

My Story, My Truth

by Benjamin Williams

Anyone who knows me has heard me snort at some time from laughing too hard. What you probably don't know is that the reason I snort is that the first man I ever loved hit my nose just a little too hard in one of his rages and a snort isn't so easy to fix. I would argue our stories are carried with us in different aspects of our lives. We get tattoos, we have scars, and we make jokes. The irony for me is that every time there is just a little too much joy and I snort I am reminded of the darker parts of my story.

At the beginning of my senior year of high school, I went to my first college party with my boyfriend and couldn't believe this was my life. His name was Matt. He was hot, he was older, and he was incredibly sweet and caring. When I had a bad day at school or when I just needed someone to talk to, he always showed up. We would drive for hours just with our hands connected or my head resting on his shoulder. He taught me that the love between two men was not wrong, it was beautiful. There was a fight between him and a friend at that party and he stormed off into his room, I followed.

He then showed me the other part of him that was angry, bitter, and violent. The door closed, I spoke, he grabbed, and my arms burned. He was stronger than me and taller than me and his force pushed me into a wall. Silence. In the beautiful green of eyes of his, I saw his want to hurt me and to hit me. He didn't in that moment, but I will never forget the rage I saw and would come to know well. As time ticked on, the look of rage in those beautiful green eyes turned into bruises on my skin hidden by a Northface jacket in September or a long sleeve shirt in May. The bruises and the hits hurt, yet the way my mind began to make sense of them still terrifies me. I justified what he did as an error I must have made, my self-worth was gone, and I wore a mask every day when I went to SGA meetings, greeted new students, and painted that extrovert face on my broken interior. The worst part was ahead, but I believed this chapter could still have a happy ending.

Fast forward to the summer before my sophomore year of college and my time as a new student orientation leader at Georgia State was coming to an end and the beautiful green eyes of the man who I thought was the love of my life were still around. He was much better or maybe I was just better at rationalizing it. To be completely honest, I am not sure which of the statements I just made is true.

It was July and he took me out to dinner and we danced and all seemed to be perfect in the world. That night we came home and all I could think about was passing out. I can remember clearly going to the kitchen to grab a drink and coming back to a kiss from the man who I had fallen so deeply in love with in between the blows he dealt me. Well kisses turned into other things that ended with the question, "do you want to?" My answer was no, but my choice was removed. I felt my wrists burn the same way they did that first night he ever laid hands on me and that night the man I loved became the man who assaulted me. I found myself with an incredible darkness remaining in what seemed to be a promising world. My entire body burned with emotion, hate, sadness, and pain. He was still stronger and taller than me, which he used to take from me the last piece of myself I saved for someone else in hope for a brighter future. Every second is etched into my mind.

For days after, a bruise on my left wrist sit as a reminder of the violence of that night tortured me so I went and got a tattoo to rest above it. A lock in the shape of a heart to represent the marks left on my heart and mind that may stop me from ever sharing myself with another in the same way again. We talk about trigger warnings, but what do you when you are walking down the aisles of a grocery store in Oxford, Ohio when

someone whose proportions resembles his turns the aisle and your body seizes with fear.

In many ways we tell our stories but the fibers of our muscles and the beat of our heart do a damn good job of reminding us what has happened to us. I am more than the scares he left on my heart and body, and the ugly reminders of a terrible evening. I am a full and whole person whose broken promises pieces make a beautiful human who loves fully and lives for each day. I am a survivor and I am thriving.