



TOO HIGH
FOR LADDERS

RK Jameson

January 7 – Hi, I guess

I can't remember shit these days. My hippocampus has been downgraded to a small hippo quad. It could be the drugs; it's probably a pinch of genetics and a splash of stuffing down trauma like a Build-A-Bear full of steel wool. It could also be that I'm an idiot, albeit a gifted one with the voice of an angel. Some of it will definitely be lies that I've told so many times I can't differentiate them from the truth. Maybe by the end of the book, we will both figure out what's killing my hippos. I'm going to tell you a bunch of stories about all kinds of shit. I need you to know upfront that I'm not saying this is what happened, I'm saying this is what I remember.

Hi, my name is RK and I'm pretty sure I am an addict. If killing yourself slowly was an Olympic event, I'd get all the gold medals. I wish I could be addicted to something healthy like if I was actually into sports, but I only like shit that will kill me. I love cigarettes and cake and driving too fast. I get my kicks fucking around with pills and alcohol and dangerous people. I'm addicted to the game. All the intricate lies I tell and the backstories I create for characters that only exist as props on the set of the show I created. I can't seem to stop risking my life for a good story. I've been at this shit for decades. I would argue that the longevity of – let's call it a lifestyle – is evidence that I am pretty good at it. You could say it's in my blood.

The amount of addiction in my blood line is staggering. When it comes to finding new and exciting ways to destroy a body from the inside, no one runs the race like a Jameson. Need to know how much caf-

feine you can have before vital organs start to jump ship? I can tell you. Ever wondered how many pills it takes to surprise a coroner? He didn't live to tell the tale, but I can tell you it's enough to take over an apartment. The family business goes back for generations. I bet there's some crazy stories from the people I come from, but I never got to meet most of them because they all died young. The Jamesons aren't here for a long time; we are here for a hard time. I'm breaking generational patterns, but only in the sense that I have been having an amazing time with my addiction. I'm not losing my job or my kids. Not having kids has really helped. I'm not constantly in and out of the hospital or jail. My addiction and I just get into shenanigans.

One time I was very drunk in Boston and got lost in the hotel I was staying at. I had to pee so I knocked on a stranger's door and asked if I could use their bathroom. I could have been murdered or worse, but it was the room of four Canadian college boys who were not only happy to let me use the facilities, but we ended up swapping stories and sharing snacks. That was such a beautiful booze-fueled evening. The next night I almost left the hotel alone with a married DC lobbyist at 2am to "go get Chinese food." I really thought we were going to get food. I was so cute. My Travel Bestie demanded that if I was dead set on going (I was), she was coming too. What could have been a scandal ended up being a free meal and a chance for my friend to scare a man into going home. We love scaring men into doing the right thing. Some would say we are addicted to it. If that's what I can pull off in 48 hours, you can only imagine what I've done with 37 years.

My life has been a cavalcade of chemically produced, made-for-tv memories. My safe place is danger, and my lack of fear, or inability to understand risk should have killed me a long time ago, but it didn't. By all accounts, my addiction is going pretty well. That's why it shocked the hell out of me when I decided to stop doing the things I am addicted to. Sweet spreadable Christ, I'm detoxing and now it's your problem too. If there's one thing I believe it's that shared pain is real pain, so let's get punched in the face together.

January 9 - Addiction

If we are going to dig into the “what it is” and “where do we go next” we should begin with how it started. I got drunk for the first time when I was 10 and I knew that it was going to be a big part of my life moving forward. My aunt made margaritas for Easter and in the Jameson family religion, ten is old enough for communion. The adults in my family would wax poetic about the good times they had with booze, and I was excited to be a part of it. I loved helping put salt on the rims. The first time the sweet and tart darted across my tongue, my whole body got warm like clothes right out of the dryer. Everything felt like summer. I loved how nice my family was to each other and how much everybody laughed. I didn’t see it as a problem; it was more of a solution - like a nice way to break the tension that usually mounted when more than one Jameson was in a room.

It was also around age 10 that I started smoking cigarettes. My friend and I would go through the ashtray outside Albertsons and pick out re-fries that were long enough to light. We would take our treasure trove of people’s discarded cancer sticks behind the store and pretend to be Audrey Hepburn and James Dean. I would lean up against the building in the classic pose and relive my days as a race car driver/leather jacket enthusiast. She would talk about having pancakes at her friend Tiffany’s house. It was all class and sophistication and other people’s DNA in our mouths. You couldn’t tell me that we didn’t look cool.

I was 11 when I tried weed for the first time. My neighbors grew it and one day the girl that was around my age gave me a lit joint and

told me to hold it for her while she went inside. She told me I could have some if I wanted. At this point I had been smoking cigarettes down at the Albertsons pretty frequently and I applied what I knew about smoking cigarettes to this joint. For those that know, this was an incredibly rough first hit and I coughed so hard I threw up. I got mad at the joint, threw it on the ground and stepped on it. I promised myself that I would never do something that dangerous ever again. In retrospect it's adorable. Despite all the other crazy harmful shit that I would put in my body the next few years, I didn't smoke weed again until my twenties. If anyone tries to tell you that weed is a gateway drug, you tell them I got addicted to drugs because I went to the dentist.

