few loyal families in attendance each week, most of whom were over the age of 60. Every Sunday, we sat in the pews and sang hymnals as the Marchands led worship. Around Christmas, the children of the church would put on a play, and naturally Elyssa and I were involved. Growing up, my sister was very shy to the point she would barely speak to anyone who wasn't immediate family, but for whatever reason, the child could act on stage. She would be cast for one of the main parts, while I, the outgoing twin, would seethe with jealousy as I studied my one line for the part of Angel #3.

I loved going to church. My faith has always been very strong. I've never questioned God's existence; I've just always known Him and loved Him since early on, in fact, I don't

remember a time when I did not know Christ. My mom likes to tell the story of when I was little, strapped into a car seat in the back of her minivan. She was driving through town running a few errands when she heard my little voice calling out from behind her.

“Mommy, I love Jesus,” I said. “I believe in Him.”

Then I went back to doing whatever it was I was doing, probably throwing a sippy-cup at the front windshield or making goofy faces at Elyssa. She said she was taken aback by my spontaneous comment, but it made her smile. She said she could see the love of Jesus in me through the way I loved others. I’ve always tried to be kind to everyone, though I haven’t always been successful. It takes a lot to make me mad because I truly do my best to always see the good in everyone, even when they don’t see the good in themselves. I believe everyone has a story, and even when it looks like someone has it all together, they’ve been through their own struggles.

Maybe it’s because of the way I try to live my life judgement free, or maybe it’s because of that “Jesus love” in me that my mom talks about, but people have trusted me with some deep things in my short life.

I have had four people come to me contemplating suicide. The first was my freshman year of high school. He was a classmate, but not someone I would call a friend necessarily. He said he didn’t know why he felt compelled to talk to *me* about his thoughts, but there he was, trusting me with something so heavy I was not sure how my heart could handle it. Nonetheless, it

was one of those moments where everything started to make sense. Like I said, everyone has a story, and I am no exception.

March 23, 2005 was a bad day for my family. My mother, sister and I were at my grandparents house. My dad was unable to go with us because he could not get off work. I remember I was sitting on the floor in the living room when we heard what had happened - it was all over the news; there had been an explosion at the oil refinery my dad worked at and there had been many casualties. At eight years old, I did not understand what was happening. All I knew was mommy was on the phone trying to call daddy and she was crying because she couldn't reach him. I sat there with my sister watching the television display images of a workplace in pieces and a community devastated. I remember running my fingers through the carpet as I prayed. *I was so confused.*

Eventually, my dad called back and he told us he was okay, but he was not okay. He was very far from okay. The months that followed that tragic day brought a rain cloud over our family. The smiling, always-cracking-a-joke man I had always known was not there. Instead, there was a shell of a man with saddened eyes and a short temper. I remember praying, "God, please make Daddy better. Please don't let him be sad anymore." *I prayed that prayer relentlessly.*

Time continued passing, and Dad only got worse. I was too young to know what was wrong, I just knew it was bad. Some nights, I would crawl into bed with my sister and play "My Grandfather Had a Store" with her until we eventually dozed off to the sound of dad's feet pacing the ground in our living room. *He never slept.* One night, my mom joined us in Elyssa's bed and said there was something she wanted to share with us.

“Girls,” she said. “I know you’ve noticed that Daddy has been acting differently lately and I think I need to let you know what’s been going on. Daddy has been very sick since the explosion. He saw a lot of things nobody should ever have to see. A few weeks ago, your dad was awake during the night. He was in the living room thinking about how he didn’t know if he could live like this anymore. He wanted to take his own life long before then, but he said he knew he had to be here for you girls. But that night was really bad, and he found himself face to face with Christ in the living room. He told your daddy everything would be okay and said he would soon get help. The next day, we went to the doctor and he has already been doing better.”

