

i (17, m) live with my parents in a suburb. my dad (52, m) is a manager in at a tech firm. my mom (41, f) used to be in the navy and now works from home. i have no siblings. when i was fifteen years old i came out as a trans man to my family. i have been on t since i was sixteen. it was awkward but ultimately they were p. alright about it. i won't lie, i have had a pretty privileged life. im pretty middle class, i live in a really nice house and i don't really have to worry about anything really.

i haven't even started writing really but i can tell already that this is going to be a long one. i'm sorry if that's against the rules, i promise i will keep it as short as i can as i'm still kind of reacting to it.

this all started my dad was at work and my mom was out shopping. i was listening to a podcast while doing chores when i heard a knock at the door. i go to the door and i see through the window on the door this guy standing outside. he was like late-30s. at first i was kind of worried he was a housebreaker or something, cuz he was dressed in all black and kept looking over his shoulder. then i saw the tom selleck moustache, dorky glasses, his striped tie under the jacket. anyway he saw i was inside and he made eye contact and i guess i had to open the door cuz otherwise impolite, right?

the conversation, to the best of my memory

ME: hi! can i help you?

GUY: you're [my name].

ME: yeah.

GUY: [my dad's name] said i could get the stuff off you.

(interlude: no, my dad is not a drug dealer. my dad is the least drug dealer kind of person i know)

ME: what "stuff"?

GUY: you know. \*pauses\*

ME: i don't, though. what's going on?

GUY: \*starts rambling. i can't remember all of this, because he really started talking in circles. it was something about my dad saving his life - it was really weird\*

ME: \*kinda freaked out\* look, my mom's gonna be home any minute now.

GUY: yeah, so let's go. \*moves to step inside\*

ME: \*moves to block him\* uh, no, i think you gotta go.

GUY: come on, my dude. i need your milk of the man.

ME: my *what*?

GUY: the fucking milk of the fucking man, dude! \*hissed\* the testosterone.

i'm really freaked out at this point, so freaked out i don't even care about being nice at this point, so i just shut the door. i thought the guy was just going to leave but he just

didn't. he kept knocking on the door again and again, and i realized i was starting to dissociate. like full on can't feel your body, looking at yourself in third person type shit. I watched myself fall against the wall as the guy kept knocking and knocking and knocking.

i remember exactly where the wall was, the corner to the right from the front door. it was the one opposite the stairs. i kept pushing myself down, like i was trying to make myself smaller and smaller, until maybe i could vanish into the floor. something happened to me in school that was kind of like this but i don't want to talk about it here but it's why i was reacting so strongly, why i was pushing myself against the corner so hard.

then eventually it was like the corner... swallowed me. dunno doesn't feel right to say it swallowed me. i really don't even know how to describe it. i'm literally staring at the screen and i don't know what to type here. okay i'll steal this from another poster and say it's like i was cracking a safe and just heard the pins go 'click' so i could open it. and i opened it, and suddenly there i was in the backrooms.

okay so i would have posted about this in r/backrooms or something but i dunno. i don't think it's relevant there really? this isn't about the backrooms really; it's why i didn't mention that up front. anyway i guess i should explain what the backrooms is if you aren't into that kind of thing. basically the backrooms is kind of like the upside down crossed with a dentist's office. it's like outside of time and space but it just consists of empty rooms with yellow wallpaper and sets of stairs. some people say there's monsters in there but i have not seen any. people say it smells like moist carpet, to me it smells more like a broken sewer pipe. kind of nasty, insidious in a sweet way.

for a while i didn't see anybody. i was just confused and lost, and i thought i was dreaming. i kept trying to wake myself up and it just wasn't happening. i actually felt a lot calmer when i realized that, like i wasn't lucid dreaming or anything, i was just vibing. it was weirdly nice. i know the backrooms must seem weird and scary but in that moment i kind of needed a non-place to match how much of a non-person i felt at that time. i kept walking and walking until i found a stairwell and i went down instead of up, so i ended up on a dark level: same as any other floor, but there's no light.

i shouldn't have gone into the dark but i thought i would be okay with my phone flashlight, and that i'd just walk back to the stairwell. this was an extremely dumb idea as there was no landmarks on this floor and so as soon as i couldn't see the stairwell anymore i lost track of it. i was kind of a moron back then. i tried retracing my steps but it was so dark, i just kept getting further into the dark, and my phone battery was starting to run low. that's when i saw a really fucked up guy.

how fucked up? well, first thing they were big. not saying being big makes you a fucked up guy but it means there's more fucked up guyness to go around. secondly the fucked up guy was looking right at me. thirdly the fucked up guy was wearing weird old-timey clothing like soem sort of steampunk adventurer and i \*hate\* steampunk. fourthly they had a cane with a electronic torch on it which is unsettling in a way i find hard to describe. fifthly, oh yeah, they had a giant fucking horse skull for a head and i twas trhe scariest shit i ever saw.

