

Stuff I've Never Told Anyone

**Finding Power
in the Shadow of Shame**

*An Anthology of Anonymous Stories,
Poems, and Letters*

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Dedication

*To all the women who are ready
to stand up to Shame
and connect with their Power.*

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Told Anyone***

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Excerpt from *Stuff I've Never Told Anyone...*

I don't remember what happened next. There is a gap between a blurry walk outside the bar and the next morning.

I woke up shivering, confused, with an ever-widening hole in my memory. I was lying on a shiny white ceramic tile floor. It took me a while to realize it was a bathroom. I got up and stumbled, I had to hold the wall with both hands in order to not fall. My pants were down around my ankles. My hair was messy, my shirt was halfway unbuttoned, my mind and body were numb. I washed my hands and saw myself in the mirror. My makeup was smeared and I noticed dried up mascara down my cheeks showing traces of my tears.

I didn't understand.

I left the bathroom and didn't recognize the house, nor could I remember who I was with. Nothing made sense, but I was so out of it that I wasn't even scared, just confused.

I opened the door to a bedroom and there was my friend. Fully clothed with her coat on, asleep in a bed. An unknown man was sleeping next to her in nothing but his boxers. He was spooning her. I shook her awake and although she seemed confused, she knew we had to leave.

Her keys were on the nightstand next to her purse.

She walked out first, looking like a zombie. We went straight for the front door. I tried to pay attention to my surroundings to make sense of the situation we were in when I noticed several condoms on the floor that I hadn't seen when I left the bathroom. There were empty bottles of beer on the living room floor and a half empty bottle of tequila on the table.

I also noticed a glass chess set. It reminded me, in a flash, of my childhood. I used to be a competitive chess player. From the age of 8-years old, I knew how to play the game to win. I was one of only three students in my class who was allowed compete against our teacher. It was through challenge and adversity that I learned to be strategic. To this day I find myself looking at every situation and calculating my next five moves.

This instinct served me well as I continued assess our situation. I knew we had to leave immediately, so I didn't hesitate to follow my friend out the door.

We found her truck in the parking garage by pressing the panic button on the alarm remote key and I drove us out. She sat in the truck without moving, without saying anything; she didn't know where she was. Eventually I recognized a major street and figured out how to get back. I

dropped my friend off at her house. Not a single word was said, and then I drove to my hotel. I went up to my room and got in bed.

I thought I was dreaming. I heard a faraway noise that wouldn't go away. I woke up to my phone ringing. I sat up on the bed and saw I had ten missed calls from a coworker. The phone rang again and I answered. He asked what happened but I didn't know what he meant. We were supposed to carpool to work that morning after having breakfast together, but I never showed up at the time we had agreed on. He told our supervisor that I had woken up very ill and that I would show up a couple of hours late.

I told him I would get ready and go, but went back to sleep after hanging up. An hour later, my phone rang again.

“What the hell is going on, Rubio? What happened to you? Are you drunk?”

“No, of course I'm not drunk! I had two beers last night and that was around 8.”

“Then what the fuck? I lied for you at work. We're in groups and they're looking for you. If you don't come in they're gonna go to your room to make sure you're okay. Get your ass here now!”

“Okay fine, I'm on my way.”

I brushed my hair and teeth, washed my face, and went to work. I knew I was walking but couldn't feel my feet moving. I knew I was on my way to work, yet nothing was clicking in my mind. Everything felt like a dream, like an alternate reality where you are not who you really are and you can almost see yourself doing everything in slow motion.

I went inside the conference room and sat next to my coworker. The supervisor asked if I was fine and if I needed anything. I must've looked pathetic because everyone looked at me with pity in their eyes. I could tell that I still wasn't all there.

I sat in silence staring at my knockoff Gucci bag emblem. The Gs on the bag appeared to be moving slowly into a circle that would eventually turn into a vortex, a vortex that consumed all of the adjacent Gs. I closed my eyes and I could see Gs moving in all directions, dancing. My friend asked me to go to the bathroom, drink some water or coffee, and snap out of it.

