

Backslider

Rift Slider was from Backwards, Amerika. Rift left when he got married and never returned. But through his parents, whom he spoke to over the phone once a week on Sundays, Rift kept up with the shenanigans of the small town.

He had since moved to Plateau, and after Rift was there several years, he met his “old lady” Kitschy Steward, or Kit, who he insisted keep her maiden name even though they got married. But unlike his Grandma Allwell, Rift was for feminism to a certain extent. They got married for impulsive reasons but married all the same. Kit’s father, Mr. Steward, or Stew as he liked to be called. Steward agreed with Grandma Allwell: Kit Steward should have taken Rift’s family name, Slider.

Rift and Kit moved in with Stew only a short time after they got married. Rift learned this was a mistake only when they lived with Mr. Steward in Ranger. This pattern of moving on impulse continued for several years until they migrated to the state and metropolis of Ark, as it is called. Rift began volunteering at the Ark Library. He says Ark is “dead center in Amerika,” which isn’t the most ideal location for him. Rift, now 38, and Kit discussed their future.

“I wish you’d go to church with me at the Hallowed Temple,” Kit told Rift.

“I will, but that’s all I’m going to do.” Rift insisted.

“Well, what else would you have to do?” She wondered.

“I think you know... You are always hounding me to get baptized. I got saved before when we were living in Potato, or else you said you would’ve divorced me. But besides the fact that I’ve been ‘backsliding’ as preachers like to say –I’m not getting baptized, too.” He ended.

“I understand. Now we just need to decide whether we’ll go on Wednesday evening, Sunday morning, or both,” she added.

“How about Sundays? That’s when I’m off from volunteering at the Library, which doesn’t open until 1 pm,” Rift said.

“Okay, but you promise you’ll go with me.” Kit pleaded.

“Yes,” Rift said.

They discussed a few more things, and then Rift dressed and started walking to the Library. It was a steady, steep incline to the Ark Public Library the whole two miles. Rift thought about his commitment to attending church at Hallowed Temple, or HT as it was called. He had been several times and was familiar with the preacher, Pastor Sextus, or Pastor Sex as Rift called him -but not to his face. Rift was the same age as Pastor Sextus... Rift, an “in the closet atheist,” felt a feeling of pity for the preacher.

And Rift's lack of respect for Sextus spilled over into his lack of "fear of the Lord." Rift liked to tell Kit the story of an old lady preacher who came to the group home where Rift had lived. The old lady preached how to "fear God" and why you should be "afraid." Rift explained to Kit the error of this statement, how to "fear God" meant to have reverence for Him: love, respect, etc. Kit tried to soothe Rift and reconcile the old lady preacher with a verse from the Bible: "My people perish for a lack of knowledge."

But this didn't stop Rift from elaborating on the old lady's stupidity. He explained that the mistake she made was to read the scripture from the King James Version of the Bible, written in Middle English or translated from the original languages to Middle English. Rift said he quit attending the services until Kit arrived, and then he just went because he liked Kit... and the doughnuts served at the service. Rift then remembered that HT served doughnuts before Sunday service. And this improved his mood. Rift arrived at the Library and signed in. He began by checking the book return slot, and after he got the books, he got the DVDs and CDs, which were in a separate return slot. After doing this, Rift put the books on a cart, pushed them to the elevator, took them to the 2nd floor, and began shelving them. Rift then went back down the elevator, put the cart up, and started helping behind the desk, checking materials in and out to the patrons. It was a Wednesday morning and relatively slow. He got a break, went outside, sat down on a bench, and called his friend Flint Harrow in Backwards.

"Well, hello, Flint!" Rift said and then lowered his voice. "How have you been?"

"Oh, I'm okay... And how are you, Rift?" Flint asked. "I've been thinking about your Black Box Law, which still fascinates me."

"Yes, 'the problem is the solution.' Right?" Rift said, quoting his essay.

"Yeah. I picture it as a three-dimensional black box..." Flint elaborated on the essay, but we'll skip that. When Rift and Flint were both 18, Flint temporarily moved in with Rift. This didn't go too badly but could have gone better. Years later, just before Rift went to the group home, and due to his alcoholism, Flint let Rift stay at his duplex. And even more, Flint had stayed at the group home in Potato a couple of years before Rift went there.

