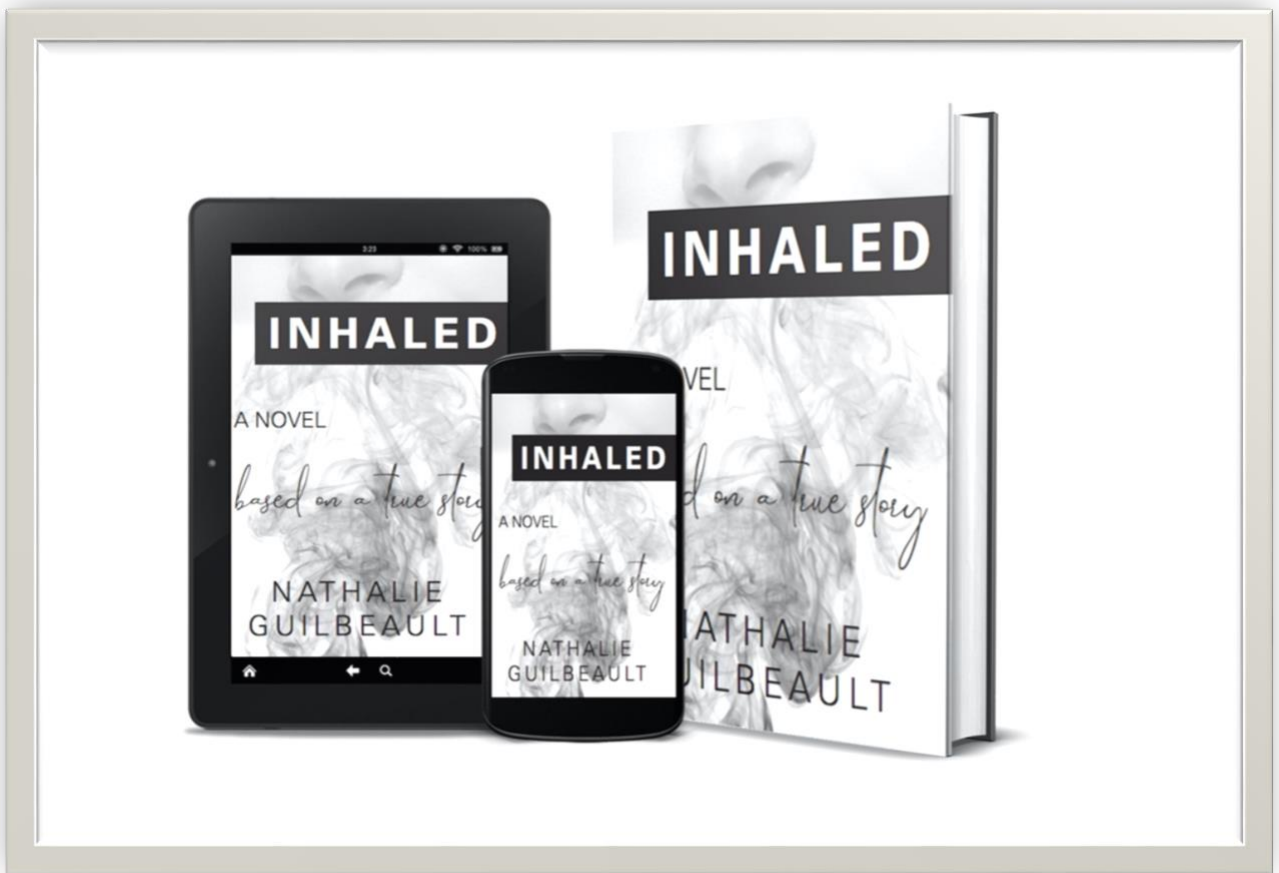


INHALED

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Excerpt



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“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell.” – Mark 9:43

INHALED

A novel

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

In her mind, and only in her mind, Isabelle Duval started to wander early in her marriage, revealing the permeability of its seal.

A seal that would hold for 23 years.

Until it would no longer.

A differing reality of the physical world, there, and waiting.

And one of the heart, too, for that is also true.

I turn my hand over and look at the fleshy part of it.

The pain, I think.

The days and the nights.

The ...

... broken and wondering.

And here, now, quiet in the dark, I press down on that place, on my right hand, and I whisper—why?

“But, as I said somewhere, the human heart is indestructible. You only imagine it is broken. What really takes a beating is the spirit. But the spirit too is strong and, if one wishes, can be revived.” – Henry Miller

I knew I was not the only woman who had had the safety of her world destroyed, the structure of her life disjointed, the foundation of her union blasted. Countless stories depicting evidence of marital crumbling are readily available to the insecure voyeur like me, seeking reassurance in futile comparisons. I wanted to share my story, not as a premise for revenge, but rather, to unburden myself from the encompassing guilt that had woven its way into my stomach.

