

"ONE DAY TOO LATE" by Dave Ulrich
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This monologue is approximately 20 minutes long.

WOMAN

When I imagined my turning point, my breaking point, my discovery of the strength that I hoped was actually inside of me... I thought it would be sparked by something really incredible.

I always fantasized that I'd have some peaceful and inspiring revelation and then find the strength to escape to a better life. No messy drama, just a self-reflective moment of clarity, followed by a slipping away into a new life of just me and my daughter. I thought it would be my story. And that it would be personal.

The actual story of the day that brought change didn't turn out quite so magical. Or quiet. The story of how I found my moment of clarity is filled with much more shame than pride. In fact, I can't tell you how much it really sucks that my story begins with "I turned my life around because of pee."

Yes, urine was the great catalyst. And that pisses me off more than anything. Puns used to piss me off, too... but that was a whole other life. It's pretty hard to make me mad today.

So this day. THE day. The events of it stayed – for the most part – private. I mean, friends and family got some bits and pieces, but never the full story. Partly because I just wasn't ready to share, but also because I just wasn't proud of it.

And why would I be? This wasn't a decision, it was a reaction. And I know now that I was always stronger than that. I know I could've have done it preemptively – god yes! I just kept waiting for the right time... until... oops.

But a thing like that, no matter how embarrassing can't stay bottled up. It's got to be communicated or it starts coming out uncontrollably in unexpected ways. A five minute fit of rage because your sweater got caught on a thing, or a ludicrous amount of tears over some Facebook post about a dog rescued from some inhumane human, or totally losing your head at Target because some poor guy

complimented my dress on the wrong day...

You get the idea. So I did finally tell it all. The whole thing. And that's how I'm able to tell you now.

I couldn't tell it until after the shelter. After traveling halfway across the country to be with family. After finally getting me and Kyra a new home. After sorting out her school change. After the divorce. And after sorting out my name change – oh, and all of the crap that created. Side note: seriously don't do that. Do not change your name ever. If you're not married yet, keep your name. Just in case. I know it's a pessimistic point-of-view, but come on, the odds are same either way, and the hassle is just... wow. I'm not kidding.

Well, I couldn't tell it until I achieved some sense of... I guess, normalcy. And once I stopped worrying about everyone else, and every-thing else. And even then, I couldn't figure out who to tell it to. It almost seemed better to tell it to a stranger.

So I kept waiting for small talk with strangers to take a turn and provide an opening. I tried just writing it, but that made everything even worse rather than free it or lighten it. I even considered looking for some sort of online forum to spill anonymously. It's funny how long it took me to think of going to a support group.

I'd never been to one, so I really didn't know what to expect. Part of me thought it would be a prank. That no people would actually show up to a group thing like that. There'd just be some creepy support group "leader" guy there. And he'd start plying me with cookies before making a move on a fragile woman in the throes of a sugar rush. Or rufi the Kool-Aid.

But if there were real live women there, most of me thought I was going to be in way better shape than everyone else. That within a few minutes of listening to some ladies sobbing through their tales, I'd realize I was okay. Get my booster shot of validation and be like "See ya girls, I'm fine." I'd go home, congratulate myself with a glass or three of Riesling, and never, ever feel the need to go back and pull up a chair at Depression Central.

I'm always so embarrassed by retrospect.

I met a lot of incredible women. Strong women. And they all had the

same damn story as me. Sure the details were different, but the story was the same. Over and over again. The signs that were ignored and are so obvious now. The excuses that were made, the waiting just one day too long.

And, of course, the big thing that inevitably happened. The big thing that finally forced things to change. It usually involved the hospital, or the police... or both. Actually, it was almost always both. The rest is just details. And mine, sadly, was pee.

I had no intention of speaking that first day. Lurk and listen. That was the plan.

The group was pretty big, too, so I thought I could pull it off. Slide through like a phantom, at least this once. But most of them were veterans whose stories had already been told many times over. They were looking at me hungrily, ready to use my fresh tale of horror to renew their internal vows. A chance to recharge themselves and remember the pact they made with themselves long ago. Which I now understand is not a bad thing, or selfish thing, at all.

So when it was clear that I was not going to get out of this, I stood up. Stated my name. And stated the facts. And told this story:

My ex-husband was a decent father. Peter. Yes, I can say his name just fine. He adored Kyra.

Sure, he drank more than a little, and worked a little too much. He certainly didn't listen all that closely either. But I understood because I sympathized with the weight on his shoulders while I stayed at home.

