It’s a sick kind of warmth, isn't it? That bubbling sensation when you think back on getting even. Years removed, sober now, but that college revenge? It still sparks something dark and satisfying deep inside. I know, I know – wrong, destructive, all of it. But denying the raw *satisfaction*? Impossible. It’s a stain on my soul, maybe, but a potent one. I don’t trot this story out often. It paints me in shades of grey I usually keep hidden. But maybe getting it down, raw and unfiltered, is necessary. No sugar-coating, no self-absolution. This is how it went down, warts and all.

Junior year, D1 basketball. Life was hotels, airports, arenas, the relentless grind of elite college sports. Pressure cooker existence. Add to that the early, insidious creep of alcohol and substances – a habit that would later nearly end me, but back then felt like fuel. Understand this: addicts operate differently. Our motivations get twisted. This isn't an excuse, just context for the character defect that bloomed from this mess. I wasn't a bad kid, not really. Tough upbringing, yeah, but I usually tried to do the right thing. Especially in relationships. Cheating? That was for *other* people, lesser men with lesser women. Hubris, pure and simple. I thought my five-star boyfriend routine and impeccable taste made me immune. Young, dumb, arrogant as hell.

A year post-high school girlfriend breakup. I was ready. The next one, she was *it*. Marriage, future, the whole damn blueprint sketched out in my naive head. Then I saw Lisa. Track star. Fast, focused, magnetic. Saw her around the athletic complex – that shared space where different sports tribes mingled. Knew I had to make a move. Party scene, inevitable intersection on a crowded staircase. Eye contact, a flicker of a smile from her. Game on. We exchanged numbers, slipped into that stupid, cautious dance of modern flirting – texts loaded with subtext, playing it cool while desperately wanting the other person to make the next move.

Red flag number one, blaring like a foghorn I chose to ignore: she was technically on a break from a popular football player when we started talking. She ditched him completely for me. Instead of caution, it puffed up my already inflated ego. *She chose me.* Therefore, she’d *never* leave me. God, the idiocy burns even now. I fell hard, fast, blinded by infatuation. That dizzying feeling when your crush actually likes you back? It drowned out every warning bell. We skipped the due diligence, dove straight into the deep end. Eight months later, official. She practically lived at my off-campus apartment, even when I was on the road three, four days a week for games. It felt intense, real. Love, I called it.

End of the season. Back-to-back parties planned. Friday night: teammate's birthday bash. Saturday: mine. Friday night bled into Saturday morning. Drunk, inhibitions gone, we had unprotected contact. Lisa tracked her cycle religiously on a phone app – paranoid about missed periods, a common thing for female athletes. I remembered, even through the alcoholic haze, she logged *everything*, especially unprotected encounters. 5 AM drunk logic kicked in: *She needs to log this now before we forget.*

I nudged her awake. "Hey, put it in the calendar. Unprotected."

She mumbled, unlocked her phone, opened the app, and promptly passed out again, phone still live in her hand. Fine, I'll do it. Side note: Lisa constantly snooped through my phone, my laptop. Insecure, suspicious. I never cared. I wasn't doing anything. Another red flag waved, unseen. Ironic, right? I wasn’t looking for anything when I picked up her phone. Just trying to navigate this damn period app while hammered.

Then I saw them. Little colored markers scattered across the calendar months. Red for periods, okay. Then black. I tapped one. "Unprotected contact." My blood ran cold. I tapped another. And another. The calendar was a goddamn minefield of black markers. Dates. Dates I was sweating my ass off in some gym hundreds, thousands of miles away.

My drunkenness evaporated instantly, replaced by a chilling sobriety. I started opening them methodically, going back through our *entire* relationship. Maybe unprotected contact happened once, twice a month *with me*. This calendar? Peppered. Some months, nearly a dozen black markers. Some *days* had two. And in the notes section for each black marker... names. *Four different guys.*

Four. Throughout our "deeply in love" relationship. Raw. No protection. One was the ex, the football player she supposedly ditched for me. Frequent flyer. Another name, unfamiliar but recurring. Regular basis, clearly. The last two looked like one-offs, but who the hell knew? This was just the *unprotected* ledger. What about the times they used protection? How many more were there?

