

## I Am Sane By Aksha Burande

I was a wife to Frank Miller and a mother to my Laura. However, one by one, I was stripped away from my identity - my motherhood and my wifehood were gone.

In a farmhouse, very secluded from the rest of the world, in Iqaluit, Canada, I stood, holding a note that was completely drenched in my own tears. The paper was soaking wet while I was reading it over and over, thinking that it was a prank, believing it was a mistake - but deep down in my heart, I knew that it was far from fake. This note read:

*Hello Susan,*

*I didn't know how to tell you this, so I decided to write this letter. You may think that I am a coward or just weak. I am not saying that I am the bravest man there ever lived, but this was the only way that worked for me. There is no easy way to say this, but - I am leaving you. We never really worked together, forced into marriage in our 20s – you know how the 1950s were - but now we are in the 70s; I can do what I want. Me leaving you is not your fault Susan - it's not mine either. Goodbye, I hope that you have a good life. Take care.*

*Stay well,*

*Frank Miller*

I cried as much as my eyes would let me, as much as my eyes could handle. I admit that we never had the best marriage, although I didn't imagine that in my final years of life, I would be all alone with several cats. I was going to die alone. At least when I die, I will feel alive in a graveyard. I automatically assumed that we were going to fulfill our wedding vows. "Till death do us part" they say, but in this case, it was Frank that "did us part." I thought I was in love - instead, Frank decided to break my heart and leave me behind to suffer - leave me behind so people could shame me. Shame me for being alone, for being a person that "failed at marriage" or worse, the one that "didn't fulfill her husband's needs". Even though we didn't talk a lot, I never suspected us having troubles. Sure we slept in two different twin beds, yet I thought we were going to last. I would have the same routine every day. I would cook, I would clean, and I wouldn't complain about anything; I acted like a perfect wife. While all he did was plant himself right in front of the television and yell.

I thought that he was nice. Even though my name was professionally Susan Miller, Frank didn't mind if I wanted to introduce myself as Susan Rodriguez - which is my maiden name. I was wrong - he was not nice, he was the farthest thing there is from it - he was a deceiving, mean, arrogant man. I was angry, I was annoyed, and yet I was still feeling sad. I said to myself *Susan, get your act together. Do not feel sorry for someone that does not deserve you. You are better than this - you are better than him; there is no need to dwell in the past.* However, all I could do was go deeper into the past that I never thought I would share. I had a daughter alone at a very young age - she was just a few years old when I had to give her up. I had to abandon my Laura because of society - because society frowned upon raising a child without a husband. All society wanted was an uneducated woman designed to cook, clean, and take care of men and children. My husband leaving felt exactly like when my daughter was taken away from me.

Now, I am finally free. I never have to look at that two-faced liar again, never have to speak to that deceitful person again and never have to hear from the devious cheat again. I can do

things my way, at my house. I could host parties and gatherings with billions of people over - and it still wouldn't be that crowded!

After a couple of weeks, I felt no sadness whatsoever. No pain and no heartbreak. However, something else was on my mind. Something was haunting me. I spent days on end trying to convince myself that it was just in my head or that I was daydreaming. I kept ignoring it, each day making up a new excuse for why my house was making such weird noises. Whether it was never having the television blasting on full volume or that I never paid attention to anything because I was so busy cooking food for Frank. These excuses became less and less real, while the haunting became the opposite. I knew that something just didn't feel right - I could feel it in my bones.

One day, out of the blue, the faucet started acting weird, but I never let it get to me - I just brushed it off and got someone to fix it. Yet every time the plumber came over, they said that "everything looks fine" - but then what was that sound? It only got worse from there. One usual creepy day, I heard the plip plop sound of water coming from the bathroom. I carefully tiptoed there to see what it was. However, when I discreetly and slowly drew the shower curtain back, I would find nothing in sight. Nothing out of the ordinary. I couldn't help but wonder how it turned on? After this alarming event, I started blaming people; like Frank - people who wronged me, mocked me, or insulted me. I thought that Frank wanted me to believe that I was going crazy, that it was actually my fault that we separated. I was pointing fingers at everyone, my friends, my family, and my distant neighbours - I didn't know what to believe. I didn't know who to believe. However, after seeing a shadow, I knew that I wasn't crazy, right? Right! I-I'm sane. Completely and totally sane. I mean, the only acceptable explanation is that someone broke into my house and is trying to kill me. That's the only possible answer. I could feel death coming, lurking in the shadows of the person trying to kill me. I was petrified, terrified, and even scared. So much so I started carrying a weapon, you know - just to feel safe and a bit of relief. I don't get any shuteye to make sure that no one tries to murder me in my sleep, I don't shower to ensure that my eyes don't close for even just for a second, and I do not get out of my house.

