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When It's Dark

4.4.16

Session One: Janet Palmier.

Hi! Welcome, my name is Emma. and you're Janet?

Yeah.

Well Janet, come on in. How are you?

I'm okay.

Janet? I need you to be honest with me or I can't help you.

Jane.

Jane, sorry. Now, tell me how you're feeling.

I'm fine.

Alright...How old are you?

Twenty.

Do you want to tell me why you're here?

No.

It's when it's quiet that the nightmares come. They crash into your skull, waves of memories and a mess of dashed hopes. It's when your mind is still that you can't bear them. The thoughts. The words. The history. It's when it's dark out, that it becomes dark in. In your mind. In your heart. It's when it all stops that you wish you could stop too.

You occupy yourself with menial tasks and things that fill up the empty space in your brain. You watch uncountable hours of TV, you study, you listen to music. Anything to avoid the silence. Anything to avoid that barrage of senses from when you were little. That overwhelming fear that just might swallow you whole.

You sprint away from the face that haunts you, but you know you aren't fast enough. You can feel your terror breathing down your neck, snatching your own breath straight out of your lungs. You run and run, because you know if you confront him...you'll lose. And not only will you lose but there will be nothing left to try again, not that you would want to. Your body will be nothing but ribbons of agony and your mind... well, your mind will be worse than it is now. Worse than frozen. Worse than gone. Worse than shattered.

4.16.16

Session Four: Janet (Jane) Palmier

Hi Jane! Have a seat.

Thanks.

How are you?

Fine.

How would you feel about doing something completely unrelated to therapy?

Do you wanna play Monopoly?

I know we're both too old for it but it was my favorite game growing up.

I guess.

Alright then, I'll be the iron.

I want the dog.

You can go first.

I used to play this with my dad.

Really? Was he any good?

No. He would always try to get the places that he liked and not the money.

Ah.

I guess my whole family was like that.

This is good Jane. Keep going. Are you like that?

No, I tried to stay away from it. I was always the one who wanted to win.

Are you still?

I don't know.

Don't forget your \$200

You know that your mind shouldn't be filled with fantasies of your own blood. You know that you shouldn't be thinking these things. You shouldn't even know how to think these things, and yet you do and you don't know how to stop. That's what you wish they had taught you. Not what it looks like, what it sounds like. Not how to recognize that dark pit in your stomach, but how to make it go away. Because no matter how much you wish you can't erase memories. There isn't a way to turn off your mind. Nothing permanent. Nothing you haven't already tried. Even though you wish you could blame him for the mess that you are, you know that it isn't his fault. Why would it be his fault? It's always been your fault. Almost everything is. Maybe not almost.

5.4.16

Session Ten: Janet (Jane) Palmier

Can you tell me your best memory?

Yes.

What is it?

I was seven and my pa had taken me and my sister swimming the lake out by the back of the house. My brother had gotten bored and so he wanted to leave but I was still sitting on the dock. I was so scared to jump in but my pa, he just waited with me until I was ready!

It was dark by then... we were late for dinner.
You must love your father very much.
Yeah, yeah I did. He passed away a couple of years ago.
That must've been hard.
Yeah, it was. But I wasn't so far off the deep end at that time. I could cope.
I see. Do you want to hear my favorite memory?
Sure.

It's from a long time ago, but it was the day I got my wisdom teeth out. I was so high on the medication but my sister sat with me the whole time and told me stories. And then after when I had calmed down a little bit she took me home and we watched *The Princess Bride*.

That sounds nice.

Yes, it was. My teeth hurt like hell though.

At first, they only came at night, the terrors, the dreams. It wasn't until later, until you realized the full weight of what had happened that they really hit hard. Ever since you were little they've been present. As constant as your dad's love, or as the waves hitting the sand. Not even those things could soothe the fear. It wasn't until it almost happened again that they really came back with a vengeance. It wasn't until the discovery of high school boys, of alcohol, and dark alleyways, that you couldn't leave the house without breaking down. Now, when you close your eyes, pale hands reach out to grab you, and raspy voices touch where they shouldn't be able to reach. The heavy must of sweat is glued to your skin and no amount of hot water can rinse it off. You jump at your shadows and your heart leaps at foreign sounds. Everything is something to be afraid of and the world is nothing but fuel for your nightmares.

5.19.16

Session Fifteen: Janet (Jane) Palmier

Emma? Can I ask you a question?

Turning the tables I see. Go ahead.

Why do you have so much Dr. Seuss? I've seen at least fifteen copies of *Oh The Places You'll Go*.

He was my favorite growing up. Reading those books is one of my only good memories of my childhood. We didn't have a lot, but we had Dr. Seuss.

Oh.

Do you have anything like that?

Uh-huh. When I was little my pa, he used to read *The Little Princess* to me. He read me that book every night before I went to sleep. I had nightmares, and so the princess would 'chase them away'

Do you still read it?

Yeah.

Why?

For the same reasons. To chase away the nightmares. To chase away The Dark.

I've heard you talk about 'The Dark' before, what does it mean to you?

I just... sometimes everything is too much and I guess it gets really--it gets really cramped? And it's like everything is too, too tight and too... it's like everything is too heavy and too much.

And that's 'The Dark'?

