

Give me something else

~~We Did This to Him~~

unnecessary and not the best opening line

~~I'll tell this story one more time and then I'm done. I'm through thinking about it.~~

good opening line

The dog had ripped everything to shreds and we'd been evicted. We were homeless and drinking at Travis's parents house while they were out of town, enjoying each other's company, trying to forget. We tried to keep the mood light. Before passing out, Andy, the dog's owner had proposed a series of thought experiments concerning time travel and homosexuality that Eric, Travis and I continued.

Also a good opening line

Okay, okay, Eric said. So, let's say I travel back in time, and I give my fifteen year old self a blowjob. Does that make me gay?

I said no.

Travis said yes, and not just gay, but a pedophile.

✓ good line

Alright, Eric modified. What if I travel back in time and my *eighteen* year old self gives me a blowjob. Am I gay? What about conjoined twins? If my twin fucks a guy but I'm asleep, does that make me gay?

✓ fun

✓
According to Travis, the answer was always gay. I thought it depended on whether you shared a penis. I can't say for sure when or how it turned, but it did. It turned. My friends were not readers; they were naturally gifted. Somehow the gay thought experiment led to questions of agency, responsibility, the problem of evil. Somebody, God knows who, but one of us suggested that we should move beyond theory, and that the only rational, noble course of action for the evening was to kill Andy's dog.

Because it's fucking necessary, Eric said.

~~And we did this to him.~~

Andy slept with the curled up mutt next to him on the couch in the next room. Shopping lists held to the fridge with magnets saw everything. We ate candy from dishes and drank whiskey straight out of the bottle. *old hat*

Eric and Andy had been my boyfriend once, but not Travis. Travis wasn't my type – too wily, high strung, the kind of grown-up boy that eats sugared cereal for dinner, but I still loved him. I loved all of them. There were others, scattered, passed out throughout the house or not there that night, a bunch of twenty something men and me, and we were more than just friends; we were a family, and that's why the three of us decided we had to do this thing for Andy.

What if we just drove her deep into the woods and left her somewhere? I think I must have suggested. Someone had to have brought this up. ✓

Clichéd! Travis said.

Weak, Eric agreed. A pathetic dodging of responsibility.

Those boys, the silly men I spent all my time with, they were all variations on the same person. Eric was a tall, handsome man with a huge intellect, wasted on music trivia, on playing the guitar, and on truly mind-bending RPG strategy. He wore the same socks for weeks and felt incredulous about the lives of others. He believed that nobody was better or worse than anyone else. For example, (he often said) I like to gamble, drink beer, and smoke cigarettes, and well... what do other people do to have a good time?

? Travis agreed that the purpose of life was to hang out and have fun. You could get your foot caught in a trap or fall off your riding animal, as long as it's fun. He had a vault of half-drawn comics, films conceptualized but not produced, and a tattoo of an S shaped snake on his forearm that he often told people stood for Sarah.

That's me. I'm Sarah.

Reconsider
I hope you believe me when I tell you that they were good. The truth is that I thought I was better. I'd been accepted to a big, important school across the country. I was going to leave everything, the land of greasy pizza boxes, beer cans for ashtrays, the sick feeling in the morning that gives way to a dull ache in the afternoon, and I was going to make something of myself. I was wrong. I can see that now. All of us had dreams so precious we kept them to ourselves, and I think we all believed, sadly, that the others amongst us were doomed.

✓ Andy was a little different. He had a gloomy way about him. He hung his head and walked into the room like an apology. We were all drunks, but Andy was somehow worse, a sad clown of a drinker. I felt a personal responsibility to make his life happier, since I'd broken his heart. I was sort of famous for it. I often saw myself walking barefoot over a path of broken hearts, sharp edges like shattered Christmas bulbs. So yeah, sue me, I thought a dog would help.

We lived in a tiny town that felt like a prison, the kind of place where everyone knows everyone, day in, day out, the old familiar grind. Some time earlier, at one of the three bars on Main Street, there sat a stranger with a black puppy sitting on the stool next to him. Imagine a cute animal. I went to her and she put her paws on my shoulders, like a girlfriend aiming to level with me. The man introduced us. She was a girl named Charlie, found abandoned on the street.

