



kind stranger

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Prelude II

It is probably, all things considered, not the best time to begin writing a book. But then, when *is* a good time? There is no time that is better or worse. Even in the throes of war, people have opened up their notebooks to observe the world surrounding them to distill into poetry. There is not much in the way of war going on at the moment - at least, none that directly affects me - there are plenty of conflicts still raging as I sit here and write this. Perhaps now is not the best time to start writing a book because I could go out and campaign for those issues. Perhaps I should take a sort of meta-sabbatical and begin a protest of my very own.

I would like to be able to provide some lovely antithesis, I would have loved to have been able to start this paragraph with a 'but', but my old English teacher would have disapproved. Not only that, but I have no 'but'. There isn't any reason, any real reason, any true, empirical reason why I don't just go out there and start hollering in the name of some foreign, oppressed people. But then, I might have to go and do my research, lest I end up looking like a fool. There is always the feeling that no matter how well-researched your shouting might be, there will always be people who tell you to shut up, because you're making a fool of yourself. It is of no value to go out into the street and proclaim that 'two plus two equals four'. Unless the streets are somehow full of toddlers who need to be taught the basics of mathematics, that is. Even then, you're probably more likely to scare them.

But what, then, is there to be said? If falsehoods are able to be dismissed for their falseness, and truths be dismissed for their obviousness, then what? Then we realise that the world can't be broken down into cases where everything that is one thing is necessarily another thing. There can be meaningful falsehoods. There can be pointless truths. Life isn't a tautology. This is the story of a man who comes to terms with none of these ideas because he's too busy playing World of Warcraft. Or a more recent game. I'm not sure, I haven't seen him come out his room in months.

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Café

“Sometimes he sits at his desk for hours at a time.” Something about how she says the word ‘hours’ implies something much longer. She’s horrified at the towering food containers. She remarks about how she’s afraid they’ll fall on him while he’s sleeping and crush him. Her description of the snot-encrusted bedroom is so visceral you swear you can almost touch it. Seemingly innocuous words like ‘tissue’ and ‘sock’ are soaked with an objectionable stickiness. The images stick in your mind. They portray a man, far beyond human interaction, a caricature you’ve only previously seen between walls of impact font, a cautionary tale against basement dwelling. Somehow, the image is not entirely dark. There is a sort of relief when all there is in a basement is dark, it’s how basements are. This one can be seen through the yellow-stained light of a camera, one with an image date in the bottom right hand corner. This is no dark basement. Lighting emanates from almost everything which people - normal people, at least - would not consider a light source. The noises are coming through now, a distinct whirring sound, the arthritic click of a mouse.

“Sometimes it’s even longer than that.” There it is, the reluctant admittance. “I just wonder what I can do to help him.” She’s telling the truth, there’s no doubt about it. At least that’s what you think. Regardless of the actual truthfulness, the sentiment is still there. There aren’t any tears, though the eyes and the area surrounding them seems to indicate there have been in the past.

There aren’t many things which cause this sort of overwhelming disappointment for someone, perhaps it was her fault, putting all expectation for future gain on her son. It’s not as if she put pressure on him in a tangible way, there was no routine, he wasn’t extradited to a music school or to some exam factory. You think about asking her about how he used to be, but then the moment passes. You sort of know how things got how they did - she’s on to talking about another subject now. You think that maybe this change of subject is going to lead to some more pleasant conversation, but the topic slowly gravitates towards her personal issues. They’re there, constantly, hanging over the cafe table, waiting to interject by puppeteering the poor woman. She slumps forward, her arms caught in the strings, wearily following her. It is their turn again, the demons, parasites -

