



Scoring Goals
in the Dark

CLARE SHINE

With Gareth Maher

Foreword by
Katie McCabe

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Darkest Hour

SATURDAY, 20 October 2018 was the day that I tried to kill myself, for the first time.

For an entire week I had been plotting my death. I decided that it was the right time to bring my misery to an end and stop causing trouble for those I loved most.

Except most plans never work out exactly how you want them to.

Drink has always been something that I have turned to while struggling with my mental health.

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Little did I know that it would lead to me being technically classed as an alcoholic before the age of 23. When drinking, I could speak more openly and I was able to express myself in a way that I never could on an average day. I relied on it to find both courage and confidence.

The day started like any other, at least during that period of my life, with a few drinks too many. The Octoberfest in Carrigaline was designed to bring people together and enjoy a few beers, but I opted to use it to drown out everything that I was feeling.

A few hours later, I stirred in the passenger seat of a car as I forced myself to stay awake. My mum was on chauffeur service as she brought me and a few friends into Cork city centre to continue our night out. Mum tried to encourage me to come home, but of course I had more drinking to do.

The first stop was in a bar called Grand Central, where I decided to alter the pace of the evening by

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snorting some cocaine in the toilet. With the effects of alcohol fading, I needed another boost. Except this one was a little too strong and I floated across the nightclub like an astronaut taking advantage of the lack of gravity in outer space.

A change of venue did little to bring me back down to earth. In fact, I spent most of my time in Cypress Avenue trying to evade the bouncers who were determined to eject the rabble-rouser who was aggressively bumping into people and making more noise than the DJ for the hire.

It didn't take long for them to catch me, usher me towards the main doors and dump me on the pathway as if I was a bag of rubbish that someone else would clean up at some stage. Naturally, I voiced my displeasure at this. If you're going to treat me like a dog then I'm going to bark like one back at you.

Then I started to sober up, at least enough to realise that I was on my own and nobody was coming

to get me. Typical, I'd taken it too far again. What was the point in trying to fight back? None of my friends had even noticed I was missing. Or maybe they had decided they'd had enough of my behaviour. So why wait anymore?

I stepped off the pathway into the main road and closed my eyes so I didn't have to see the oncoming car crash into me. I wanted to be squashed like a bug and bring my petty existence to an end. Goodbye world, nice knowing ya!

The driver, however, reacted as quickly as he could and slowed almost to a complete stop. The front of the car still hit me and bowled me over. My bag swung loose and scratched the paintwork on the bonnet as my torso smashed down on to the cold concrete and my neck snapped forward quickly before I curled into a ball, like a hedgehog trying to protect itself. People gathered around and the driver got out to check to see if I was alive, which I

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was unfortunately. Wanting the ground to swallow me up, I continued to shout the same line, as the tears streamed down my face. I kept repeating, ‘I just want to die.’

I had failed in my attempt to commit suicide. I couldn’t do anything right, even when it came to killing myself. This was my darkest hour and yet I still came through it, which meant a lot more suffering was to come because I had serious mental health problems and they were not going to disappear anytime soon.

Initially my intention was to slip away via an overdose of tablets. That felt like the best way to do it; painless, no mess. But here I was now in the back of an ambulance crying uncontrollably, having to deal with the mess I had gotten myself into. How am I going to explain this to my family? How do I explain to them that I don’t want to be alive? Where did I go wrong?

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Amazingly, I wasn't injured from the incident and was not charged. The driver – who I'm pretty sure I walked past in the Gardaí station on the Tuesday afterwards – opted not to press charges but simply asked about my wellbeing. I could have ruined his life, yet he was willing to forgive and forget.

I had to do something similar. I had to accept responsibility for my actions. Before doing that, though, I went back to that bar a few days later in search of CCTV footage of the incident. I guess I was looking for confirmation that it really happened. As if that would change anything – the past or the present.

If I were to retrace my steps in search of the original trigger point in wanting to kill myself it would lead to a Venn diagram that interlinks all of my self-doubt, loss of confidence and burning anxiety back to when a childhood friend tragically lost her life in an accident.

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The shock of experiencing something so traumatic at such a young age – I would have been around 15 at the time – is something that I never properly dealt with. I never really mourned her death or figured out how to put it to one side in my memory bank. Life isn't a movie that skips forward to a happy ending. The struggle is real and it is an everyday thing.

When you accept that you have mental health problems, you have to carefully tiptoe through life because any mis-step can result in a landmine going off. There are so many triggers surrounding you at all times that it's almost impossible not to explode every once in a while.

That is precisely what happened to me one week prior to my first suicide attempt. It was a close friend's going-away party as she prepared to move to Australia with her boyfriend, and everyone was in good spirits. Except I was nowhere to be found. The

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night before was a heavy one which ended in two guys carrying me back home because I was so out of it. They ended up in my kitchen chatting to my mum until all hours as I collapsed on the sofa having drunk way too much.

Naturally, I was in some state the next morning. Even though I was babysitting my niece, Emily, my mind was scattered, more focused on the fact that I could not find a single cent in my bag or any of my clothes. On top of that, my mobile phone was broken, again. I did somehow have a ticket to a rave concert that day, so it was a case of figuring out how to scramble together some funds to aid my next top-up on alcohol. As ever in these circumstances I would find a way to get what I wanted, whether it was through begging, stealing or borrowing. All that mattered to me was having a good time.

Once again I turned to Mum and mumbled a request, or was it a demand, to drop me to a bus stop.

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Little did she know that I had snatched a bottle of wine from the fridge and transferred it to an empty water bottle. All that mattered was me having a good night out and I would use anyone and everyone to achieve that, even my poor old mum.

I can't remember what I consumed at the concert, drink or drugs or a combination of both, but it was probably enough to drop a horse. The next thing I know I'm turning up to my friend's party. The clock has struck past midnight and in I tumble with my rags for clothes and aroma of pure alcohol and the eyes hanging out of my head. Nobody was pleased to see me.

I had lied and lied, through my teeth, about where I was and why I had missed a special friend's party. As I stumbled through my local pub to make my way to the smoking area at the back, I could see faces with expressions of utter disgust stare in my direction and hear comments uttered in low tones

but loud enough for their loaded adjectives to sting like whips to my back as I passed by. I ignored them, mainly because I knew that they were right, that I was a disgrace, but I didn't want to face up to reality at that moment.

However, the worst was still to come. After finally locating my friends – who felt in a way that their night was ruined by my selfish actions – they didn't hold back. Among the tirade volleyed in my direction was the cruellest but most realistic thing anyone had ever called me – a junkie. I couldn't believe that I had slipped so far down in their estimation that I was now being described as a junkie. That hurt more than anything I had gone through before. I had lost the respect of my friends and it was 100 per cent my fault.

That was the tipping point and it was a long time coming. I wasn't in control anymore, it was the drink and drugs that had taken over and I couldn't stop.

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If those who I loved and cared for didn't want me around them then what was the point in trying anymore? I had already started to neglect the tasks assigned by my sponsor at the Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre, I wasn't playing football and any sort of future where I would be happy felt like an impossible dream.

My plan for committing suicide became active and when it comes to that stage there is no going back.

On the Monday after that party, I sat on a wall, sipping on a cup of coffee, smoking a cigarette and coming to agreement with the devil on my shoulder that my time on this Earth was done. I began to type into the Notes app on my phone what would be my goodbye message as tears streamed down my face.