

Chapter 9

Free from lock up

I'm going to be released? I can't believe it! After so much bagging and pleading for them to let me out, finally I was being set free. A part of me refused to believe it, just in case it wasn't true, but the part of me that was still full of hope was ecstatic.

I was going to miss the girls, but just the thought of being able to leave this cage made my release pain-free. I had nothing more to miss. I had no fear even though I wasn't sure where they were going to send me. All I knew was that it was going to be somewhere different. Anything to me was better than this.

I'd been non-existent for so long. I'd been isolated from human contact in a cell without going outdoors for a year. At this point, hell would have been a better option.

It seemed like the day I was to be released would never arrive. But it did, and so abruptly. Just out of the blue without warning.

Counselor: Michelle, you need to go to the lobby and get your things. Your social worker is here to pick you up.

Me: Where am I going?

Staff: Your being released.

Me: Can I say goodbye to my friends?

Staff: NO!

Why, why, why?! I thought.

Rob: Hi, Michelle. Ready to go?

Me: Of course. I've been ready for two years.

Without hesitation, I walked out the front door. There were no tears, because there was no comfort in this place. As we walked to the parking lot, I felt only numb, no emotions came to me other than disbelief as we got into the car. I heard Christine (my romantic interest) calling my name from a distance. The voice was coming from her dorm, and I asked Rob if I could walk over to where she was to say good bye.

Rob: Sure, but make it fast.

Once I got to the dorm I saw her standing in the door way.

Christine: Hey where are you going?

Me: I've just been released.

Christine: Well, take care of yourself

Me: Yeah, you, too.

Staff: Christine, who are you talking to?

Me: I've got to go. Anyway, take care.

I was all choked up as I walked away from her. I had feelings for her, and there she was in front of me after all this time, and I couldn't say a thing. Not only was there no privacy, but I was being rushed. All I was left with was goodbye.

Me: Where are you taking me?

Rob: A foster home.

I really didn't have anything more to say, so I just stayed quiet. I sat behind the passenger seat and enjoyed the wind blowing in my face. I still had a hard time believing I was free. I wasn't sure if my freedom was temporary

or permanent. I feared that one false move would send me back to the cells. We started getting closer and closer to where my family lived, I thought "Sabotage".

Me: I thought you said that you were taking me to a foster home.

Rob: We are, your new foster home is a few towns away from where your folks live.

Me: Oh.

A feeling of relief came over me. He then pointed to a house in the middle of lots of trees. I watched the foster parents walk toward us from their home. As I got out of the car, I took a quick glance around me. As far as my eyes could see there was nothing but trees and snow.

"Great," I thought. "I can't believe this. I haven't been able to talk to anyone for one year, and now I have nothing but trees and snow to keep me company."

Sandy: Hi, and you must be Michelle? I'm Sandy, and this is my husband, Clyde. It's nice to meet you.

Me: Hi.

I didn't know what to say, so I just forced a smile and followed Rob's lead. When we walked inside, the couple were so nice to us, smiling and going out of their way to make sure we were comfortable.

I thought, This is going to last just as long as my social worker is here, but much to my surprise, they were truly kind people. Even though I enjoyed staying with them the few days that I did, I still felt locked up and conveyed this loud and clear to Rob.

Me: Isn't there somewhere else I can go besides here? There's nothing here for me to do, and all of these trees are making me dizzy.

Rob: I know. It's only temporary. I'm looking into a place right in town. I think you might like it a little better.

Rob: I promise you'll be out of here soon. Just behave.

"Soon" turned into three weeks. I wanted so much to see things and talk to people.

The couple asked me if I was unhappy with them. I told them that it had absolutely nothing to do with them, I didn't feel like telling them that I was silenced and confined for a whole year. They probably wouldn't have believed me anyway.

Rob: Are your bags packed?

Me: Yep, and have been for some time now. I'm ready to go whenever you are.

I turned to Sandy and Clyde.

Me: Thanks for everything.

Clyde: It was nice having you. Take care of yourself.

I practically ran to the car and tossed my suitcases into the back seat. I sat impatiently in the passenger seat. "Come on, come on, lets go," I whispered as I stared at the front door. Soon after, Rob came out and Clyde followed waving at me with a smile on his face. Nice couple, too bad they live out in the middle of nowhere.

Me: How long am I going to be staying with this foster family?

Rob: It's not a family. She's single, and her name is Carol she's a nice lady. She'll be your foster mother temporarily, that is, until we can get you into some type of trade school or halfway house, whichever comes first. I have some brochures in my office of some trade schools you might be interested in. I'll swing by on our way to Carol's house and pick them up. You can look

through them and tell me what you think.

It seemed like in no time at all I was standing at the front door of my soon-to-be foster mother's home, with suitcases in hand.

Carol: Hi, Rob. Hi, Michelle. How are you? I'm Carol. Make yourself at home. You can put your luggage next to the basement stairs. Would you like something to drink? Soda, juice?

Rob: No, thanks. I can't stay. I've got some things to do. I'll be going. You all get acquainted, and if there's a problem, you know where to reach me. See you later, Michelle. I'll be back by next week.

As he walked past me, he patted me on the shoulder and whispered, "Be good."

Carol: There are a few rules I'll need to go over with you: no drugs, no sex and no strangers in the house. Especially when I'm not home. Sound good to you so far?

Me: That's fine.