This wasn't finding suspicious texts. This wasn't a friend tipping me off. This was a meticulously documented chronicle of betrayal. A freaking *ledger* of infidelity.

My stomach churned. I felt bile rise in my throat. I scrolled through her texts, call logs. Nothing recent jumped out, but Androids back then had that deleted items folder. Empty message contents, but the numbers? Thousands deleted. A quick Facebook search cross-referenced one number – the ex. Plus half a dozen other random dudes I didn’t recognize. And then the gut punch: two of my *teammates*. One guy I considered a close friend.

I dropped the phone like it was burning me. The evidence was overwhelming, suffocating. Every glance back at that screen felt like another physical blow. Defeated doesn't cover it. Emasculated. Stupid. Naive. Every time I’d turned down an opportunity on the road, stayed loyal… for *this*? Loyalty felt like a fool’s errand. The pain was white-hot, searing. Embarrassment followed close behind. All I wanted was for the agony to stop. Is that normal? To immediately think, *if only I'd cheated too, this wouldn't hurt so much*?

I stumbled out of the apartment, needing air, space. The pre-dawn chill bit at my skin, but I barely felt it. Emotions I’d never experienced roiled inside – a toxic stew of hurt, rage, confusion. My ego, that towering monument to my own perceived greatness, lay shattered at my feet. What do you even *do* with that? Too ashamed to call anyone.

Then the hurt began to curdle, twisting into pure, unadulterated rage. Cold, hard anger. Revenge wasn't just an option; it became a necessity. An imperative. I didn't know how yet, but I knew, with chilling certainty, that I would make her *pay*. Make her hurt like I was hurting. Make her *never* forget.

My phone buzzed. Bono. My roommate, teammate, seven-foot Eastern European wall of stoicism. He was crashed on the living room couch.  
"Where you at?" His accent was thick, gravelly.  
Voice shaking, I whispered, "Keep this quiet, man. Lisa... she's been..." I choked on the words. "...cheating. Extensively."  
Silence. Then, "Stay put." I heard shuffling on his end, my bedroom door opening. His voice boomed, muffled but clear, "Yo, witch! You cheated on OP?" Faint, panicked sounds from Lisa. Then Bono, louder, laced with menace: "Get out! NOW!" More scuffling, a door slamming. Bono came back on the line. "Yo. She gone. Come back. We talk."

I walked back, numb. Bono met me at the door. No hugs, no bullcrap platitudes. We weren't wired that way. Alpha males, different cultures, same discomfort with vulnerability. He clapped a heavy hand on my shoulder. "Is your birthday today, yes?" I'd actually forgotten. "Tonight," he declared, eyes hard, "we get screwed up. Find you some girl. Drill her. I never liked her anyway." Simple, brutal comfort. Exactly what I needed.

Breakfast was a blur. Still half-drunk, numb. My phone exploded – calls, texts from Lisa. Pleading, denying, explaining. I fired back a single text: *Saw the calendar. Everything. Don't contact me.* She kept blowing it up, desperately trying to convince me to let her come to my birthday party tonight. Ah. Now I saw it. Bono was right. Her social standing, her entire campus identity, was tied to being *my* girlfriend. Me showing up solo to my own massive birthday bash? Instant social implosion for her. She wasn't worried about *us*. She was terrified of the *embarrassment*.

That night... oblivion called. A friend sent a birthday care package from Cali: top-shelf weed, hash, moon rocks, pills, and the devil's dandruff itself. White stuff. I didn’t just dip a toe in; I took a running swan dive. The pre-game for the club is hazy, but I remember one image crystal clear: me, slumped in my armchair, sunglasses hiding God knows what, a loaded, vacant grin plastered on my face. Two girls perched on the chair arms, laughing at something I probably didn't say. There's a photo. Look close, you see the fault lines beneath the facade. The cocktail hit. Booze, white stuff, pills. Numbness. That glorious, artificial *normal*. First time using wasn't about partying; it was about *not feeling*. *This*, I thought, *this is control. No one can hurt me like this again.* Oh, the bitter irony that realization held for my future.

