

Finding the Light

Not good enough. Not good enough. All these years, and what was I? Not good enough. One bold statement thrown out in the air that scarred me more deeply than knives ever could. Not good enough. The words reminded me of hot pink tank tops, size 0 jeans and stiletto heels, of silent tears and puffy eyes, of self-pity and hatred. See, I used to be one of them, walking down the hallways, gossiping, pretending to be unaware of the admiring stares that followed us as we click-clacked to class, never in a hurry. We used to be so close. Heartfelt promises, innermost secrets, darkest fears, we shared it all. In our pink leopard spotted pajamas, we would lie in the dark and spill to each other. We would stare at the star covered ceiling and somehow feel that we were completely and utterly safe, that we had each other's backs. And wherever we were, we always had each other. We did everything together. And so it was, politely refusing cookies and milk, and secretly stealing down to the kitchen to eat celery instead. We dieted together, complained about our weight together, dreamed about our futures together, in short; there was nothing we couldn't talk to each other about. We became each other's family, quadruplets, sisters, whatever you want to call it, we were inseparable.

Until we weren't. Where I had always been accepted, I was pushed away. I started to see through them, and that scared them. They turned a cold shoulder towards me, but I thought it was just a phase. Little did I know that I was losing them, my best friends, forever. They would throw up in the bathrooms after lunch, and instead of doing it with them, I looked away. My size 3 jeans suddenly became "fat", the word we all dreaded above everything else. They became skinnier and skinnier, their double 0 jeans becoming loose,

and instead of watching it from the inside, as I always had, I was pushed out of the circle I had always been in. Poof, like magic. Now you belong, now you don't. Thoughts of them consumed me like a fever, pushing me, always pushing, to be better, do better, be skinnier. Be good enough. Crying into my pillow became a nightly ritual, my hair in my mouth, my pillow drenched with tears, but dry in the morning. I lead a double life, a model student in school, but it was just a façade. A barrier I put up, a cover of make-up and false indifference. But it was no use. I was too far gone. My smile began to crack, the plaster over the hole in me breaking off in large chunks. My nightly crying no longer stealthy, but loud sobs, howling, raw, often not stopping until one or two in the morning. . Make-up could no longer hide the effects of my loss of sleep and I took to keeping a razor in my pencil bag, Vera Bradley, of course. The razor was pink in color, flowery, but the blade was just as sharp as the words that they said to me. " Not good enough." " Never was, never will be." " Look at her jeans, she's so fat." The razor matched my pencil bag perfectly, or at least it seemed to blend in, except it was fatal, like the hole inside of me.

I screamed my throat raw, trying to get someone, anyone to notice me. I chased after them, pleading, begging, on my knees, but I was just not good enough. Not good enough for anyone to care. Not good enough to deserve them. Not good enough. I took to skipping class, hiding in the restroom, banging my head against the pink walls, hating it and needing it at the same time, my eyes red and puffy, my face a mess. Not good enough. Not good enough. Just not good enough. But there was one reason that the razor stayed in my pencil bag, that I even dragged myself out of bed when my alarm rang, that I bothered to put up the facade of 'I'm fine', even though it was as transparent as a plastic bag, floating in the wind.

Julie Markowitz. She was my saving grace, my best friend until the very end, until she, too, left me for them. Her expression is imprinted in my memory, scarred there for life, as she broke the last barriers keeping me from

leaving reality. A mix of anger, hatred, disbelief, and disgust. Her perfectly manicured fingernail pushed me up against the lockers, slamming me into them with such force it nearly hurt. But I was past feeling pain. She hissed her poisonous words in my ear as if afraid to be seen with me. Her words cut right through me like scissors through a paper doll.

“ I can't believe I was ever your friend.”

Her eyes bored into me as if, if they stared hard enough, they could see right through me. Her minty breath washed over me, and I realized that I had no one. No one. The only person who had ever cared had turned away from me. I was alone.

“I can't believe I never saw what a loser you are. Listen to me, Alexis.” She yanked my chin so that I was looking directly into her eyes. “I can't believe you dragged me in to your pathetic life. How could you do this to me?” Heads turned and she lowered her voice. “ Stay away from me, you freak. I don't know you anymore and I don't want to.”

With that, and a swish of her long blond hair, she turned on her heel, and walked away, a queen in her own right, walking an imaginary red carpet as the hallway parted for her. The bell rung and the students dispersed. Her words rung in my ears, pushing against the sides of my head, making me dizzy as they swam around in circles. The walls seemed to close around me and I ran to the restroom. I felt disconnected, as if some kind of wire keeping me on Earth had been jolted loose by the silent implication in their eyes, a sharp pity and revulsion as they turned away. Not good enough. It echoed in my ears, deafening though unspoken. It screamed at a volume of zero decibels settling in to the contours of my mind, settling there heavily, weighing me down with their unbearable burden. A kind of haze passed over me, and I felt separated from my body, lifted and thrown back down because of the same three words. A fatal roller coaster ride that did nothing but crash, again and again. Not good enough. Not good enough. Not good enough. Stuck like a broken record on

constant play. Not good enough. That time, when the stall door locked behind me, there was no more sobbing in the corner. No, the tears ran down silently, burning an acid path down my face. The tile floor swam before my eyes, but my purpose burned through me like fire. I tore open my pencil bag and with hands shaking with urgency, slit my wrists.