i really thought i was gonna die there, in the backrooms.

then the fucked up guy pushed up the horse skull and it turned out to be a weird kind of hockey mask, and under it was this older-type lesbian milf type. so it worked out! we talked. she introduced herself as marquess irma laflamme iv. if she didn't have an extremely british accent i would not believe her ; she made the queen sound cockney. she asked if i was lost and i extremely was. she could tell because i was on near the Lowest Level, and considering i was a Beginner i was definitely wandering into the wrong areas for me. i asked if it was because there were monsters down here.

she said, "no. there's monsters \*out there\* (gesturing with sick torch cane) but near as i can deduce there's no minotaurs in this labyrinth."

i liked her!

i walked with her back up the stairwell and into the better lit parts. as we walked together, she explained what the backrooms were, filled me in on the etiquette. she called them 'the hallowed halls' because she thought the backrooms, as a title, sounded 'like dogshit'. she was funny. she was a relaly good listener too. i didnt tell her any of the weird stuff but i did tell her about my home, my family, my school. in turn she told me about her estate, her bloodline, and her dabbles in the occult. she came her through a summoning ritual; when i told her how i came here, she was really impressed, and called me 'a prodigy'. i decided, in that moment, that this woman was apocalyptically hot and i should hang out with her as much as possible. the problem is that in the backrooms, you never really meet anyone twice.

when we got up the top of the stairwell, i realized i had been walking for hours and my knees ached. i said i kinda wanted to sleep in my own bed and she bid me adieu, but first reminded me of the seven rules of the hallowed halls.

No fighting - arguments okay within reason, but don't hit someone.

Do not be racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, and so on.  
No shops, no banks, no money - everything must be shared freely  
Do not follow others back to their home times and places  
No open flames, dangerous chemicals, or explosives.  
Do not use the power of the backrooms to raise the dead  
When using magic, be kind.

ME: Wait, there's magic here?

IRMA: \*the prettiest smile\* There's magic everywhere.

then she lit her cigarette by snapping her finger. it was so fucking cool you guys oh my  
ogd

anyway my phone said it was late and i told her I had to go home. I thought it'd be  
harder to find a way home but I could actually feel which corners would lead me back  
and which wouldn't. I just pressed myself into them and I popped right back out home  
again. it was dark and i was sitting at my desk. my mom called me from the kitchen, and  
i went downstairs for dinner. my dad was back and so was my mom. we talk about schol  
and stuff, but then i remember the guy and realized that was like something that actually  
happened. i brought it up to my dad and my mom and tried to explain how weird it was.

conversation, best as i remember

ME: \*finishes telling story\*

EVERYONE: \*weird long pause\*

DAD: \*never swears, ever\* the motherfucker.

ME: dad?

MOM: so, how was school, (me)?

DAD: no, (mom's name), he deserves to know.

ME: what's going on?

MOM: nothing.

DAD: look, (me), maybe he wants your testosterone vials, but he'll have to claw them  
from my cold dead hands.

ME: \*laughs\*

DAD: \*laughs too\*

ME: \*relieved this is a weird joke\* you know, he called it like, 'milk of the man' or  
something really weird. like i think it was 'manmilk' or something.

DAD: \*deathly serious\* milk of the man.

ME: \*realizes this is not a joke\*

from there, it just turned into a kind of weird back and forth between me and my dad about the guy wanting my testosterone. it wasn't an argument, not really, but it definitely didn't feel like we were on the same page at all. my mom didn't say anything after the first bit. after a while my dad started saying \*he\* should "be entrusted" with my testosterone. he refused to explain why no matter how many times i asked. eventually i just asked if i could have the rest of my meal in my room and they let me off. when i got up there i felt really weird. i didn't feel like they were doing something bad, but for context my bedroom door has a lock on it i never use. that night i used it.

the morning after i just got up and got dressed, ate breakfast, then my mom drove me to school. we were driving and it took until halfway to school when i realized that last night at the dinner table and the guy at the door really happened. i asked my mom about it, and she just looked at me all confused. she didn't remember anything about it. i don't remember if i thought she was gaslighting me or if i was just gaslighting myself. i dropped the topic and she dropped me off at school. maybe i would have forgotten about it if the guy hadn't shown up at my school.

it was behind the bike shed. i was having a smoke break with a few of my friends when i looked across the yard and saw him. i nearly shat, it was so weird seeing it confirmed. i remember: i really thought i dreamt the entire thing, the backrooms, the dinner, the weird guy, the whole day. i hoped that maybe i had made a mistake, but the guy made eye contact and walked toward me. now here's the weirdest thing - i look around and suddenly my friends are ten feet away smoking far apart from me.

GUY: Hello, [me].

ME: Hi.

GUY: Bum a smoke?

ME: Uh. \*hands him a cigarette cuz etiquette\*

GUY: Your family is fucked.

