

For all the party girls.

Introduction

A BABY SEAL WALKED INTO A CLUB. Just kidding! The baby seal was *me*. And fine, I didn't walk into a club, per se—not on that night, anyway. It was the VIP tent of Cirque du Soleil—you know, the famous French Canadian circus show? They'd set up a big, white tent—it sort of looked like a peaky marshmallow—called the Grand Chapiteau on Randall's Island, which was up on the East River just off Manhattan. Earlier that evening, I'd been picked up at the Condé Nast building in midtown and chauffeured there. For “work.”

It was the summer of 2009, and I was walking with a bit of a limp because I had broken glass in my foot from . . . well, I wasn't sure what from, exactly. I *think* I broke a bottle of Kiehl's Musk on my bathroom floor and then I stepped on it, I guess, and I never wound up getting the shards taken out.

“You need to go see a doctor,” my boss—legendary beauty director

CAT MARNELL

Jean Godfrey-June—said every day when I hobbled into her office in ballerina flats. “*Today.*”

“I will,” I’d promise. But then I’d just go home, pound Froot Loops in a dark trance, or get high with my friend Marco.

Yep! I was twenty-six years old and an associate beauty editor at *Lucky*, one of the top fashion magazines in America, and that’s all that most people knew about me. But beneath the surface, I was full of secrets: I was an addict, for one. A pillhead! I was also an alcoholic-in-training who drank warm Veuve Clicquot after work, alone in my boss’s office with the door closed; a conniving uptown doctor shopper who haunted twenty-four-hour pharmacies while my coworkers were at home watching *True Blood* in bed with their boyfriends; a salami-and-provolone-puking bulimic who spent a hundred dollars a day on binge foods when things got bad (and they got bad often); a weepy, wobbly hallucination-prone insomniac who jumped six feet in the air à la LeBron James and gobbled Valium every time a floorboard squeaked in her apartment; a tweaky self-mutilator who sat in front of *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, digging gory abscesses into her bikini line with Tweezerman Satin Edge Needle Nose Tweezers; a slutty and self-loathing downtown party girl fellatrix rushing to ruin; and—perhaps most of all—a lonely weirdo who felt like she was underwater all of the time. My brains were so scrambled you could’ve ordered them for brunch at Sarabeth’s; I let art-world guys choke me out during unprotected sex; I only had one friend, a Dash Snow-wannabe named Marco who tried to stick syringes in my neck and once slurped from my nostrils when I got a cocaine nosebleed; my roommate, Nev “Catfish” Schulman, wanted me out of our East Village two-bedroom; my parents weren’t talking to me ever since I’d stuck my dad with a thirty-thousand-dollar rehab bill. I took baths every morning because I was too weak to stand in the shower; I wrote rent checks in highlighter; I had three prescribing psychiatrists and zero ob-gyns or dentists; I kept such insane hours that I never knew whether to put on day cream or night cream; and I never, ever called my grandma.

HOW TO MURDER YOUR LIFE

I was also a liar. My boss—I was her assistant at the time—had been incredibly supportive and given me six weeks off to go to rehab. I'd been telling Jean that I was clean ever since I got back, even though I wasn't. And then she promoted me.

So now I was a beauty editor. In some ways, I looked the part of Condé Nast hotshot—or at least I tried to. I wore fab Dior slap bracelets and yellow plastic Marni dresses, and I carried a three-thousand-dollar black patent leather Lanvin tote that Jean had plunked down on my desk one afternoon. (“This is . . . too shiny for me,” she'd explained.) My highlights were by Marie Robinson at Sally Hershberger Salon in the Meatpacking District; I had a chic lavender pedicure—Versace Heat Nail Lacquer V2008—and I smelled obscure and expensive, like Susanne Lang Midnight Orchid and Colette Black Musk Oil.

But look closer. I was five-four and ninety-seven pounds. The aforementioned Lanvin tote was full of orange plastic bottles from Rite Aid; if you looked at my hands digging for them, you'd see that my fingernails were dirty, and that the knuckle on my right hand was split from scraping against my front teeth. My chin was broken out from the vomiting. My self-tanner was uneven because I always applied it when I was strung out and exhausted—to *conceal* the exhaustion, you see—and my skin underneath the faux-glow was full-on *Corpse Bride*. A stylist had snipped out golf-ball-size knots that had formed at the back of my neck when I was blotto on tranquilizers for months and stopped combing my hair. My under-eye bags were big enough to send down the runway at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week: I hadn't slept in days. I hadn't slept for more than a few hours at a time in months. And I hadn't slept without pills in *years*. So even though I wrote articles about how to take care of yourself—your hair, your skin, your nails—I was falling apart.

I'd never been in the VIP section of a circus tent before. There was an open bar and colossal flower arrangements, and waiters in black tie