

The following excerpt is from a novella currently in final draft stages:

The mountain roads were bleak and lonely in those wee hours of the morning. The sun crested up in front of him- near blinding - and combined with his exhaustion, it created a massive headache that hit him around 5 am just outside Wheeler Junction.

The town he stopped at was picturesque, a resort of some sort if all the tourist traps were any indication. Asher pulled into a lonely truck stop and parked as out of the way as possible. When he removed his hands from the wheel, they throbbed in a red-tinged ache. It may have been the only thing keeping him awake at the moment; the backseat of his truck was as good a place as any to sleep, even if it would be cramped.

He was half asleep when his cell phone rang. Asher bucked awake, the action pitched his phone under the passenger seat of his car. He knew who it was, and his empty stomach twisted in a way that made him nauseous. The phone was half a ring away from voicemail when he finally answered. "Hello."

"What is going on!?" His father. In the distance, Asher could hear the sound of the freeway outside his house. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened, Dad. I just.... I can't be normal. I -"

"Did anyone do anything to you as a child?"

"What? No! No, Dad."

"I knew your mother teaching you to cook was a problem."

"Dad, that's ridiculous." It would have been laughable if his father wasn't stone-serious. "This has nothing to do with Mom or anyone else but me." Asher had to make that clear. He suddenly remembered how he'd lashed out at a stranger and was, for the first time in his life, worried for his mother. "Please, trust me."

"How can I trust you?!" His dad's barely controlled anger made Asher flinch.

"You raised me!"

"I raised a thief then?"

"What?! I'm no thief. Everything I took with me was mine."

"You broke into my lockbox, Asher. You broke into my property."

"Your property? My things were in it!" The issue had never bothered Asher before. It was for safekeeping and a rule in his parent's household. This line of questioning, however, stung. "I didn't want to involve you guys, so I left!"

"You didn't touch the boys, did you?"

Asher was first stunned into silence. His breath hitched up in his throat, and the back of his eyes stung. Anger at the suggestion that he'd hurt his own brothers kept him from crying. Instead, he barked out the only word he could think of. "What?!" Asher leaned forward in his seat and gripped the front armrest. "Why would you even think to ask me that? I'm your son!"

"Not anymore, you aren't."

Silence once again stretched out between himself and the phone. "...dad?"

"Don't call here unless you're willing to get yourself fixed." Then nothing. His father hung up. In the back of Asher's mind, Mason's words echoed in his head. "Once you're a faggot, you're dead to your family." Slowly, Asher pulled the phone away from his ear and looked at it. When he realized he had been holding his breath, he dropped the phone with a ragged gasped for air.

Even if you kill yourself trying to be otherwise.