At the club, tables booked, bottles flowing. Teammates asked where Lisa was. "Done," I said, coolly. No details. Played the unfazed breakup card. Inside? A raging inferno.

It wasn’t a meticulous master plan, more like opportunistic evil. That kind, naive kid I used to be? He died in that armchair, fueled by white stuff and betrayal. Morals? Gone. Loyalty? A sucker's game. If I thought I’d never get cheated on because *I* was faithful, the universe had just laughed in my face. Collateral damage? Didn't care. Mission objective: Annihilate Lisa emotionally. Maximum pain. That became my operating principle.

A few days later, mindlessly scrolling Facebook. Saw a profile picture – one of Lisa’s track teammates. An idea sparked, cold and sharp. *Her team.* Specifically, her 4x4 relay team – the tightest unit. Perfect. If she cheated with my teammates (still wasn't 100% confirmed, but the deleted texts were damning), I'd target hers. Simple, brutal symmetry. Plus, women's track team > men's basketball team in terms of numbers *and* aesthetics. More targets, better looking. Win-win, my twisted mind reasoned.

First target: Relay teammate #1. Had a boyfriend? Even better. *Everyone cheats,* my new mantra whispered. Let’s test the theory. The social media flirtation dance – like a few pics, she likes back, slide into DMs. Easy. A week later, she was in my bed. The rush was *power*.

Next target: Relay teammate #2. Same playbook. Same result. Had a boyfriend too. Cheated on him with me. Mixed feelings? Sure. A flicker of sadness for the guys, quickly extinguished by the validation it gave my bitterness. *See? They're all the same.* It wasn't *me* she cheated on; it was just *women* being disloyal. Twisted logic, I know. But it fueled the engine.

Target #3: Completed the relay team set. This one was single, slightly less satisfying on the "exposing hypocrisy" front, but still served the primary purpose: hurting Lisa through proximity.

The collection began. A bra here, panties there, a piece of jewelry. Not trophies for me, but ammunition. Evidence. Each item carefully cataloged in my mind, ready for deployment. Sometimes it was effortless. One girl left behind a very distinctive pair of sneakers. I knew Lisa would recognize them instantly. They belonged to the girl Lisa’s *ex* (the football player) had rebounded with *after* Lisa dumped him for me – a situation that had already deeply pissed Lisa off. Now? That same girl had slept with *both* her exes. Beautifully cruel. I specifically targeted items Lisa could identify: a track team sweatshirt with a teammate's name embroidered on it. Perfect.

The stockpile grew. Bras, panties, earrings, headbands, that sweatshirt, the shoes. A war chest of betrayal.

Then, the inevitable explosion. One of the boyfriends found out. Texts, rumors, confrontations. It ignited a firestorm within the track team. Accusations flew. The relay team imploded. Friendships shattered. The drama was spectacular, operatic. Coaches got involved. Meetings were held. Tears were shed. And I watched it all unfold with a cold, detached satisfaction. It felt like orchestrating chaos, and the power was intoxicating.

Adding insult to injury? That same week, the Athletics PR department plastered massive posters of *me* all over campus promoting the next home game. Building-sized banners. My face, everywhere. Lisa and her crumbling team had to see me looming over them, day after day, while their world burned down around them. Felt like a goddamn conquering hero, albeit a pathetic, broken one. Their coach, furious, demanded action from compliance and my coaches. My coaches practically laughed. "Internal team drama. He broke no rules, nothing illegal. Not our problem." This reportedly sent the track coach into a rage. Their team's national ranking plummeted. She even got caught tearing down smaller posters of me herself, a petty act of impotent fury that only made me grin wider.

