

He told me not to think of him like a psychiatrist and more as a friend in confidence; someone to bounce ideas off. It sounded like a game of ping pong to me.

“This is a safe space,” he said. “Everything you share is confidential.”

I knew he was lying, and he knew I knew he was a lying. I didn’t say a word.

He fiddled with his glasses. “You can be completely honest in here.”

Sum 41’s “Fat Lip” blared through the headphones that hung around my neck. He never asked me to turn it off or down. I was testing for boundaries. I wanted to make sure he knew how much I disdained being there, that our time together was forced, that I wouldn’t participate.

Dr. Dimock stared at his legal pad. He had a habit of tonguing his lips. I scanned the room counting the certificates on the cigarette stained walls. Five to assure whoever sat in my chair that this overweight, sweaty, glasses wearing middle-aged man really was a doctor and I should trust him. If anyone ever tells you it’s a safe place and to think of them as your friend the first time you meet, you know it’s not a safe place and they are certainly not your friend.

“What brings you in here today?” he asked.

I counted the second hand on the clock. It was math class all over again.

He never looked up at me, just kept asking dumb questions that I wouldn’t answer, and scratched at his yellow sheets of paper.

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“Who do you think the most famous person in the world is?”

“What?” That one caught me off guard.

“Who do you think the most famous person in the world is?”

I smiled, partly because I like messing with people, partly to see if he was even listening, and partly because it’s who everybody seemed to be talking about on the news. “Osama bin Laden.”

It was five to five. He scribbled something on his legal pad, looked up for the first time, and asked me what I meant by Osama bin Laden being the most famous person in the world. I told him that I had to get going, pulled my headphones over my ears, and walked out of the office.

My mom was waiting for me outside. She asked how the session went. I told her it was bullshit and made the stonewalling face; a forced blank expression with eyes of rage. “Just give it a chance, Troy,” she said.

I snapped, “I can’t believe you sold me out like that.” The rest of the drive I stared out the window.

When we got home, I went straight to my room, closed the door, turned on the stereo and listened to System of a Down at full volume. Between tracks I could hear my mom sobbing on the phone. I figured she realized I wasn’t going back to see Dr. Dimock again.

My cell rang. It was Ed. He wanted to head over to Virgil and hit the new half-pipe they put in at the arena. I paused to give the appearance of thinking about it. I hated sounding too eager. "Sure," I said.

"Be outside in twenty. Emily'll drive us."

Emily was Ed's girlfriend. She should have been mine. I've known her longer, and I've had a hard crush ever since I first laid eyes on her. Five-foot nothing and blonde hair hanging down between her shoulders. Emily had the soft face of a young girl not yet jaded by men. Her eyes were always lined in dark colours. Purple was my favourite. That's what she had on when we first met. She wore a shy smile. Don't even get me started on her body. The girl is a ten; I don't award those easily either. She smelled like Britney Spears. Well, at least she used Britney Spears' perfume.

It was a football game after school, home opener or spirit week or some other forced fun that allowed us to be excused from last period to attend. Em mentioned she was going and I told her I was too. I don't usually go to those sorts of things, for a girl though, of course. No that's not entirely true, there are some girls I wouldn't go with. I wouldn't go with a Liberated Feminist that's for sure. Well, unless for a quick two pump and dump. I hoped going would somehow lead to her and I getting together.

It was a terrible game, I think. It was cold and starting to rain a bit. Emily wore the thin long sleeve shirt that girls always wear even if they know it's going to be cold outside. It hugged her body in all the right places. I knew she was cold so I offered her my sweater. It was the only name brand

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sweater I had, a yellow and blue striped Tommy Hilfiger job. It came in a bag of hand-me-downs from one of my older cousins I didn't really know. Name brands were a big thing in high school, that's why I remember it was Tommy Hilfiger. Emily thanked me for the sweater and gave me a hug. If a girl takes your sweater then you're pretty much on route to becoming her boyfriend. At least that's what I thought in those early high school years. After the game she left with her friends and I left with mine and the next day I found out she had started dating this guy named Ed. The fuck? Now that I think of it, I don't think she ever gave me that sweater back, the bitch.

There was a decommissioned railroad track running beside the asphalt that lined the skate park's edge. I pulled out a baggie of cocaine and asked Ed if he wanted to do a rail off the rails. I was being clever.

He nodded over his shoulder. "Not with Emily around."

I glared at him. I hated that he kept things from her. Vulnerability always lies in pretending to be someone you're not.

"Get rid of her then," I said.

She was sitting on the bench, texting, and half watching us as we cursed and bailed and cheered whenever we messed up or landed a trick.

Ed pulled a ten from his pocket and gestured at Emily. "Em, go get us some Gatorade."

He walked over and waved the bill in her face. She sighed, stood up, snatched the bill from him, and marched toward the arena.

“I’m keeping the change,” she scoffed.

Ed could be a real douchebag. I don’t know why she was with him. It was obvious neither of them was happy. Or at least that’s what I always told myself.

After she left, I poured some coke on one of the rails and used a card to cut four lines. I hit one, Ed huffed two, then I snorted the last one before Emily returned with the drinks.

Ed clapped my shoulder grinning. “Rails off rails, bro. Classic.”

Emily brought the drinks and asked how long we would be there. “There’s a party on Lakeshore,” she said.

