

It was a Sunday afternoon when I realised that my father had always hated me, and that there was nothing I could have done about it.

The antique oak box with his belongings sat on the living room table of my two bedroom apartment, mocking me. How much Nazi memorabilia can a man own before you can safely assume he's a Nazi? Or is it the pictures of him and his friends, hands stretched in a salute to the flag, that tip the scale? Or is it perhaps the childhood memories, suddenly put into context, that makes it certain? Why he always seemed ashamed of me. The way he spoke of my mother, a woman who I've never met. Why he refused to let me come to one of those meetups he always went to.

So, eulogy. Where to begin? My father was a ... a what? A complicated guy? Not really. An asshole? Definitely.

Among the photo albums, grimy old coins, and emblems of eagles, the iron cross stood out to me. I think it's because I remember seeing it before. A cast iron middle lined with silver, laid upon a black, white, and red ribbon. The swastika stared at me from the centre, 1939 written in bold letters. It felt heavy in my hand. I couldn't quite place where I recognised it from.

Part of me hated the guy for dying, but mostly I just felt relieved. He could have been worse, I suppose. The man had tried, at least on occasion, to do right by me. And God knows I didn't make things easy for him. But how much can you really expect from a child?

Fuck him. Who cares. He's dead and none of this matters.

The sound of a key in the lock of the apartment door snapped me out of my haze and I threw the lid down on the box. I still had the iron cross in my hand and stuffed it into my breast pocket before my flatmate entered. I'd rather not have that conversation.

He gave a nod and a greeting, then gestured towards the box. "What's that?"

He always seemed compelled to make light conversation, so I gave him the short answer. How I'd been looking for inspiration for the eulogy. How I hadn't found anything useful.

"You don't have to give one you know," he said. "If you don't want to."

Always with the fucking advice.

"I didn't fucking ask." It came out harsher than I'd meant. I considered apologising but then he gave me that look. That awkward stare, taken aback as if faced with a lunatic. What, like I didn't know what he thought of me?

"He was my dad," I continued, trying to control my anger, push it down below the surface where it couldn't do any harm. But why was I always the one who had to watch myself? "What kind of a son doesn't give a eulogy at his dad's funeral?"

"Alright man, sorry. Just trying to help."

"Why?" Again with the confused look. God I hated it, just fucking stand up for yourself. "What business is it of yours anyways?"

Seemed like I hit a nerve. He walked off, muttering to himself that it felt like walking on eggshells with me lately. As if I acted any differently. Fuck, I needed a drink.

The bar at the corner of my street felt like a second home, except there people actually liked me. It'd been my dad's favourite place, and where, as a kid, I used to go to try to drag him home so he could make me dinner. I didn't tell them he had died. It seemed easier that way.

How about this as a start?

*My father was a man of simple means and simpler pleasures. He liked to drink, and yell, and complain about how unjust life is. His greatest joy came from shouting at the telly, and explaining to his buddies how he would have done things better if only they put him in charge.*

*Deep down he always knew he was meant for greater things, except the immigrants and the Jews somehow kept him from accomplishing them.*

That last part was a guess on my part, but it seemed to fit the bill. Not exactly heartwarming stuff. There had to exist a middle ground. Nice enough to pass for a eulogy without resorting to lies.

One beer turned to ten and day turned to night. The same people came and went as always came and went. It felt good to catch up with everyone. Pretend everything was normal.

I ended up talking to this young couple for a few hours before tagging along with them to another bar. I probably should have called it a night here, but fuck it. I rarely had money to spend, so I may as well use it while I had it. And I deserved to be happy. To feel good about myself. Even if only for one night.

We had some more drinks. The guy shared some decent crystal that I even managed to pocket a bit of, followed by more drinks. Things got ... blurry.

I found myself on the train home some time later. The sun was starting to come up and I felt *good*. Got into the apartment, put on some music, popped open a beer. I'd almost forgotten about my flatmate when he ambled out of his bedroom like a shirtless zombie to turn the volume down on the stereo set. He didn't look pissed or anything, more like he'd accepted his fate and had decided to make the best of it.