A letter to Flint's landlord said, "Rift Slider is staying with Flint Harrow in duplex #13."

Well, that was the end of Rift and Flint's fun. But during Rift's stay, he wrote the Black Box Law, an essay that we don't have time to go into, but the gist of it is: in every situation, there is a problem that we're not aware of, and the problem is the solution; for, once we've found out that there is a problem, it ceases to be a problem out of our awareness. But the Black Box Law, Rift thought, was problematic itself.... Mainly because it used the words "problem" and "problematic" so many times. Anyhow, this is the essay Flint mentioned. Rift thought momentarily about his gratitude for Flint taking him in before he went to the group home, and then Rift remembered Pastor Dover. "Flint, are you still going to the Crux of Christ? And how's old Pastor Dover doing? Still preaching that the world's only 6,000 years old?" Rift gave Flint a hard time.

"Yeah. Pastor Dover will take us to the Creationist Museum in a few weeks." Flint said, unaware of Rift's mockery.

"Sorry, I can't talk any longer. I must go peddle books!" Rift said, then added. "And say high to Dover for me."

"Okay. I will. Goodbye, Rift."

"Talk to you later, Flint."

Rift volunteered from 11 am to 3 pm, then walked home, which was all downhill. For this, he was thankful, he thought. Rift took his time. The Ark City Park was about halfway between Rift and Kit's duplex and the Library. Rift had a seat on a park bench for a moment. It was mid-March and the first week of spring. Rift sat there momentarily, lost interest, and continued his walk home.

When he arrived home, Kit had set all the furniture outside.

"Kit, how did you get all this furniture outside?" A little frustrated, Rift insisted that he would have to help her move it back.

"I'm spring cleaning!" Kit said cheerfully.

"I see that, but who helped you get it out here?" Rift pried.

"Jo," Kit said.

Jo Sot, an addict and an alcoholic, was Kit's friend from childhood, a willful lush, not to mention her preference for ingesting toxic substances. And this is what troubled Rift. He didn't prefer to be around alcohol since he had recovered from the habit. Thus, his dislike of Jo was not from spite but rather a form of self-preservation. Rift tolerated Jo, even after he found her smoking meth in his bedroom with a stranger she had brought over to his and Kit's place.

Jo asked if they could nap, and Kit got them some fresh sheets and pillowcases. While Jo and the stranger were "resting," which Rift deduced was because they were coming down off meth... While they were supposedly resting, Kit told Rift that Jo had asked for some tinfoil, which Rift knew could only be for smoking "the shit," as it is called in certain circles. Rift quickly opened the door and told them they were not to be "smoking dope" in his home. Rift lacked the assertive skills to ask them to leave and never come back, as he thought he should have. But now he wrestled with what to do in his present situation.

"Jo is coming back in a little while. She had to run to a friend's house. I'm not sure who, but she said she would be back." Kit explained.

"Call her and tell her there's no need to come back over. Tell her I'm home, and I don't feel like company, and that I'll help you get the furniture back in the house." Rift said

He didn't feel like helping after volunteering at the Library, but it was better than Jo visiting, as he knew Jo was "on the shit" again.

“But she’s going to church with me tonight. It’s Wednesday, you know?” Kit pointed this out. “Well, tell her what I said. I’ll go to church with you if that’s the only reason you have for her coming back over.” Rift concluded. “But she needs a church.” Kit insisted.

“Okay, but let’s go ahead and get this stuff back in the house. Jo might not even show back up. No telling, you know?” Rift added.

Rift and Kit worked to move the furniture back into the house but were through before long as they hurried so that Kit could make it to church. But Jo Sot showed back up just in time to take her and Kit to Hallowed Temple, anyhow. Rift avoided Jo and merely pretended he was watching the news, which he was just watching while he waited to see the weather forecast. Kit left at 6:30 pm. Church at HT began at 7 pm. Rift, relieved, watched the TV. Or rather, he watched the TV as his thoughts, still on Jo Sot’s trespass, were fixated on why Jo, who was more than likely fueled up on speed, was going to church at HT with Kit.

Rift shook it off and focused on trying to watch the weather. This didn’t get his mind off the fact that his wife was traveling in a vehicle that could be pulled over and impounded if they discovered narcotics therein. After coming to this thought, Rift texted Kit, who didn’t reply. Rift assumed she made it to HT and was in the service with her phone on silent.

