Chapter 6: Japan

I haven't told you this yet: I've had three major manic episodes. Two happened while I lived in LA, and one happened abroad, in Japan. They were all uniquely terrible, but Japan is the one that still resonates with my family and close friends, and it's by far the worst.

Speaking Portuguese seems like child's play compared to Japanese, and I think that's part of what made this episode so much more frightening. I wasn't just abroad. I was about as far from home as possible, in a place that's the opposite of the USA in almost every way.

If you've made it this far, here's the part I don't tell on first dates.

All of my episodes have had one symptom in common: I become extremely paranoid. In Japan, I became convinced that the college friends who'd come on the trip with me were being controlled by Japanese gangsters. I stopped contacting anyone back home because I was afraid the mob would do something terrible to them.

I don't think I've ever told anyone this next part. I had also convinced myself that a gang in Brazil would kidnap my girlfriend who lived in Rio if I tried to contact her.

I can't recall how many days I was in that state. I think it was a week or more. I remember carrying everything I owned around Tokyo, sleeping outside for multiple days. I was so paranoid I couldn't even use my credit cards to get a room, because I thought they'd take all my money, or worse.

I only got home when I trusted one of my friends enough to reach out. I was still extremely paranoid, but I put the paranoia aside and trusted him to help in this difficult situation. In some ways, he saved my life. Unfortunately, we aren't even friends anymore, and that deeply saddens me.

I also lost the relationship with the girl I was dating at the time. She is the one I considered my first girlfriend abroad, and she ghosted and blocked me. Thinking back, I took that harder than the entire episode. I was having one of the worst experiences of my life, and I was still worried about her safety and well-being, even though I was the one in danger. I stayed silent to protect her. She heard silence and left.

It's very easy to explain a blackout-drunk night socially. There's a clear reason: you drank too much and can't remember what you did. Maybe it gets you nicknamed Shoulder Kiss Guy, or you get into a fight with a family member. The next day you sober up, acknowledge what happened, and try to move on with whatever relationships it affected.

A manic episode doesn't work that way, in my experience. Most people probably think you're fucking nuts, and that you belong in a hospital. The ones who don't think that take a long time to shed the trauma of seeing you in that state. I understand this. My mother and sister took it extremely hard.

I've told this story more times than I can count. It cost me a relationship, a friendship, and a lot of money. But I don't let it dictate how I live my life. It also taught me one thing: even your chosen family will struggle with an extreme manic episode. That goes for dating and for having a partner.

I'm perfectly okay talking to anyone about this experience, but it needs to happen in person.

I want to thank everyone who helped and thought of me during that time. I couldn't appreciate it then. Sometimes at your lowest point, you feel other people's love the strongest. Extra gratitude goes to my family and my close college friends.

I hope my future wife reads this book and truly understands what my life was like before she came into it.