Carol: I go to church every Sunday. I won't force you to go, but I would appreciate it if you did.

Me: Okay, that's fine.

Carol: Your room is in the basement. Under no circumstance are you ever allowed in my room. Oh, yes, by the way, Rob told me you're going to be seeing a therapist every week on Wednesdays for a while. I forgot what time. The papers are around here somewhere. I'll find it later. Go ahead and get unpacked.

On my way down the steps, I thought I was finished with having my head examined. All of my thoughts left my mind as soon as I got to the bottom of the steps.

"Oh, yeah! PRIVACY!" The room was cozy and there was nothing but a bed, dresser, closet and a window. Perfect. Oh, and the bed was so soft. I laid down and kicked off my shoes.

Carol: Michelle!

Me: What?

Carol: Are you hungry?

Me: No, not really.

I heard her walking down the stairs.

Carol: Do you like it?

Me: Yes, The room is so cozy.

Carol: Well, I'm going upstairs to fix supper. You're more than welcome to join me.

Me: Okay.

The rest of the night, I just stayed downstairs and unpacked. I couldn't believe it. A room all to myself with my things in it. It was still hard to believe that I was not going back to lock-up. This, I thought, could possibly be the beginning of the rest of my life!

Wonderful Wednesday. Therapy day was here at last. I had hoped that they weren't expecting miracles. I couldn't see what the point was in analyzing me. What were these people trying to figure out? Were they waiting for me to say some magic word and ... VOILA, I'm cured? What was I supposed to be ailing from? Was I crazy? Did I act that much different from anyone else?

Me: Hi. Is Leslie in?

Secretary: Yes, she is with a client. What's your name?

Me: Michelle, I had a 2 o'clock appointment. I hope I'm not late.

Secretary: No, you're not. Why don't you just have a seat? She'll be right with you.

Me: Okay.

Only a moment had passed when I heard:

Leslie: Same time next week, okay? Take care.

Secretary: This is Michelle, your next appointment.

Leslie: Okay. Come on in.

She then opened her office door and stepped aside to allow me through.

Leslie: Did you have trouble finding the office?

Me: No.

I sat down and anticipated her questions.

Leslie: Do you like it here?

Me: No, not at all. There's nothing to like, because there's nothing to do.

Leslie: What would you want to be here?

Me: I don't know. More people, maybe. I'm not sure.

Leslie: Do you miss your friends?

Me: No. I don't know. I guess.

Leslie: Want to talk about her?

Me: How do you know it's a her?

Leslie: Because you just left an all-girls school.

Me: School? Is that what they told you? It's more like lock-up! And yeah, I miss someone very much. Actually a couple of girls, but one in particular. Stupid, huh?

Leslie: No, not at all. It's understandable.

Me: Well, it's not like she and I were able to have any kind of relationship. I wasn't allowed to talk to her, or anyone else, for that matter.

Leslie: Why not?

Me: Because I'm a little different, that's all.

Leslie: In what way?

Me: I don't know. It doesn't matter.

Leslie: Are you gay?

Oh my God, what made her say that? It must be written all over my face. Maybe it's the way I dress. ... I do dress like a boy, and I even walk like one, too, or so I've been told. Maybe someone told her.

Me: How do you know?

Leslie: I was told a little bit about your situation, that's all.

Me: I know it's wrong.

Leslie: What makes you think that?

Me: The counselors at lock-up would tell me so. One even told me that it's not natural, but I just can't help it.

I put my head down and wept.

Leslie: You're not the only one who's gay. There are many lesbians. They just don't live here. Once you're able to, you need to go to a city with a healthy population. There you will find someone to be with.

I didn't quite understand what she was saying.

Leslie: Next week I'm going to bring you a book so you can see for yourself that your feelings are normal.

And she did. That very next Wednesday she brought me a big book filled with pictures of Women hugging each other and smiling. I just couldn't believe my eyes. There was actually a book that defined what I was. Maybe I wasn't sick or crazy after all. She gave me the book to keep, and I was mesmerized by its pages. I read it and read it until ...

Carol: Michelle! Where did you get that book?

Me: The therapist. Why?

Carol: This is sin. I need to call your social worker right away.

Me: Why?! What's wrong?

I could feel my chest tighten up. Oh my God, I'm in trouble. What is Rob going to say about this? what if they send me back to lock up. Oh God help me!

Me: It's her fault.

She called Rob while I stood there, anxious and helpless. She told him all about the book and demanded an answer as to what he was going to do about it.

Carol: Here, he wants to speak with you.

Me: Hi.

Rob: Listen, I can't talk right now. I'm busy. But I will straighten this out sometime tomorrow.

Me: But Rob!

I started crying.

Rob: Hey, don't worry, okay? I got to go. Tell her I told you that I'll take care of it tomorrow.

Me: Okay. Am I in trouble?

Rob: No. I'll talk to you later.

Me: Bye.

Carol: What did he say?

Me: He'll take care of it tomorrow.

Carol: And I'll take care of this.

As she waved the book around in front of my face. I wasn't sure what happened after that. The incident was never discussed again, which was just as well. Rob canceled my therapy sessions. I figured I had been cured. The days seemed to drag on until Rob finally found a trade school called job Corp to send me to. Carol cried the day I left. I didn't understand why. What did she care? I felt sorry for her. I didn't want her to miss me. I knew how it felt to say goodbye and not want to.