I needed to describe, in painful detail, the unexpected life passage I had chosen to walk, its fine line sometimes erased, or redrawn, oblivious to the hurt and destruction that would ensue. My desire to share was a function of survival, as I needed to finally breathe properly, dilute the shame and access the universe's forgiveness, and not be inhaled, any longer, by ways I did not understand then, and may never fully, yet.

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Seated on the edge of her seat, Isabelle Duval fixed her eyes on the dining room floor, pondering something so out of character; so daring—in fact, so dangerously reckless, it sent shivers up her neck. She needed to offset imposed earthquakes with controlled ones. She needed to shield herself from the waves of grief that kept coming at her, violently and consistently, like eternal tides tightly bound together, leaving her with barely time to breath.

For somewhere, over the endlessness of a vast blue sea, her moon had gone rogue, and had lost its ability to ground her, and she felt confused. She felt lost.

Do I want movement, or do I want stagnation?

She wondered more, her eyes still fixed to the floor.

Do I want freedom from this pain? A pain she did not seek. A pain she did not ask for. Or deserve.

Enough, she thought, and she looked up, for she knew her answer. Her way forward.

CHAPTER TWO

The decision to marry came rapidly, most likely out of a fear of being alone; a fear rooted in my past. I had decided, almost unilaterally, John was going to be the one. I didn't see any of it coming, even when the clues telling me to go came rushing over me.

The pre-honeymoon phase took a nosedive one week prior to the ceremony. My married life, in its infancy, had set its own beat, and I heard nothing, or so little of it. I was deaf to it all. Oblivious.

I remember the morning of the wedding, telling my maid of honor, I couldn't go through with it. It was a gorgeous day for an exquisite fifty guest lunch affair held in one of Montreal's landmarks, a quaint little Inn, located where the International and Universal Exposition had taken place in 1967. John and I had planned the wedding together, and the venue had been carefully scouted. There was an unbelievably beautiful rose garden, coupled with a country ambiance, that made a small, inexpensive wedding feel grandiose and regal.

At 28 years-old, fresh from a seven year relationship that had ended badly, I had fallen in love with a man who would prove immature his whole life. At first, I had been seduced by John's tenacity, his perseverance in courting me. That someone was able to keep up with my abrupt and cynical side had stoked my curiosity, as each of my genuine pushbacks had been met with such nonchalance and humor.

From the beginning of our relationship, the sensations I extracted from my time spent with him were sensations that filled me with unconditional acceptance—or, what I thought was unconditional acceptance. And that was my opium, the need to be seen. For the duration of my entire marriage with John, I would rely on this feeling to legitimize my union with him, and to tolerate the many deviant behaviors that would come to mark our relationship. So yes, the way I thought he fully accepted me, the whole of me, complete with my curvy personality, and sharp edges, had seduced me. He truly wants me, and this I thought, is what love is supposed to feel like. John and I met at a private party in Montreal, and I would later understand that his emotional

inadequacy was responsible for what I perceived as his tenacity. I remember vividly the B-52's song, Love Shack, blasting, the crowd dancing, as he introduced himself.

“You train often,” he had yelled to me with the wave of a hand, and beady, glassy eyes that told of nothing I wanted. Not too far from us, stood a tall, redhead, slim and elegant. She seemed paralyzed in the corner, before the large window, beer in hand, playing with the Claudine collar of her white chemise. I remember thinking as I scanned the whole of her, the way girls do with impunity, the verdict harsh and final, this girl looks as if she is wearing a collar made of dollies. Sometime after, I would find out he had attended the party with his then girlfriend—the tall, slim, and elegant redhead. Oblivious to her presence, and oblivious to my reticence, John had planted his index finger to my side, deep into my flesh. I had pushed his hand away from my body, pulled my tank top further down. Nothing, my eyes had said to him, you are nothing. That night, he had followed me to the taxi, running behind me, begging for my phone number, which I had declined to give him.

Eventually, after three months of incessant phone calls left with my secretary and my roommate's boyfriend, I gave in. He had touched something. Marilyn Monroe's saying was starting to ring true—if John could handle me at my worst, I could give him, at the very least, a glimpse of me at my very best.

Somewhat handsome, at 5 feet, 11 inches, his body, although, still lean, showed signs of impending doughiness. Our lovemaking had allowed me to touch and feel the potential for his body to become fleshy. I understood that he probably had peaked physically a few years earlier, his trained body then the subject of an intense sports regimen. I would discover over time, how my slow disinterest for all things sexual would correlate with John's inability to care for himself, body and soul. Weaved into the us we were, inside the slow dysfunction of our ways, the desire to feel

and touch—to be touched—was alive. I wanted John in a way he could never be. Slowly, so very slowly, my abdication for all things sexual, unfolded, leaving the seeds of intimacies behind.

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**And whoever the author, whatever the book, thank you for reviewing
wherever you can.**

