

I'm in an apartment in Allston, Boston right now and I need to come out and tell the truth.

My parents are chasing me down right now as I speak.

I spent the last month living alone. First, in Burlington, Vermont, where I stayed with a group of teenagers about the same age as me working for a nonprofit called [Hack Club](#) that helps people run coding clubs. I stayed there for about two weeks.

This summer, I got into a program at MIT, so I decided to find an apartment to stay in for around four weeks in Boston.

I was walking home from the Charles River this afternoon and I realized something: these 1.5 months that I've been living alone have been the happiest of my life, even though I've been skating by on little to no money (all the money that was on my paycheck went to paying for the rent and a couple of groceries, as well as transportation for the last two weeks) and living in a relatively cramped space.

Specifically, I thought: I haven't cried in such a long time.

I didn't realize my parents were 1) emotionally abusive towards me and 2) emotionally and mentally dragging me down until I had a chance to live on my own and realize that it doesn't have to be like how it used to be. I don't have to cry every two weeks because I'm compared to other people and told that I'm worthless. I don't have to deal with pressure and responsibilities put on me by people who do the former to me.

And I realized: I want to live alone starting now. I don't want to go back to the emotionally abusive household I was to live in, *because we are all tied by blood*, because of my filial piety, because of all these reasons that were imprinted into my brain as soon as I came to America.

I was born in Manhattan, NY on December 8, 2006. I was to be sent to China until I came back to Brooklyn, NY in the summer of 2010.

I still remember vividly to this day some things that happened that summer before I went to kindergarten.

One, I remember being taught how to shower. As in: I was locked in the bathroom for forty minutes, not allowed to come out until no soap existed on my scalp.

Two, I remember being taught how to read the alphabet. We got these cards with *A, B, C* on them and taped them to the wall. I tried so many times to get them right. *A* stands for apple, *B* stands for banana, *C* stands for cat. I had my hands tied behind my back with a jump rope that I normally took to the park. This was so I couldn't cover my ass when I was hit with a hangar.

Three, I remember going to Coney Island for the first time in my life. I had a photo taken of me. In it, Voldemort has her arms wrapped around me, and I'm wearing a dress and smiling with perfect teeth. The last time I looked at that picture, the only thing I could think was, *Objectively, I think she looks so innocent and sweet and childish and definitely oh so naive.*

Four, I remember being given a hundred dollar bill. Leave it up to a five year old to buy donuts with the only money she was given. I was hit with a hangar, Voldemort's favorite weapon of choice. At least they were plastic.

I don't remember too much about being six. We moved to a new apartment, that is to say, room, down the street, where the three of us were crammed into one room. My father came home once every week, so occasionally there would be four of us in one room.

Actually, one particular incident stands out to me. I had a lot of accidents that year. As in, I peed in class because I was too shy to raise my hands. I pooped in my pants at home because I was too shy to knock on the door of the bathroom while Voldemort was in there. I was hit with, you guessed it, a hangar! Fifty points for you.

My sister came to America that year.

In second grade, Voldemort became pregnant with my brother, Andy halfway through the second grade school year, around December/January.

The first incident of 2013 (I think?) was when me and my sister got these candy flashlights. They're in every Asian store: rock candy encased in a plastic case that also serves as a flashlight. It was our Christmas gift and we were so excited, because every time we went to the supermarket we'd touch and poke these because they were oh so cool. So of course, we fought each other over whose were cooler. I told my sister that obviously mine's were cooler, it was literally blue. She told me that pink was obviously cooler. Our fight escalated the way you might expect a fight between two kids to escalate: a yelling match over everything and anything. Well, my bed's bigger than yours. Well, my bed's on the top bunk, so I actually have a window to see out of this stupid basement apartment. Well, I'm better than you at this. Well, look, my flashlight can project this and that. Voldemort came in and screamed at us. Threw the flashlights on the ground, cracking the candy in half before throwing it in the trash.

We sat through lunch sullen, tears not yet fully dried on our faces. She took the metal bowl in the middle of the table and threw it to the gorund. I think it was the first time I ever saw an act of violence perpetrated by an adult on an inanimate object, the rice on the floor like some sort of murder scene. I loved reading mystery books at the time: *Nate the Great*, and I was just getting into *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*, and occasionally a more harder book like *47 Clues*.

I remember that year, I had scars from my legs kneed down from where Voldemort had hit me when I had managed to cover my back and ass. Right afterward, she got a Tiger balm in alcohol, because East Asians believe that they can make bruises disappear. We rubbed my round ellipse shaped scars for an half-hour, watching them get darker and darker. She told me to lie: I fell while playing tag. Jump rope.