whatever you want to call them - have got their wretched hands on those wooden crosses again. You can tell even when they have to go and torment some other poor soul they leave their mark. The wires are so thin, they get tangled up, even those parasites have no precise control over her. This merely exacerbates her behaviour, full-body jerks accompany every layers-deep tale of her own life, the strings tear and snap, springing back. Even in freedom, she is hurt. Besides, tonight, she'll have to go back home, and when she sleeps, she'll become a marionette again. But right now, she's more interested in flagging down one of the waitresses to get the bill. She'll pay, you think nothing of it because she always pays. She always does, out of either the goodness of her heart or some undisturbed, deep-seated psychological issue. Since it saves you money and not talking about it keeps her happy, it seems fine to continue on the quiet path. She goes up to the counter to pay, as if she doesn't want you to know that she's going out of her way to do this. She's taken - for whatever reason - only her card up to the counter. She scans it. It rejects. She has a look on her face quite unnerved by this. She goes to check her shoulder to get her purse, but it's on her chair, back at the table. You wonder whether she has enough money on her card.

"Oh, sorry," the man behind the counter says. "Sometimes we have... issues with the connection." he continues, with an indiscernibly mixed European accent. As he turns around to signal to his co-worker, his ponytail sticks out of the back of his cap. You wonder how long it took to sort that out. His co-worker holds the card machine up.

"If you can just try again," she starts, but then as she reaches into her pockets, she switches tone. "We don't take cash." If there was sign that said that, she would likely have pointed to it.

The man behind the counter speaks up again. "Here you are."

He presents the card reader. He, like everyone else who uses these things, assumes the reason for the error is that of a connection problem - there's never any issues with money. For most people, this is the case, the 'damned thing' or the 'bleeding new device' is lambasted for its inability to perform the one thing it was intended to do. Sometimes the printer tape is out, as well. At least they doesn't make a truly horrendous sound any more, you think. The woman behind the counter tears the rejection printout off and throws it away in a rehearsed motion. You assume that if there is a bin behind the counter, the crumpled paper ball has definitely gone in.

You wonder whether your friend - if you can call her a friend - does actually have enough money. You shuffle your chair back as she readies her card again. Are the two connected? The floors are hard wood, and the chair legs are not made of the smoothest material, so perhaps the resulting squeak caused her to want to pay more urgently. Maybe she's going to say that she shouldn't have to pay if the card reader doesn't work. But that's not her. Indignant behaviour was never her thing.

She scans her card again, and the payment is collected. You collect her bag and take it over to her, and she thanks you, and you both part outside the cafe, or at least you would have if you had had to go in different directions. Living locally, you know which bus she will have to take to get home, so you wait for her bus, even though your one has passed. She waits for her bus as well, and gets on, and you happily say goodbye after what you think was a strange, but all too common card-payment problem.

Then she asks you if she can use your card to get on the bus. The driver notices this, and says that she can't. You'd like to help, but she's made up her mind - the driver doesn't take cash either. She walks home. And you know it's a pretty long walk.

Home

“Honey, I’m back,” she says, not knowing whether she’s referring to her boyfriend or her son. This sort of linguistic ambiguity is pervasive throughout their shared existence, as ideals of father, son, housekeeper and breadwinner merge into one. Who looks after who if everyone is fed by the microwave? That poor device has seen a thousand single-serving meals put into it, each fork plunged into the cellophane potentially a symbol for the irredeemable hatred of an unknown, external force. Its beeps are weary, so any user wishing to sneak out into the pantry to warm up some frozen and re-refried tin of whatever doesn’t have to worry about the existential threat of having their presence detected when the timer goes off. All of them have experienced this far too many times. Too many for their own good. Next to the microwave is a toaster, which has long since gone unused, all bread products are warmed in other ways, or eaten raw out of a hastily-opened stretched plastic packet. The letters on the nutritional information section are warped and twisted, almost as if they are in a Dali.