The blood flowed out fast, faster, as I began to carve lines of red over my arms. The pink razor turned red with my blood, and I began to laugh. A deranged, demented laugh that echoed through the restroom, bounced off the walls, dipped through the sinks, and returned to pierce my own ears. The pain heightened my senses to pinpoints, and with it came the self-pity and hatred that made me go back, day after day. I started to wear long sleeves to hide my scars and brought Lysol and wipes to school to wipe up the blood that stained the mortar between tiles. The facade I had maintained began to slip, and so did my grades, because, to be honest, I just didn't care. I lived solely for the rush of relief that came with the blood. It relieved me of reality, like my sanity flowed out with the blood that poured out of me.

And then, one day, I just couldn't stop. I sat there, in the familiar bathroom, watching my blood pour out. It reflected the harsh fluorescent lights overhead, and seemed to smirk at me and say, "You'll never be good enough," in a perfect French accent. I stared at it, feeling a rage build inside me. In a frenzy I began reopening all my old wounds thinking crazily, "Not good enough, never good enough." I started to cry, tears of rage and tears of hatred. I ripped open my arms, watching brown skin turn red, screaming, "Just not good enough", until I passed out. I lay there on the cold tile, my long black hair spread around me like a halo, unconscious. Someone must have found me, because the next thing I remember is whitewashed walls, and an ugly blue hospital gown. I was propped up in a hospital bed and I screamed out my rage at the world. I hated it, for doing this to me. I hated it, and everybody in it. I cried and cried. I yelled my throat raw, and, exhausted, fell asleep.

Recovery was slow, painful and confusing. I lost my way many times, and took refuge within myself. I built a box around myself, a box that stayed with me. I seldom spoke and I found comfort in silence, but the first day I spoke was a day etched clearly in my memory. I was in therapy, which basically consisted of people trying to get you to talk about your “traumatic experiences”. That was a direct quote, by the way. The sun was streaming in through the window and the hard plastic chair I was sitting in was poking into my butt. I had begun to eat more after hospitalization, but my jeans were still loose on me and I kept shifting uncomfortably. The sunshine glittered on the faces of the people in our circle, and on face in particular. A little girl, hardly more than eight or nine years old. Her arms were scarred so badly that you couldn’t tell which color her skin was. She kept her head down and her eyes were filled with knowledge and a haunting sadness that belied her young age. Looking at her, I felt angry that the world could do this to so innocent a child, and vowed to do something to make sure that that would not happen to any other child. As if sensing my thoughts, she looked up at me and smiled. Her smile filled her face and filled me up with a determination to do something, anything to help her, and other kids like her, to tell them to just hold on, that reinforcements were on the way to keep fighting for just a little bit longer, that they were brave and good and kind, no matter what others might have said.

The warmth of the day and the beige room we were in was making my arms itchy, specifically because they were bound in layers and layers of white bandages. My black T-shirt and jeans weren't helping matters either. A familiar rage built up inside me. The same rage I had felt that fateful day in the restroom stall. All-consuming, it burned a track through me, and I knew I had to do something. Someone in our little circle of suicidal people was talking, but the rage was burning me, consuming me, and it was all I could do to remain in control. I was shaking all over, thousands of mini earthquakes. So I began to talk.

The words tumbled over each other in their hurry to get out, and the story poured out of me like a bottled up waterfall. By the time I had finished, I was crying, tears and snot dripping off my nose and on my shirt, and I was bent over, gasping for air. The barriers that had surrounded me were lying shattered, in pieces all around me. I was free, after years of being chained down. I was free, and enormous burden lifted off my shoulders. The burden of my story. The rage had passed and I felt drained and exhausted, but I knew what I had to do. I would tell my story again and again, warn others of the dangers that lay ahead, and convince them to never, ever go to the resort of taking your own life, that it is never worth it, that there is always some light at the end of the tunnel. The thought filled me up with determination, strength and courage. I had found the light, coming from inside of me, like the smile from that little girl. A light which contained dreams and hope and promises for the future. A light that reached out, that guided your path, that gave you the strength to carry on. A friendship, born out of two lonely people. A smile, filling up a room, driving away the lurking shadows of grief and doubt. The silver lining in the cloud. The light at the end of the tunnel. The first hint of dawn after night. The first sign of spring after a long, cold winter. A rainbow, arching across the heavens after a thunderstorm. People were clapping and crying with me, but it was more than just acceptance that I felt. It was the feeling of being myself after months of covering up, of overcoming, of finally being what I'd been striving for all this time.

Good enough.