He never hurt Kyra, only yelled a little, and everything got paid. So who was I to walk away from that?

Why would I lead Kyra into a life of less comfort and more struggle, just because I got pushed around a little? I knew the only thing that would ever make him go too far is if I left him. Leave and he just might kill me.

And to be honest, those "moments" may have been painful – rough and a little scary – but was almost better than feeling neglected. At least it was acknowledgement.

Obviously, I didn't have a satisfying relationship, but who the hell did? What I did have... what Kyra and I had... was a comfortable life. And at my core I think I had always instinctually, or subliminally, attached the greatest importance to how much comfort I might feel. Ugh. It's so embarrassing that I ever felt that way. Especially now...

But, well, we're talking about the 'then'. And 'then' I made a mental list of why to stay. The first being death if I were to go, of course. Over time, I actually put it to paper. Well, on the computer anyway.

And as the pushes got harder... the list just got longer! Soon I had a whole string of justifications IN WRITING, and I could always find things to add. I was a master at excuse-making. No matter how hard it should have become, I could always find more reasons to put off taking action.

I kept telling myself that I'd go when that list ran out. When finding one more reason to stay just wouldn't come.

But one reason always trumped them all. The very first item on the list. If I left, I thought that he would kill me. Not Kyra, I knew he wouldn't do that. But me... oh yes he would.

And that was powerful stuff... because I couldn't leave Kyra alone, facing a life without her mother.

With me gone, her dad would go to prison for killing me, or kill himself, too. That's how those things play out. And then my little Kyra would end up an orphan. Maybe get some low-brow foster mother who would teach her wrong. Treat her wrong. Dress her wrong. Turn her into a TV personality. Not an actress, not a host... a personality. A Kardashian, or a Honey Boo Boo. And this imaginary piece of trash would never be a parent to her... she would be a guardian. Someone who wouldn't care if she were lead into the life of a Jersey whore.

No no... I had to stay alive to finish what I started with my little girl. So what if there were some bumps and bruises along the way? It was for the good of my daughter.

But then it came, like it always does for the ones who wait one day

too long. My day arrived. It was my turn. Time to be forced into taking a stand... if I could walk away from my day. Not everyone gets to go on.

Whenever other people would kick off a story by saying "I remember it so clearly...", I always thought they were full of it. I could never remember anything from the past clearly. I remember things, sure. But it was like watching it through a frosted window. Everything is there, except the clarity. But when my day came, I finally got it. I mean I still think most of them were bullshitters, but I now know that it is possible to "remember clearly".

Kyra was still at school. My phone was on vibrate and I left it in the bedroom on the vanity. Peter is a gadget guy, LOVES his tech stuff. So he insisted that we not be "old-fashioned" and keep a land-line. So I had no idea my cell phone had been ringing.

I was bouncing around rooms, cleaning up, then watched some shows on Netflix. I finally tried our new espresso maker – but the clean up made me realize I wasn't likely to use it again for awhile. But I read somewhere you can use the grounds to help fertilize your plants. So I took them out in a paper towel to the balcony. I was going to spread them around the tomato plants I had started, but I banged my elbow on the patio table before I got there and spilled it all over the deck floor. I got down on my knees and scooped them up with my hands, and carried them over to the plant several times until I could just dust the rest away.

My hands were a mess and I didn't want to get it everywhere, so I went straight to the bathroom and started a shower.

Once I was good and clean I stayed in, enjoying the warmth and the water pressure. Turning, enjoying the pressure points, and probably moaned a little in pleasure. When the curtain was ripped away it didn't matter that it was my husband in front of me, I felt so violated. So naked and vulnerable. And of course the blast of fear. It was so intense that I almost just passed out right there. Which would have been far less painful.

He grabbed under my arm, hooking it and yanked me out. My shins hit the edge of the tub and I toppled over and out. Smashing my face on the floor.

Wet and slippery I tried to crawl on the tile and got nowhere. I stopped and howled at him trying to make him explain. But he just grabbed my hair, yanking me up to a near sitting position.

He kept demanding that I look at him, but I just kept panting and staring down at the tile – the little squares of shiny seashell colors. The drops of blood coming from my mouth were dripping down on them bringing chaos to their order.

“Look at me!” He kept saying.

I spit out the blood a couple of times onto the tile creating more chaos. And I finally looked up at him.

His fist reared back so fast and released so quickly that it seemed like less than a second to the blackness that took over. I wished I had gone unconscious, but I just blacked out while still getting to fully experience the feeling of what came next. The kicks.