I grew a lot during second grade. In fact, I was proud that I was last in line and taller than all the boys. Voldemort didn't have any time to get me new leggings - she was throwing up everyday and I was supposed to feel guilt - and so I walked into class one day wearing leggings that were a bit too short for me.

My second grade teacher, Mrs. Tafuri, asked me: *where did you get those bruises?* It was the first time in my life, as far as I can remember, that I felt shame, my cheeks burning. I started crying in front of the class, and she took me out into the hallway, coaxing me, *It's okay, you can tell me. Did someone do this to you?* She sent me to the nurse's office in the hall right in front of the classroom. The nurse took one look and called the principal.

And I remember what happened afterwards. The principal had Voldemort come in during my lunch break. His name was Mr. Wu, and I was called during a rainy lunch. This meant that we were in the auditorium, rewatching Finding Nemo for what had to be the 50th time. All was good, until my gym teacher Ms. C came in and asked to see me. I thought all the kids were looking at me in the light of the projector. At least the ones next to me were. I knew what this was about because for the last few days Voldemort had been giving me the stony face and berating me about how *fucking stupid* I was, a *dumb bitch* for wearing those leggings. That is was all my fault she was going to get arrested, this family was going to be broken. Who are your brother and sister going to have? By then, I knew about adoptive parents. *You know what they all do? Have you seen the news? They're doing it for the food stamps and money. They let the kids starve, they hit them.* You know: They will do worse than I do to you. That was unspoken.

I started crying. Ms. C, bless her, kept patting me on the back and saying, *It's okay, it's okay.* We walked to the office.

I think you know what happened. Mr. Wu let her go. Voldemort got away scotch-free. I remember the words he said: That this was the only time she would be off the hook. That was where I first learned the concept of trust. You can't trust adults. Maybe Mr. Wu, being in the same generation himself, believed that it was okay. That was when I started keeping secrets. Adults are fickle.

Third grade, bless my brother, was mostly safe and sound. Things were busy. Voldemort's friend was in town, finishing up paperwork to start her restaurant back in Wilbraham, Massachusetts.

Voldemort was always so calm around friends, and so much happier around them, that I wanted them around too. Maybe I was the problem. Maybe I was the reason she was so unhappy. There was a baby to take care of. US citizenship to apply for. My dad was going to work for our friend once

they were up and running, so he'd have a stable job.

Still, there were moments.

Up until then, I'd adored my dad. Do the math: if he came back every week, he was there for 52 days of the year. Sometimes there were holidays, days taken off for doctor's appointments. Around 60 days, 70 days max a year. I adored him because he'd never touched me the way Voldemort had. But he never really did anything else, though. I could understand that.

But I think being married to Voldemort started rubbing off him around this time. His relationship with Voldemort was a bit frayed at this point, and we could all see it. Who wants to come home from twelve hour shifts delivering food to take care of a baby? I could understand that.

But what I didn't understand was when he kicked me. Kicked me with his leg, on my back, into the corner. My sister and I had gotten a little too carried away playing with the toys we had. I was the *oldest* one, so I was the *guilty* one. Maybe if I was more *damn responsible* that never would have happened.

I speak less ill of him because that's the only incident I remember. Maybe it was a one time mistake, maybe he was just at a breaking point that day.

In fourth grade, people started forming cliques of sorts. I was confused with the way things worked, and I was completely, utterly shy, the kind of shy I now classify as social anxiety. I had a couple quarters that I got from weekly allowance for doing various chores around our apartment, although that soon ended when I asked Voldemort if I could get a raise of sorts and she responded by cutting it off entirely, citing my "selfishness". I decided to buy some chips at the grocery store, and I was surrounded by people all day. Suddenly everyone wanted to be my goddamn friend.

So I kept doing it. And when I ran out of quarters, I'm ashamed to admit that I stole some from her pile of change. And I kept doing it. And doing it. And I lied and pretended that I hadn't stolen it. And I did it not once but goddamn twice.

As punishment, I was left to freeze in the staircase leading to our apartment. No heat in the middle of December in Brooklyn, in thin pajamas. I threw up green bile, I cried, I tried sleeping. I was let back in at 12AM in the morning, snot and tears mixing.

I've never stolen since, which made me question: maybe I was just a bad kid? Maybe I was a *dumb bitch*. Sometime in second/third/fourth grade my handwriting had become illegible. Voldemort slapped my hand with a ruler until my handwriting became legible again. Maybe I was the problem.