ME: \*stares\*

GUY: Your dad? Scumbag. Mom? Well. You? You're gold. You're solid gold, [me].

ME: ... Thanks?

GUY: You're the kind of man I can make a deal with.

ME: I gotta go.

GUY: \*stepping in front of me\* How would you like a television, practically as good as new?

ME: Uh.

GUY: All I need is the T.

ME: Look, man... No.

GUY: You drive a hard bargain. \*digs unlabelled pill bottle out of coat pocket, rattles them\* How about these, huh? Extra with the TV, free of charge.

ME: Uh. What are they?

GUY: \*rattles them again\* They're prescribed. From a doctor, a \*real\* doctor.

ME: I'm good.

GUY: Come on.

ME: Really.

GUY: \*takes my hand, presses the bottle into my palm\* Here. As a taste.

ME: \*jerks away, but still holding bottle\*

GUY: \*leaves\*

then he just walked away like it was nothing. when i got home i stuck the pills in my nightstand and tried not to think about it.

alright, so to explain this next part, i realize i'm gonna have to cut back to like: six months before this stuff began. actually like five years. when i was in middle school i had a best friend who moved away to a few towns over. we fell out of contact for like years. then six months before the guy turned up at my door she contacted me out of the blue. we reconnected over texts and phonecalls, and we started making arrangements to meet up. it probably should have been a sign it took us six months to arrange a meet-up, but eventually we decided on a date: three days out from when the guy gave me the pills.

i debated whether or not to postpone it, but decided that it'd be good to reset since i'd be staying over at her parents place for like a few days. we were in like constant communication for the weeks leading up to it, and throughout all of this i was packing up and confirming with my dad that it'd be okay to drop me off and stuff. like we planned this out extensively, right down to where we'd be getting lifts to go to places she wanted to go see with me. we were going to meet up in a shopping mall where i'd be dropped off by my dad and her mom and her would meet me at the banana republic.

my dad drives me over, i get off and say goodbye, then i wait at the banana republic.  
and wait.

and wait.

and wait.

and my best friend \*does not show\* .

and i waited!! like i was there three hours sitting on a bench. the only time i left was to go to the food court and the bathroom. i was texting her and trying to call her, but i was just being fully ghosted at this point. it was insane. i thought she was in some kind of

accident but i looked on her insta and she was still liking stuff. she's \*still\* posting stuff last time i checked. i don't know what this has to do with anything; i don't know if this was backrooms or my parents or what. in the moment it thought about calling my parents but i went out for a smoke and it was dark out, and i realized my dad had probably already driven home and that i really should have rung earlier if i was going to ring at all. i really had no idea what to do when i realized that i had a rolliebag and a backpack with a few sets of clothes, my testosterone, and my zolof; plus my parents didn't know, and still thought iw as with my friend. now normally i wouldn't even think about renting ah otel room in these circumstances - i awasn't a minor but i felt like one - but i realized i could just go into the backrooms whenever i wanted. no money, no oversight, no-one calling my parents if i was away.

so i bought some supplies from the mall and found teh righ kind of corner to bring me into the backrooms. i think i finally have a metaphor for it: it's like pushing open a stage trapdoor, where you push but the mechanism bringing you to a newplace is still doing a lot of the work. i was getting bettr at it too, cuz the first time i did intentionally it took like thirty seconds and this time it barely took five. plus i was getting better at noticing the corners that could bring me there. i was noticing them even when i wasn't looking for them. it was like petrichor, like how after it rains the whole world smells \*stronger\*. it's kind of incredible how much my mood improved from being in the backrooms; when i was there, even my posture improved.

now, the thing about the backrooms is that without human intervention they are all pretty much identicla. so in some places like latvia or chicago im told the backrooms are basically all identical. however if you go to places like houston or south africa, the backrooms are insanely modified cuz humans have been going into them for hundreds, maybe even thousands of years. like people say there's cave paintings in there in certain places, which kind of makes you wonder why it looks like an office bu9ilding from the 70s if it's always been around.

anyway the part i was in on this trip was heavily colonized. i didn't meet anyone - that's a weird constant, the backrooms are never crowded and you noly meet people in ones or twos - but the place was teeming with past activity. the walls were covered in graffiti and these murals, some of them still wet with paint. some of the rooms had been converted into living spaces, with beds and sofas and stuff. there were even kitchens with fresh hot food; yuo'd think they'd go off or even go cold but time is kind of screwy in the backrooms so it was good to eat whenever.