I kept pouring gasoline on the fire. Instagram, Facebook – photos of me smiling, partying, surrounded by girls (never the teammates, gotta maintain plausible deniability publicly). Every post calculated to twist the knife. Underneath? Still bitter, still broken, the kind kid replaced by a cynical, vengeful shell. But nobody saw that. Just the cool, unaffected athlete moving on.

The pregnancy scare? Another weapon. A girl from another sports team, claimed she was pregnant after a brief fling (another pawn in my game, quickly discarded). Turned out false, but the *rumor* spread like wildfire, adding another layer of scandal, another public humiliation for Lisa. I left a trail of wrecked relationships, feeling zero remorse at the time. They cheated on their boyfriends with *me*, their friend's ex. In my warped view, they were culpable. Targets dwindled. My reputation preceded me. Girls got wary.

Time to escalate. Classmates of Lisa's. Girls she just knew casually. Then, the unthinkable: her family. I flirted relentlessly with her married sister. Got close. *Too* close. She was receptive, shockingly so. But their dad, who initially *liked* me and even took my side post-breakup (before the revenge scorched earth campaign), found out. He intervened, shut it down hard. The sister faced familial fallout. Didn't matter. The message was sent: *I am everywhere. You can't escape what you did.* In my mind, this was all *her* fault. She unleashed the monster.

Lisa cracked. Medical leave. Depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts cited. Medication, drastic weight loss. She looked like a ghost. The reports filtered back to me. And the sicker she got, the more twisted satisfaction I felt. It was an obsession now, the power, the control, the inflicting of pain. I'd already caused far more damage than she ever did to me, but I couldn't stop. Processing my *own* pain? Moving on? Never occurred to me. Just needed *more*.

Weeks later, she resurfaced, needing her stuff from my apartment. Showed up unannounced, late night. She was staying with her parents locally. Looked fragile, broken. I refused to let her in. "Got company," I said curtly (which was true, just not one of her former friends this time). "I'll drop your crap off this weekend."

That weekend, I gathered her belongings. Then, I took my collection – eight, nine different items from different girls, teammates included – and *mixed them in*. Bras tangled with her sweaters, panties nestled in her shoes, the track sweatshirt with her teammate's name stuffed deep in a bag of Lisa's clothes. All into big, black trash bags. Drove to her parents' house, dumped them on the porch like garbage. Called her dad. "Her stuff's on the porch. Tell your demon daughter." Our previously cordial relationship was obviously ash now.

Fifteen minutes later, my phone rang. Lisa. I answered, eager, needing to hear it. Pure, unfiltered hysteria. Sobbing uncontrollably, words tumbling out, incoherent. Not anger, just desperate, broken pleading. *Stop, please stop.*I let her cry for a moment, savoring the sound. Then, coolly, clinically: "Why were there other guys' names mixed into our relationship, Lisa? You mixed them in. I just mixed other girls' crap into yours. Seems fitting, doesn't it?" I thought it sounded profound, a perfect little ironic metaphor. *Jesus.* The cringe is real now.

Later, heard from a mutual acquaintance she'd actually suspected *me* of cheating the whole time because I traveled so much. The mental gymnastics required to justify her own actions... astounding. My schedule was public! I called constantly! Logic had clearly left the building long ago for her.

Months passed. She returned to school, fragile but present. We bumped into each other at the athletic facility's physical therapy center. The hunger for vengeance, dormant for a while, flared again. *Another opportunity.* I switched tactics. Pretended remorse, suggested maybe… maybe we could talk. She was wary, understandably. But eventually, starved for any semblance of normalcy, she bit. We started "mending" things. For about a month, it was a twisted parody of a relationship. My rules: No male friends. No parties. Full access to her phone, accounts, location tracking 24/7. It wasn't reconciliation; it was a hostage situation. Gave me that hit of control I craved. All while I was sleeping around freely, of course. That was the *plan*. Finally, engineered it so she "discovered" me with a girl from one of her classes. The ensuing breakup was volcanic. Screaming, accusations, tears. My parting shot: "Now you know *exactly* how it felt. Remember this." Another victory, another dose of toxic satisfaction.