Rift, needing something more distracting, called Flint, who did not answer either. Rift, realizing Flint was probably at church, went for a walk. Frustrated, Rift headed back to his and Kit’s duplex. While unlocking the door, he heard his home phone ringing, the landline. But he didn’t get to it in time. Rift, irritated, turned on the radio as the Noteworthy classical music program was coming on. He lay down on the couch and had the music playing loud enough on the radio in the bedroom that he could hear it.

Rift woke at 10 pm, as the Noteworthy program was going off and the All Night-Classical program was coming on. He immediately went to look for Kit when he discovered she wasn’t home. He then called her. Kit didn’t answer, though. He texted her: “I know where you are!”

This was his way of saying, “I know you are at the Indian casino!” Rift took his meds for the night and went to bed. He drifted off to sleep when he heard Kit and Jo enter the door.

“I need to use your bathroom to freshen up,” Jo told Kit.

“Okay, just be quiet, Rift is asleep,” Kit told her.

“I’m not asleep, and where have you been? You didn’t even call me to let me know,” Rift said in a loud voice from their bedroom to Kit.

Rift got up and entered the kitchen, where Kit fixed herself a sandwich.

“Have you been at the casino?” Rift asked.

“Yes. I’m sorry, but I lost my phone.” Kit told him.

“You lost your phone?!” Rift said in a raised voice. “Well, now we’re going to have to buy another one. And how did you get money to play at the casino?” He asked.

"Jo loaned it to me," Kit told him.

"Loaned it to you?!" Rift raised his voice even more. "Where's she at?" Jo Sot came out of the bathroom about that time.

"I am not paying you back for 'loaning' Kit money," Rift told Jo in as firm of a voice as he could, considering the offense. "You know she has a gambling problem, don't you?" And Rift went back into the bedroom and shut the door.

"Well, you should probably go," Kit told Jo. "I'm sorry."

"I thought we were going to hang out?" Jo insisted. "Fine, he's awful controlling, though." "He's just upset." Kit defended her husband.

"Alright, I'll see you in a few days. I need to get some rest anyway." Jo said.

Jo Sot left. Kit went to bed on the couch. Rift, angered, lay awake listening to the radio, unable to fall asleep for a couple more hours. But eventually, he did fall asleep. The last thing he remembered was the radio announcing it was 2 o'clock.

Rift knew what it was like for things to go south in a friendship. After a disagreement with a couple he and Kit were friends with, they told him that what had happened was just "water under the bridge." But Rift knew different: the water was still rising, and that bridge was no longer any good to anyone: only an idiot would think of crossing it during this flood.

Rift woke around 9 am to the sound of knocking at the door. He went to the door and saw Kit asleep on the couch. Rift opened the door; he already knew who it was. It was Mr. Steward, who was a tall, lanky man. He smoked a pipe, but he would "bum" cigarettes off his daughter Kit whenever he came over. And this bothered Rift, but not as much as Stew smoking in the house, which he did. When he was angered with him or just feeling facetious, Rift would call him Steward. This bothered the old man, but he would fall silent and take the joke. In the meantime, Rift invited Mr. Steward in to have a seat.

"Wake up, Kit, your dad is here." Rift shook her awake.

"Oh, hi, Dad," Kit told Stew.

"Kitty!" Steward roared. "Get me a cigarette!"

This bothered Rift, who called her Kitty. He had always considered calling her Kitschy because he would tell her: "What use was it to name you Kitschy if he was just going to call you Kitty? Kit isn't much better." Rift would say.

"What's up, Steward?" Rift made conversation.

"Oh, just getting out of the house for a minute. I thought I'd see what you two were up to." Mr. Steward said. "Why don't you make me a cup of coffee, Kitty?"

Things like these remarks, or demands as they were, infuriated Rift. Again, Rift lacked the assertive skills to deal with his father-in-law. Instead, Rift let these transgressions bother him to varying degrees.

"Did you go to church last night?" Rift asked.

"Nope, I didn't," Stew said. "I'm going on Sunday, though."

Rift liked to ask Stew questions he already knew the answers to, to ruffle his feathers.