the best part for me were hte puzzle rooms. these are kind of controversial - some people like blocking off corridors and putting up puzzles like you'd see in resident evil or

something. some people hate these things but i really like them. i guess i've always liked escape rooms and stuff so it was easy to get into? my favorite was this one that was like based around alchemical symbols and like writing stuff on your arm, that really screwed with my head. it's nice too cuz people leave little comments and hints on the walls - i added a note saying the puzzle was really cool. i guess that means the backrooms are also kind of like dark souls??? i also liked this one that was about answering questions from a robot fortune teller tho that one is obviously pretty antiziganist so it's disqualified in my book. third best is definitely the one involving the water buckets and the weighing scales, but i have really crappy upper body strength so i had a pretty hard time with it :S

i treated the whole thing like it was a hike. a hike through weird endless corridors but a hike nonetheless. i realized i could actually think in there, like consider my life and stuff beyond all the immediate day-to-day things that can distract you. it was meditative. i guess it gets like that when you're just taking it one room at a time. i was running out of T tho and you can't exactly find that easily in the backrooms, so i thought about going home. i had been keeping track of time on my phone and so even tho i couldn't call anyone - no reception in another dimension - i could tell how long i was gone. it had only been three days but felt much longer. i was kind of sad to go honestly, but now that i had a method i could just keep doing it. when i found a corner i realized i could just pop back home. i thought about being picked up from town to keep up the illusion, but realized i was overthinking it; i could just say i got a bus or a lift or something. so i just went into a corner and landed about two blocks from my house.

i came back in the evening. i would have expected my parents to be home by then but the garage was empty and neither of their cars were there. when i unlocked the door i went inside and heard this music playing on loop somewhere upstairs. it was like chumbawumba but not tubthumping. googled around i think it's [this](#)? anyway i was back in cell and i found out i had a LOT of missed calls. i went upstairs to unpack and listened to my voicemail. none of them were from my parents. it was that fucking guy. he had been calling me every day, basically every hour. for the first ones he'd just keep asking me to call him back at a number - different one every time - but eventually he'd just groan and hang up. after that he'd just start screaming into the phone. it was actually really disturbing and i was kind of worried for him more than i was for me. then i went into my bedroom and i fucking freaked.

my room was TRASHED. it was apocalyptic. my bed was overturned, my wardrobe had been pulled over, my nightstand was just \*gone\*, and the window had been smashed open. i found where that music was playing: it was on a bluetooth speaker on the ground, on top of a pile of pizza boxes and empty ice cream tubs. i checked the door



and saw that it was actually hanging off the bottom hinge, like someone had kicked it in and popped it off the hinge. the bolt didn't even work anymore, and i was worried that if i tried closing it fully i'd make the whole thing fall out of the frame.

at first i thought that weird guy had broken in through my window and trashed the place, maybe kicked his way out of the door for some reason. then i realized there was no glass on the floor. the window had been busted from the inside; there was no signs of forced entry anywhere in the house (all doors locked, all windows intact, etc). when i went to the window and looked out, i found my nightstand out in the backyard. going down there, i searched the stand and found the pills were missing. specifically the pills the weird guy had given me. searching the place top to bottom, i could account for everything, even my nintendo switch and my gaming tower; if you were a burglar, you would think to steal those!! i tried thinking of anyone who could have a motive to do something like this, but i couldn't come up with anyone but my parents.

thing is, they weren't looking for just those pills the guy gave me. they had ripped open my mattress to check what's inside, punched open walls with a hammer, and even pried up a couple of floorboards. you don't do that looking before you look in the nightstand. they had to be looking for something specific, and the only thing anybody seemed to care about was my testosterone.

it still hurts my head just thinking about this. i have tried racking my brain to remember ever seeing that guy before he turned up at my doorstep and i just can't. i don't know who he is, how he knows my parents, or even what he wants my t FOR. like maybe for supplement purposes? maybe he's trans too??? i don't know but why MY t???? it would be way easier to get a prescription (grey market is an option) than obsessing over some random stranger. even putting that aside, my parents weren't being normal about this, right? i mean that's why i'm making this post. i think there's a normal way of handling this but i don't know exactly what it is because it is all so strange. i just know it isn't what my parents are doing, and i don't know if that makes me the bad guy or not.

anyway, i should be full-on freaking out right now, but under all the panic i get this weird sense of clarity looking at all of this nightmarish bullshit. see i have a bank account. that's not the one for my debit card - i have been saving in this account since i was literally 7 years old from like christmas gifts and part-time work. it's got like five thousand dollars in it. i realize that if i take out like, half of that, i could save up and rent someplace cheap. i have a driver's license and if i got a job i could save up to get a cheap car, then i could basically live anywhere. plsu with the backrooms, i could actually live out there. i talked to people who did, it's a little rough, but it's better than the streets. if i did that and i saved up, i could actually get somewhere. i couldn't believe i was even

thinking of it, but it felt like my only option. i called an uber, drove out to my bank, and asked to withdraw some cash.

i was told the bank account was empty.