Years passed. I graduated, moved to Central America, descended deeper into a degenerate spiral of pills, crime, and paranoia. Still hadn't had a real relationship. Couldn't trust anyone, especially women. Still blamed Lisa for the darkness I'd become. Then, a message notification. Lisa. Facebook Messenger. Two years since our last toxic encounter. An ocean between us. And still, that immediate, instinctive thought: *Opportunity.*

We talked. Hesitantly at first, then like old friends. Flirting crept back in. She was finishing her last year of university. I was planning a trip back stateside to visit friends anyway. But I told her something different. "Got a job offer," I lied smoothly. "Moving back to the city." We made plans to meet up, "see if there's anything left." I put on an Oscar-worthy performance. Contrite, changed, ready to put the past behind us. Inside? Same vengeful, broken record.

Flew back. Met her at a coffee shop. Spent two intense days together. Laughter, shared memories (carefully curated), intimacy. From her perspective, it must have looked like a genuine second chance. A miracle, even. She had no idea I was booked on a flight back to Central America the next morning. Hooked up multiple times. Let her believe the fantasy. Then, while she slept, I packed my bag, drove to the airport, and boarded my plane. Before takeoff, I blocked her. Everywhere. Phone, social media, everything. Vanished. This time, I couldn't hear the fallout. Could only imagine her waking up, finding me gone, realizing the elaborate cruelty of the setup. The satisfaction felt... fainter this time. Hollow.

My substance abuse escalated exponentially. Never sober for a full 24 hours after that day I found the calendar. Three years later, hospitalized. Organs failing. Near death. That was my rock bottom. Looking back, the revenge? Yeah, it felt good in those moments, that sick, powerful rush. But the energy I poured into destroying her? It corroded me from the inside out. It paved the road to my own near-destruction. I inflicted pain, yes, but the deepest wounds were self-inflicted.

**Years Later.**After hitting bottom and clawing my way back through sheer will and eventually a 12-step program (found in the front of any phone book, as they say), I was terrified of relationships. The Lisa experience was a deep scar. But eventually, the loneliness and bitterness grew stale. I moved back to the States, committed to sobriety, and cautiously decided to try dating again.

Met Kate. Dating app. Instant connection. Fiery red hair, sharp wit, a three-year-old son I quickly grew to adore. She was also damaged goods – fresh out of an abusive marriage, history of substance issues, same trust issues, same fragile emotional state. We understood each other's scars. We moved slowly, built trust carefully. It felt... authentic. We moved in together, got a car, talked marriage, another kid. Her son called me Dad. Taught him to pee standing up against a tree. That sealed it. He was mine. Things felt… healed. Stable. Happy.

Then, the little inconsistencies started. Kate worked nights at a club. Supposedly closed late, 4 AM some nights. She started coming home later and later. 5 AM, 6 AM, sometimes 7 AM. Excuses piled up: friend's car trouble, late-night Waffle House runs with coworkers. She seemed… off sometimes. High. Not weed. That jittery energy, dilated pupils. Nose candy? Molly? She denied it vehemently at first, then admitted to a "half line once" for energy. The lies felt familiar, triggering. The lateness escalated. One blizzardy morning, she told me she was leaving work at 6 AM (two hours after closing). An hour passed. Nothing. Texts, calls unanswered. Finally, a text: "Almost home." Another hour crawled by. 9:30 AM, she finally pulled into the lot. I’d been waiting outside, covered in snow, frantic, having missed work because I couldn't leave her son alone. She stumbled out, rambling incoherently: pulled over (no ticket), ran out of gas, friend having a meltdown, blaming *me* for registration issues. Eyes pinned, jaw grinding. Pills was obvious. The lying, though… that was the deeper betrayal. It scraped open the old Lisa wound.