“I’m back. Hello?” she asks, once more, not expecting a response, but hoping for one. Hope is one of the worst things to have when you’re trying to talk to someone, the anguish she now feels - are they not hearing her, or are they just ignoring her? If they are ignoring her, then is it of their own volition, or are they engaged in their own tasks? Knowing what both of the boys in the household are like - she refers to them as ‘boys’ sometimes, but only to herself - they’re probably both each off in their own worlds. All she can do to try and ingratiate herself in one of these alien dimensions is open the door. Even then, she can’t bring herself to enjoy Call of Duty or the latest rugby match. Posters have slumped to the floor on the wall opposite the door, and the blu-tack obsessive in her wants to go right over there and fix it up immediately. But then, the speck of dust in the eye vanishes amongst the hoarded masses of figurines and newspapers, taken from the past and forcefully transplanted into the future, going against the natural life cycle of thin, inky paper. She thinks these newspapers are for throwing away, not for keeping for the future. Perhaps, she is often told, they are an investment. But since they occupy so much of the spare room, and there’s no room for a bed any more amongst some of

the other clutter, she wonders if newspapers can pay rent. In that moment, she wishes that the poster was the only thing she has to fix, and he's not even noticed her, sticking her head in to the yellow-lit room. There is a smell, too, and it is there, and it is not going away, no matter how many visits she makes to the room during his college hours. If her son is away, it merely means he will come back with something even worse-smelling to replace the equally noxious odour of cleaning product.

To him, the smell of the cleaning product is a break in the flow, a trip hazard for the senses. Instead of focusing on whatever he wants to do, he's having to use some of his brain power to determine the source of this strange miasma. There is the faint smell of vomit - or at the least, the smell that they use to remove vomit. Visits to the bathroom at his senior school taught his subconscious that link, and now, there is no escaping the link between the two. Two roughly opposite ends of the smell spectrum are linked together, folding the continuum into a wholly unnatural tube, like the mixing of red and blue light to make magenta. Yet, he does not know that there is nothing inherent about the smell he smells. The smell is meant to induce psychological reactions in the recipient. Yet here, a quasi-Pavlovian response is discernible, the vague smell of the bathroom and the putrid smell of vomit. She closes the door, after breathing out, almost wanting to keep as much of the foulness in there as possible. It is true she'd love to help, but there's just so much in there. The house would be full of things that he would refuse to throw away. Eventually, it would all come crashing back in there, but instead of being ordered like it is now, it would be in chaos. Manga piled on comics. DVDs and CDs replaced, swapped over, forgotten in the ever-changing sea of plastic cases. Hundreds are homeless, without hard covers to protect them from the real world, full of scratchy objects and curious cats and dogs. Not that their dog would be brave enough to walk in there.

She goes to sit in the kitchen for a while, there is a TV which is no in use there, she can retaliate against the creation of the other personal bubbles by creating her very own. This is not an obstinate response, this is not something that she is doing on purpose. It is the only way she knows how. It is the only way she, and the other two, are used to doing this. He's been home all day. His stepfather has, too. They exchanged a quiet 'good afternoon' in the kitchen after her son had got up to get breakfast. The quietness wasn't usual. 'Good afternoon' is usually said with a sort of sarcastic tone. But not today. But not for any

real reason. They just didn't decide to imbue it with the same sort of sarcasm. Who knows why?

The kettle boils, it is the only other appliance in the kitchen (apart from the fridge and the microwave) which gets used at all. It emits a little whine, the steam billows out, the tea is ready. She has to wait a while after making it. She's subtly happy she doesn't like coffee like the others. The instant coffee is awful, and somewhere, she's happy with the neatness of it all. The teabag is a wonderfully repeatable device. You can see one, a hundred, but they're all just as nothing-y as the last. Circular, square, with a little tag or a handle, the pyramidal ones, whatever floats your boat - or your leaves. The milk. The pleasing colour gradient, every colour of tea that has been made well is good. All the way from the rich, near-black to the milky. Yet, it never tastes that different. One day, she thinks she's going to try it without milk and then with lots, just to see how they compare. It's written on a post-it note, somewhere in the back of her mind. The notes are layers thick, the ones on the outer layer have already been forgotten, and the ones below have faded, they have congealed to the wall. If someone were to try and strip it away, they would likely give up after the first few feet.

