Excerpted from Kate Price's THIS HAPPENED TO ME: *A Reckoning*
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This book is a betrayal. In Appalachia, where I grew up, no one talks about family secrets or sexual abuse or rape or being hit or beaten within an inch of your life or mental illness or going hungry or without heat. Our rugged and ingenious Scotch-Irish ancestors had anarchy baked into their bones. Sharing or showing vulnerability is a sign of weakness, an almost certain death in our land of steep mountains, winding, muscular rivers, and narrow valleys. We don't talk about the guilt, fear, confusion, isolation, and abandonment we feel in every cell of our bodies. And so, in these hills and hollows, each generation of reticent leaves on our family trees is born bruised.

Mountain culture is rooted in a deep sense of loyalty—Us versus Them. We are raised to be suspicious of outsiders, especially the absentee coal mine owners and landowners who have exploited our families' labor for generations. We are raised to be suspicious of the factory owners who keep families indebted to the company store just to feed and house their children. We are raised to circle the wagons. We protect one another by silently braving the hardships our kin have endured for generations. We tough it out and don't complain. We drink and drug to suppress the pain that has been passed down and down and down through blood. We shut up and shut down, in isolation.

But trauma doesn't heal in isolation. So, I share the details on these pages to speak the unspeakable. To be the woman today I needed as a girl back then.

This book is a betrayal in that I am disobeying the patriarchy. My father controlled me in order to keep his secrets locked away, all the while telling me, "This happened to me, so it's happening to you." But he underestimated the power of my hidden words to reveal the truth. Even though, as a child, I could neither grasp nor articulate the effects of his tyranny, I poured my confused, battered heart into my diary to relieve my pain. I didn't stop writing, filling endless notebooks and journals for decades, until I found my voice and the truth. He thought he had succeeded in shuttering my ability to love and dream. He threatened my life if I were ever to fall in love with someone else: I was his property. But he failed to stop my heart, even though I was numbed for decades by the fear of being hunted in my home and hometown, where the daily newspaper is filled with stories of missing teenage girls and husbands murdering their wives. I am violating that code of silence and dissociation, yet I am here because I am angrier about what happened to me than I am scared of him.

This book is a betrayal in that the life I have created for myself challenges the Appalachian norm that discourages girls from being educated and independent.

Instead, girls are taught to be quiet and make the food and fuck the men and boys and become factory girls and not think. I was taught that girls and women were supposed to make everyone else's life easier than our own.

This book is a betrayal in that I describe how my childhood dreams of going to college and becoming an academic saved my life, leading me away from our small central Pennsylvania mill town, where intellectual curiosity is suspect. Over forty years ago, my mother recognized my academic talent as my way out. She was determined that I go to college far away from my hometown so I could enjoy the educational, economic, and travel opportunities she was denied.

I am sorry to say this book is also a betrayal of my mother. All she wanted was for me to leave home, never to return. To start over. But that has proved impossible for me to do. A part of me never left home despite her insistence that I leave for good. My mother lived vicariously through me as I traveled to India and throughout the United States during college. But after decades of yearning to flee the mountains, I was hit with a persistent wave of homesickness. I loved Boston's sophisticated, bookish sensibility, yet I longed for bluegrass music, the annual town fair, driving country back roads, and cozying up in my favorite threadbare quilt during midnight August rainstorms, catching fireflies and sleeping on dewy grass under a bowl of stars, then watching the steam rise off the mountains at sunrise. The pull grew even stronger as I started to heal from my abuse. I thought about the kids in my hometown who were suffering the same violence I'd barely survived. I couldn't abandon them as I had been, left to fend for myself. While leaving saved my life, my heart still yearns for my friends, for the land on which I suffered and from which I escaped. I ache for all I left behind.

This book is a betrayal of my beautiful brain that tried for so long to protect me, shielding me from fully feeling the violence I endured. I've pressed my mind to reconstruct unbearable details of violence and to formulate chronological descriptions of unthinkable brutality. As a writer, I am greedy to put words to what I felt and lived through. But there's a part of my brain that fiercely resists this. Traumatic memory is fragmented and nonlinear for a reason. My brain, like my family, wants me to leave these memories buried. It had done its job, detaching from my body—"playing possum"—so I wouldn't suffer my perpetrators' abuse in real time. But I have forced my brain to follow the trail of somatic breadcrumbs I remember—sounds, smells, tastes, and bodily sensations—down the path to my solidified memories. Even as I type these words, my brain fights me, tries to persuade me to give up, then acquiesces, reluctantly loosening its grip and letting the words flow.

This book is a betrayal of the fate that should have been mine. I am the one choosing to tell the story of what happened to my battered body, despite being told to

just take it like a good girl. Instead, I am revealing the truth of our replicated cycles of abuse, addiction, and madness: we passed our collective trauma from body to body as we buried our dead, each filled with our kin's skeletons and humiliation. Yet, I've survived to help others heal. I have lived to tell the tale of the million ways I should have been killed by my father, another male relative, a perpetrator, a boyfriend, a husband, a swollen liver, a needle in my arm, a revolver in my mouth, a slice across my wrist when life got too hard. Instead, I have healed and pulled myself out of a desperate life where I had nothing but questions and into a place where I have found answers not only for myself, but for others forced to walk a similar path. My truth is not unique; survivors are everywhere.

This book is a betrayal because I am still here.