

broken whole



Author's Note

All of the events in this book are true. However, in these scandal-mongering days, I do want to protect myself from claims of "making things up." If you compare timelines and details between this book and my blog, *brokenwholeblog.blogspot.com*, you'll see a few minor discrepancies, made for the sake of better pacing.

Additionally, in the chapter which takes place in Dallas, I used fictitious Christian names, and masked a few arcane technical details.

I also changed the names of a couple of people who requested it. And, finally, I invented a surname (but not the actions or situation) of an officer in the chapter where I'm arrested and jailed by the LAPD. The officer in question, in the unlikely event he should ever read the book, will undoubtedly know that I'm talking about him.

Introduction

For virtually all of my adult life, I'd imagined that I would one day write a book. The only thing holding me back was that I felt nothing much had ever happened to me. The most exciting event of my childhood was a bomb scare in my garden: the police were called, three police cars showed up, and a search was conducted. My poor mom, coming back from grocery shopping, saw all the police officers, panicked, dropped her grocery bags and came running, assuming the worst. It was, of course a false alarm called in by the horrible bully, Nicky Clarke from down the street.

In my twenties, feeling rather dead in the emotion department, I took method-acting classes, hoping that I could learn to cry like my hero Conrad Jarrett, in *Ordinary People*. I did emit a brief whimper during my first monolog, as I recounted the story, told in the first chapter proper of this book, *Physicality*, where my dad noticed, for the first time, my skinny wrists. But that emotional episode proved to be a flash in the pan until I broke up, a year or two later, with Shaun, my first serious boyfriend, when I cried at length for the first time in my adulthood.

It wasn't that my life was without incident: I emigrated from England to the United States to go to grad-school in Philadelphia; I had my fair share of boyfriends, including Xavier, a Mexican artist, who stalked me after we broke up, and whom I tried to have deported before ultimately getting a restraining order against him. I even fell in love with the love of my life, Ben. Yet there was no narrative to draw from this: who wanted to read about my struggles with chronic fatigue and depression.

Then, in 2006, something happened: something which came close to destroying me. It brought with it tears aplenty, both for me as well as for my partner Ben. It sent me spinning through a months-long journey into the heart of self-hood; I emerged a changed person. Moreover, my life suddenly had a story to tell, and it was something with a beginning – in my childhood, a middle – the crisis itself, and an end – the conclusions I came to in writing this book.

Yet it's an end which is still unfolding. Every time I thought I'd written the final chapter, and reached stability, the ground would suddenly lurch again. Now, two years later, I say, with some caution, that I'm sure-footed again; that it's time to end this book, that perhaps the story is complete.

Prelude - 2006

Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, CA, August 11

I have always been strongly compelled to organize, categorize and understand every piece of information in my life. Now the flood of ideas through my brain was becoming almost impossible to handle. I was, for the moment, still able to control it, but I was close to being overmastered. The hardest thing was to figure out simple priorities against the raging background of my thoughts. And now the pressure was vastly increased by the screamingly high priority of not worrying my boyfriend Ben. He'd called me, out-of-the-blue, almost in tears because I was late for our meeting with our couple's counselor, and I'd immediately set off to try to get across to West Hollywood. At all costs, I thought, I have to protect him.

(For weeks, I'd known that my increasingly confident and ambitious demeanor had worried Ben – who was a worrier to begin with. I knew he thought that I was becoming slightly manic. So I'd gotten into the habit of concealing things from him: I didn't want his worry to restrain me from achieving my goals. Ben's last boyfriend had had episodes of intense mania as well, so this only increased my desire to hide from him all signs of any behavior that he might wrongly interpret as manic.)

For the moment, I could still wrestle my thoughts to a stand-still long enough to remind myself, every other minute, that it wasn't life-or-death. If I missed the meeting with our counselor, Ben would be upset; very upset: but we'd get through it.

At the Renaissance Hotel on Highland, I tried to get a taxi, but the hotel staff ignored me. I became briefly and savagely furious until, once again, I managed to recall

that my sense of urgency was self-imposed. But that thread of rational thought kept disappearing in the vastness; I couldn't hold onto it for more than a few seconds at a time. Each time it slipped my grasp, my focus would return to the urgency of protecting Ben from worry at all costs.

I wasn't scared about myself, however, until I rounded the corner onto Hollywood Boulevard. And then I felt, just for a second, that it might be possible to drown in the deluge of my own thoughts.

I tried again to hail a cab. It was rush-hour; traffic barely moved, and all the cabs were full. I was, by now, almost panicking with the urgency of saving Ben. It had finally become impossible for me to have a rational perspective; I was indeed drowning.

I redoubled my pace, crossing through traffic to catch a cab in the other direction, anything. Once more I momentarily recalled the lack of real urgency, but only briefly, before crashing back, with increased violence, into a skewed sense that making the meeting with Ben and our couple's counselor was life-or-death.

I steeled myself. "Calm down, there's no rush." A second later, I looked at the time, and started to run. The clash of priorities began to feel like a clash of hammering irons in my head; then a constant thunder. I ripped my expensive watch – a sexy, masculine watch with a wide leather strap that Ben had given me – off my wrist, and threw it with my cell-phone into a parking lot, hoping that if I could no longer tell the time, the raging confusion would cease. But it only got worse.

Dimly through the clattering chaos, I momentarily heard a shining clear note: instead of worrying about Ben, I should take care of myself. This was my own crisis now, not Ben's: I was falling headlong into the void, and had to save myself. Moreover

in saving myself, I'd save Ben too. If I lost my mind, Ben would shed far more than the few tears he'd cry at my missing our counseling appointment. It seems so obvious now; but that's a symptom of mania: that you can get so consumed by something that it makes you blind to all other priorities. In this case I was so driven to protect Ben that I was quite literally driving myself insane.

