

Author's Note

The stories in this book reflect my recollection of events. Some names, locations, and identifying characteristics have been changed in order to protect anonymity. Dialogue has been re-created from memory. Personal journals, police reports, hospital and medical records and legal documents were used to corroborate facts. I have omitted some people, places and events which have no impact on the veracity or the substance of the story.

Chapter 1 - Pain

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It's been 18 years since I came to in that hospital bed. They didn't know the extent of my brain damage because they were keeping me in a continual medically induced coma to give me a break from the nonstop pain. The medical reports contain several entries from the nurses saying they heard me moaning, repeating over and over again, "I'm scared!" If their knowledge and experience was then what it is now, they would have realized I had a traumatic brain injury and treatment would have been very different.

It was the most immense pain I've ever felt in my life. My face was black and blue, my hair was covered in blood and my body throbbed as if it was pinned under a ton of broken cinder blocks.

Looking to my right, I saw my mother. A nurse turned toward to her, placing a hand on her quivering shoulder. "Tell her the truth," she urged. Arms crossed, tears in her eyes, my mother told me "Amy, you went out a window." A window? My thoughts were interrupted by another stabbing pain. Was it my leg? My head? My neck? Everything. Consciousness slipped into darkness before I found the source of the pain.

The window my mother was talking about is on the third floor of a San Francisco apartment building. My ex-boyfriend Kyle's apartment. The fall could and should have been fatal.

The last thing I remember? The shot of tequila. Weeks later, long past the time doctors could test my blood - it was speculated that someone had put something in my drink. So how did I get to Kyle's? Why would I be at his house now, months after we'd broken up? And how does a person fall out of a window?

Kyle, there was something about him. He was much older than me, very sure of himself, confident. He reminded me of my father. He was controlling - but in a way I liked. Kyle was going to take charge - take care of me. He paid for everything and opened doors for me. He was a man, not a boy. And I liked it. It wasn't long before I started falling for him. Before I knew it, I was spending most of my nights at his apartment. Days spent together were always fun and exciting. He took me camping in Yosemite. He taught me to snowboard in Tahoe. I loved the excitement, loved it so much I pretended not to notice he was always smoking weed. Here I was in San Francisco, 2,500 miles away from my controlling father, living my life. Free. Finally.

There was a beautiful studio apartment in an old Victorian building near where Kyle lived in the Marina District. It was \$780 a month - way more than I could afford at that time, but I took it anyway. No matter what - nothing was going to get in the way of my freedom. I'd figure it out - had to. I'd find the money somewhere.

I spent two and a half years with Kyle. He liked his life - no responsibilities, no desire for a family, career or house. Nothing. For a while, I liked that life too. But things were changing, the life of living carefree with wild adventure wasn't enough anymore. I had no future with him and knew it. It was easier breaking up with people back then - we didn't have the constant connection of text messages or have to risk seeing an upsetting photo of an ex with his new lover online because there was no Facebook.

But we'd broken up months ago, so why would I have been at Kyle's? My thoughts were disrupted by another stab of pain across my body. The pain never stopped really, and neither did the questions in my head. I didn't know then that many of these questions would never be answered.

I felt so bad for what my mother was going through - watching her, sitting next to her only daughter groaning in agony. I didn't want to bring it up. Didn't want to hunt for details. Didn't want to ask questions. I wanted this to be over, for my mother's life to go back to what it was. For her pain to stop.

Bits and pieces of memory have come back, but most of what I knew then was what my friends had told the police and what the police had seen when they arrived at Kyle's. Me - on my back on the street, twisted and bloody. The window - three stories above, open. Kyle - drunken and bloody, wearing jeans, but no shirt.

I remember a few details of the night, like that I hadn't even wanted to go out in the first place. It was New Year's Eve. I'd worked a full shift at the office after spending the day before driving home from Tahoe in one of the worst snowstorms I can remember.

I was just tired. Worn out from one of our non-stop, rowdy Tahoe weekends – one of many that ski season. But I got a call from my best friend Janet, who was begging “Let’s go out, we’ll just go local, just to the Paragon. Come on - it’s New Year’s,” she begged. Maybe I was afraid to miss out, maybe part of me wanted to go. The Paragon was an upscale restaurant and bar mostly frequented by twenty and thirty something white collar professionals. It was only a few blocks away from my apartment and Janet promised it was going to be low key. Nothing major. I agreed. But first, I told her, I needed to lay down and take a nap.

I was jolted from a deep sleep by the sound of my doorbell. It was Janet, and she was ready to go. I shook myself out of my sleepy haze, got dressed and went out. It was a normal night for us, together, laughing, drinking a few beers. But everything normal changed when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned to meet an unexpected and unwelcome face.