He was kicking along with his muffled shouts of horrible names directed at me. I don't remember the specific words he chose, but it hardly mattered. He was furious, that was clear. And though it might have given me some insight as to why this was happening, it wasn't nearly as important as having it stop.

But it didn't. He tired of kicking and got down to his knees. I was now fetal on the cold tile. Unable to hear. Unable to see. And unfortunately could still feel.

I was no longer sure what wetness was water and what was blood.

With the kicks over, the punches began. At first it was a flurry. Then there was a break. Then staccato with more indistinguishable shouts between. Head. Arm protecting breast. Leg. Side. Back. I turned flat on my stomach and he continued hitting my back over and over. And then something must have alarmed him because it all just stopped. He caught his breath. Stood up. And walked out. And that was it. Silence.

I laid there crying for as long as it seemed to help, but eventually it just gave way to the pain. That's when I realized that I needed to get up and assess the damage. That I might need medical attention.

I tried for quite some time to sit up. Not only was I slipping and falling, I couldn't feel my legs. My vision had returned, but the only real progress I made for the first ten minutes or so was to turn over onto my back and stare at the ceiling.

A towel was hanging on the rack within reach, so I grabbed it and pulled myself to a sitting position using my upper body strength. My stomach and back were racked with pain and my legs still useless, but at least I was sitting up now.

I looked down to see my skin was covered with enormous bruises, every limb, everywhere, there was a bruise or bruises. Already. Ten minutes and I was one big bruise.

My senses were all returning, sharply. When I wished things were dull or fuzzy, they were screaming loud and clear instead. Suddenly I could feel every movement, see too sharply, hear my own breathing and heartbeat, taste my own blood, and smell.

The smell was how I first realized that I was sitting in my own pee. My pee. And my blood. And my saliva. I had simply lost control of my body. Someone who swore to love me, had beaten my body into total submission. And it just gave up. It released and evacuated.

So I told myself to get it together. Breathe, breathe, breathe. And then I drug myself into the bedroom – leaving a trail of urine and blood, from tile to carpet. Pulled my phone from the vanity. Called the police, but asked for an ambulance.

And I waited. Knowing that I could relax a little at last, because people were coming to make sure I stay alive.

And that's when it changed. With the "will I die?" part over, and the waiting part started, I had nothing to do but breathe, and think. And with every breath I took, every inhale of my own urine, pain and horror and shock became disgust. And the more disgusted I got, the angrier I became. This was not okay. None of it. This would never happen again. Kyra and I were gone, forever. If he ever sees me again, it will be in a courtroom. I swore that to myself as I sat there soaking in the ammonia stench of my own urine.

And if you don't count a mediation room in a lawyer's office, then I kept my pee promise.

The craziest part was, as I answered questions between tests, and then through surgery. As they struggled to deal with the internal bleeding, and before I was moved to ICU... and well after I went under for two days. I still had no idea why. What did I do? What had happened? What set him off?

But something even greater was troubling me. Where was Kyra? Were they making sure Peter wasn't anywhere near her?

Eventually I found out how it all happened. Kyra hit someone at school. They tried calling me and I hadn't answered, so they called Peter. He thought I didn't answer because I was doing something, with someone. So he rushed home to catch me in the act. Instead found me with myself, but his adrenaline was already...

And the most messed up thing about it all... after he finished with me, he went to the school and talked to the principal with Kyra and the other kid's parents. And he was completely normal and rational. I very nearly died and could have for all he knew. But he sat there acting the perfect parent, cleaning up the mess of the bad parenting Kyra had received from her absentee mother.

The police didn't get to him until he returned to work.

When I left the hospital we stayed in the shelter since Peter was out on bail. It took so long to get through the court dates that I let Kyra finish the school year. We got a restraining order expedited and a police escort for Kyra to get to and from school.

When all the legal stuff was done and we left town, I never felt so alive. I was free, and I was stronger. But it was still tender just below the surface. And that's why I needed to talk.

By the time I was ready to stand there in front of the that support group, I was finally free of the adult diapers. I had a new kidney, but the other was still on shaky ground. Nonetheless, I was back in control of my pee, and ready to truly take control of my life.

I don't look back on any of it anymore with pain... only regret. Regret that I didn't make this new me on my own. I waited one day too long. So he made me. He created the person that stands here now.

And that is the only part left that still hurts him. So I beg anyone that knows inside that they really should go, or that they need to go... eventually. Do not wait that one more day. Just go. Because that one day, is always one day too late.

And then you could be stuck with a story about pee.

THE END