

# THIS IS SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO ME BEFORE I HIT THE BIG TIME

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FIRST RUNNER-UP IN THE 500-WORD MEMOIR CONTEST

ESTIMATED READING TIME: 2:16

63

OPIUM

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My friend offered me her ex-fiancé's old car, and it came with a story. He had wanted to learn Arabic, went to the military language institute in Monterey because he couldn't afford to study it otherwise—that was before 2001, he'd never have to serve. Now he was off to Iraq.

He decided to drive across the country to where he had to report for duty. A last trip in freedom. But after a breakdown (mental, not automotive), he left his car in Boulder and flew to Georgia. The car was mine if I wanted to go get it.

A strange letter came in the mail, sealed with black duct tape and written in crazy-looking capital letters. It was a handwritten "deed" on the back of a page of Arabic language exercises.

I called the number I had in Boulder, and spoke to an old man who said yeah, it was on his lawn. I was welcome to it. I thought it was a Toyota or a Honda for some reason, but it turned out to be a brown Ford Bronco, the old kind.

The whole thing started to feel too weird so I didn't call the man back or go get the truck. Someone I didn't know had a breakdown (mental) in it and was heading to the Iraq war and it just didn't seem worth it.

I asked my friend about her ex-fiancé sometimes. She said she got e-mails from him, in which he wrote that if she knew what he was doing she

would never speak to him again.

Months later, I started seeing the unavoidable pictures of torture in Abu Ghraib. I imagined the duties of an Arabic translator and was glad not to have his Ford Bronco. I wondered if, technically, I owned it, thanks to the “deed” that I thought was in a drawer somewhere, but I’ve packed and moved since then and never saw it.

A man named Tony Lagouranis finally broke the vicious silence and went on TV, wrote editorials—in the New York Times for example—about what he had done at Abu Ghraib, and why, and who had told him to. He became one of my heroes, pretty much all I had in that terrible year 2004.

It took a while before I made the connection and realized that it’s his car I could have owned, maybe do own.

I drive around in it sometimes in my mind, usually listening to Dylan. One of the dark albums, the ones about America. Blood on the Tracks, Bringing It All Back Home. I guess they’re all dark really. My friend, she still lives alone.