
Chapter 1

Tracy shoved her helmet on her head, got on her 1972 Harley-Davidson Ironhead Sportster and peeled out of the parking lot at Slade's, raising a cloud of dust. As she sped down the county road, she tried to get a grip on her emotions but the tears she was fighting were beginning to cloud her vision. She reluctantly pulled over at a rest stop, secured her bike, sat down with her elbows on her knees and her hands over her eyes, and gave in to sobs. The column of burning pain she had come to know so well shot through her body, from her throat all the way down to her stomach. She didn't deserve to be treated with disrespect and even cruelty but that had been the main story of her twenty-seven year life.

Born with Waardenburg Syndrome, Tracy had suffered everything from being shunned to verbal taunts to physical attacks. The most striking physical attributes of those with the syndrome are having eyes of two different colors (usually brown and blue) and the even more stunning shock of white hair

growing from the forehead which did not allow for any hiding. She had been forever cursed to a life of stares, avoidance, and finger pointing—at best. She had been called a witch, a demon and many hurtful and profane variations, and while she certainly had developed some protective armor, the old stabbing pain never got easier and had to be dealt with every time—especially when she had allowed herself, once again, to trust someone, only to be devastated by hurt and betrayal.

Tracy was used to being alone and, for the most part, was comfortable with it. But after working at the Harley Davidson plant in Milwaukee with a group of technicians who shared her interests and seemed to accept her, she let her guard down and let Zak into her life. Zak was the leader of the production team and appreciated Tracy's knowledge and work ethic. He also appreciated her incredibly sexy figure. He was smooth and good-looking and she was taken in by the steady stream of compliments he showered on her that diminished her defenses. She was unused to that kind of attention. He worked his charm and after just a few dates, when he asked her to move in with him, she accepted. Her living arrangements had been up in the air as her sister, Tasha, had transferred to Madison. She could not really afford the large apartment they had shared on her own so Zak's offer seemed fortuitous.

Things had gone well with Zak for a few months. But life together began to sour after Zak found it difficult to handle it when Tracy's looks drew attention whenever they were out. Many people were curious and some were put off by her unusual hair and eyes. Guys also noticed her lush little body. Instead of developing some empathy for Tracy's situation and helping her to feel safe with him, Zak became annoyed that she attracted so much attention, so he decided they just would not go out. However, he was a social guy and fully blamed Tracy for their isolation. He began to drink more at home and became withdrawn, and then mean-spirited. Tracy was reaching her limit of

tolerance with his unpredictable and unacceptable behavior. His disrespect had worn her down.

His resentment of her boiled over on a hot Saturday afternoon in late July when she had persuaded him to go out to Slade's, a popular neighborhood hangout. Zak had several beers and when a guy at the bar began talking to Tracy, he grabbed her arm and yanked her out the door to the parking lot. His speech was just beginning to slur and he was loud and nasty.

"Zak! Let go of me! Jason and I were just talking. He's married for Pete's sake!"

"It wasn't just Jason. Everyone was looking at you. They always are!" he shouted.

Tracy began to blush but she said nothing as he continued.

"You're just a freak!" Zak shouted. "Do you think those guys think you're hot?" he said, laughing bitterly. "No one even notices that kick-ass body you have because they can't get past that skunky white streak in your hair or your outer limits eyes."

By now, they had attracted the attention of other patrons and though Tracy was deeply embarrassed, she was also so angry, she had to work hard to stay calm. She really just wanted to leave.

"You're drunk, Zak. I'm leaving," Tracy said as she turned and strode to her bike.

"Like hell, you bitch!" he yelled, and when she didn't stop walking, he added, " If you walk away, you can just get your shit and get out of my house."

Tracy didn't turn around but flipped him the bird over her shoulder, stalked out to her bike and got on. He started after her, but a couple of guys who knew Zak from work held him back to give her time to ride away. Besides, Zak was way too drunk to drive. One of the guys would drive him home later.

Eventually, the familiar pain subsided and Tracy was able to get a grip. When would she learn that all men were the same—a big package of selfishness wrapped up within a fragile ego? She wiped off her hot, tear-stained face with the bottom of her shirt, reached into her bag to grab a water bottle, and after drinking half of it in one swig, poured the rest down her neck. That small bit of comfort gave her the space to begin to do what she always did in these situations—begin planning a way forward. It didn't take her long to decide what to do. She would go back to Zak's and pack up as much as she could. She'd have to leave a lot behind, but the important thing was to get away—fast. Her precious books and collection, she would make sure to take. She would start over, again. Her sister had just left for a semester abroad, so her apartment in Madison was furnished and available, and moving to a different city seemed like a plan. In time, there would be a new job and a new apartment, but she vowed there would *not* be a new man.