

Chapter 7 – “The Moon’s Bay”

I don’t want to write this chapter, but I feel it is important. In the 1940s, before the advent of modern medicine, more than 40% of people with Bipolar eventually committed suicide. Even today, the number of those who lose their lives to this disease is staggering.

All of us who have this Bipolar know “the dark hour.” We are alone. We are afraid. We feel that the whole weight of the world rests upon us and we cannot carry it one step further. In that hour, above all other times, we must know that this is not what the world is truly like. The foreboding thoughts are not what we really think. The terrible weight and craving for darkness are not our thoughts. They are the products of changes in the frontal lobe of our brains, in the rate of neuron growth, in the shedding of the myelin sheath around our nerve cells. We are, in that dark hour, locked in a false prison built of thoughts produced by this disease – a disease that has altered the very function of our brains. If we die in that hour, the disease wins.

My darkest hour came on a beach in California. I’d taken one of my famous road trips, all the way from Kansas to the coast in three days, then spent a week cruising northern California. This time was different. I had been back and forth between depression and mixed episodes for six months. Although I beat around the California countryside for a week, my intent was clear. In the back of the car was a rifle I’d purchased especially for this occasion. I’d even bought an old junker car and left my more expensive one at home to be sold to cover the bills.

I don’t know what day it was when I found the bay. It is somewhere North of Mendocino; a beautiful horseshoe bay with high cliff walls and a narrow outlet to the sea. I played around on the beach for a few hours. There were large lava rocks scattered here and there and a small scoop of a cave off to the right. I decided this would be the place.

I went into Mendocino and fiddled around that afternoon. I was wearing an Other and I’m not sure what I was doing. I know I ate dinner at a restaurant attached to a hotel. I remember this because I had a flimsy internal debate about whether or not to skip the whole suicide thing and get a hotel room. I didn’t have the money, not that it would have made a difference.

It was fairly late at night when I went back to the bay. I set myself up on a large rock, rifle in hand, suicide note in pocket. I didn’t know about Apollo 13 then, so the significance of the

bright moon shining directly overhead was lost on me. It was only a day or two from full. I could see kelp tops underwater. It was that bright.

I began to cry almost at once. I cried because the soul that is me was rebelling against the urge to die that was not me, an urge created by my disease. As I cried, the tears changed. From somewhere inside, a sense of determination appeared. I told myself, in spite of everything, I wasn't going to die. I gave myself permission to live. My tears of fear and sorrow became tears of relief and also grief for the part of life I'd already lost to the illness. Gradually, there came anger. If I didn't want to die what the hell was I doing on a beach in California with a gun? What was driving this?

Although I would not get into treatment until the next time I got seriously depressed, this was my first moment of awakening; a separation between me and the disease. This was the moment that gave me the power to seek help.

I don't remember falling asleep, but I woke up on that rock several hours later. It was cold and lava rocks are not very comfortable. My right ankle hurt where I had been lying on my foot. The moon was laying low over the sea and her reflection was like a sidewalk out to her. I didn't take that walk. I tore up the note, got in the car and started driving. I slept the rest of the night on a roadside somewhere else and had an uncooked frozen pizza for breakfast.

I don't know why I got the sudden will to live. Higher power? So I could later bring my daughter into the world? A little extra Vasoactive Peptide in the Cerebellum? I don't know. What I do know is that I'm alive. It's not my fault that I have this disease and I'll be damned if I'm going to let it kill me, or anyone else I can keep away from it.

I know that the real me has never wanted to kill himself. My suicidal thoughts were caused by a disease. Having pneumonia will make you cough. Having Bipolar makes you think about death. It's not you. It's the disease.

A lot of folks who are on the edge of suicide end up calling local law enforcement in order to prevent themselves from carrying thorough with ending their lives. Paramedics and police officers know the mental health supports that are available and can help you. If you are standing at the dark doorway and can't wait to call your doctor, local mental health clinic or a religious figure, put down this book and call 911 or the local emergency phone number. I want you to live. I can't bear to think that you would get this close to hope and not make it. If you need help, go get it right now.