"Wouldn't want any more complaints from the neighbours." He winked at me with a lazy sort of half smile.

I stared at him. Perhaps it was time to give a reminder of who's in charge. But he had a point. I'd almost been evicted a couple of times, and my neighbours all had it out for me.

He lit a joint, then looked at me curiously, like he'd had an internal debate before posing the question. "You still planning to work today?"

*Fuck.*

I checked my phone: six thirty. I still had time.

"Same place as last week?" he asked, but didn't wait for an answer. "Call in sick."

"Fuck you, I can work." I slurred the words too much for the confidence to be real, but I'd happily fake it if it meant getting him off my back.

"Or tell them you need a few days off. I mean your dad just— "

"I'm fucking fine, okay. I can work."

It took me almost an hour to get there. I didn't want to crash and fall asleep on the way, so I bought a small bottle of rum at a corner shop, downed half of it with a large coffee on the train.

My dad had been a chef all his life, and I've followed in his footsteps, although I'd been fired from the last few places and now mostly did temp jobs. I'm a good chef, it's just hard to stay consistent, especially considering some of the people I've had to work with. Not as good as he was though. He'd done it all — from fancy high end restaurants to food trucks and everything in between. He even travelled the world in his youth, cooking to earn a keep. I dreamed of someday doing something similar. The kitchen had been the one place we could really connect.

Perhaps that's what the eulogy should focus on.

*My father was a simple man. He valued his work and his friends, and sought the simple pleasures in life. An accomplished chef, he threw himself into adulthood at an early age, seeking*

*refuge from a troubled home life. The search for a better, more meaningful future ended back in his hometown, where he settled into a quiet routine and remained for the rest of his life.*

Nah, fuck it. While the words themselves held some truth, the picture they painted was a lie.

By the time I reached the building the fatigue started to set in. The next few hours would suck, but I knew I'd be fine. I always pulled through. Just had to straighten up, walk with confidence.

I entered through the front door without knocking. The place consisted of three or four large rooms painted in bright, happy colours, filled to the brim with decorations. Boxes full of toys lined the walls on top of playful carpets. The kitchen was in the far back and somewhat shielded from the rest.

"Hello?" The call came from the next room and was followed by the most beautiful girl peering out the doorway. About my age, with shoulder length blonde hair that perfectly framed her freckled face. Innocent, like she'd always expect the best from you. She was the kind of girl you could pass on the street and spend the rest of the day thinking about, wondering what life would have been like if you were the type of person someone like her could fall for. God she was beautiful.

"Can I help you?"

I'd been staring. Like an idiot.

"I'm Anthony." The words came out slurred.

"Okay? ... " She looked nervous. What the fuck was I doing?

"From the ... uh ... the temp agency. To fix your food?"

“Oh!” The tension slid from her shoulders and she smiled at me and I found myself smiling back. “Please, come on in. They told me you’d be here, I was just expecting someone older. You’d been here before, right? I’m Hanna.”

We made some small talk, although I didn’t really say much and ducked into the kitchen as soon as I could. Soon after I heard people arrive outside, Hanna enthusiastically greeted them.

“She’s had a bit of a grumpy morning,” someone said, “but she’ll be alright.”

The daycares were always easy work, especially this one. Breakfast consisted of ham and cheese sandwiches and a small bowl of milk and cereal for each of the twelve kids. By the time I had it ready the room outside had filled with noisy laughter and incoherent babbling and I began to crash *hard*. Hanna came to roll out the cart but stopped on the way out, probably because I was standing with my head leaning against the corner by the walk-in pantry, half asleep.

“You okay there, Anthony?”

I snapped out of it, fumbled an assurance and got back to work, trying to stand straight. I could feel where this was heading, so I chugged the rest of the rum, did a bump of crystal to wake up, then did the dishes. I only had to get through the next hour or two, then I could head out. Make it in time for the funeral.

Lunch was spaghetti bolognese. The recipe was handwritten and impossible to read. Blurry leathers zoomed in and out but refused to focus. Whatever, I didn’t need it.