sometime when i was gone, my parents had drained the entire account. five thousand dollars and ten years of work: gone. to be clear, this wasn't a joint bank account or anything; my parents made quite a big deal about entrusting this money to me when we turn my kid joint bank account into an adult one, and i felt really proud i didn't touch it except on very rare occasions (buying components for my tower, my switch, etc) because i wanted to use most of it for going to college in europe + surgeries. this is a bank account in \*my name\*. i don't know how they tricked my bank into withdrawing all my money, and there is no way it wasn't them. when i went back to the house and checked my room, i realized that they had raided the cabinet where i kept my banking documents. it was dark and my parents were \*still\* not home.

i actually waited in the sitting room with the lights out. it's pretty cliché but i was kind of full-on dissociating again. it was only when i heard the front door open and my parents came back in that i kind of snapped back into it, and i turned the light on to see my dad and my mom: my mom was walking with a limp, and my dad had a really nasty shiner on his left eye, and both their clothes were torn up. i was kind of stunned, so stunned i just kind of stared at them. in response, they finished locking the door and started making conversation. like small talk-level conversation. it was the closest i ever felt to being trapped in an oblivion conversation. eventually i just thought fuck it and jsut brought it up: i said my room was trashed, and my mom had the fucking nerve to tell me i really ought to clean up there more often.

ME: oh my fucking GOD, what?!

DAD: Don't talk to your mom like that.

ME: you broke into my room! you stole all my money! and \*about to ask about their injuries\*

MOM: i want to make one thing clear: we're not selling the house.

ME: \*too flabberghasted to respond\*

MOM: we're not getting a divorce, either. that's off the table.

DAD: we're gonna have to pull together as a family.

ME: dad, who is that guy?

MOM: he doesn't know who you're talking about.

ME: the guy who wants my testosterone!! we literally talked about him!

MOM: I said he odeon't know—

DAD: i'll handle this, [mom]. \*turns to me\* look, i'll be open and honest with you, [me], but you need to be open and honest with me, too. otherwise, we cannot open a dialogue.

ME: okay, sure. who is this guy? why is he—

DAD: you can't just hog the discussion like that, [me], you need to speak before you can listen.

ME: \*getting sick of this pseudo-group therapy bullshit\* you know what, i don't care anymore, you guys can do whatever you want, but i want my money back NOW.

DAD: \*shouting in my face\* you're my only son! you're my only son! stop projecting your own flaws onto me!

typing it out, it's really hard ot convey how upsetting this was. my dad is usually a very quiet ki nd of guy. he doesn't even like, laugh, he kind of just giggles. now he was screaming in my face, and jabbing his finger into my chest again and again - it actually stung, he was poking so hard. his face was all twisted up too, like contorted in rage, i never thought i'd say that about something i saw in real life but it's true: it was like something else was wearing the mask of my dad. he yelled so loud my dissociation came back in full force like a forcefield going up, and i just curled up standing, shaking, and then... my dad stopped being mad. like turning on a DIME, that's how quick he went from murderously angry to totally normal. he and mom go back to talking bout some dumb shit i don't remember, saying stuff to me even though i can't even say anything back. eventually they just walk upstairs back to bed like it's a totally normal monday night even though it's 2am in the morning and my mom is trying and failing to hide a knife wound on her arm.

i don't know how long it took but eventually i'm able to get moving again. i go upstairs sort of on autopilot, then i open my bedroom door and it just falls off. inside is the broken window and the ransacked place and i realize i can't sleep in here. i go to the spare bedroom and i open it to find my dad's in there settling down to sleep in his pjs. note: him and mom usually sleep in the same room. my dad sometimes sleeps in the spare bedroom if he's got like the flu but i don't think he does and it seems kind of weird.

ME: uh. can i sleep here?

DAD: well, bud, i'm kinda sleeping here. something wrong with your room?

ME: \*flabberghasted, again\* i can't sleep there.

DAD: sure you can. have you ever tried cognitive behavioral therapy? works wonders.

ME: my mattress is all... torn up...

DAD: \*doing a weird nasal accent he sometimes does as a joke\* sounds like a you problem. \*sighs\* look, [me], it's late, i gotta hit the hay. you should too.

so i went on the couch downstairs because there was nowhere else to sleep.

first thing, i cried for the first time i went on testosterone. second thing, i got my backpack - which had my testosterone - and used it as a pillow so no-one could steal from it. third thing, i started researching. i figured the likeliest thing was that my parents were having some kind of mental health episode. it didn't really explain guy but i wasn't really thinking about him at the time. after a few hours of rabbitholing i couldn't find anything that matched it, except for those kind of symptoms that could belong to any disorder. i wondered if i was getting this wrong somehow. maybe i was going crazy. i mean, there were people on the net talking about the backrooms and it (mostly) matched up with what i was experiencing, but that's probably what people going down the Qanon pipeline think too. maybe it wasn't my parents who trashed the room, and maybe someone else stole my money. maybe i did all that - if you dissociate a lot you forget things, even big things. maybe the guy wasn't real - no-one but my parents seemed to acknowledge he existed, and even then they hadn't ever interacted with him. i never tell anyone this usually but when i was thirteen years old i had a nervous breakdown. it was intense. i had to be institutionalized. it's kind of the reason my best friend moved away: she was there on the worst night and it scared her. i try every day not to be that person again, and that night on the couch made me really scared i had failed.