It's almost cool enough to drink now. The water temperature for black tea should be from about 90° to 98°, depending on the type. One of the post-it notes was removed from the ever-increasing wall when she decided to ask a friend for some tips on how to make tea better - not knowing that within her means, she has already achieved perfection. But the website that she was linked to had brewing and cooling information for things like Ceylon and Oolong, not Yorkshire. Back went the post-it, once more with its unlucky brethren, and hopelessly lost. It might even lose its stickiness and fall to the floor, as they so often do. Of course, it might take a few years to fall to the floor as it is shuffled around in a sea of them, another foot deep. Whenever she walks in to put another one down, she lifts her legs up, like she's wading through water.

It's gone cold now - the tea, that is, and the dregs are ready to be thrown into the sink where they will meet the piles of plates which have yet to be done. The washing machine is full, but it hasn't worked in quite a long time. Mere storage for sullied bowls. No one sees it as that, it's just how they're used to seeing things. Cereal in mugs. Instant ramen in metal preparation containers. A living, breathing carousel of liquids and soups, switching from unintended container to unintended container. Of course, there is always the question to be asked, what is

an intended container? If a Sports Direct mug has the correct dimensions to accommodate a Pot Noodle, then why not use it? The handle is somewhat ergonomic, you could argue - but you don't because no one eats ramen out of a mug they got with a purchase of a pair of football boots in Year 6. Of course, no one does. No one wants to admit they do, at least. It seems to be a bit of student life making its way into a family dynamic that hasn't had those experiences, the shoestring budget tied to a well-off family purse, the dichotomy of going to one of the most expensive educational institutions in the world and leaving the heating off to save money. But that would be alright, in a sense, people just starting their twenties aren't going to freeze to death if the boiler remains off, and can generally deal with lukewarm showers. But the equation changes when it's a home that is lived in with the intent of being there forever. It changes the tone. There is always the issue of aftertaste, as well, dish soap seeping into weak stew, tea dregs bubbling to the surface of a mug of chicken soup. Things like these would make anyone else stand up and take notice, but if these people were to do that, their legs and eyes would become tired very quickly. Nothing to stand up and take notice from. It's all pretty much the same, the grout goes black, the tiles slowly follow suit as weeks pass without showers. There's always a smell which lingers.

It's dinner now, surprisingly enough. It's not late enough in the year to be dark, but it's been overcast since she got home, and perhaps she's glad it is, too. Grey skies outside don't wear you down if you're sitting comfortably around the living room table, watching a game show yet again. Grey skies outside don't wear you down if you knew you weren't going to be outside, too.

A plastic football crashes against the thin wood fence, and it shakes. It's not going to fall over, and if it does, the boys responsible will just hatch a plan to pull it back up. Some of the panels are loose, they shift about in the wind, letting cats pass through, but not dogs, a sort of larger-than-life cell membrane, responsible for the deterioration of the end of the garden. There is a shed down there, and that's about all they know. A lone bush has encroached on several properties at once, unaware.

Is it dinner? Things have been quiet since she said it was.

Dinner One

It's dinner now, and there is an agreement amongst the three people sitting there that this is, in fact, dinner. A time where they can sit around a round table, almost cramped up against one another, leaving space for a fourth occupant, the TV. It's not right against the table, but it feels like it might as well be. Paper-thin, smart, compatible, says the box - presumably still in the house somewhere. But for what? With what? The bottom of the screen is faintly green. There's a receipt for the TV in the box, but the warranty has expired. Plus, half of them end up like that anyway. It might be cheaper to buy a new one and roll this one up like an old, stained carpet. You can't clean burn-in.

They keep sitting there, watching something. It doesn't matter what that something is, it's something with people moving around. Jeopardy, hatred, malice, all bubbling under the stretched and altered faces of hosts and contestants, weary to have their chances at winning a temporary escape from their life dangled in front of them, facts like ghostly carrots suspended from-

A spoon clinks against the side of the bowl - not, this time a mug - and this signals the end of the official 'dinner'. Everything else is now extra time, a tense connection between the diner and the chair. Can he get up? Not if the others are looking at him. But also not if the diners are looking at the TV. They'll see his movement and think he's trying to sneak out without permission. But no permission is ever given or received. It's a wordless game, dinner here. Are you allowed to leave once you're done, or do you have to wait until everyone else is? This is no restaurant, there is no bill to be paid or waiters to wait for. There is nothing tying anyone to any of these chairs - not physically.