I became obsessed. Tore the apartment apart looking for proof. Found nothing. Tried to convince myself I was paranoid, PTSD from Lisa messing with my head. Then, a chance encounter at a pool hall. Chatting with a guy, Jerry. Mentioned Kate's club. His sister, Sarah, pipes up, "I used to work there." I mentioned the late closing times. Sarah looked confused. "We always closed at 2 AM during the week, only 4 AM weekends." I brushed it off, but doubt festered. Checked the club's website: 2 AM closing Sunday-Thursday. Denial kicked in again. *Must be outdated.*

Sunday night. Texted Kate: "What time you off?" Reply: "Home by 4:30 AM. Text you when I leave." At 2:30 AM, heart pounding, I called the club. "Can I speak to Kate? It's about her son." Manager: "Sorry, we closed at 2. She left already." Ice water in my veins. *She was lying.* Again. Drank myself unconscious that night. Woke up, she was asleep beside me. Saw her purse. Went through it. Tucked in a small zipper pocket: an empty dime bag, a tightly rolled dollar bill. Classic nose candy paraphernalia. Left it on the coffee table where she couldn't miss it. Went to work seething.

Came home. She was doing her makeup. Mirror reflection.  
"Hey babe," she said, oblivious.  
"We need to talk," I stated flatly, leaning against the doorframe. "Called the club last night. They closed at two."  
Instant deflection. Rage. "You controlling psycho! You don't trust me! You have no right!" Pure gaslighting. But I knew this dance.  
"You're doing white stuff again, aren't you? Lying about it!" I spat the words. "You're a freaking 403!"  
She whirled around, eyeliner pencil clenched like a dagger. Swung. I flinched, but not fast enough. It plunged an inch and a half into my shoulder, snapping off. Then fists rained down on my face, head. Shock more than pain. I didn't hit back. Stood there, bleeding. Pulled the pencil shard out, dropped it. Walked to the kitchen, patched the hole with duct tape (scar's still there, right through a tattoo). Walked out. Liquor store. Fireball. Walked and drank until I blacked out in a snowdrift. Woke up briefly to Jerry, the pool hall guy, hauling me into his car. Blacked out again. Woke up in my bed, pool of vomit.

Kate crying on the couch. The talk. Admission: white stuff, yes. Going to coworkers' (all female, she insisted) apartments after work. Sometimes pills to come down. Promises to stop, to be honest. A fragile truce. But trust was shattered.

Weeks later, things *seemed* normal, but she worked constantly. Extra shifts, covering for people. Fights triggered immediate "gotta go into work" escapes. Red flag. Then, Google Maps. Shared account. Saw a location search history for a random residential address, pinged right when she supposedly left for "work." Confronted her. Showed her the phone. Her response? "Never went there. Google's wrong. Glitch." The sheer audacity. I knew. Grabbed some clothes, got a motel. Nights of screaming phone fights, tears, crappy cable TV. Desperately wanted to believe it was *just* pills, not… the other thing. Convinced myself: help her with the obsession, save the relationship.

Decided to reconcile. Bought flowers. Borrowed a friend's car, drove back to the apartment late, planning to meet her in the lot when she got "home." Around 2:45 AM, our car pulled in. But *Kate* was in the passenger seat. A strange man was driving *my* car. I ducked down, watched. The driver got out. Then *another* man climbed out of the back seat. Three of them walked into our apartment.

Phone out. Texted Kate, playing dumb: "Hey, home yet? Can I come over? Wanna apologize." 15 minutes of agonizing silence. Then: "Just got home. Need alone time. Love you. Talk tomorrow." Heart hammering against my ribs. Rage, grief, a horrifying déjà vu. Slammed my head on the steering wheel. Got out. Went to the door. Locked. Forgot my keys. Loud music thumping inside. Knocked. No answer. Walked around to the windows – ground floor. Living room empty. Bedroom window… blinds down, but a sliver of visibility at the edge. Pressed my face close, peered in.

The image burned itself onto my brain forever. Our bed. Kate. Without clothes. Getting spit-roasted by the two strangers.

