

HOPE

A JOURNEY OF SELF LOVE



PREFACE

The Beginning of the End

You can't write a book from your brain; you have to write it from your heart. Well, fuck. This is going to hurt. It's going to heal, but first, it's going to hurt. Feel the feels to heal the heals. Okay, that's not a real saying, but I'm sure you're picking up what I'm putting down. I can't ignore the need to tell my story anymore, and through that process, finally close off some very old wounds. I've had many doubts about writing this: *Do other people even hate themselves, or was that just me? Surely my experiences weren't actually that bad? Who am I to write about this? And, Holy shit, everyone will know the truth of my deep dark heart.*

Yet, after every doubt there was always a breath of knowing that I had lived this experience, of taking a machete to the overgrown and unruly path of self-hatred for a very important reason. In these pages you will get to know who I was, and how I overcame the things that enabled and conditioned me to live half a life built on fear, guilt, shame and unworthiness. I write this story having found a new perspective, the kind of perspective

that seven years of courageously sitting with my deepest darkest demons can provide. I have contemplated, hated, blamed, held on to and re-travelled this story so many times now, and this is my final retelling. This was my story.

7th July 2013

I don't know who I am anymore. I am changing. I am struggling to know or figure out who I am, and who I am meant to be. I struggle to accept and love myself, constantly trying to make myself better, but nothing is ever good enough, even when I do accomplish something. I hate everything about myself, which is really hard to accept because I remember times when I actually had self-confidence. I don't trust my husband; I can't let go of the past when he hurt me. I don't feel like he loves me, and sometimes I wonder if this is because I don't love myself. Our relationship is broken, and I don't know how to fix it. I don't know why I must be the one to fix everything. I feel like I don't belong or fit in anywhere. Like I am constantly trying to impress and be liked by everyone, and I'm not succeeding. I feel like I don't have a best friend, someone I can turn to and trust with the real me. I feel like I am losing control and wondering if I ever really had any control. I look back on all my 'happy' memories and wonder if they were really happy, or if it was just a lie that I told myself. I feel like I am a perfectionist who can never get anything perfect. I want to accept myself and be true to me. I want to stop fighting with myself, and my husband. I want to trust him, feel loved by him and let go of his wrongdoings, without letting go of him. I want to be able to say my husband

is my best friend, and mean it. I want to trust him enough to let him in and share the real me. I want to make a difference in the world. I want to be a good role model for my daughter. I want to be me and be okay with that. I want to look in the mirror, smile and stop there, not pick on every single flaw I see. I just want to be happy.

This was my very first reflection, at 26 years old. Barely scraping the surface of my feelings, I wrote about where I was and how I truly felt in my life, as I answered questions for a counsellor I was about to start seeing. I'd reached out, wanting someone to talk to from an outside perspective, but if I was being honest with myself, what I really wanted was someone to side with me in my relationship. To prove that the blame was not on me, to be told I wasn't wrong, but rather I had been wronged, and that it most definitely wasn't my job to fix it. What I got instead was a hefty dose of reality and truth, one that opened a portal for me that I could never walk back out of. Blake Bauer—man, did I have a Zen crush on him. Nothing seemed to faze him, ever. There was an air of peace, calm and tranquillity about him that had me wondering which organ I'd have to sell in order to reach that kind of peace in my life. Turns out I didn't have to sell an organ, I just had to learn how to listen to one: my heart.

Fuck. This was definitely going to hurt.

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'I love you, Renee.' Four words Blake had asked me to say to myself, whilst looking in the mirror. Four simple words, right? Easy. I knew the statement wasn't true. I knew I

didn't believe it, but I'd done drama in high school, I'd been in some plays and had plenty of dance performances under my belt. I thought I'd easily be able to bluff my way through four words. Only I couldn't. 'I-' barely audible, forced out of my mouth was as far as I could get. Tears streamed down my face and my breath choked me from the inside out. I couldn't even look at myself. Something inside would not let me lie to myself any longer. The depth of my self-hatred had been brought to the surface in one attempted sentence.

'I know what you did, just tell me the truth!' I screamed.

I'd just accused my husband of cheating on me. I had no evidence, nothing to base my accusation on, nothing but this unrecognised, gnawing pain inside of me. The shock on his face was nothing compared to how painfully deep I'd struck him in the heart.

'Why on earth would I cheat on you?' he asked me softly. I had no reply for that, only a resigned and heavy truth that hung silently in the air around me.

'Why wouldn't you? Look at me.'

In the long minute it took my husband to pick up our child and walk out the door, I knew I was broken, and that I very well might have broken more than just me. I didn't even cry, I just kept trying to find proof. That had to be the answer; that was so much more logical and less painful than something being 'wrong' with me.

I eventually gave up searching and buried the whole experience under the proverbial rug. It barely fucking fit, with all the other painful experiences and cries for help I'd

been shoving in there my whole life. This chaos of blame and accusation had bubbled up from the depths of me and started lashing out with such a force that no one saw coming – least of all me, and this was only the beginning.

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