By the time I was 16, I was regularly drinking throughout the day and started experimenting with pills – pain killers mostly. The day I found out you could take pills recreationally wasn't a remarkable day outside of the fact that I took a Vicodin I didn't need. I went to school and everything was fairly routine until it kicked in. It was love at first pill. I was excited about biology class for the first time ever. I asked questions, I participated in the discussion, it was quite an achievement that I actually went to class. I don't remember what we covered but I remember having a really good time and wondering why I hadn't been interested in science before then.

I remember feeling dancy as I walked through the halls, almost jaunty. I bee-bopped by the daycare and for the first time really pondered the fact that there was an actual daycare in my high school. You gotta love a school that taught mostly abstinence, but at the same time, had a place for teen moms to stash their kids. For the record, I think it's great. It's vitally important to make sure teen moms have access to education and that kids have a safe place to go, but these were opinions I didn't even know I had until that exact moment.

I got the Vicodin at the dentist. The early 2000's was a different time, a magical time when you could get Vicodin for a toothache. The pain went away two days in, but I got a five-day prescription. They always tell you to take all your antibiotics even if you start to feel better, and I

didn't really understand that these weren't antibiotics, so I just kept taking them.

The next three days were magical. Shit was decidedly less magical when I ran out so, I just faked another trip to the dentist. "Oh noooooo, it still hurts, and I can't concentrate at school. How am I ever going to get into a good college if I don't get good grades?!" It was my best role since I got the lead in my fifth grade musical where I sang seven solos and insisted on renaming the character after myself. My Oscar-worthy performance at the dentist easily bought me another five pretty rad days. My brother was consistently injured but couldn't swallow pills, so I started having a lot of rad days.

By the time I was 17, I was drinking and smoking and poppin pills when I discovered energy drinks. Energy drinks were handy because I didn't have to scam anybody to get one and it solved the problem of being constantly hungover. Oh, the magic of an energy drink. I had one, immediately wanted a thousand more and I found them all. At this point, I quit doing after school activities because playing soccer can't buy drugs and alcohol, but a part-time job at Target can. I started mixing schnapps and energy drinks and I was unstoppable – at least for a short while. Within a year, I passed the first of what would eventually be hundreds of kidney stones.

If you've never had one, imagine you get hit by a car but only on your lower back and just when you start to feel ok, the same car comes and hits you again. I was writhing in pain, sure that I was dying. My mom had kidney stones too, so she knew we needed to go to the hospital. That's when I had my first dose of fentanyl. I felt like I had discovered another plane of existence – a beautiful world where colors were brighter and love was a visible spectrum of light flowing through everyone.

That was also the day I found out that my parents didn't have health insurance for me, so as soon as I passed those bad boys, I was discharged with some lovely take-home drugs. Hi Percocet, what a lovely warm winter coat you are. I figured stones were a solid new avenue to try dif-

ferent drugs. The internet said kidney stones were caused by caffeine, alcohol, and dehydration (among other things like genetics.) I thought “that’s great, I’m already doing all of that anyway” so I just kept at it. It was sacrificing a couple of hours of pain for a couple of days of feeling amazing. My mom certainly didn’t have the money to keep paying for prescriptions so I worked more hours to make more money, drank more energy drinks to stay awake, took more pills to get through it and drank more liquor at the end of the night to go to sleep because I spent all day wired up like an electric fence. This cycle continued to some extent well into my twenties.

Over the course of my life, I have passed well over 100 kidney stones, it’s probably in the two or three hundreds - I stopped counting after a while because it just became routine. I stopped seeking medical attention when hospitals stopped using fentanyl for kidney stones because if I’m not going for fentanyl, what the fuck would I even go for? I’d just stay home and ride it out. That eventually caught up to me in my thirties. Before we go that far out, let’s talk about fentanyl. That was one that I never tried to find on the street. It’s not a moral victory as much as I didn’t trust the meth heads in my hometown to manufacture fentanyl. I didn’t trust them to make meth for that matter. It felt like a drug that needed to be done under supervision. I’m not surprised a bunch of folks are dying because that shit is like a long hug from your favorite person if hugs could kill you immediately. I may be a drug addict, but I’d like to think if I am, I caution on the safe side of it. Sure, I spent a lot of money on drugs and hospitals, but I’m alive to tell you about it – that’s gotta count for something, right?

I miss my early addiction. It was so manageable. I spent hours driving around a little buzzed in my little Ford Contour, smoking cigarettes and listening to “Americana” by The Offspring. It feels cute looking back on it; dangerous, but in a cute way. Ooh, love that. RK Jameson: Dangerous, but Cute. The literal next chapter of my life started when I went to college and Holy Hanna-Barbera, it did not go well.