i woke up wondering if i should just leave. just walk out of there, not look back. the problem is that i really want to go to college and i really want to have a job and move out of my parent's house, properly, and i don't want to spend the rest of my life working in an amazon warehouse to make that happen. i want to be a self-made man - that's kind of an in-joke in my head i have but it's true - and i don't want to be scared of failing anymore. but i am scared, i was scared. i was so afraid that i was going crazy and that i was going to be put in an institution again. what's more likely: that my whole world had gone rotten, teeming with terrible life, or that i had gone insane? i know what it's like to go insane; i know how easy it is to go insane. im fucking crying again thinking about being on that couch. it was so fucking dark man i cant remember any light that reached in there. im not a praying person and my family isnt really that religious but i swear if i was i wouldnt have felt god in that room at all. i wondered feverishly that maybe if i started giving the guy my testosterone, i could make some kind of deal where i could live at his place or something. he couldn't be much worse than my parents, if everything was going wrong. i dont know why i started thinking that. i felt so out of options then. so alone. i don't think i ever felt so alone, not even when i was chemically restrained and left in my room at night. by the end of the night - i don't think i got any sleep - i started

tihkning about just calling it. you know? just calling it quits. i didn't care how. i knew how. itr's not tat hard to stop. you can do it in your sleep. it's easy. reeally easy.

then i just... blanked. i can't remember. it's just gone from me now.

the first thing i remember is morning light. that's how i realize i've lost time - it was dark the moment before. i'm in this family restaurant i haven't been in since i was twelve, with this ridiculously tall stack of pancakes. my mom is opposite me and we're both in a booth. it feels like a dream. my mom is talking to me.

MOM, BEST AS I CAN REMEMBER: I don't think you should detransition. Not right away. I'm just saying I'm not liking the effect your milk of- \*catches herself\* your testosterone supplements are having on your father. He's not himself... \*laughing\* I'm not myself! All I'm saying is, detransition shouldn't be taken off the table. It wouldn't resolve all our problems, but it might help with most of them. What I'm really saying is, this isn't our choice, it's your choice.

ME: \*stares vacantly, utterly checked out\*

MOM: I'm not saying I have a wild idea, but I'm saying I have a really wild idea. \*leans in\* How about you give your mommy some of your milk of the man? It can be a little secret: a little son-mother secret. You know, I'm not saying I don't love your dad anymore, but I feel like we have a vibe romantic attraction just can't match. You were literally grown inside me, there is no connection deeper than that. So I think you should give me the milk of the man.

ME: \*hellodarknessmyoldfriend.mp4\*

MOM: I need it, [name]. I really really need it.

i wasnt listening because right over her shoulder, between booths, was an angel. it was clad in a strange shimmering armor, and it had bandages wrapped around its chest and it was so big that it had to get on one knee and its head still touched the ceiling. It had a helmet in the shape of a falcon, and i could see its eyes glowing like burning sapphires in the open beak of the bird. i was hallucinating, vividly, and knew it. it clarified everything in a moment: the backrooms and my family's troubles became so much more real by comparison. it was the most beautiful and paradoxical thing i had ever seen: definite proof that i wasn't crazy, because this is what me being crazy looked like. i was seeing a vision of the archangel michael in a local family restaurant and it wasn't even the weirdest thing that happened that day. i could tell from its edges that it was already fading, and that soon it would vanish, and it would never bother me again: i could not say the sam eof my other troubles, and those i would have to resolve by hand.

after saying that last part my mom was silent, just staring at me. that actually gave me time to recover from the vision and start thinking again. i don't think my mom really cared, she just wanted an answer. i'm pretty sure i was openly weeping because waitresses were throwing concerned looks to us but i was too blitzed out to care and my mom seemed ot have other things on her mind. I went out and sat on the curb to catch my breath. I was having thoughts. I didn't have a plan or an answer but something was forming that wasn't quite a noun; I was verbing something up. I was plotting: to what end I was not sure, but it was undeniable that my mind was headed toward something. I looked out and I saw my mom's car, and for a moment I was startled because I thought it strange to see it in a strange parking lot, and then I remembered we had to have drove here in something. That's how out of it I was.

