No Calm, Just a Storm

I was killing myself slowly. I didn't see that I felt so ashamed of who I was. I still felt gross and I felt inadequate. I pretended I wasn't scared of anything, but I feared everything.

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The pavement felt like it was pulling me in like quicksand as streams of salty tears poured down my face. I was done, I was finished. I wanted more for myself. These people who loved me and wanted me had been let down. I was letting myself down. I finally stopped denying the problem. It was my drinking that was getting in my way. It was my need to escape. It was me. I was the problem.

February 2014 was just me getting acquainted with single life after leaving my thruple with David and Keith. I thought I'd take a break from hard drug use, but that didn't happen. I knew where to find drugs, and when I had time between, I drank. I was in strange apartments and cheap hotel rooms, dive bars and sometimes caught in blizzards on my search for the next high.

My only aspiration was to be the biggest bottom in the dark and twisted delusion I was living in. I made friends with all of the people I'd get free supplies from, and I made my life revolve around a world that I once said I'd never be a part of.

One Tuesday afternoon in March, two guys and I sat on a bed with music playing in the background. The shades were drawn to block out the daylight streaming in. The drugs were bountiful, and for the first time I was so removed from reality and wished that I could live like that forever. We said we were misfits. We were outcasts and we belonged with each other. We had been rejected and lived with our stigma in the darkness. No one could burst our bubble if we stayed hidden from the rest of the world. We wanted everyone to understand how great we were, but each time the drugs wore off a little, we started to get antsy and felt lonely.

Hopes and dreams were clouded by the smoke as it filled my lungs. I was drowning with each dose I took. I swam in liquor to maintain this feeling of complete abandon. I moved to New York to dance, and now I found myself in a condo overlooking midtown Manhattan, deciding whether or not to jump. From the outside, it looked like I was having fun, but on the inside I was dying. I was pleading for freedom from these feelings. That dive was looking pretty good.

Days would pass like hours, and I would forget to take my medication, and then when it came time I'd wonder if I should even take it at all. It'd be easier to just let myself die slowly. I was living in a state of constant misery, and when I'd make it out of the apartments and hotel rooms, I'd go to bars and tell people I was dying because the medication wasn't working anymore—probably

because I wasn't taking it. Even the doctor told me that I had to take my medicine when I'd see him. I would reassure him I'd take his recommendation and then disregard everything when I was using drugs.

It was now April, and I had no idea where the time went. I spent my days in the shadows, paranoid and seeing and hearing things. Everyone knew there was a problem except for me. I couldn't see it until one day when I looked into a mirror and stared at myself in the eyes for a moment. I hadn't done that in a very long time. I saw no life, I saw no soul. I was void of reality and I needed rest—I had been awake for eight days straight. I was exhausted and couldn't keep it up any longer.

I went to my apartment up in Inwood, the Canada of Manhattan, far from everything. I stopped at the grocery store along the way to gather cereal, milk and some snacks. I knew this was going to be a rough comedown. I ordered Chinese food with the last bit of money I had and turned on First Wives Club—it was on repeat for days. I was in a cave and didn't want to come out.

After about a week, I knew I had to do something. I needed to get an actual job because Spring and working coatcheck at a small, hole-in-the-wall bar in West Village weren't going to make ends meet; not in April. So I went to a restaurant in Chelsea where a friend referred me to the manager, and I was hired. My first thought was that I could now afford to do drugs and go on binges on my days off; instead, I found my new fix of tequila and club soda.

I put down the pipe and picked up the bottle. I once wanted to do things with my life but then changed my life to revolve around escape. I would taste-test every drink on my shifts at work and drink pint glasses of tequila drinks, hoping to feel good. At first, I did feel good, and then it was oblivion. I was late for work so many times and my new manager at the restaurant sat me down multiple times to speak to me to tell me he liked me as an employee and wanted to keep me on, but he couldn't make exceptions for my tardiness. I would find myself drinking harder on my days off to makeup from not drinking as heavily on work days. Sick days meant inviting a friend over to watch movies as long as they brought a bottle or two of wine which I drank most of. I would go for a run in the early afternoon after a glass of white wine with muddled mango. I'd be sitting on the subway heading downtown contemplating how long it'd take me to get things done so I could start my drinking, and sometimes I'd find myself on a bar stool not knowing how I ended up there. I was still miserable, but alcohol now ruled my life and I just wanted to die. I was killing myself slowly. I didn't see that I felt so ashamed of who I was. I still felt gross and I felt inadequate. I pretended I wasn't scared of anything, but I feared everything.

Saturday, June 21st, 2014, was supposed to be a night for relaxing. I took the night off of work so I could get some beauty rest for Broadway Bares: Rock Hard the next night. I had to rest up for a long day of rehearsals and performances and I wanted to be my very best. It didn't take much to sway me into going out for a drink; really though, it was a simple text message with someone saying, "Wanna go get a drink?" One cocktail turned into a whole night of drinking until I arrived home around eight o'clock in the morning.

My call time was at noon and I was waking up at over an hour after, arriving at Hammerstein

Ballroom on 34th Street just around two in the afternoon, stressing over what they might say. My choreographer looked at me with disappointment in his eyes. Then he had a conversation with me. It was the talk that I needed, but he delivered it with love and grace. He told me that I couldn't be in the show. He explained that it's not just about me, it's about everyone. He looked at me and told me that I am beautiful and talented, but then he stressed that I have to accept my responsibility and stop letting myself down. I never knew you could feel so empowered yet so destroyed all at the same time.

I was the problem all along. My drinking just exacerbated the problems I had within, covering them up, and I thought it was helping the issues. I wasn't escaping anything. I left Hammerstein humiliated, tears streaming down my face and there was no taking back what had just happened. I made a complete fool of myself, and now I had to live with the consequences. How could I let all of these wonderful people down? How could I let myself down? I was wonderful, I was just lost.

It was sunny and hot, and I wished for gloomy and rainy as I texted a friend in the show I had known him for years. We worked at Splash Bar together in previous years, and he always had bigger visions for me than I had for myself. He believed in me and I didn't know what he saw, but he saw something special. I poured my heart out to him. I was a monster to myself and others when I put substances like alcohol and drugs into my body. I needed to change my life. Within minutes, he told me to meet him the next day and he thought he may have a solution. I was ready for anything that would improve my way of living. I was done throwing away my life and my dreams. I was done.

This was the door opening with a bit of light shining through. This was an opportunity for my life to change, and I was so scared of what was on the other side. I had been so scared to know, too scared to see. I sat next to my friend the next afternoon in a room of people sharing their experience and by the end I raised my hand, "Hi, my name is Richard…" and I knew I had found my people.

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