I don’t think I understood the magnitude of that conversation while it was happening, all I could think was “why did this have to happen to our family?” It was not until years later that my dad finally sat me down and shared the horrors of what he experienced back in 2005. What I didn’t know before was that my dad was not near the explosion when it happened, but he went into it to pull people from the fires and debris. My dad has always had a passion for weight-lifting and his strength is impressive, but when he described the day of the explosion, I realized God’s purpose for him. He told me about how he heard a voice as clear as a bell say to him, “I made you strong for a reason. Go in there and help those men.” He obeyed and pulled friend’s and co-worker’s bodies from the rubble. He said he had never carried anything heavier than a dead body before. *Honestly, I don’t think he ever stopped carrying the weight of death on his shoulders.*

Like I said, I never knew why my good, God-fearing family had been put through such a terrible sadness until that night my freshman year of high school. Then, it all made sense. My dad, the explosion and the thought of suicide had all been to prepare me for this moment with

this young man. I was able to use my dad's experience as a story of hope and strength for my classmate. I'm happy to say he is alive today, and though I don't keep in close contact with him as to never reveal his secret, I can say he seems to be very happy.

Three more like him followed over the next five years. I'm still not entirely sure why these people have trusted me with something like whether they should live or die, but they have, and each time I'm there for them no matter what.

I suffer from anxiety; it's something that runs on the Purcell side of the family and, of course, it was passed on to me, so I take on each of these situations and struggle a bit. I care so deeply about people in general, so it hurts me if I feel like I can't make their pain go away. Their pain becomes my pain and I lay in bed wide awake staring at the ceiling praying God uses me to help them.

On nights when I struggle, even as I have surpassed my teen years, all I want to do is crawl into bed with my mother. She does not understand what its like to be consumed with anxiety, but she knows how to handle someone dealing with it. She'll take my hand and hold it and softly rub it with her fingertips until my uncontrollable breathing and crying has subsided. She kisses my head and holds me until I fall asleep, assuring me all will be better in the morning. She knows how to be there without being overbearing. The thing with my mom is we all give her such a hard time about being cheap and stubborn and the fact that she could "talk the ears off of a wooden indian," but at the end of the day, she is the glue that keeps our family together. I could not imagine life without her. She has such a strength that comes out when we need it most, she cares deeply for those she loves even when her love is not appreciated, she goes above and

beyond to make our house a home and she is like a tiger when it comes to defending my sister and me, which is how I know she'll always be there for me.

People say “mother knows best,” and in my experience, this has been a correct statement in every instance. Mothers have a gut feeling that we as children don't always buy into until it's too late. In middle school, I can remember my mom telling me “don't wear all of that eyeliner, it doesn't look good.” Did I listen? Absolutely not because I thought it looked fantastic. Should I have listened? Absolutely yes because I looked like the grudge which, for those who don't understand the reference, is not a good look. Even with boys, I ignored her advice, forgetting she was a young girl in love with the wrong boy before she was ever my mother. *I should have listened to her on a lot of things, but I didn't.*

My sister is another story. She is my best friend, my go-to, my womb-mate, my forever love. She and I have always been so close. Everyone says twins have a special bond, and not that I would know anything different, but I have to agree with them. We've been there for each other since before we ever took our first breath of air, and that is something I would definitely classify as special. However, being twins, we were constantly compared growing up. She was the skinnier, more athletic, prettier one, and I was the smarter one. *I think that's about the only thing I've ever been better than her at, but I would rather be the lesser of us two because I just love her that much.* I would take every illness, every heartbreak, every ounce of hurt if it meant she would never have to feel pain.

When we were 17 years old, we were sitting in my dad's truck eating a quick meal outside of the building where we practiced. We waited in the warmth of the truck to avoid going out into the cold until it was absolutely necessary. It was December, and even though we don't

get many cold days in Texas, I remember this day being particularly chilly. As we ate our sandwiches, we listened to music and talked sports - *pretty much the only topic of conversation we ever discussed.*

“You know, if one of us ever had to be seriously injured,” I said to my sister, “I would a million times over rather it be me.”