I got up and walked around the parking lot, smoking a cigarette from my pack, trying to think. Looking at the cars I saw this weird old timey car among the sedans and the mondeos, and it had tinted windows like a limo. I stopped, and the car door opened, and out stepped Irma. I couldn't believe my eyes, it was so damn weird seeing her in sunlight rather than the pissy flourescents of the backrooms but there she was! okay, pretty dressed down compared to how she usually went in the backrooms, but it was Irma in the flesh. I made eye contact with her and she gave a queen wave, then we moved at a respectful pace to meet in the middle, exchanging greetings all the way. For that moment, it seemed so nice: meeting an old friend. I really wish it could have stayed like that, but when I came close I saw the look of concern on Irma's face and that's when the conversation took a turn.

Irma was all questions, basic ones: was I alright, did I have a way home, so on and so forth. Every time I tried pushing past that to ask what she was doing here, she'd give a short blunt reply then move onto another question. She asked me what I was doing in the backrooms last night, and an instant later - she could read the hesitation in my microexpressions - she realized I didn't remember a thing about that. She asked again if I was alright, and I told her I was fine, but if she thinks she saw me in the backrooms she had better explain what I was doing. She nodded, looking off into the distance, before beginning the story.

She had been doing a routine stroll in the lower levels when she came across me wandering alone. I looked strange - she didn't elaborate in what way - so she stopped me and asked if I was lost. I said I was looking for magic, and asked if there was "a magic spell that could make everything okay again, like in your childhood or something". She said such spells existed - though they were a lot more specific than that - but she would need to know more first: if I wanted to relive my childhood, what day? She said I just sort of stood there lingering in place, then I started rambling about the most ordinary

day in the world, about my parents being normal and my house being average and my life being altogether common-or-garden. She had to cut me off several times to ask for clarifying details because I was being super vague about everything. Apparently when she asked what my dad did I said "he goes to work" and when she asked where that was I said "wherever my dad works" and when she asked what he did all day I said "he's paid well". Figuring I might have been on something, she asked me what my dad's name was, as that might give me something concrete to hold onto. Instead I just started saying, over and over, that I didn't even know his name.

Last night, I slipped into the backrooms on a dissociative episode, and I was rambling. That's all it was.

Just then, we looked off as one to the restaurant, where my mother was sprinting out the double doors. She ran right past her car, running to the curb and dove into a waiting cab, which sped away. The doors swung open again, and the guy came out of the restaurant carrying a sledgehammer on his shoulder. He had this peaceful look in his eyes, like a buddhist monk, as he went up to our car and started smashing it to shit. He took out the windmirrors first with big overhead swings, then he moved out to breaking every window in its order. He beat the panels until they broke off, then destroyed every light in the car. By the time he was done with it, it didn't look like a car anymore: it looked like a fossil, like something extinct. A small crowd had gathered outside the restaurant, of fry cooks and patrons, and they weren't doing anything; they didn't even phone the cops. In the process of smashing up the car, the guy had taken off his shirt, revealing a surprising musculature under his shirt: I saw his biceps move like pistons as he ruined my mom's car with his sledgehammer. When he saw that he was done, he dropped the hammer and mounted what remained of the car's bonnet; the suspension squealed like a pig, the metal groaning deep. When he found his footing, the guy pointed at me on the curb and said - spoken softly, yet heard by all - "I don't know if it's the clothes or what, but this kid looks just like Steve Jobs. And he's definitely got some of Steve's fashion sense."

I looked back at Irma, and she had the strangest expression on hre face. She was confused. she had the kind of face where confusion looked wrong on her. it couldn't have been there for longer than a second, and was soon replaced by a look of strange anger; something in her eyes had narrowed, gone flinty and so cold. I turned to her and asked her for a favor I had been thinking of asking the whole time but was too scared to pop; to rely on someone is a form of weakness and i try not to invite any more of it into my life. i gave her my backpack and told her it had everything in the world that mattered to me, and asked her to keep it safe for me, and get it as far from this place as possible. at this moment something spilled out of her too, like she had been holding it back just as

i had held back my own favors; she told me she had an estate where i could stay as long as i needed to, and even have a stipend until i got back up on my feet. i told her i would think about it and she asked me, she didn't ask me but she implied, that i was in a dangerous situation and i shouldn't play around. she would be waiting for me in the backrooms, she would always be waiting, but she must have been afraid id never make it there. i told her to trust me. she did.

before i begin the end of this story, i have to make something clear:

i am a good person.

a fundamentally good person.

i don't always make the right call, but i always do things for the right reasons.

i would never cause harm to anyone intentionally, maliciously.

i would, however, do things to prevent further harm.

to save a patient, sometimes you must amputate.

i really, really thought my parents could still be saved, if only they knew.

leaving irma behind, i approached my mom's car. the crowd was still gathered outside the restaurant, no-one making a move. i realize now why no-one called the cops, because it was the same reason i had never called the cops: this was simply not a part of town where cops went. it was a nice neighborhood. sirens were always in the distance, never approaching, but that did not mean terrible things never happened here. i looked up at the guy on my mom's car and at once i saw two contrasting sights. in one eye he was some sort of demonic prophet, his gross musculature and his insectine stillness making him seem like a sculpture in hell's church; in the other he was a normal guy with a dorky moustache he was too young to pull off, the sort of insignificant guy who was your coworker or your neighbor but never anyone you truly knew. at once i saw these competing visions, and no matter how hard i tried i could never resolve them into one whole image. i still can't, and it hurts my head to try. taking out my housekeys, i told him the testosterone was back at my house and offered him the key to the front door.