Even if permission was, somehow, to be gained, then it would not be a wholly positive one. Permitting someone to do something they shouldn't do to test whether or not they would do it unprompted is a good test of character. But in this case, it's been like this hundreds of times before. There is no 'test of character', unless their family is some sort of social experiment. I think that all the experimental data you could have wanted about family psychology could have come from a single, knowing look shared between the three of them. There is an unofficial sign language between them. None of them explicitly acknowledge it, none of them would be able to recite or explain the

rules behind their interactions. It's like rules in English that everyone unconsciously uses but no-one knows. Phonetic reduplication. Adjective ordering. Pop linguistics terms that are sure to catch out anyone trying to teach English to somebody who doesn't speak it.

Permission still has not been acquired, but someone has gotten up. There doesn't seem to be a reason thus far, the time for justification ends as the man walks out of the room, but he keeps walking, he doesn't sit down on the sofa. The TV is still on, some of the contestants are close to winning. The familiar sound of the toilet door closing and locking is heard, retroactively putting in a justification. Do you have to tell people you're going to the bathroom if you're still eating? Is it bad manners to just not say anything? These are not the questions that they are thinking about. Instead, burning bright in her mind is one thing. "Are you alright?"

"What?" he responds, not understanding the sentiment behind the statement, responding as if it were a random question asked by a passer-by on the street.

"Are you alright? You know..." She has seen a few adverts on television that talk about mental health, but there isn't anything substantiative to them, there are no plasters to buy, nothing that can be purchased to fix any problems she might have already, unconsciously diagnosed him with. "Mentally." That's the best word she can muster. Through her internet travels, she has figured out that there is a whole list of these symptoms, and their effects, and their super-symptoms that they coalesce into, these big-label terms like "chronic depression" made up of a hundred and fifty smaller terms, which, to the untrained and scared eye, all apply to all of her loved ones.

The word 'mental' has negative connotations for both of them. 'Are you mental' has been a multi-generational term, thrown around in both traffic jams and schoolyards. He sees that she has asked if he is 'mentally' okay. Does this mean that she thinks he is mentally not ok? There is an air of assumption on both halves, and neither wants to be labelled as 'mental'. Can you be 'mental' yourself for assuming someone else is 'mental'? Probably. But this isn't one of those cases.

"I don't mean it like that," she continues, less than a second after. "What do you mean it like, then?" He starts back.

"I just wanted to know if you felt okay. With how things are going at the minute. For you." The implication of 'at the minute' makes him feel uneasy, things aren't any worse or better than normal, he's okay in this situation - but this triplet of sentences makes him consider

everything that everything that is not good right now. Perhaps she is alluding to news that could make him feel worse. The world is okay, but, for him, being asked if you're okay when you feel very mildly okay is just going to demonstrate to him how not perfectly okay he is. He's an okay level of okay.

"I'm fine, mum." The word 'fine' is a very bad word to use in this situation, at least in her eyes. 'Fine' is a word that people use when things are anything but, in fact, it happens so often that the implications of the word fine, coupled with the often dry and defensive way it is said, often overtake the literal meaning of the word. An example of how words are defined by use, and not by meaning. At least, when it comes to speaking. It's used in front of 'dining' and 'china', but never in this way. Never to mean that the china is 'just fine'.

"Oh, that's good." she says, seeing through some of the added meaning of the word fine, not knowing whether he means it as a way to cut the conversation short, or as a genuine means of saying everything is fine. Perhaps the very nature of these conversations stains the meaning of the word 'fine', because when he gets around to saying it, he realises that the conversation they are having isn't going to be a pleasant one. If he says anything more than 'fine', he might have to confront the things that aren't. And putting more emotional effort into giving a more positive response can't happen either, he's too tired for that. Plus, his words would take on a snarky undertone - someone who is known for their lethargy coming out and saying "Oh yes, I'm having a great day!" would probably set off alarm bells in the minds of the listeners.

