

A New Path

Category: Me, Too

written by Joe Amaral | January 24, 2023

Our ambulance had been summoned to help a woman tripping on mushrooms—activated by a midnight 911 call about a possible assault and death. The police arrived at the location ahead of us to ensure safety. We walked inside to find a woman sobbing and holding a blood-soaked towel against her mangled hand. She had huge, dilated pupils from mushrooms she'd ingested with her boyfriend. Her story unraveled as we listened in horror.

He had urged her to take drugs, binge alcohol, and swallow pills. She had refused most of the substances, except the 'shrooms. He was acting strangely, wanting her to go to sleep and pass out. They had been fighting for weeks, it turned out. Two days earlier, she told us, they were driving along the rural road out to their ranch when he had suddenly swerved into a tree head-on, totaling their car. He later said he was avoiding a deer. Airbags saved their lives, leaving them with only minor cuts and soreness.

The woman wanted to break up with him. He wouldn't allow it, saying he would rather die. She suddenly deduced he was attempting a lover's suicide and called him out on it. The boyfriend lunged for the gun they kept on the nightstand. She tackled him. In the confusion, their three big dogs attacked. One clamped down hard on her hand, puncturing and tearing her skin to the bone. Another dog bit the boyfriend. She was able to lock herself in the bathroom. He didn't pursue her but ran outside, and soon a single gunshot rang out.

After we got her into the ambulance, I sat quietly with her, listening as she flew through all the stages of grief. I bandaged her hand, pressing an ice pack against it for pain relief. She said she was a botanist, that she grew beautiful flowers from seed. She told me other things I will never repeat about the abusive relationship. By the end of her story, her large eyes glistened almost with relief. She was ready to start anew. "Maybe it's the mushrooms," she said, "but I feel I'll become a stronger person from this—I already know it."

During the fifteen-minute ride to the hospital—in the safe space of the ambulance—I acknowledged and supported her while she processed what had just happened. I never heard about her outcome. I like to think that despite the trauma she'd experienced, she received the care and assistance she needed to take the new path opened before her.

Joe Amaral

Grover Beach, California