"Well, I'm going to church with Kit at HT this weekend, Sunday," Rift told Steward. "You should go with us," Rift suggested but anticipated his answer to this, too.

"Kitty." Stew began. "Is that preacher now? What's his name..." Stew asked.

"Pastor Sextus," Kit reminded her dad.

"Yeah, that's right. I remember now. Is Sextus anointed?" And this was the question Rift anticipated.

"Of course!" Kit replied. "He's at the Hallowed Temple, isn't he?"

"Well, I don't know if I like you going there. I know That preacher there before he was anointed because we used to go there, but..." And Stew fell silent. "Why don't you two attend church with me Sunday at Fellowship of God?"

"You mean go to church in the FOG!" Rift joked.

"Now, don't stew too long over that Stew." Kit joined in, but Stew took it in silence.

"Seriously, why don't you two come with me?" Stew insisted.

"We'll think about it," Rift replied.

"Or you could just come with us to HT?" Kit offered.

"You know how I feel about Sextus. I don't know why you're even asking," Steward said.

Rift wasn't sure what the old man Steward meant by "anointed," but he couldn't imagine how Pastor Sextus didn't meet these fanatical standards that Stew imposed on his preachers. Sextus was as rigid as they came. If it was up to the Sextus, he would still have homosexuals put to death, as it says in Leviticus 20:13. But moving on. Rift told Stew that he had to get ready to go to "work" at the Library. And Steward said he was leaving. Prepared to go volunteer, Rift had forgotten all about the previous night. At 10 am, Rift set out.

Rift and Kit lived in a duplex. Their neighbor was an old Black woman named Dot. She liked to drink beer and was always on her porch doing so. Dot was 78 years old, and Rift wondered how she wasn't dead yet from the massive quantities of alcohol she drank daily. After a day of drinking beer, she switched to whiskey for the evening until she passed out drunk. And in the duplex adjoining Dot lived her Son Jay. And just as Dot drank beer all day, Jay drank wine all day. But he didn't switch to whiskey in the evenings, so he said it was as if several bottles of wine a day were any better. And in the adjoining duplex beside Rift lived a younger man, 21, named Quest. Quest was gay, and by gay, I mean homosexual. Stew, intolerant, referred to him as "Quest the Queer." The week passed by, and Rift, though dreading a day at church, -despite this Rift spent his Saturday morning looking at the HT website, reading "What We Believe," a page about what he referred to as the "Hallowed Temple Indoctrination Page." Rift read through the list of principles. It reminded him of the principles of AA. The one that, well, all of them, he thought. The idea that one is powerless over alcohol didn't sit quite right with Rift since he had quit drinking without a "Higher Power."

And when he was last using alcohol, Rift had once been baptized. He never spoke of it, though. Rift had been “drinking quite a lot,” according to Kit. Though Rift was not a violent drunk, he would just have laid around watching nature documentaries all the time and never really going out into real nature. Kit thus felt compelled to separate from Rift. Now, a couple of things happened that Rift never really mentioned again about this time in their life. One was an incident with Jo Sot. Kit phoned and told Rift that Jo was coming over and that Kit needed him to “loan” Jo 20 dollars. Rift reluctantly agreed. Jo came by to pick up the money, asked to freshen up in the bathroom, and stayed there for quite some time. Jo came out, took the money, and left.

This was the end of an incident in which Kit later accused Rift of sleeping with Jo when she came to pick up the 20 dollars. Rift, who explained the incident, told Kit that the only thing she didn’t know was that he suspected that by “freshen up,” Jo meant “Can I use your bathroom to smoke a little shit,” and that was all that happened. Besides, Kit was the one who sent her over to pick up the money, to begin with, a fact that irritated Rift quite a bit.

But the failed baptism, Rift kept a secret, not to surprise Kit with it later. No. Rift would conceal this. It began as a noble idea but quickly dissolved. Rift, wanting Kit back, decided he would get baptized. This was a hasty decision, he later thought. Rift began attending church at Hallowed Temple the three weeks before Easter.