"Okay." In this way, words like 'fine' are traps. Any more or any less requires further elaboration, and the more you use the word to get out of having to explain things, the harder it becomes for you to change your tune and have it be taken seriously. If he won the lottery tomorrow, being excited about holding the winning slip of paper would be dampened by his overuse of the word 'fine'. Plus, he's read that lots of lottery winners blow all of their money, or are hounded by their relatives and friends, or just murdered. Does he have any relatives that are likely to murder him? He's not thinking about that right now. That comes later.

"Have you finished?" Any sentiment of urgency is removed from this line. She means it, truly and honestly - and that goes through to him successfully. The conversation has been changed to that of a present and situational conversation, one that refers to the moment

that it takes place in, and deals with practical things. In this case, she is building up two the second part of her two-part routine. Waiting for the setup, she moves her spoon from the table to inside her bowl.

“Yes.”

Here comes the punchline. “Could you take the plates up?” It’s almost amusing, now that she thinks about it. He thinks of it as a punishment for saying that things are just ‘fine’. Would she have asked him to do this if he had elaborated? Probably not, she wouldn’t condemn a sad individual to a scraping dregs of soup into the bin and putting the cold and slimy bowls into the washing machine. But if he had said how he felt good, then maybe she wouldn’t want to dampen his spirits. Thinking about it more would probably give him an idea of how to best manipulate her into not making him take up the bowls, but then he might not be able to say anything convincingly. Plus, if he says he’s really good, then she might expect him to clear up.

“Okay.” He has lost today, and will do a hundred times in the future. But it’s alright. The mild disappointment will be washed away in the washing machine, and things go back to how they were. ‘Fine’ is still a word that can be used, but its repeated uses tarnish it, the lustre and connotations of ‘fine dining’ are muddied by the millions of uses by people who don’t really mean anything when they say it. But that’s alright.

After loading the bowls and cutlery into the half-full dishwasher, cautious to not tip over the top rack where the dreg stained mugs lie, he goes back to his room. The stepfather is back in his room, too, having failed to fulfil his promise to come back to the dining room after hearing the opening of the dishwasher. *That* signals the end of dinner, to him at least.

Office

“I just don’t know what to do.” she says, to a co-worker who has known her for several years at this point. She’s distant enough to her that their emotional outlets don’t have to be reciprocated. They’re at arms’ length, like a disinterested counsellor. But she’s not disinterested, she just finding it hard to listen when the story is always the same. And maybe, that’s another aspect to it. When some people complain about the things in their life, they change their story, they edit bits and swoop back and forth between colourful and conflicting lies. But this is a grey constant. She continues talking about her son, and how her boyfriend is not being particularly nice right now. She refers to him as her ‘boyfriend’ rather than someone who she willingly entered a marriage with.

the idea is that this man is a victim of circumstance, and eventually dies alone when he receives a gold award
bad events in his life are met with fame and reward online
he posts about his suicide and he gets gold and dies

he lives alone with his mother, who has a relationship that is obviously not great
you are one of the mother's friends
she's stuck to both of them out of different kinds of obligation, maternal for her son, monetary and physically for her partner

PLOT:

mother sees a therapist to see if he can be fixed
the therapist says yes and attempts to speak to the son, who responds to nothing meaningfully
the stepfather is increasingly annoyed at the spending of their limited money on a therapist for him
he eventually gets tired of him and kicks him out of the house, where he drifts for a while, seeing other people, getting better, showing us little vignettes of how his life was and now is (used to be into metal with his friends, etc...)
he stays with you and in that time you see him manifest into someone different
he comes back and old habits begin to kick in again
his job goes from good to bad as bad things seem to happen to him
bad events in his life are met with fame and reward online, and exacerbated by his parental conflict
annoyed, he attempts to leave, but his real friends can't be bothered with him
his job gets worse and eventually, he changes his goals to that of internet fame
eventually, he gets more and more desperate, things that he posts about online seem to manifest in the real world, he makes situations worse in order to gain self-sympathy and distances himself from his mother who wants to love him
his mother takes her anger of his dismissal out on the stepfather
she has to choose towards the end and she chooses her son, oblivious to how his life is getting worse as she tries to fix it

she leaves for some reason - she's going to sell some of his unused possessions to get some money - she's done her research and cares about this and is sad to see it go
during her absence he posts about his suicide and he gets gold and dies

chapters:

