THREE THINGS: THE GOP'S TRUMPIAN DEATH PANELS [UPDATE-1]

Remember back in 2009 during the health care debates when conservatives and the Republican Party cried about "death panels"?

THREE THINGS: RACIST REDIRECTS AS GOP CLINGS TO ITS BRAND

None of this had to happen. Not a lick of it. It makes the ongoing daily failures even more ridiculous.

THREE THINGS: EVEN MORE FAMILY FUN WITH COVID-19

I figured it would be the oldsters in the family who would be my first worry when it came to COVID-19. I was wrong. This is an open thread.

THREE THINGS: GOOD

(FAMILY) NEWS, BAD (COVID-19) NEWS

Good news: my kid tested positive for strep. Bad news: COVID-19 is still on the march, and we have some Swedish Death Cleaning to do.

THREE THINGS: MORE FAMILY FUN WITH COVID-19

COVID-19 makes family discussions interesting. Challenging, even. I never expected to have to tell one of my kids not to come home.

THREE THINGS: ENDEMIC COVID-19 EDITION

Need some good news? This isn’t it. Brace yourself because it’s going to get worse no matter what the Trump White House wants you to believe.

COVID-19: THE GIFT OF

FAMILY DISCUSSION TOPICS [UPDATE-1]

There’s nothing quite like receiving an email from my father first thing in the morning.

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY



People often wonder about how attraction affects whether an interaction is sexual harassment or not. I have an answer for that, a story from my own life. This is my story, but I’m so damn tired of starring in it. Let’s make it your story this time.

Warning: this piece is scary and disturbing af, and worst of all, true. It is the story of a night-time stalker, and if that’s not for you right now, stop here. No shame in it.

The scene opens with you standing in a small ground floor apartment, West LA, 1992. Grey speckled carpet, layers of matte beige paint. It’s got a couch, a bed, a table, all hand-me-downs. A small kitchen is stocked with pasta, sauce, ramen, and the basics of whatever the

Safeway nearby stocks cheap. You are there, shuffling and floating room to room with your cat, a tabby girl called Speedbump. You are probably worried about how to make rent. You are usually worried about how to make rent. You are a short brown-eyed white girl, born and raised in LA. The apartment is near where you recently didn't graduate from high school, and also not too far from UCLA, where you will never attend college. You are 18, technically an adult. You are two years out of your mom's house, not on good terms. You are few months split with a not very good boyfriend, on better terms, if still not good. You are funny, but often sad, and not very good at socializing. You're also a teenage bag of hormones for anything cute, male or female. You look longingly and lustily at a lot of people, most of whom don't return the look.

To not put too fine a point on it, you're awkward, easy, and damn lonely.

You are living alone in this apartment, which you definitely can't afford, but somehow have a lease on. You are poor, and scared of everything. There's stains on the carpet already, and you know you're not getting more and more of the deposit back. You need that deposit. As a high school drop out in the middle of a recession you're struggling to find work. You're working at Rene Faire and doing bit jobs, but you have no idea if you have any future at all. You are vulnerable. You look vulnerable. You probably smell vulnerable. You have friends, but they're all as broken and crappy as you are. You're the only one with your own apartment, so friends come over. You're not that neighbor, the bad neighbor, you're just not the good neighbor either. Sometimes, the neighbors have to tell you that you're being too loud, and you apologize, mortified. You are easily mortified. There are a couple incidents at the house, and the police are called. People coming around who shouldn't, that kind of thing. One homeless guy starts leaving things on your doorstep, which freaks you out a bit. After a little while, he stops.

A few weeks later, someone else is around. He's not living in your complex, he's starting to just, *be* there. He's around your apartment at night, walking across the parking lot when you are. At first you don't see much of him, just enough to see it's the same guy, always at night. He seems to wear white, but you don't see his face clearly. And then, it's almost every night. He's outside your apartment. He tries the door. Sometimes there's a tap on the wall or window and you turn around and see him running away. You get a shotgun. You call the police a lot. They don't really do or say much, and you get the feeling they don't really care. You can't describe the guy. You know he's this tall, wears a lot of white, fast runner, at least compared to you. (Everyone is a fast runner compared to you.) No one you know. No one you've ever met. The police shrug and wish you luck shooting him. They actually say that, and leave again.

One day you're in your room, and you turn around to see him next to you, inches away, just outside the window. He's looking at you, staring. You can see his face, his upper body. He's gorgeous. He looks 20-ish, clean cut in preppy white clothes, every inch a classic hot UCLA college boy.

Your whole body flushes. You are warm, and your heart is pounding. Fear and shock wash over you, along with the hatred prey feels for the predator.

Without any conscious thought that you can recall, you make a fist and punch at his face. He jumps back. You don't so much hear the glass breaking as remember later there was the sound of glass breaking. You don't remember the feeling of your fist going through the glass. He runs, you turn and run out of your house to chase him, never realizing your hand is streaming blood. His face is etched in your memory. It's beautiful. You hate it. You hate him. He vanishes down the corner into an alley and you lose him. But now, you can do something

you never could before: you can describe him. You call LAPD, again. A friend comes over and bandages up your hand while you wait for the police. You tell him over and over everything you've noticed about this man at your window. You look at the window, and think about the deposit again, but you don't say anything.

