

I was in the freezer at work when my brother texted me that Shawn Galvin had shot himself. The lunch rush had been awful as usual and I needed a break, left the other waiter on shift alone to fend for himself, and went in the back to make myself nic-sick among the racks of salted fish and pork strips. As I pulled from the vape every ten seconds, I looked at my phone, trying not to think about the carcasses that surrounded me, and then I felt a vibration and saw Robbie's name at the top of the screen.

*holy shit*, I texted back, after a long minute of staring at the words like they were in Cyrillic. The nicotine head zap was really kicking in. My chest felt rabbitly.

*yeah*, said Robbie in response. *awful. we're sending a basket from the whole family, i signed your name on it.* Then he sent a picture of the card. It was there alright: Jesse, capital letters and pen, my name, if not my handwriting.

That was typical Robbie. Everything was taken care of before you knew what was going on. Mother's Day: sent flowers and a gift card, just Paypal me. Little sister manic again: we're at the hospital, what do you mean I didn't tell you, I'm telling you right now. If he'd asked I would have told him to leave me off. But he hadn't asked, so I didn't bother protesting. Shawn had probably been the only one in that house who remembered my name anyway.

I put the phone back in my pocket, took a huge and nausea-inducing hit from my stick, shut my eyes tight, and thought about Shawn blasting himself through the blond head with his dad's Colt. I thought about it so hard I barely felt the vibration in my jeans of another text. If I'd looked, I would have seen Robbie telling me not to go online today, because there were some sick people in town saying they thought it wasn't a suicide at all which was really disrespectful to everybody's grief. That might have changed my mental picture a little. Instead I just stayed on the same looping tableau in my mind: Shawn in front of the big gold mirror in his dad's

bedroom, staring at himself with his deadened, pink-veined eyes, his dad's metal safe open on the floor, his dad's military-issue pistol in his mouth. In my mind Shawn's hand was childlike, and on his wrist I saw the yellow Livestrong and braided rope bracelets he wore in middle school, but his face was adult. I thought I knew precisely how it looked. I'd been picturing that face in almost that exact scenario for over a month straight.

When I saw Shawn at L-Bar five weeks earlier it was for the first time in almost six years, but since I'd spoken to him it had been over a decade. If I'd noticed him across the bar on my own I probably would have left on the spot, maybe even convinced Noah the bartender to let me out the back way, cursing myself the whole time for being so hung up on my own childhood fears that I couldn't even shove it in anybody's face how much better I looked since high school. But I didn't notice him. I was busy drinking, busy gaming out the forty-something guy in the Sonic Youth shirt next to me, trying to see if he'd let me bump a line or if I'd have to let him feel down my jeans first. He was bragging to me about his old job in the art world in Manhattan, how he'd worked for the gallery that discovered Amanda Gunnarson, the Icelandic artist currently blowing up on Instagram.

"Sure," I said, feeling the edges of my field of vision start to darken with black spots. "The roadkill sculptures. With the little sparkly maggots." The guy nodded and opened his mouth again. Then I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"Oh," was all I could think of to say when I turned and saw him. For a moment I was sure I was hallucinating, that I'd taken something and somehow forgot. But he was real. I'd felt his hand. He'd touched me.

"Jesse," said Shawn. "It's you, right?" His voice sounded fuzzed-out, sluggish, or maybe it was just my own shock distorting the words. He was still beautiful, but he looked so different

from how I remembered him. He was so skinny: clavicle and elbows poking out sharp and angular, eyes sunken behind the defined bones of his once-familiar face. His hair looked like it was growing out from a buzzcut, nothing like the thick blond mop from high school. The blue of his eyes was faded, the whites sickly and veined with pink, like they'd been bloodshot so long they just stuck that way. He was definitely on something, something bad. Not that I could judge.

“Yeah,” I said, and stood up. “What are you doing here?” I was trying to compose myself. Nothing good had ever come of me being beneath Shawn Galvin, so I tried to straighten my back, look him in the eyes, but his were cagey. I didn't know if he wanted to hit me, mock me, get me to blow him, or pretend we were old buddies. Or some combination. I didn't know if I really wanted to find out.

“You look so great,” he said, drawing out the vowels stupidly on the last word. “You really changed.” He reached his hand out again and touched it to the sleeve of my jacket.

“Thanks,” I said. I looked at his hand. He was wearing a baggy hooded tank top, and I could see, just above the inside of his elbow, a messy crosshatch of pink and puckered scars on his skin, twin to the one on the soft part of my own arm. I wanted to move away from him but my limbs weren't responding. The old, familiar hot pain in my throat was suddenly back. I forced out a rushed goodbye, something like, “Good to see you have to go.”

“No,” he said, and tightened his grasp on my sleeve, pulling my arm to him. “Jesse, no, wait.” I heard the deep syllable of his exhale, and somehow in that second I understood—he wasn't trying to hurt me, wasn't on top of me, wasn't threatening me. There was nothing in him that was above me, for the first time in either of our lives. His grab wasn't powerful, it was desperate.

“I need to ask you something,” he said. The bar was busy enough that it sounded like a whisper. “Do you remember what happened?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” I knew what he meant, but he still wasn’t looking in my eyes.

“I mean when we were kids,” he said. “Do you remember what happened to us? I mean what happened to you? It was wrong, but—do you remember it?”

I didn’t know what to say. For a second I felt dead. The old feeling.

“Yeah,” I said. “Of course I remember.”

“Okay,” he said, and let out a long breath, then slipped his hand from my arm. “Yeah. I just—like, I forgot, you know? And then—”

“It came back,” I said.

He nodded. When he finally looked directly at me, I wanted to look away. His eyes were terrified, but it wasn’t a human fear, like a little kid’s or a victim’s. There was something animal about it, something blank. “Jesse I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m really really sorry.”

“I know,” I said. “It’s...” But I didn’t know what it was. The bar was dark and loud, getting louder, a terrible place to talk. I hadn’t said more than five words to Shawn since we were thirteen. If we were in a movie this would have been the climax of something, and I would have hugged him, taken him back to my place or gone to his, and we would have talked until dawn, finally telling each other everything. But there was nothing to climax out of, no rising action, no plot, just tiny cramped and empty life. And I didn’t have that in me. “I have to go,” I told him.

“You’re not a bad person,” he said. “Okay? You’re a good person. You’re a really good person.”

I didn’t respond. He kept staring at me with those whimpery eyes. Part of me wanted to say it back; at least, part of me wanted to want to. Part of me wanted to kiss him. Part of me

wanted to hit him in the throat. Most of me just wanted to go, wanted to leave this all behind, so I did. I left him there dead on the side of the road, dead like me.