I can't even ask anyone for help. My friends look at me with eyes full of pity, for this sad divorcée. My family looks at me full of disgrace and regret. However, that's not even the most outrageous part - who will believe that someone is haunting me and trying to kill me inside my very house - a locked house! People will think that I am insane. They will send me to an asylum or a doctor! But I am not crazy; I am as sane as they come. Everyone will think that it's all in my "imagination" or that I am "delusional". It's real. I am not crazy! I am not insane! I am sane! I have to be. I don't think that the wall is talking to me, or that my pillows stare at me. Even if I did, it's normal. Right?

I must survive this, survive this divorce, survive through this haunting. I need to show people that I don't need to stand behind a man, I can be my own person. That I can stand up on my own, for myself, even when no one is standing beside me.

Every night I think of it as my last. I hate the feeling of being threatened in my own home. I hate what someone is doing to me. I hate that I cannot stop them, as much as I try - they are always one step ahead of me. When they take two steps forward, I take one step backwards.

When death walks one step in front, I run a kilometre back. I am always behind. Trying to trick them, trying to stump them, but nothing works.

One night it got serious - something touched me! It shook me to my very core. I rolled into a ball in bed - trying to shield myself from whatever was coming next. My hands were suddenly clenching my head; I didn't know how or when my hands got there. I was banging my head on the head frame of the bed yelling and screaming. I needed this to end! Whoever it was needed to come out! Needed to end the torture that they are putting me through! Needed to just stop! Everything just had to stop! Blood covered me, from my head to my toe. I could see and smell the metallic red fluid eating my white bed covers in the dark. I hastily grabbed my bat, ready to swing it at whomever or whatever comes at me. My mind was going millions and millions of kilometres to think of all the scenarios, answers to my questions, and in every situation in which I ended up dead. I knew death was right around the corner, waiting for me to give up. Waiting for me to quit at life.

I needed to know more. I was spiralling, I felt like every single bone inside my body was gradually chipping away. My brain was exhausted, tired from thinking, tired from everything that was happening. Even if I did survive, who would believe me? Who would think that I am sane? Because *I am* sane. I am not crazy, not insane, not mad - I am sane! I knew that this was far from over. Even though I didn't want to admit it - I barely made it through the day. During daylight, I always had my weapon on me, ready to attack - even in the bathroom. I trembled when it came for me to turn a corner, always I kept my weapon in the upright position to strike when necessary, yet that didn't make me feel safe - nothing did. It was like I was going to see death right in the face, making eye contact every time I had to turn, every time I had to enter a room. Every single time! Now at night, I was trembling with fear, yet wanting to remain as still as an owl. My hands were still bloody, but I kept the grip on my bat - even though it was slipping away.

My hands were quivering, shaking. I sensed that something was going to happen - something bad. As soon as I finished that thought, an unknown person dragged me from my feet to the ground. Thump! I fell! I couldn't make out the figure in the extreme and intense darkness. The person wrapped their hands around my neck, struggling to ensure that no air was going in, or coming out. The individual's wispy hair brushed across my face, going everywhere. The person frantically trying to get a better, harder grip on my neck. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't talk, I couldn't find any strength left in me to fight back. My hands were releasing from the bat, I felt numb everywhere - trying to fight the urge to breathe, trying to use as little energy as possible. I was on my last breath, and I knew it. I knew that I would die, and I knew who it was. It could only be one person - my dear daughter, Laura Rodriguez. As I was choking, I got out the word "Laura." She instantly stopped, but it was too late, I was barely clinging on to life - not being able to pull myself back to reality. In my last moments, I heard crying, yelling and regret. I didn't say her name because that is the person I want to remember when I die - I said this because I figured it out. I figured out my killer! It was my daughter! My own daughter killed me! My family killed me! My own blood killed me! I felt Laura trying to save me, trying to give me CPR and trying so hard - but it didn't work. I knew that killing me was her greatest regret. All she wanted was one final moment with me, and she would have given anything for that, even her life.