As I sat on the toilet seat, I had an overwhelming desire to cry, to scream, to pull my hair out but I did not know why, and the physical reactions would not come. I wiped and saw blood on the toilet paper and with that almost seemingly insignificant cue, I felt stabbing pain in my anus. It was as if that entire time I had been falling from a building, no emotion, no feeling, no concept of time or reality and seeing the blood was like hitting the floor. My entire body ached. I had a hard time getting up because my legs were shaking, I was shivering, and in an instant I was bawling and couldn't breathe. I went to the mirror and I looked like shit. My hair was somewhat brushed,

I was wearing the same clothes from the previous night, my shirt was wrinkled, and my face had day-old makeup that had lasted through the night. I washed my hands and my face and tried to fix my hair and clothes as best I could.

Walking back to the conference room was difficult. I sat next to my friend and he immediately confirmed his suspicions that something was definitely wrong.

“Are you on drugs? Goddamn it, Rubio, did you take any drugs?” he whispered and then sighed. “Or did someone give you something?”

Tears started rolling down my face. He gave me a napkin he had serving as a cookie holder and rubbed my back gently and slowly. I could see his jaw clenching. In the two months we had spent together we’d become very close. He tried to touch my leg to comfort me and I flinched instinctively. He already knew what had happened, even before I did.

I knew I was in pain. I felt lost and nothing made sense. But the second I felt his hand on my leg I was hit with flashbacks.

I was back in that apartment. I saw myself sitting on a couch with two young men, one on each side. We were playing chess and they were drinking tequila. I was good at chess and somehow they beat me. I heard one say, “Checkmate” and then his hands were on me.

Black out.

I saw myself on the bathroom floor, I couldn’t move my body, I couldn’t talk, only feel. It hurts. I try to push him away but I’m not strong enough. My words are slurred “No... don’t... stop..... NO!” My knees are hurting, my bad knee, the right one, is really throbbing. He is pushing himself inside me violently. All I can do at this time is hold on to the tub as best I can so he doesn’t smash my face on it with each thrust. It hurts so much, but resisting hurts way more. I let myself go.

Black out.

Our supervisors at work let us out early because some people had to catch a flight. I stay for two more nights. My friend takes me to his room and makes me sleep in his bed while he sleeps on the couch. He doesn’t want to leave me alone, but also doesn’t want to get too close.

I replay the scenes over and over. I should not have gone. I shouldn’t have had *anything* to drink. I must’ve removed my thumb from the bottle at *some* point. Did I drink that tequila willingly? We were at *their* place, what does that mean? Did I lead them on? But I’m a fucking lesbian, I don’t even like men! Goddamn it, why did I have to go out? Why did this happen to me? I am so stupid! I am such a fucking idiot! This is all my fault, oh god, this is all my fault. I don’t even know who these people are, where they live, their names, what they were driving, how tall they were, NOTHING!

I don't go to the cops.

I don't go to the hospital.

I drive home and cry the entire way back. It takes me eleven hours.

It takes me two weeks to recover, like a bad hangover, from whatever they gave me.

It takes me months to be able to be intimate with my girlfriend, with the woman that loves me so tenderly. She is so nurturing, so caring. The first thing she said while embracing me tightly and clenching her jaw was, "It *wasn't* your fault." I didn't believe her then.

It took me ten years before I could look at men without a defensive strategy in mind. I was always on guard. It also took me ten years to believe that none of it was my fault. It took that decade before I could have sexual encounters without being triggered. Knowing that it wasn't my fault was one of the first steps to healing, and that healing has empowered me to return 100% to myself.

Even after all those years, there was a series of moves that society didn't see coming. I expected to be broken and weak, but the opposite happened. It wasn't checkmate. Instead, I got my queen from out of nowhere and blocked their threat to the king and obliterated their entire game. I won my power back.

I might have been another statistic, but I will not be shamed.

I might have been a victim, but I will not be victimized.

I will use my experience for awareness.

It was not my fault.

It was *NOT* your fault.

I will call out rape jokers, victim blamers, and slut-shamers.

I am a champion.

I own the board.

I choose which pieces of my life I want to save and which ones I want to advance.

I have all the power to make the next move.