No, no the dark comes after, it's worse... it's just worse.

What is 'it'?

It's... it's what happens when the pressure--when the pressure is too much and it kind of condenses and I know that I'm stuck and I can't get unstuck and it's suffocating and it's hot and it's sweaty and *I can't take it anymore!*

Jane? Jane, it's okay.

Don't touch me!

Jane?

slap

Oh god, oh god, Emma im--I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to... emma, oh god, oh my god. sorry, I'm so sorry I'm--I'm sorry.

Jane, jane it's okay. It's my fault. I pushed you too far.

I'm so sorry. Oh god, oh god oh god, oh god.

Jane!

Oh god, Emma I--

Look at the clock. Can you get through ten seconds?

Yeah but I--

Good, do it again.

Okay.

Can you do it again?

Yes.

Again.

Again.

Again.

Your mind is fire dipped in glass, burning you from the inside out. And it's bad. It's *so* bad but it's not even close to the monstrosity that lives in your chest. Because if your mind burns your heart is nothing but empty space covered in thorns and jagged edges. They didn't used to, but

now, the cuts hurt more than the burns. They go deeper. No one can see it, no one wants to. But maybe it's better that way. Maybe it's how you want it. Maybe you like to wallow. To sulk. To drown in your own misery. It's almost over your head now.

5.31.16

Session twenty-one: Janet (Jane) Palmier

No, no you don't get it. How could *you* understand? It was my fault. It wasn't his. Maybe it didn't even happen. That's what they said. That's what they said! They said I was a silly little girl, my imagination had run wild. How could I trust my own eyes! My own senses!

Jane, Jane I don't know what you're talking about.

I told them! I told them, Emma, I told them and they didn't believe me...

What did you tell them? Jane help me understand.

I told them... I told them what he did.

Who did?

My uncle! My uncle!

What did he do? Jane, what did he do?

I... it was my fault after all. I'm nothing but a silly little girl.

Jane...

No, i'm sorry, i can't

Jane, did he rape you?

I didn't---it wasn't...

Jane?

Yes.

You can't imagine an end. Maybe someday. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not the day after. Emma told you that you should count the days. If you make it through one you can make it through the next, the next, the next. (The next). But the days that it doesn't end add up. Making you strain to keep your head up. To keep your back straight. Keep trudging forwards. Keep moving! When it's dark. When it's quiet. Counting the days just makes it worse. It adds weight to something that is already dragging you down, down, down. The lines in his face blur together until you think you might be able to forget. Maybe. But when the sun goes down (down, down down,) your world flies from black to technicolor, vivid and screaming for attention. His weight is on you and just like the dark, he's pushing you (down, down, down). And all you can smell is him. Him and the bitter aftertaste of your fear.

6.10.16

Session Twenty-Six: Janet (Jane) Palmier

on the phone

H-hello? Is this-am I speaking to Emma Sanchez?

Yes, how can I help you?

I'm, uh, I'm Janet's brother.

Oh! I'm so glad to hear from you! Jane's not actually here right now if that's why you're calling.

I don't know why, she doesn't usually miss her sessions.

Um, she's—Janet's in the... hospital.

What?

She tried to—she took—she took sleeping pills.

Oh my god.

She would want you to know.

Is she going to be okay?

Yeah, they um, the doctors say she'll make it.

Oh god, I'm so sorry.

Uh-huh.

Do you—do you think I could come and visit? Do you think that would be something she would want?

Oh, of course, I'll just have to...

Yes?

What?

Nothing.

I suppose i'll be, uh, meeting you soon, then. Goodbye, Ms. Sanchez.

See you—

You never knew that smiles could kill until your's wrapped itself around your throat. Tight. (It didn't mind the thorns.) And it built up, too. Until it was crawling its way down. Down your throat into your lungs and you were choking. Choking on "I'm fine"s. Suffocating on "It's all good"s. Because lies don't go down easy, even if they used to. That's the funny thing about lies. They start out like silk, like champagne, slippery and sweet. They slide down your throat with ease. They dig roots into your mind and they don't want to let go. They won't. But the deeper they get, the less they have to try, they know you're hooked. And you are, irrevocably stuck in your ways. You rely totally and completely on the lies you tell yourself. They drop the facade. Champagne hardens into gravel, broken glass, tearing into your innocence on the way down. Blood runs down your throat in rivers until the only thing that you crave is oblivion.

6.11.16

Session Twenty-Seven: Jane

in the hospital

Emma, Emma I don't want to die.

I don't want you to die either, Jane.

Am I gonna be okay?

Yeah, yeah I think you are.

You were humming to yourself the other day. Under your breath. Later you walked in on your brother crying. Tears streaming down his face. You asked him what was wrong he shook his head. "You were singing," he said, "it's been so long...". You hugged him for a little bit too long. Until your own shaking joined his.

You like the sound of the birds. You love the feel of the sun breaking over the horizon warming your face. You love the smell of baking cookies and the sound of ginger ale. You love days spent in the shade and the breeze coming through your hair. Watching movies with your brother on Fridays. You love road trips when the wind races you, barreling past, when there are no other cars on the highway.

His face is fading, disintegrating and blowing away in bits and pieces on the wind hurtling past your open window.