I wasn't sure why I said it, I just sort of said it out of nowhere, but I meant it. She was such a talented athlete and her passion was like no other I have ever seen; I could not bear the thought of her talents going to waste. If she was to ever be injured, it would crush her.

Elyssa was the athlete who put her entire focus on her game. She would wake up at 6:00 every morning to workout, doing her Insanity Beachbody videos. I would drag myself out of bed around 30 minutes before it was time to leave to go to school and as I'd cross the hall from my bedroom to the bathroom, I would hear the voice of Shaun T yelling out commands and see Elyssa faithfully obeying him. Her form was perfect. I tried doing a video workout with her one time and I could barely catch my breath after the warm up. *Like I said, my athletic ability has never been at the level of my sister's.* But anyway, Elyssa would finish her morning workouts, go to class, work out or practice during our athletics period, come home, go into the backyard, hit volleyballs for about two hours, come inside, leave the house, go to the gym, then start the cycle over the next day. She is a maniac, but her hard work ultimately paid off with her breaking six school records, accepting a full-ride scholarship to a Division 1 school, being named an All-American and having the most killer six-pack you've ever seen.

We grew up doing everything together; took all of the same classes and sat next to each other in each, played on all of the same teams, participated in all of the same organizations, had

all of the same friends. *There really was not Kelsey without Elyssa or vice versa. We were the definition of two peas in a pod until one day, we weren't anymore.*

The day we separated to go to college was a day I had dreaded ever since she committed to play volleyball at the University of Central Florida in Orlando and I had committed to play in Wichita Falls, Texas at Midwestern State University. We had always been the “Purcell sisters”, “the twins,” “the Purcell girls,” never just individuals. I think that was part of the beauty of separating for college, as difficult as it was, because we were allowed a time for self discovery, a time to embrace our own dreams and ambitions, a time to no longer be constantly compared and a time to have a fresh start. *Lord knows I needed a change of environment after high school.* It was not like I was running from a bad reputation or a mean girl or anything like that. No, in fact, high school had been a great experience with the exception of one bad thing, but I'll get to that soon enough.

I was the good girl, the Jesus freak, the waiting-until-marriage-virgin, the nerd, the volleyball player, the twin and the nice girl, and I was perfectly fine with being judged for those things. I had never felt shame for being who I am, but I was ready for a fresh start nonetheless for I had experienced love and heartbreak like I have never experienced before during my sophomore and junior years of high school. Having my heart broken absolutely shattered me. It was one of the most impactful experiences I have ever had, and though it was extremely difficult to get through, I got through it and I learned from it. It shaped me into who I am today, and it definitely shaped how I would handle my next relationship.

Not many know of the events that went on behind the door of apartment 424, a mile away from my college campus. Not many would understand the hidden hurt that lied beneath smiles of

seemingly happy Instagram posts. Not many would fully comprehend the emotional turmoil I was put through for months because, well, I didn't tell anyone. It was all about appearances; maybe if everything *looked* like it was okay, it would actually become okay. *At least that's what I wanted to think.* You see, there was a time when things were good, really good even, but that's not why I'm here. I'm here to tell the story of how I almost let one guy ruin me. My boyfriend, Cameron Jay Webber Jr., almost brought me to my end, but he didn't. But to tell the story of me and Cameron, I must first start with the story of me and Nick.

Chapter 2: Nick

*Be it coincidence
Or be it fate
You were brought into my life
Our paths have crossed
Right now we trail
But tomorrow is uncertain
We hope we dream
Of everything
Turning out how we planned
But if we awake
And our paths have forked
Then I only wish
For your remembrance*

Nicholas Moore was a nice boy from a nice family who lived two streets down from my house, though I never met him until my freshman year of high school. He was raised as I believe any boy hoping to become a man should be raised: with a little tough love. His family owned several rental properties around town, and Nick and his two brothers were expected to spend their weekends working for their dad making repairs in the trailers and houses. Nick hated

working on those trailers and swore he would burn them to the ground the day his dad handed them over to him.