She was a good puppy, he said. He wanted to keep her but there were roommate issues. He had a small apartment. He implored me to understand.

It's just that I have so many cats, I said, but in my mind, she was already home and curled up lazily in front of a fireplace that does not, and never existed. I brought the puppy home first and convinced the other roommates second. It would make a perfect birthday present for Andy, I told them. It would make him happy.

What about all the cats? Travis wanted to know. There are three goddamn cats in this house.

Eric corrected him: there are four goddamn cats in this house.

Boys, boys, boys, I said. And the puppy was ours.

But goddamn. Turns out puppies quickly turn into dogs, and after six months of the thing spinning through the place like a top, shit in my old fashioned typewriter, financially crushing vet appointments, pseudo pet psychology, attacking strangers, barking, snarled gums, shivering, and shedding all over everything, it had all added up to the shit-storm that happened that evening, leaving us homeless and drunk in Travis's parents kitchen.

Something else
~~More liquor went down our gullets like water.~~ The plan grew legs and galloped through the living room. For Andy's sake, and yes, for Charlie's too, we were going to undo this awful thing we'd done. She wasn't meant for this world; some animals are just cursed with chaotic brains, not wound up right. If Charlie had thumbs she would pull the trigger herself. We would

take on the guilt of murder for Andy so he could get a nice place and a girlfriend and stop being such a sad sack all the time. Everyone agreed.

I had this ~~nutsy~~ feeling that I was sobering up a dangerous little. We kept drinking. An alcoholic's dream state: you see only what's in front of you, and you think that's the entire world. Methods discussed included: poison, a bullet in the brain, bludgeoning, all rejected.

We're off task, Travis said. Does everybody have a drink? Keep drinking.

The three of us looked at Andy and the sleeping animal and then back at each other.

Eric suggested we take her out back, put her in a sack and throw her in the lake.

I mentioned that it was awful, this thing we were doing. Travis told me to shut the fuck up, and we set out blindly on our task. I don't know what else to say; we just got up and started doing it. We found a sack of potatoes in the garage. We poured it out and dozens of forgotten spuds, overgrown with poisonous spores, were left rolling around the concrete floor.

Une pomme de terre, Travis said, and then he picked one up and took a bite. An apple of the earth. It was unlike him. I wondered where he learned this obscure, pointless French. *- fairly common, is it not?*

It was my job to get the victim on the leash and outside. She was sleepy but thrilled to be woken up, and then all of us were in Travis's back yard, sliding down cold, wet grass towards the water. The lake was a flattened, black tarantula. I swear it had fangs, and still we kept

walking towards it.

*~ you're overdoing it. Pull back.
Have more fun.*

✓
Eric reminded us how awesome our lives would be once this thing was over. He said we were going to get back on track. We would drink less, eat better, and start working out. I for one plan to do a hundred push ups as soon as this bullshit is done with, he said.

Our bottle of ~~Jack~~^{Heaven Hill} was almost gone, so metaphors about optimism versus pessimism were no longer relevant. The night stars twinkled and the full moon ~~shined~~^{looked} down on us approvingly. It seemed right again. I thought of werewolves and new beginnings. I crossed my chest and asked for some kind of moon goddess to forgive us. Charlie dragged her feet and whimpered, and Eric picked her up and threw her inside the boat. It was a rickety aluminum thing, no motor, for fishing presumably. I had on a long skirt that dragged on the earth, gathering leaves and grass, and now it soaked up the murky water stagnant at the bottom of the boat. We made it to the center of the lake before Travis managed to drop one of the oars. Surely oars float, but this one had a mind of its own and drifted away. He kept rowing along with just the one, until we eventually got wise to our trajectory, which was moving in circles.

Charlie whimpered and circled in the opposite direction. She feared the water collecting at her feet and barked at it, tried to murder it with her tongue and then spit it out. She made the boat shake back and forth. It occurred to us then what we were doing, that maybe we should think it through. We wondered how we'd gotten this far.

I said that it was because we were assholes, and we saw in her the things we hated about ourselves.

Travis thought that was insane. He wondered where the whiskey had gone.

