

CHAPTER 1

REGRET

Sitting in the waiting room for my doctor's appointment, my mind was racing. I couldn't believe my stupid error of judgment. *What was I thinking?* I was so angry with myself. I started to feel my chest becoming tight, my heart beating faster. Finding it hard to breathe the palms of my hands began to get clammy – *what if I'm positive?* I tried calming myself down by doing some of the deep breathing techniques a counsellor in the past had taught me. *Breathe in through your nose slowly for two counts and breathe out through your mouth for four counts.* I could feel my heart slowing down, my breathing becoming more comfortable.

I peered around the clinic while doing my breathing exercises. The walls were adorned with posters about safe sex and protecting yourself against HIV and STI's. Seeing this

wasn't helping, so I focused my attention on the guys waiting in the waiting room. A nice distraction. Sitting opposite me was a good-looking guy in his thirties, masculine build, messy, short brown hair and wearing a tight black singlet, blue jeans and thongs. He had a nose piercing and a half sleeve tattoo on his right arm. I couldn't quite make out what the symbol was, but it was black with different patterns that were distorted by his muscular biceps.

He busted me checking him out, embarrassed, I smiled and quickly looked down. I snuck a quick glance again, but he was now occupied with a magazine he was reading. I felt like my mild panic attack had ceased thanks to the sexy muscle guy sitting across from me. But then again, sex was the last thing on my mind. In fact, I couldn't think of anything worse right now. It was casual sex that had put me in this situation. Jeff and Dylan had both assured me they were clean, but how can you be sure? *God, how did I end up here?*

I wanted to point the finger at someone else, so I blamed Ricco. I had fallen in love hard with Ricco, and I thought our relationship was going somewhere, but at the three-month mark, it was over. Ricco told me that he wasn't in love with me. I was crushed. So, on a Friday night that week, I went down my old, familiar self-destructive path, getting high, drunk and having sex with the first guy who wanted me.

I had met Ricco three months earlier at the largest gay club in Prahran, 'The Market'. The Market was the place to go and party on a Saturday night. My friends and I would start with pre-drinks at someone's apartment and then walk down to the club around 11pm. We were all club members, so we got free entry and access to the VIP line and didn't have to wait in long

queues. Being able to walk straight in gave us that feeling of exclusivity, sense of importance, especially when you walked past the long line of people that were either new to the club or only came out occasionally. They didn't see the value in buying a membership like we did.

I wasn't always confident in approaching new people, but once we'd dropped ecstasy and it started to kick in, all my inhibitions disappeared. I felt invincible, confident and sure of myself. There was no room for my usual negative self-doubt as the influx of the feel-good hormones of serotonin and dopamine flooded my brain. Most Saturday nights were a bit of a blur. I loved the euphoric feeling the drugs gave me. I could escape my past and myself for the night. For that night, I could be whoever I wanted to be, and nobody really knew me. I could be someone else, the party boy, a reinvention of myself, a gay Madonna.

My friend Brent, who I had met a year ago while working at a Post Office in China Town in Melbourne - was my first gay friend. Brent had been on the gay scene a lot longer than me and knew a lot of people but being a 'young gay' as he liked to call it, would introduce me to guys when we were out. This night, it was while Brent was chatting away to a guy and girl sitting on a bench seat, that I saw him. *He is gorgeous! Look at his muscles!* There was a space where I might be able to sit next to him and start up a conversation, so I plonked myself down next to him.

'Hey, how's your night?' I asked.

'Yeah, good. I'm Ricco' he replied.

'I'm Shane, you're really hot by the way' I said confidently.

Ricco laughed, saying 'Thanks, you're not too bad yourself.'

Ricco was a cute Italian guy a couple of years younger than me. He looked like he worked out, with a stocky build and a great smile that drew me in straight away.

‘You look like you’re flying!’ I observed.

‘Yeah, I think my pill has kicked in’ Ricco said.

‘Yeah me too’ I replied. Then I leaned in and kissed Ricco.

Kissing on ecstasy, or ‘e’ as we called it, felt amazing. Every sense in my body was alert, and it felt like it was the best kiss I had ever had. So passionate, sensual. You can’t get enough.

Ricco and I moved to the dance floor downstairs. Dancing and kissing; mostly kissing. As the drugs became stronger, it was hard to see more than two feet in front of me. Ricco grabbed my hand and walked me back up the stairs until we got to the bean bags in a dark corner of the room. Laying on top of him, we then made out for what seemed most of the night. Things started to get hot and heavy, and I usually would be self-conscious, but the drugs running through my brain killed any of my inhibitions. *I didn’t give a shit!* Ricco pushed me up onto my knees, and before I knew it, he was doing things to me, you shouldn’t do in a club. As I looked around to see if anyone had noticed, I could see the guys sitting around were none the wiser, or maybe this was nothing new. The drugs heightened the sensation, and my orgasm was so intense I collapsed next to him, trying to inconspicuously put it back in my pants.

‘Wow, I wasn’t expecting that!’ I said.

Ricco smiled cheekily, ‘I couldn’t wait.’

For the next three months, I had a boyfriend. I felt fulfilled, in love, and wanted. We saw each other nearly every other day, and instead of going out clubbing on the weekend we would stay home watching movies, cuddle on the couch, have mind-blowing

sex– repeat. When we first started dating, we both got tested for STI's and HIV, and with both being negative, we started having unprotected (raw – the gay term) sex. Going raw felt better than a condom, and I felt closer, more intimate – *connected*. Ricco was a 'top' (the giver), and I became the 'bottom' (the receiver). One Sunday afternoon, my housemate was out for the day and Ricco, and I spent the afternoon making love. Each time we made love, I felt closer to him with every moment.

Being new to this, I had only bottomed a few times with my first ever boyfriend when I came out a year before. I enjoyed that position better anyway as the male G-spot is the prostate gland. He would kiss me tenderly, slowly kissing down my back. Holding me close with his muscly arms made me feel loved and protected. Lying next to him being held in his arms, I thought I had found the man of my dreams, I was undeniably in love.

The following week we had reached the three-month mark of us being together. The three-month mark in any relationship being same-sex or heterosexual seemed to signal the crossroad of a decision to make, whether you move ahead or turn left or right and leave it all behind. In my head, I definitely thought we would move forward and spend the rest of our lives together. I couldn't have been more wrong. Ricco decided to turn right and leave me behind. One night we were lying in bed after making love when he turned to me with a troubled look on his face.

'How much do you like me?' he asked

'I'm falling in love with you' I confidently said. He paused and looked up towards the ceiling and took a breath. I could feel it in the pit of my stomach, I knew what he was going to say before he could find the words.

'Please don't hate me, I'm not feeling it' he said.