At 13 years old, Nick was given the body of an old Chevy Blazer his dad bought for \$300 and told he would have to work for the money to buy the missing parts and build the car into a functioning vehicle if he wanted to drive it some day. His young hands were already callused from years of hard work and swinging a baseball bat. Nick was good at baseball. He grew up playing the sport and had dreams of going on to play in college. His favorite saying was “if you can dream it, you can do it,” and that’s exactly how he lived his life. He was carefree, ambitious, goofy and he radiated with positivity.

What first attracted me to this reggae-loving, baseball-playing surfer dude was his kindness. Everybody liked Nick. *How couldn't they? He was wonderful.* He looked at the world on eye-level, no one was above him or below him, just equal children of God trying to make their way in this world.

I first met Nick on our first day of high school. We had English together, and we both faced every freshman’s worst fear and got lost trying to find the classroom. We weren’t the only ones, and when another teacher saw us looking panicked and confused, he escorted us to the right location. I didn’t know it then, but Nick said he knew from the first time he saw me he wanted to be with me. He said he thought I was beautiful. *Hmm, beautiful. The impact of that word never fails.*

Nick and I started out as great friends. We sat near each other in class and we would talk every spare moment we had. He constantly made me laugh. He was sort of the class clown, and I

ate it up. I knew he was special, I knew I loved being around him and I knew I wanted to be friends with him for a very long time.

The first time I ever asked Nick to hang out outside of class was in January of our freshman year. I was waiting on my mom to pick Elyssa and me up from Driver's Education where a sour old woman taught us the rules of the road in the most monotone voice you've ever heard. Nick and I had been texting- just small talk - and I remember feeling nervous all of a sudden.

“Do you want to meet me at the basketball game tonight?” I texted him. *Goodness I was anxious, but why?* I only saw him as a friend. We had never discussed anything romantic, we had never been flirty, so why was I so jittery about asking this boy to the basketball game? Maybe it was because I feared he wouldn't think of me as a close enough friend to meet outside of class, but that seemed silly. Despite all of my worries, he texted back with a simple “yes, I will see you there,” and that was how it started. From that point on, we spent a lot of time together in class, outside of class, texting, calling. He was a great friend, until one day, it all went up in flames.

To this day, I am saddened by the memory I am about to share. It was a Friday. I was walking down the hallway of my high school's foreign language building, on my way to fourth period Spanish. I arrived to class early, as any nerd does, and waited in my chair for the bell to ring and class to begin. Suddenly, my good friend Niha poked her head in the door and shouted at me.

“Kelsey,” she squealed. “You need to come outside into the hallway right now! Nick is waiting for you.”

“Okay,” I thought. I didn’t suspect anything significant noting the fact Niha was always loud and excited about everything, so I figured my good friend Nick was just wanting to say hi like he normally did.

I stepped out into the hall and the second I did, my heart dropped into my stomach. Standing there was my beautiful Nick, holding a bouquet of flowers and flashing a smile that beamed from ear to ear. *Oh no*. I knew this was going to be more than just a hello. My mind raced and my knees buckled as I walked toward him, knowing I was probably about to break his heart.

He was radiating with excitement and his smile grew even bigger as he handed me the flowers and asked me a question.

“Kelsey Purcell, I have been wanting to ask you this for a long time now, so here it goes: will you be my girlfriend?” His faced glowed with confidence as if he already knew my answer to his question, but he was wrong. *He was so wrong*. I began to feel a knot in my throat that made it difficult for me to breathe, much less speak. I could feel my eyes welling up with tears and my cheeks turning four different shades of bashful.

He must have noticed too because his confidence immediately began to fade. I can still see it so clearly: the look on his face as I cried out the words “I can’t, I thought we were just friends.” *It was awful*. That larger than life smile turned into a stunned expression of hurt and

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