We'd left it on the dock.

You mean that dock? The one way the fuck over there?

The moon reflecting off the water made a kind of humiliating daylight and we saw each other's shameful, ridiculous faces. I started crying. The guys hated when I cried, and usually I was good at turning it off. I'd discovered the secret to getting men to love you, and it was so deceptively simple I thought I should write a book: just be like them. Listen to their music. Learn about sports and Dungeons and Dragons. Don't cry. But I couldn't help myself. Charlie whined with me. She raised her head to the heavens and howled at the moon. Then she squatted down and peed in the middle of the boat, and the four of us steeped in murky urine.

Eric re-introduced the plan, and I sobbed no.

Just give me the bag, Travis said. We won't throw her in the lake. We'll just put her inside so she doesn't capsize the damn boat and kill us all.

And then what, I said. We'll have a dog in a sack, and we'll still be in the middle of a lake in a boat with one oar.

Eric said that the crying, hysterical woman had a point.

Travis pulled the sack off my shoulder and put it suddenly over the dog's head in an, aha! Gotcha! Moment. She wore the thing like a ghostly Halloween costume with no eyes cut out. She circled around panicked, got tangled in the string of the bag or something, I don't know how it happened, but it ended with Charlie in the lake, me in the lake after her, and a tipped over boat. Keys, wallets, cell phones; all of us went under.

Drunken people drown in lakes all the time. This is a fact. I held this thought with clenched fists. I told myself to appropriately panic, to take what had just happened seriously. The water was so, so, cold, and somehow thick, like syrup. Sticks and seaweed floated on the surface and my skirt billowed around me. I thought of life flashing before my eyes, and it did, sort of, a stilted half-life in smoke, a lot of down time and missed opportunities. Weak, girly push ups. I clawed madly at the water and resolved to do better. I saw my elementary school playground. A yearbook torn in half at the spine. My father's face.

When I made it to the dock Eric was already standing at the edge, hugging himself, shivering and looking out over the lake. I knocked the empty bottle of whiskey off the side when he pulled me onto the deck. A quick survey showed only half of us had made it to the shore. We screamed and paced and looked out across the water, but it was still so dark. A layer of mist rested on the surface, at ankle's height if you were walking across. Something twinkled on the horizon that could have been splashing, or nothing.

This is the point where my memory betrays me. What happened in those panicked minutes? I've tried to repaint the picture so often the canvas is nothing but a wet, muddled mess. Eventually we climbed up slick grass to the house, shivering. What were we doing? It was the wrong direction. In my memory we crawled on our hands and knees, but there would have been no reason for that. I'm sure we walked. There's always this nagging sensation that we should have stayed longer. Jumped back in the lake. Tried harder. Today I feel it as a persistent sting, like a ~~hangnail~~: *something stranger*

Charlie was waiting for us in the garage, her tongue hanging out and her wet tail wagging obliviously behind her. The torn potato sack hung around her neck like a wreath decorating a

prize-winning horse. She did that thing dogs do with their head ^s when they suspect they've done something wrong but don't know what it is. Are you guys mad at me? The dog seemed to say. She sniffed at a poisonous potato and looked up at us meekly.

Why is Charlie all wet? Andy wanted to know. He was awake, standing in the doorway. She ran to him and he bent down to cradle her in his arms. She whimpered and cried and bit at his face. It was slowly fading into day. We watched an Oldsmobile turning around the corner, its headlights cutting through the morning mist like daggers. It was Travis's parents.

Andy set the dog down. Where's Travis?

I stared down the car's headlights as they turned into the driveway. My mouth tasted blue. Eric ran around the side of the garage and puked in the bushes. I heard car doors open, the ding, ding, ding, of a turn signal left on, and Andy's voice repeating my name: Sarah. Sarah. What happened to Travis?

That was a long time ago. We suffered police reports and funerals, the hushed whisperings of locals; did you hear what happened to that boy out on the lake? It never stops.

The school thing fell apart. ~~None of us really left the garage that morning. Basically, I'm still~~

~~there.~~ Hold this last moment for a little longer. Make it resonate, but not in a cheap, easy way. Make the last line sing.