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Addiction for Dummies

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Author Bio

Anthony is from Staten Island, New York. He is a Political Science major with a triple minor in Writing, Philosophy, and Peace and Justice Studies. On campus, he works as a tour guide and a lifeguard. He is the manager of the Swim Team, the current Parliamentarian for the Student Senate, and the Recruitment Chair for Phi Delta Theta Fraternity. After college, he plans on trading campus life for city life with a decent law school and hopes to one day work for the government.

Addiction for Dummies

Tony McComiskey

Hi, my name is Tony, and I'm an alcoholic. If you have seen me stumbling around campus on the weekends, you may find this statement easy to swallow, but I am not the Tony that I'm referring to. My father, also named Tony, is whom this sentence is referencing to. My father is a 53 year old retired NYPD officer who has enjoyed drinking since his teenage years. Since I've been around, I've always seen him enjoy two or three casual beers in an evening, but nothing too fratty. So what changed? This long, sad story begins on the most romantically charged day of the year: February 14th, 2010—Valentine's Day.

I'm running through the woods at full speed, seconds away from solving an ancient mystery thousands of years old, but, as I'm racing towards the final clue, I see an obstacle: it's fucking Batman. Batman, why are you placing detonators on the final clue? Wait, are those zombies behind you? Before he could answer, I was forcefully jerked out of dream world and plopped into a reality that would never be the same again. Actually, writing this all down makes me kind of happy that the final piece of reality as I knew it was Batman attempting to blow up zombies.

Anyway...

I was suddenly shaken from sleep by the sound of my father repeatedly screaming one word:

“NOOOOOOOO! ...NOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

Have you ever seen “Shutter Island?” There's this scene where Leonardo DiCaprio finds his children dead in a lake and he lets out this agonizing scream of “no” that was literally identical to the way my dad did it. Everyone in the theaters started crying, but I was tearing up for a different reason.

Again, I digress. Did I mention I have ADD?

Anyway...

My heart was on an instant adrenaline kick that got me to my parents' bedside faster than a little girl who thinks there is a monster under her bed. As I entered the room, half expecting to see my mother dead, I quickly discovered that it was not her, but my Aunt Annie who had passed away. My father was sitting upright in bed next to my mother. His blue eyes were glazed with moisture as he listened to the EMT's report over the phone. My Aunt Annie is my father's older sister and my godmother. She lived a tremendously difficult life due to the early and unexpected death of

my Uncle Tommy, who had passed away 18 years earlier. Before my uncle's untimely death, they had three children together: Tim, Katie, and Patrick. Although I'd like to divulge the secrets of their unfortunate tale, this story is going to be about me for a change.

"Ay buddy, you're from New York, so you may understand my subtlety. If you're making a lot of money, and you're not doing anything on the books, and you aren't selling drugs, what are you doing?"

I was seriously confused at this point. And honestly, I didn't want to shoot the shit with this creepy cab driver.

"Err, the mob?" I unenthusiastically blurted out.

"BINGO!" said the driver.

Okay, my comfort level was seriously diminishing here. A few minutes of silence calmed me down, but as we whizzed by the Gettysburg exit, my heart began to race again. Where the fuck is this mob boss taking me? Before I had the chance to inquire, he asked if it was cool that we make a detour to pick up a certain lady friend. Okay, so the dude is trying to get laid. I can appreciate that. Plus I really have no say in the matter, so I might as well play along.

We pulled up to a complex, and a woman emerged from the shadows wearing a tight black top with matching booty shorts. Okay, so this "lady friend" of his is a hooker. Well that's just great. As she opened the door, a rush of cool October wind slapped me in the face. She plopped down next to me in the back seat and instantly started talking my ear off. The driver warned me that she likes to talk, but she seriously wouldn't shut the fuck up. Then started the touching and uncomfortably honest remarks.

"You know, you seem really different from most guys my age. I really like your personality, and your eyes are *sooo* blue. Let me see your phone, I want to give you my number."

One hand reached for my phone and the other for my thigh.

"Maybe I could come by sometime now that I know where you live. I bet we could have a real good time in that tiny room of yours."

Fuck, I don't need this right now. If only they knew what had happened only twenty-four hours ago. I politely nodded sporadically at the hooker as my mind drifted back to the memory of the night before...

"Tony, you're now the man of this family."

That right there is a direct quote from my father. If you're wondering why my father, the clear head of my family, would be transitioning the power over to an eighteen-year-old, then you are in the same boat that I was when he said it to me. As he ascended the stairs, a horrifying thought ran through my head faster than a speeding bullet, but I refused to believe such an unthinkable thought. He repeated those words three more times as

he crept into his dark room. When he emerged from the darkness, he was holding one hand behind his back, and at that moment, my unthinkable thought became reality.

There it was: my dad had his gun.

Without even thinking, I instantly reacted. After over two months in college, I had had my fair share of blackouts, but this one was different. It wasn't a jovial experience filled with reckless fun that my friends and I would never remember. Nope. This was a dark, cold emptiness that filled my entire being.

I can remember it in flashes. First came the struggle: in my attempt to wrestle him to the ground, he had managed to slam my right shoulder up against the wall in his drunken stupor. Next comes the screaming: I found myself on top of my father holding both of his hands down yelling in his face. Next to me were my furious mother and my hysterical older sister. My sister was crying uncontrollably in her doorway while my mother was kicking my downed father in a blind fury.

How could you leave the three of us behind, Dad? What about your friends and your grieving mother? And you're suicidal because your sister passed away?