That gleaming note I'd felt moments earlier disappeared again in the gathering murk; I felt my sanity slipping away; I knew I needed to medicate myself immediately, either with drugs or alcohol. I pitched into a Mexican restaurant. I must have looked a strange sight: dressed in a tight-fitting, black open-necked shirt; my sleeves rolled up to my biceps; six-foot-six; muscular; blue eyes full of fury and torment.

I grated out, "I need a drink," to the petite hostess. She looked at me worriedly, taking in the way I was dressed: intentionally to impress a public audience with the internal glow of looming superstardom I'd felt as I'd left the house this morning. She said I'd have to wait for a table.

"You don't understand, this is an emergency," I shouted.

She looked at me like I was an alien, then shrugged. I strode into the bar, grabbed a bottle of tequila, and walked out, ignoring the bartender's flailing arms and angry shouts.

I was on Sunset Boulevard by now, just east of La Brea. I drank about a fifth of the bottle: it tasted foul. Vodka is my drink, I thought randomly. My mind was still falling into chaos; the alcohol wasn't working.

I went into a 7-Eleven, where the cashier looked up at me, startled.

"Call 911!" I said, urgently.

The cashier barely even made eye-contact with me before switching back to his customer. I couldn't understand why nobody could see my pain.

I shouted at him, "Call an ambulance, now!"

"Fuck off!" he told me.

I slammed my fist onto the counter, and poured the bottle of tequila all over it.

"Now will you call the fucking police?" I needed help, any kind of help. I knew I needed to be restrained and medicated.

A young gay customer yelled at the cashier, "Call 911!" The kid led me outside.

"Here, I'll call them," he said, soothingly.

I tried to sit down, but I couldn't keep still. He couldn't get through to 911; he was on hold for ten agonizing minutes: I couldn't wait. I crossed the street through moving traffic, and entered the strip-mall on the corner, which contained a Starbucks, nail salons, and some jewelry stores. I thought the police would come eventually, and I was concerned now that they'd think me dangerous; that bullets might fly.

The tequila was finally slowing down my thoughts. Somehow, I suddenly instinctively knew the worst of the crisis was passed: I'd saved myself. But there were still the consequences of my actions to deal with, and I was still far from being myself. I heard sirens, so I went into one of the salons to sit peaceably, my hands clearly visible so the police could see I wasn't armed. I was completely exhausted and intolerably thirsty. The tall Asian transsexual who was doing somebody's nails, kept looking over at me, a half-smile alternating on her pretty face with curiosity. I prayed she wouldn't say anything to me.

The police never came, so eventually I went outside. I still wanted to go to the emergency room, but maybe now I could do it without police involvement, I thought. I convinced a kindly Filipino security guard that I was having a medical crisis, and he lent me his cell-phone so that I could call 911.

He had, ironically, a blue-tooth headset, my first exposure to one despite my immersion in technology, and it took me a while to get it to work for me. But I couldn't get through to 911 - I was kept on hold for even longer than the kid across the street had been. I knew Ben would be worried. It seemed impossible, but it had only been thirty minutes since I had left the Renaissance after failing to get a taxi there.

I finally gave up on getting through to 911, but I didn't know who else to call. I didn't want Ben to know what had happened - at least not yet. But Ben's cell-phone number was the only number I knew by heart, and neither of my therapists had listed phone numbers, so finally I had no alternative but to call Ben. He was frantic. He'd been calling and calling, getting my voicemail. I told him my cell-phone was dead, and asked him not to ask me any questions; just come and pick me up.

At last I could let the tension breathe out of me. I thanked the security guard for the use of his phone and asked him if he could please find me some water. He looked at me dubiously, so I started to pull off my \$300 belt to offer in exchange for a bottle of water. He relented and got me a bottle of water, declining the belt (for which I was later thankful – it's still my favorite belt).

When Ben picked me up, I had to figure out how to explain to him everything that had happened that day. Because, you see, this headlong rush through Hollywood was only the climax of an astonishing day. I knew it wasn't the right time to tell him anything

about my day preceding his tearful call from our counselor's office less than an hour earlier.

Nonetheless, my mind was still racing, and there was the manic temptation to explain myself fully. I kept holding onto the fact that I couldn't possibly tell him everything without scaring him; I had to simplify things. I kept saying to myself "breathe", as a mantra to remind myself, through the haze of explanations yearning to be spoken, not to be driven to make Ben understand everything. I wrote "breathe" on a scrap of paper as we drove home, because I didn't trust myself. And once I got home, I wrote it out again, on more scraps of paper, so I'd see it everywhere.

Later that night, as I got ready to take a shower, I looked at the scrap of paper on the sink with the word "breathe" written on it. I was worried that Ben would see it, and the other pieces of paper I'd left lying around, and think it was another act indicating that I was not entirely in my right mind. We had a decorative bowl in the living-room full of pebbles of green glass bought from Pottery Barn. So after my shower, I grabbed a few green pebbles, and left them in inconspicuous places replacing the pieces of paper. Now I knew that every time I'd see one of those pebbles, it would remind me of "breathe", and I'd stop trying to put into words what was going on in my racing mind.

But would I still remember "breathe" in the morning? I surreptitiously stuffed a pebble underneath the sheet on my side of the bed, knowing that whenever I woke up, the physical discomfort would reconnect me to "breathe".

The next morning, things returned to a surprising degree of normality between us. We were both anxious about what had happened; but also eager to please each other. I felt sure that I'd never again let worry for Ben drive me to the edge of insanity. I also

knew that it was going to take a lot of dialogue before he could fully understand what had happened the previous day. I had no idea there were even worse days to come; that the first, as yet undiagnosed, manic episode of my life hadn't wrought, by any means, all the damage it held in store.