So yeah. In fifth grade I was all alone at the start of the school year. Voldemort was in another stony-face phase - I hasn't gotten into the prestigious middle school I would have gotten into had I worked hard in fourth grade on the New York State Test. She didn't talk to me for a week straight.

I think fifth grade saved my life by giving me an idea of what it could be. I tried my hand at making friends for real for real. I managed to do it. At school I finally felt like I fit in for the first time in my life, although some semblances of what was going on at home started seeping in: I wore broken glasses the whole year. They were split in half because Voldemort had broken them in half during a fight I remember nothing about. We couldn't afford to get me new glasses, or maybe Voldemort just wanted to gloat, so my father "fixed" them by affixing a piece of Stretch-Tite in between the middle pieces. Eventually that was less effective and my glasses would randomly slip apart. This happened when we were walking to lunch, and a girl in my class thought it was funny. Not in a "I am a bully way", but in a "How did you fall down the stairs" way and asked why I wasn't getting new glasses. All I could do was shrug and feel my cheeks burn because Voldemort had gaslighted me into believing that I had started the fight.

Actually, I only learned what gaslighting was a few years later. It was 2021. I was reading *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado. Somewhere in the first third of the book, she talks about the origin of the word "gaslight" from some film in the 1940s.

Before it was a verb, "gaslight" was a noun. A lamp. Then there was a play, *Angel Street*, in 1938, and then a film, *Gaslight*, in 1940, and then a second film in 1944 featuring an iconic, disheveled, unwinding performance from Ingrid Bergman.

A woman's sanity is undercut by her conniving husband, who misplaces objects in an attempt to send her to an asylum. Ultimately, her husband's plan is revealed: He had murdered her aunt when his wife was a child and had forced their whirlwind romance years later in order to return to the house so he could locate some missing jewels. Nightly, he ventures into their attic, unbeknownst to her, to search for them. The eponymous gaslights are one of the many reasons the heroine believes herself to be truly going mad — they dim as if the gas has been turned on elsewhere in the house, even when no one has seemingly done so.

Fuck. She's outside right now. I'm not Christian. Voldemort was. Is. She was fucking Christian. I'm agnostic. I believe something is out there. Specifically, hope: hope that I can make it through, what's that poem, I'm going to search it up right now, I'm having a fucking heart attack in the dark.

Ok. It's *Do not go gentle into that good night*, by Dylan Thomas:

Do not go gently into that good night,

Old age should burn and rave at close of day;

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Oh Lord, please help me get through this dark and stormy night.

Ok, I'll try to get back on topic. Writing isn't linear but you, the Reader, may appreciate if it was more linear. And why am I writing this? To calm my nerves, and to possibly explain to the police, CPS, whatever that I can't do this anymore. I can't live like this. And I hope you understand that, because I'm coming to terms with it.

In sixth grade,

We were in a small town in Massachusetts now. Every time someone asks me where I'm from, I don't know how to answer that. *I'm from Brooklyn, but I moved a couple years ago to a small town in Massachusetts* is the defacto answer, for two reasons: I'm proud to be a Brooklynite, and the truth is, I've never felt at home anywhere really so I don't know where I'm from. How specific do you want me to get? I can say I'm from the womb like every other human on this entire planet (for the time being).

And so seventh grade started. I spent that year really feeling alone. I was alone. At home, I didn't fit in. At school, I didn't fit in. I sat alone, thought alone, ate alone. Nobody at home noticed that I was off.

She texted me: *Amanda send me your address your mom wants to know where you are.*

And how could you? How could you drag someone else into our situation, to mock me like that?

I ripped the photo up into pieces and threw them in the trash can next to the dryer, which was filled with simply lint up until that point.

Sometimes I can't describe how I'm feeling in words as much as songs:

Tell Me How, Paramore:

I can't call you a stranger
But I can't call you
I know you think that I erased you
You may hate me but I can't hate you
And I won't replace you
Tell me how to feel about you now
Tell me how to feel about you now
Oh, let me know

Do I suffocate or let go
Think I'm tired of getting over it
And just starting something new again
I'm getting sick of the beginnings
And always coming to your defenses
I guess it's good to get it off my chest
Guess I can't believe I haven't yet
You know I got my own convictions
And they're stronger than any addiction
And no one's winning

Everything to Everyone, Renee Rapp:

You're so impressed with me, I've been on ten since I woke up
Now I'm payin' taxes so your expectations have gone up
Now I play the actress, 'cause you got me actin' so grown up
And I can't take it, I hate when you're cryin'
God I hope that it's over when I'm older
I can't be everything to everyone
You call at 3AM, I'm pickin' up
I need the guts to go and give you up
'Cause I'll kill myself trying and I'm not scared of dyin'

i miss you, i'm sorry, Gracie Abrams:

Good to each other, give it the summer
I knew you too
You said, "Forever", and I almost bought it

I miss fightin' in your old apartment
Breaking dishes when you're disappointed
Nothin' happened in the way I wanted
Every corner of this house is haunted

Mean It, Gracie Abrams:

You don't know what I'm feelin'
Maybe that thing you said under your breath, you mean it
Holding onto two thin lines, 'til we just walk between 'em
Getting so loud, I can't pretend that I don't hear 'em
I know you mean it

Burn, David Kushner

All you ever caused was pain
You can say you're sorry, the evidence is on my
Body, but I never complain
I wear it as a lesson, a curse, and a blessing
Oh, oh-oh, oh-oh, you're not a prophet
Have you forgotten that you're godless?
Oh, oh-oh, oh-oh, you're on your knees, and
You're tryna speak, beggin' me please, but
Don't even say what you're gonna say
It's too late, too late, baby
Why did you wait to finally change?
It's too late, too late to save me, oh, oh, oh
You watched me

Burn, burn, burn

I don't even pity your pain

You can use it as a weapon, but I won't ever let it

Pull me back under again

I let you fool me once, but now I'm dead and gone

closure, Taylor Swift:

It's been a long time

And seeing the shape of your name

Still spells out pain

It wasn't right

The way it all went down

Looks like you know that now

Yes, I got your letter

Yes, I'm doing better

I know that it's over

I don't need your closure

Everybody Loves You, Charlotte Lawrence:

I am so tired, I have to tame my mind

Before I get too frustrated, mm

Can't go back in time to change in someone's eyes

Try not to talk about it

I'm too mad, I'm too late, I'm too gentle

It's too hard to explain, I'm not helpful, mm

It's my body, and I'm trying to hate you 'cause I want to

It's my body, and I'm trying to, while everybody loves you

It's my body, and I'm trying to forgive you, I don't want to

It's my body, and it hates you

Why does everybody love you?

Sometimes I close my eyes, amidst the dancing lights

When it feels too wild for breathing, mm

I can't sleep at night unless I start to lie

And believe it like a story, no, no

Try not to think about it

So insane, I'm so used to my nightmares

It's okay till it's not, and I'm back there, no, no

Let You Down, NF:

Fells like we're on the edge right now

I wish I could say I'm proud

I'm sorry that I let you down

All these voices in my head get loud

I wish that I could shut them out

I'm sorry that I let you down

Yeah, I guess I'm a disappointment

Doing everything I can

I don't wanna make you disappointed

It's annoying

I just wanna make you feel like everything I did

Was never tryna make an issue for you

But I guess the more you thought about everything
You were never even wrong in the first place, right?
Yeah, I'ma just ignore you, walking towards you
Paranoia, what did I do wrong this time? That's parents for you
Very loyal? Shoulda had my back but you put a knife in it
My hands are full, what else should I carry for you?
I cared for you, but
You just wanna make this worse
Want me to listen to you
But you don't ever hear my words
You don't wanna know my hurt, yet
Let me guess
You want an apology, probably
How can we keep going at a rate like this?
We can't so I guess I'ma have to leave
Please don't come after me
I just wanna be alone right now, I don't wanna think at all
Go ahead, just drink it off
Both know you're gonna call tomorrow like nothing's wrong
Ain't that what you always do?
I feel like every time I talk to you
You're in an awful mood
What else can I offer you?
There's none left right now, I gave it all to you

Yeah, don't talk down to me
That's not gonna work now
Packed all my clothes and I moved out
I don't even want to go to your house
Every time I sit on that couch, I feel like you lecture me
Eventually, I bet that we could have made this work
And probably woulda figured things out
But I guess I'm a letdown
But it's cool, I checked out
Oh, you wanna be friends now?
Okay, let's put my fake face on and pretend now
Sit around and talk about the good times
That didn't even happen
I mean, why are you laughing?
Must have missed that joke let me see if I can find a reaction
Nope, but at least you're happy

Family Line, Conan Gray

It's hard to put it into words
How the holidays will always hurt
I watch the fathers with their little girls
And wonder what I did to deserve this
How could you hurt a little kid?
I can't forget, I can't forgive you
'Cause now I'm scared that everyone I love will leave me