Just getting ingredients proved a challenge. Cans of crushed tomatoes crashed against the floor, carrots slipped from my hand while grating. I was on my second onion and must have been distracted. Sliced right into my index finger and damn near cut the thing in half. Fuck it hurt. I managed to keep the volume on the swearing to a minimum while searching for a first aid kit,

struggling to keep my balance in the spinning room. By the time I found it I'd left bloody smears all over the walls and floors and counters. Everything was a mess; bloodied ingredients strewn all over and the preheating pan gave off a lot of smoke. But it was fine, I could handle it. I had time to clean it up and still get everything ready.

For some reason I took out my father's cross, and I remembered now where I'd seen it before. I was maybe seven years old, and I don't know where I'd found it, only how my dad reacted when he caught me. He'd grabbed me by the neck of my shirt, forced me face first out the sixth story window, showing me exactly where I'd end up if I went through his stuff again. I could still remember the panic as I clutched at his arms, shrill cries falling deaf on the concrete path looming far below.

Hanna stood in the doorway shouting about something. When did she get there? She said I had to leave, although I could barely hear her over the fire alarm. That she'd called the cops. The children were being ushered out by someone. Some other woman appeared, older, looked terrified. She tried get me to sit down but I was fine and why the fuck couldn't she see that I didn't need any help and I just had to do the onions and I could start searing the ground beef and the kitchen was a mess yes but I could clean it up and everything was fine and I could still fix this and— ... Yeah, everything was not fine.

The next thing I knew I woke up in the walk-in pantry. I must have put myself in there because it was locked from the inside. Someone pounded on the door, *hard*, the whole frame shook with every hit. Eventually it broke down and two large men in uniform entered. The cross dropped from my hands as I pushed myself back into the corner. I kicked and screamed and tried to fight them off, but they wrestled me down, face against the cold linoleum floor. My father's cross lay there staring at me. I tried to grab it but they had me in a firm hold. No matter how

much I twisted and pulled and begged they wouldn't let me go. I yelled at them, pleading, starting to fight again, until they pulled me through the kitchen and I saw everyone else. I wasn't just scaring the kids. The old lady looked on the verge of a heart attack. Hanna sat outside, crying. She had a bloody lip.

Was this really what I'd become?

As they dragged me to the car, I thought of my dad. How I'd felt on those worst of nights, the ones where he'd decided to drink his problems away, then take his frustrations out on me. Growing up I'd never understood why, always wondering what I'd done wrong. What I'd done to deserve it. Hanna had nothing to do with my problems. The children at the daycare didn't beat or belittle me, never made me feel inferior or unwanted. And still I'd smashed into their lives like a tornado, leaving a wreck in my path. They didn't deserve this. And neither had I.

I sobbed the whole way to the hospital. Kept saying I was sorry. The officers didn't care, but I didn't say it to them. It was to all the people I'd hurt over the years. To the friends I'd wronged, the girlfriend I'd treated like trash. To Hanna. To the other woman and the kids. To myself.

I'm in the hospital now, sober and sewn together. They're going to let me go, for now. I'll get a court date. Probably going to do some time, but that's okay. Might even do me some good.

For now though, I'll give it one final try.

*A eulogy for my father.*

*My father was a broken man. He felt that he'd been dealt a bad hand in life and was unable to deal with it in a healthy way. He was abrasive, mean, and bitter; a man of many vices and unapologetic about them. But there were some good sides as well. Cracks in the shell where traces of the man he could have been sometimes seeped out.*



*He cared for his friends. He took pride in his work. And although he ended up doing a terrible job at it, he took me in and raised me when my mother chose freedom over responsibility. He didn't have to do that. And I will always cherish the time we spent together in the kitchen; the one place where he'd show some passion, where the life was allowed to shine within him.*

*Perhaps the lesson we should learn from his life is to not begrudge ourselves for our past, or wallow over things out of our control, and instead focus on what we do have. On what we can do better. And, with a little luck, we might be able to manage our worst sides without selfishly pushing them onto others.*

It'll have to do. I'll be fine. Eventually. I always pull through in the end. I am sorry that I missed his funeral. For all his faults, I still loved him, in a way. And I'll do what I can not to continue down the same path. I cannot imagine a worse fate than becoming my father, like he had become his.