Really?!

Do we mean nothing to you then? I know it's absolutely devastating, but she wouldn't want this for you, she wouldn't want this for us. You're justifying your immature actions based upon the death of your sister, and I know for a fact she'd kick your ass if she knew what has become of you; this is a complete fuck you to her memory. Never in my life had I witnessed a more selfish act.

The strong foundation of our family had been shaking for a while due to my father's decisions, but the floor finally crumbled beneath all of us in that moment. We were free falling, and there was no parachute in sight.

"Go fuck yourself; I don't want to talk to you." The line goes dead. Those were the last words I said to my father, and now he's on his death bed. This is a joke, right? This is straight up out of a movie.

It was pouring out, but that wasn't going to stop me from going to Servo's turkey dinner, even if the line was practically past the health center. As I was gearing up to brave the rain, I got a call from my mom. "It's your father, Tony... Something has happened. You're going to want to head over to the hospital. The school is sending a shuttle to your dorm now."

"If I lay here, if I just lay here, would you lie with me and just forget the world."

These words from that lame Snow Patrol song were playing in my ears as I walked away from the hospital that rainy, dark Thursday morning when I was told that there was a 90% chance that my father would be brain dead within twenty-four hours. How did it get to this point? Why didn't I do anything to stop this? What the fuck is wrong with me?! I saw all the signs and did NOTHING.

My face was splattered with a combination of never-ending tears and a slow drizzle. I played this song on repeat as some fucked-up form of subjective torture; it was my punishment for doing nothing to halt this entire catastrophe. This wasn't an arbitrary song either. This song meant something to my father. Whenever it came on, he would always tear up by the end, and say the same line every time: "If this song was around when my father died, I would play it on repeat."

So that's just what I did. I played it on repeat until my ears begged me to stop and my eyes no longer produced tears, a phenomenon that I had never experienced before that day.

I slowly entered the room where my father was barely clinging to life. He was hooked up to at least ten different tubes, including one that was filled with his feces. That's something no human should ever have to witness: your father shitting into a tube. The alpha male of my family and my male role model was nothing more than a shell of a man at this point. He was a shade of deep yellow due to the rising ammonia levels in his body that his failing liver could no longer process, and he was uncontrollably shaking and sweating due to his triple threat withdrawals from Vicodin, alcohol, and nicotine.

God, what the fuck is wrong with this guy? The day that he was being transported to rehab, he popped around twelve to fifteen Vicodin at once, a.k.a. suicide attempt number two. Miraculously, he defied all medical expectations and survived. Looking back, it may have been easier on all of us if he had just died that day. It's horrible to think, and even worse to type, but I can't help thinking it. What's even worse is that I think my mother feels the same exact way.

Mid- March and I'm home for the weekend. You know what that means-- my dad's going to do something stupid. Hoorah! I just don't know what I'd do with my life if I wasn't worried about what he's doing with his. We really hit a new record with this visit, though; I had been home for under an hour when I was told that my father was found nursing a water bottle of vodka the night before.

Perfect.

I had just started to get comfortable with him again, but there goes that. That's it-- if he doesn't go to rehab, then I'm done with him. I figured

calmly approaching him about this was the best move, so I made my way to the kitchen where he was sitting.

“Dad, this has to stop. Do you have any idea what you have been putting this family through for the past year? You have no option here, you’re going to rehab.”

He was quiet for a moment. After twenty seconds of silence with his head down, he stared me in the eye and said almost angrily,

“No. No I will not. I will do this my own way. I will fight my own battles.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me, Dad. How can you even argue at this point?! Do you realize that we all feel the affliction of this battle that you’re clearly losing?”

Twenty more seconds of silence passed.

“Dad, I’m not doing this with you. I will leave you with this: if you do not go to rehab, you will be declaring war with this family.”

As I turned my back and exited the kitchen, I heard him mutter under his breath, “I will not go to rehab.”

So it’s been six months. Wow, he was actually right. He said he’d be able to beat it on his own, and despite my disbelief, he really did it. Finally, after almost two years, my relationship with my father was finally back to normal. It was August 4th, the day after my birthday, and we were heading to Brooklyn to celebrate. My father and I were in the car a minute away from my Aunt Millie’s house when something oh too familiar occurred.

“Dad, what did you just put in your mouth?”

There they were-- the panic eyes. His face began to drain in color as my heart sunk into my stomach. Fuck. I fell for this fucked-up game once again.

Again, I repeated the question, “Dad, what the fuck is in your mouth?!”

“Nut-ting” he muttered, clearly unable to speak because of the pills he had blatantly popped.

“Do you think I’m a fucking idiot? Spit them out,” I demanded.

“It’s just asp-in,” he slurred.

“If it’s just aspirin, then why won’t you spit it out for me?”

We had pulled over outside my aunt’s house at this point. There was a tap at the back door. I quickly swung my head around to motion that we needed a minute, and my dad took full advantage of the distraction. As I turned my head, his hand lunged for the water bottle next to me. With the bottle now in hand, he turned his head away from me and tried to swallow the pills. He always seems to underestimate me, which has been his largest flaw in all of this. Why would you pop them in front of me? Before the

water could touch his lips, I grabbed his face and squeezed it tight. Ta-da! There they were.

Underneath his tongue were two large oval pills, exactly what Vicodin looks like. I released his face from my grip and he began chewing like a mad dog as I turned away in disgust. Before exiting the car, I took one last look at him. His lips were covered in a thin white coating, his eyes were wild, and he wasn't my father.