Ed threw his board down and pumped across the asphalt. “Ten more minutes.”

Emily played the new Blink-182 album. The country air poured through the open windows. She shifted the car into third as the stereo blared, “Seventeen without a purpose or direction, we don't owe anyone a fuckin' explanation.”

When we arrived at the party, I was jonesing for another line, Ed too, so I found the bathroom, locked the door, and cut four more. That’s what I hated about cocaine, its non-lasting qualities. Although this hate wasn’t enough to stop me from nostriling it down. I took two off the toilet tank, flushed, and left the room. Ed knew the routine and

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was waiting outside the door. I walked down the stairs to join the party, half listening for the bathroom door to close and the fan to click on.

The house was filled with a bunch of kids dressed in argyle vests and skinny jeans. One guy had a bull ring pierced through his nose. Another had bottle cap sized discs in his ears. Hair was worn in two styles: straight cut and gelled or, knotted and messy in dreads. The girls added highlighted streaks of purple and green for effect. They all wore thick-framed glasses. None of them were drunk but they seemed to be having a good time anyway. Despite them all looking the same, there were distinct cliques divided by their “I want to be different like everybody else” appearance. I couldn’t tell the difference.

This was not my scene.

Outside someone offered me a joint. I took a couple hits and started to cough. My eyes watered and I knew it’d been sprayed with Windex. Some dealers spray their weed with Windex to make it weigh more. I passed it back and the guy said, “Good shit, eh?” I recognized him from school but we’d never talked.

He was a skinny basketball kid who did a lot of speed and was always bouncing around the hallway. Once, I walked into the gym and he was all by himself, hand standing against the wall, pumping off push up after push up. Still, he was a twig. I don’t remember what he was like

before his brother killed himself, but since then he's been completely strung.

"Got any blow?" he asked me.

"Nah man, just finished the last of it," I lied.

"Shit. Well, if you want to go in on a ball, I got a pretty good hookup."

His brother blew his face off with a shotgun in his bedroom at their family home. Rumour had it that he owed a boatload of cash to the biker's for cocaine and couldn't pay.

I nodded.

He passed me back the joint but I said no thanks and he sort of just walked off with it. One of the other guys in the circle turned to me and said, "You can't give him any blow, dude. He snaps on that stuff. Jase was one of my best friends and I know he'd hate to see his brother get all messed up like he did."

The guy that was talking to me, rumour also had it that he stole the blow from Jase, his best friend. I didn't care either way. Didn't look like he did either. If buddy wanted to get high, let him. I didn't know his brother and barely knew him and it's not really possible to care about someone you don't know.

I spotted Matty across the yard. He was seated by one of those backyard fire chimneys. I gave him a wave, "Hey, Matty."

"Sup, Troy?"

"Thinking about taking off. These people depress me."

"Yeah, I'm just here to drink their beer and then I'll be out too. You want a bump of K?"

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He pulled a vile from his pocket. The powder looked like shards of glass. He poured a generous pile on the web of my hand.

“Thanks, dude.”

I stifled the bump and lit a cigarette. There was a trio of girls huddled nearby. I recognized them from school too, but we’d never shared two words. They kind of just watched Matty and me and whispered shit to each other. Whatever, let them talk.

I stepped toward Matty to take a seat and lifted my foot too high; enough to lose my balance and stumbled to the side. Ketamine is a cat tranquilizer. On people it’s like funnelling twenty-four beers up the nose. It’s a hell of a drug.

“Moon walk, baby,” Matty laughed. I recovered and sat down. “Did I show you my new knife?”

“No man,” I said. “Let’s see it.”

He pulled out an automatic switch, flicked it open, and handed it over. It was an Italian job, shiny redwood for the handle, cold stainless steel for the blade. The thing had some weight to it.

“Cool,” I said, stabbing the air in front of me. I looked over at Matty, smiled, and pretended to stab him in the leg. He jumped back, “Are you crazy? These are new jeans.”

“I wasn’t going to cut you, I just wanted to see you fall off your chair. It was a joke.” I folded the knife closed and handed it back to him. He passed me a beer.

Sitting in silence, blitzed on K, drunk, high on blow, he told me to give him my hand and then poured me another

bump. Sometimes you can hallucinate on the stuff, but we hadn't done nearly enough.

Matty did another bump then looked at his jeans.

"Shit, Troy. I think you got me. My jeans are soaked."

"It's probably beer," I said. "Or you pissed yourself."

"I don't know, man. Flick your lighter at it."

I pulled out my Zippo and snapped the cap open lit. It was a trick I learned that cost too many hours practising not to show off. Under the flame there was a circle of dark on his thigh. The circle was expanding. I dismissed it as the possibility of us starting to trip. He sponged the spot with his fingers and placed them under the light. His fingers were red.

"Fuck, man," he whined lazily. "You stabbed me."

I hung my head. "Sorry, Matty."

One of the eavesdropping girls screamed.

The hipsters in the kitchen ran out of the house.

"If you were already thinking of bouncing, now might be the time," he said. "These people are snitches and will call the cops for sure."

"Matty, man, I really didn't think I'd get you."

He wiped his fingers on his pant leg. "It's all good."

"Well, you should probably put a Band-Aid or something on that," I laughed.

"You owe me a pair of jeans."

I hopped the fence onto the sidewalk and started a light jog toward home.