Collapsed against the wall outside, slid down. Sat there, face in hands, hearing muffled sounds from the room above. Pure, murderous rage surged. *End them. All three.* Then a colder thought: *End her. Then end myself.* Got back in the car. Drove to a 24-hour gas station known for selling basic hunting gear. Bought the biggest, nastiest skinning knife they had. Drove back to the motel, grabbed my apartment keys. Headed back. Time to paint the walls red.

Slowly, quietly unlocked the front door. Knife gripped tight, sweat dripping, heart pounding. Crept down the hall. Bedroom door slightly ajar. Dark inside. Silent. Reached in, flipped the light switch. Kate. Alone in bed, without clothes, passed out. Protection wrapper on the nightstand. Confirmation. Took a step into the room.

Then, the door across the hall creaked open. Her son's room. Spun around, knife raised, expecting one of them. But it was just him. *My* son. Standing there, small, sleepy. *Why was he here? Did she leave him alone? Was he here during… that?* He saw me, rushed over, hugged my leg. Looked down at his innocent face, then at the knife in my hand. Tucked the knife into my back pocket. Knelt down. "Hey buddy. Daddy's gotta go away for a while. Just wanted to say bye." His little face crumpled. Picked him up, tucked him back into his bed. "Goodbye, little man." Knew it was the last time. He couldn't lose his mom too, no matter how much she deserved… whatever she deserved. Ending her was off the table. Ending myself? Still seemed like the only option.

Walked out. Sobbing on the street. Bus stop bench. Pulled out the knife. Started hacking at my wrists. Clumsy, desperate cuts. Not deep enough, fast enough. Then, flashing lights. Cops. "Hey man, what are you doing?" "I'm done," I told him calmly. More cops arrived. Surrounded. Twenty minutes of negotiation. "Hand me the knife." Stared at it. Nothing they could say mattered. Couldn't face a psych ward. Raised the knife, lunged at the nearest officer. Expected bullets. Forgot I was white. Got tasered instead. Darkness.

Woke up in hell. A psych ward for the criminally insane. Six weeks of lost time, fluorescent lights, muffled screams, Thorazine shuffle. Got out on a technicality. Taxi ride back felt like crossing dimensions. Charged my dead phone at a McDonald's near the apartment I could never return to. Voicemails, texts. Fired. Credit cards maxed (Kate, obviously). Called her. Relief, worry in her voice. Met her at the McDonald's, no son. Brushed off her attempt at a hug. Told her everything I saw. Denial first. Then the ultimatum: "Tell me the truth *now*, or you and him never see me again." Tears. A mumbled confession: "Yes. I cheated." Crystal, pills too. The guy drove because she was too high. Stared at her, empty. Stood up. "Where are you going?" she asked, panicked. Looked her dead in the eye. "Going to go do pills. It's all I can think of right now." Backpack on. "Are we…?" "No, Kate. Telling the truth didn't change the outcome. I just needed to hear it before I walked away." And I did.

The next few months were a blur of homelessness, dealing, using, strip clubs, motels, sleeping rough. Lost 65 pounds. Looked like death. Woke up in a hospital again – seizures, organ failure. This time, something clicked. A month recovering. Discharged to a halfway house. Found sobriety, meetings. Never looked back. Got a job training at a gym. Started rebuilding, physically and mentally.

Fast forward five years. Still sober. Healthy 265 lbs. Happily married for two years. Own my own business. The best revenge? Wasn't destroying Lisa. Wasn't almost ending Kate or myself. It was deciding, in that hospital bed, to stop being a victim. To stop blaming the world. To build a life worth living. Looking back at that messed-up kid in these stories? Don't even recognize him. Turning 30 soon. Five years sober. If you'd told me then I'd be here now… impossible. Glad I didn't succeed that night. Glad I chose life, chose recovery. Spoke to Kate once, years later. Briefly. Seeing her life compared to mine now? Yeah. Living well truly is the best revenge.

Sorry this was long as hell. Never told the full story like this. Feels… heavy. But necessary. If you're going through infidelity hell, learn from my mistakes. Revenge feels potent, but it poisons you. Healing yourself? That’s where the real power lies.