Dinner - the three have dinner, child is left, man is right, woman is central, they talk quietly at first and then watch tipping point. a question about therapy comes up. after being quiet for a long time, when the guy goes to the bathroom, she has a talk with her son, who says no to therapy.

Office - talks to therapist, who is you! holy shizzles! you have a dilemma because you know she doesn't have the money but do they really need it? you agree to go and see the son, who you've known since he was smaller.

Dinner Two - son mentions therapy, guy is annoyed that they're wasting their money, mother says that she's getting it from her friend, guy calls her friend a liar or something idk

Therapy - son goes to therapy, and then we follow him home, where his father has gotten annoyed at the waste of money, and when the son says he doesn't like it, the father says 'why did you waste this money on him?'

Outside - the guy kicks the son out of his house, and he goes to the therapist's office and says he'd like to stay with her a while. he's warmed up to the idea.

Dinner Three - he's a changing person, away from this system, he's getting better. and hopefully i might be able to convey that. he talks to you and gets in contact with some of his old friends, and reluctantly agrees to go running with you in the morning.

Bed - parents argue over what they should do for a while. clearly not interested in his advances, but he doesn't seem to care

Dinner Twenty-Four - it's been three weeks and the relationship between you and the guy is changing. he seems more outgoing and nice, and you get a call from his parents. they'd like him home, and he reluctantly goes, but you've given him a phone he can use. it's not like they're going to take his stuff away, though.

Online - he has a chat with two of his friends online, and they have a good time.

Dinner Thirty-One - another week, and another argument

Online - he talks politics with his friends, and they get all pissy about it, and one goes away. the other slinks off. he makes a few posts on the internet about feeling lonely and gets lots of responses.

Dinner Thirty-Two - his life keeps getting worse, his parents have started throwing things at each other

Offline - he leaves, and goes back to your house, rain soaked, looking like something out of a film.

Online - posting from his phone about how his parents are bad, but he has no real evidence, and his mum wants him back. she comes to pick him up.

Dinner Thirty-Four - things seem alright, but then they just aren't. the father leaves, and the mother is sobbing, they won't be able to pay anything, and then she tries to get into the things he likes so she might be able to sell some of it.

Online - he posts about selling some things, and about trying to be a better person

Dinner Thirty-Five - she decides to leave, to go and sell some of his stuff, after they are visited by a bailiff in the middle of dinner

Online - during her absence he posts about his suicide and he gets gold and dies

Café - a year later, you and the woman are in the cafe again. her card works first try. you notice it's not hers.

yo this is a cool lil story about how i am a famous writer

so me and my mum are out shopping for a christmas present for my dad and we come across none other than Teehan Page - wow, i know, right - so him and his wife are there, and so in this hall there are four other people other than everyone who i've... mentioned so far. so he speaks to me about writing his review for ducc, and that's cool and all. we depart, and that was just real cool tbh.

so basically my mum says that she didn't know who he was if he didn't say who he was - she thought that mr page mistook me for someone more famous (ie. any amount of famous) than me. so then i think - no, i'm a famous writer bro don't kick me down. so *then* i think about how there are eight people in this hall, and at least four of them have heard of Ducc. so that means that half of the people in the hall know about my book, and by using simple mathematics, this means that half of the people on planet earth (on average) know about Ducc. now, i don't know about you, but that means that like 4 billion people know about ducc, which is more than... christianity, maybe. well so that means that ducc is more important than christianity. or islam. i don't know. well it also means that there's about 1 billion authors of ducc in this world. extrapolation is pretty coool.