i realize now that when i was thinking, beginning to plot, what i was plotting was revenge.

i needed to go home. i didnt order a taxi - how would i even pay for it - and i didnt ask my dad for a lift. when i thought about it, my phone buzzed cuz my mum had sent me a text; she asked where i was, cuz she was already at home. instead i walked home. it was miles and miles away. the sun was burning down, and even though most of the walk was shaded by the trees, i still got pretty bad sunburn down my face and hands. halfway back i hit an area of town with a dozen strip malls, and the sidewalk vanished. i



almost got hit by a soccer mom in an SUV. by the time i got back it was dark and everything burnt, from my ankles to my shoulderblades. i was gonna let myself in using the key under the stone in our japanese zen garden, but when i got home i found the door had been smashed in, like someone had gone at it with a sledgehammer. i thought the guy had already arrived back until i got close enough to hear pulp's common people on full blast. my suspicions were confirmed when i found my dad in the sitting room; he was watching the music video with the song blasting out of the speakers; he had a silver woodchopping axe lain by his feet, and a massive black-eye.

DAD: hey sport.

ME: \*taking shoes off\* hi.

DAD: i quit my job today.

ME: cool.

DAD: they told me i wasn't giving 100% to the company. i told them i didn't care about their company. i'm a member of the working class. so i gave [my dad's boss] a little "here's johnny" action. \*taps the axe\*

ME: that's great, dad.

DAD: hey. \*pointing at his black eye\* see this? this is how they fuck the working man. i'm a working man, [me], and they fucked me. they fucked your working class father.

ME: you make a hundred grand a year, dad.

DAD: everyone does, son, and never let them tell you otherwise.

ME: \*say nothing, turn to leave\*

DAD: hey. look at me.

ME: \*turn around, stare\*

DAD: i know you think me and your mom are going to get better, but we're not. we're only going to get worse.

ME: \*smiling\* i know, dad.

we laughed, then, like it was all an inside joke.

i went upstairs to my parent's bedroom. and took out the family photo album my mum kept under the bed. taking out photos and stuffing them into the inner pockets of my jacket, i also grabbed the jewelry box on the nightstand. i saw my dad had left his laptop unlocked and open, and debated selling it onto his company's business rivals - it seemed like a lot of work so i didn't. there was some kind of ruckus downstairs and i thought about checking, but i was busy and it just sounded like my dad smashing shit again for no reason. i went into my room and was ready to grab the rest of my shit there, but i saw that - while the place was still trashed and ruined - someone had set up a foldout cot in the middle of it all. i just imagined my mom looking into my ruined room and - not thinking to clean it up - decided i needed somewhere to sleep. i knelt down by

the bed and examined it; the cot was one me and my mom used on camping trips. i was uncertain if it was some kind of a message, some kind of a way my mom had of telling me... something. i didn't care anymore. i looked up and kneeling down, i could now see my mom cramped under my desk, staring at me. to fit, she had bent her limbs so badly i was worried (still, somehow) she might have permanently damaged herself cramming herself into the desk like this; it was like someone had switched off the neocortex and all that was left was unknowable, awful instinct. she opened her mouth wide, and a foul smell came out of it that made me nearly gag; she screamed "THE CATHOLICS WANT TO RUN THE WORLD: WE WILL BURN THEIR CHILDREN. HONOR THY ELDERS, DYLAN, EVEN WHEN THEY RESEMBLE PIGS." even now, i didn't understand. i just did not understand. i ran out the bedroom and downed the stairs as fast as i could, and i slipped in a puddle of blood at the foot of the staircase. it was a ridiculous amount of blood, like sitting in it it looked like a lake. i could feel it soak into the seat of my pants and onto my skin where it would stick for hours afterward, and i knew it would take a hundred showers before i ever felt clean, if i ever felt clean again. there was a set of footprints - not bootprints, like bare feet in blood - leading from the puddle to the sitting room. i looked up and saw the guy sitting on the couch, ass-naked. he had been staring me the whole time, and drinking a beer. he raised his bottle and didn't smile, only smiled with his eyes, like we were friends. i knew i had to run and get out, get to the backrooms where i could hide and get on my laptop and write this u p and find irma and post on reddit so i could find out if i had been the asshole for letting this guy into our house or for answering the door int he first place or if my parents had been the bad ones all along - i needed ot know, i needed to know if iw as still a good person. beside the guy was my dad's axe, stained up to the handle with red, and my dad sat beside the stranger; dad's head in dad's lap.