The police don't find him, no one ever finds him. But an officer tells you that your description matches a serial rapist who breaks into women's houses at night. All the women he attacks live alone. He breaks in, overpowers them, rapes them, and leaves. LAPD wishes you luck, and leaves.

You feel more disgusted and hateful and fearful than you can describe. You realize that if you'd seen this guy at a party, you'd chat with him without any reservation. You throw up a lot, you stop sleeping. When you do sleep, it's short and fitful and you sleep with the shotgun within hands' reach. A few times you manage to get out of the house fast enough to chase him, but you lose him, you always lose him. Another time, he shows up when you have your friend with you. You see his face in the window and reach down under the bed, grabbing the shotgun. You don't remember what happened next except blind rage. Your friend tells you that you cocked the shotgun screaming and chased him. When your memory picks up again, you're running down a Los Angeles street holding a shotgun. No one stops you, no one gets involved. But your friend, still white in the face, reassures you that guy won't be back after that.

That guy is back within two nights.

He's always well groomed, always attractive, and soft-eyed, when he stares at you through your windows. That he's attractive only makes it worse, so much fucking worse. It's not that you'd let him get close to you if you didn't know what he was, it's that you could imagine a situation where you would want him to. It's like some part of you is betraying you so utterly that the more you hate him, the more you hate

yourself. You hate that you could ever find something like that attractive.

You go to your property rental company and beg them to let you break your lease, explaining that you're in danger. You offer to give them copies of police reports about your stalker. They threaten to sue you. You try to hang on for your year-long lease to end.

After a couple months, you just move to Oregon and stiff them for the last few rent checks. You feel guilty, but not about the lease. You feel guilty that you couldn't do anything, that he'll probably move on to a woman without shotgun and a propensity to chase him screaming. You feel like you're letting other women down by not catching him. You will feel this way for the rest of your life.

You don't like pretty people for a while after that. You don't even like having them for friends. You have, as the saying goes, trust issues. You try to hang on to friendships and relationships, but at the same time, you mostly burn down everything in your life. By the next year, you're homeless.

Eventually, far away from your hometown, and floating from place to place, you start to heal. You start to sleep for more than a couple hours at a time. You start to be willing to kiss people again. But you never felt particularly safe in your homes, and never hung onto them very well after that. You still don't, that part of you was broken, and no amount of crazy glue and clamps will ever make it strong enough to hold your weight again.

Hi, it's me again, the person to whom this happened. Things did get better. I worked hard to get them better. In the course of those years I learned the upside of letting yourself be attracted. When someone attractive seeks consent, you feel like a million bucks. You feel

attractive yourself, and powerful, and wanted, which makes the whole thing fucking magic. “Me? You want me to say yes?” Let’s kiss all night. Let me stare at you, let me say yes, let me hear you whisper yes, let’s see how far two throaty yeses can take us.

But that’s not what happens when someone attractive to you doesn’t want your yes. When an attractive person seeks power, exploits you, makes you feel small and preyed upon, you hate that any part of you can like any part of them. You hate yourself. You hate the idea of attraction. Everything is betraying you at once. It’s like you can never say yes again, like you looked for “yes” and “no” and found them erased from the universe. That’s what the years after this were like for me; freezing, and not finding either yes or no.

There’s a lot of ways to flirt in this world. Some of them look the same as assault, rape, and harassment to the sufficiently distant eye. “How can this be so terrible and that so wonderful, if they look so much alike?” The difference is simple: The partner wants to be with you, and wants you to be with them. The predator not only doesn’t seek your consent, they don’t want it. I couldn’t have given consent to that man. Consent, if it could have happened, would have ruined it for him. Predators don’t want you, they want the end of you. They go out of their way to make it so that you can’t consent, there is never a place where it can be safe to say yes. Because they’re not trying to have sex with you. They’re trying to suck your life up into their ego, and destroy who you are, to make it clear that what you want and what you feel doesn’t matter, doesn’t even exist.

All that matters is seeing you succumb.

I don’t know what happened to that young man. I don’t even know if the story the LAPD told me was true. It took me years to sleep right, to stop looking for danger everywhere, even when I was next to a loving partner. Maybe, if I’m honest, I haven’t completely stopped. It took me

the better part of a decade to trust anyone, and not to destroy my relationships with friends and lovers. It took me longer to know it was ok to trust myself. Like feeling safe at home, I don't know if I will ever rest entirely comfortably on finding a stranger attractive again.

If the person trying to rape you looks like a movie star to you, it *can* be different. It can be worse.

My work for Emptywheel is supported by my wonderful patrons on Patreon. You can find out more, and support my work, at Patreon.

SOFTWARE IS A LONG CON

Computer systems are poorly built, badly maintained, and often locked in a maze of vendor contracts and outdated spaghetti code that amounts to a death spiral. This is true of nothing else we buy.

WITH CLOWNS TO THE LEFT, AND JOKERS ON THE RIGHT, TRUMP TURNS TO SCARAMUCCI

Well, I don't know why I came here tonight
I got the feeling that something ain't right….