Oh, and all that I did to try to undo it
All of my pain and all your excuses
I was a kid, but I wasn't clueless
All my past, I tried to erase
But now I see, would I even change it?
Might share a face and share a last name
But we are not the same

Motion Sickness, Phoebe Bridgers:

And while you're bleeding on your back in the glass
I'll be glad that I made it out
And sorry that it went down like it did
I have emotional motion sickness
Somebody roll the windows down
There are no words in the English language
I could scream to drown you out

tolerate it, Taylor Swift:

I wake and watch you breathing with your eyes closed
I notice everything you do or don't do
You're so much older and wiser, and I
Wait by the door like I'm just a little kid
Use my best colors for your portrait
Lay the table with the fancy shit
And watch you tolerate it
If it's all in my head, tell me now

Tell me I've got it wrong somehow
I know my love should be celebrated
But you tolerate it
I greet you with a battle hero's welcome
I take you indiscretions all in good fun
While you were out building other worlds, where was I?
I made you my temple, my mural, my sky
Now I'm begging for footnotes in the story of your life
Drawing hearts in the byline
Always taking up too much space or time
You assume I'm fine, but what would you do if I
Break free and leave us in ruins
Took this dagger in me and removed it
Gain the weight of you then lose it
Believe me, I could do it

my tears ricochet, Taylor Swift

And if I'm dead to you, why are you at the wake?
Cursing my name, wishing I'd stayed
Look at how my tears ricochet
And I can go anywhere I want
Anywhere I want, just not home
And you can aim for my heart, go for blood
But you would still miss me in your bones

coney island, Taylor Swift feat. The National:

And I'm sitting on a bench in Coney Island
Wondering, "Where did my baby go?"
The fast times, the bright lights, the merry-go
Sorry for not making you my centerfold
Over and over
Lost again with no surprises
Disappointments close your eyes
And it gets colder and colder
When the sun goes down

happiness, Taylor Swift:

And in the disbelief
I can't face reinvention
I haven't met the new me yet
There'll be happiness after you
But there was happiness because of you
Both of these things can be true
There is happiness
Past the blood and the bruise
Past the curses and cries
Beyond the terror in the nightfall
Haunted by the look in my eyes
That would've loved you for a long time
Leave it all behind
Tell me, when did your winning smile

Begin to look like a smirk?

When did all our lessons start to look like weapons pointed at my deepest hurt?

Wake Up, EDEN:

'Cause we've been driving so long

I can't remember how we got here

Or how we survived so long

I'm trying to run from our pride

'Til you set fire to my atmosphere

And I remember how I spent the 23rd

Feeling six feet under

When I'm 30,000 feet in the air

Chasing that sundown

So far East, I'm Westbound

Feeling like the edge of this world is near

But you'll feel better when you wake up

Swear to God I'll make up

Everything and more when I get back someday

Shooting stars all break up

And even though it seems like half the world away

Things will be better in America

Heard the streets are gold there

Maybe I can fly out of this place someday

Chasing dreams like I'm on Novocaine

Screaming through your airways

Looking back, I almost thought I heard you say
Stay, you're not gonna leave me
This place is right where you need to be
And why your words gotta mean so much to them
And they mean nothing to me?
So stay, you're not what you're hearing
'Cause I've been watching you changing
And who said you're one in a million
Anyway?
'Cause you see only what you want to
Your tunnel vision haunts you
And you can't see what's wrong
And you keep sleeping through the p.m.
Eyes wide open when you're dreaming
You're sleepwalking, just keep talking
And maybe you can talk you way out of this deep end
No B plan in your system

If You Want Love, NF:

Yeah, as a kid I used to think life
Is moving so slow, I watch it go by
Look out the window of my bus ride
I thought the world was so small, through my closed eyes
I've always tried to control things
In the end that's what controls me

Maybe that's why I'm controllin'
I wish somebody woulda told me
If you want love, you gon' have to go through the pain
If you want love, you gon' have to learn how to change
If you want trust, you gon' have to give some away
The older I get, I feel like I'm always tryna save time
Talkin' to the voices in my head, they make me think twice
Tellin' me it doesn't mean it's wrong because it feels right
I'm scared that one day I wake up and wonder where the time go
Talk about the past like it's the present while I rock slow
I'll sit in the living room and laugh with kids of my own
And tell 'em
If you want love, you gon' have to go through the pain
I wish you woulda told me

Please, Reader: I just want someone to understand and tell me that it isn't all in my head.

1. Voldemort's real name is Juan Zheng, who is identified as my biological "mother" on my official documents.