At Easter, he sat in the very back of the church and sipped on a pint of whiskey. On Easter, HT held a mass baptism, and anyone was welcome to get baptized. Pastor Sextus explained that not only could anyone come down and get baptized, but that he would give them “a new set of duds,” as well. By this, he meant a pair of red shorts and a red t-shirt with HT printed on them that “advertised” the church, as Rift later referred to it. Rift, knowing this, began sipping often on his whiskey through the service. Not only did he drink the pint, but Rift also had a “backup,” which he began to drink when someone in the congregation noticed Rift Slider drunk in the back pew. And told the preacher, who walked to the rear of the church to investigate.

“Whoa!” Sextus said, waving his hand in front of his nose. “It’s obvious you have been drinking, son.” And this infuriated Rift, being called “son.” But Rift kept it together.

“It was just a little wine I found in the back.” Rift lied.

“Son, we don’t allow drunkenness in church.” Pastor Sextus said. “I want you out of my church, mister.” The preacher was furious.

And Rift just laughed and laughed.

Then, the preacher reconsidered his actions and laid his hand on Rift’s shoulder.

“Lord, this man could use a little extra help.” And then the preacher rambled on for a bit. “You can either get baptized or leave, son.”

“I’ll get the bath.” Rift agreed to the baptism.

Pastor Sextus led Rift down to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The preacher “immersed” Rift in the water.

Rift at once ran to the back of the stage to a trash can and vomited.

“See, we got the Devil out of him, didn’t we?!” Sextus said.

“Amen!” Shouted a lone member, the rest too stunned to speak.

Feeling quite a bit better after vomiting and unaware of the eyes upon him, Rift got dressed into his HT shorts and t-shirt, put back on the shoes that he had taken off before the baptism, and made his way to the church bus.

Rift considered this and knew he hadn’t returned to HT since his purging baptism. He assumed Pastor Sextus had forgotten about “the incident.” And if Sextus remembered, Rift could always tell him that he had stopped drinking on that day as if it were divine intervention.

Rift made himself some coffee in his mug from the Library Café. Rift had switched from alcohol to caffeine. Steward drank coffee, as well. And when Rift would go over to his father-in-law’s, he would always offer him a cup. But the coffee was, often, a thick, viscous nightmare. Black Death coffee is what Rift termed the shit Steward brewed up. And it got one wired up like on meth if they weren’t used to it.

Rift was done talking and walked back home. He took medicine that took away his nightmares of being murdered, of being dragged down to hell by demons, and of other things that caused a sleep disturbance. He put the radio on All-Night Classical and drifted off to sleep.

Rift dreamed of being hunted down by someone in the forest, the same woods he had wondered about at night as a child. But something was different now: the woods were no longer a sanctum.

Rift got up and about. He felt rested despite the dream.

Kit wanted a child, and Rift wouldn’t give her one. She would say she wanted something to care for and had taken to feeding a stray dog. Rift had just discovered this that morning as Kit had brought the dog in to feed him.

“Kit, where did that dog come from?” Rift asked.

“I’ve been feeding him outside, and he wanted to come in,” Kit told Rift.

“If you feed it, it will never leave, Kit.” He told her.

“I don’t want him to leave.” She said.

“Well, I don’t know, a dog is a lot of responsibility...” Rift told her, but upon reflection, he said:

“Perhaps you can keep it, but you have to take care of it.” “Okay!” Kit said happily. “What should we call him?” “Rascal,” Rift said without much thought.

“Why is that?” Kit asked.

“Out of nostalgia.”

Kit and Rift walked and got Rascal a dog, a leash, and a collar with money Rift had saved. Rift could save a little money back for situations like this that came up. He could save this money because he had quit drinking. Otherwise, he and Kit would be in debt to pawn shops and Mr. Steward by this time of the month.

Rift and Kit went to the pet store. Rift bought a leash and a collar, returned home, and took Rascal for a walk.

Rascal was a small dog, about 12 lbs. His main feature was along with one brown eye. Rascal had one gray eye. And he was solid brown except for the tip of his tail, which was black. He was light brown, at that. Kit and Rift took Rascal around the churches. And as they got by the Methods Church, Rascal defecated on the church lawn. Kit was distraught that Rascal was “defecating on Jesus.” Rift told Kit he would get her some “poop bags” so that she could clean up after Rascal. Kit insisted he does this immediately.

The three of them returned home, and Rift watched a movie for the rest of the day while Kit studied her Bible. Then they went to bed early, as the two of them were tired from the day's excursion. They had skipped church, and Kit didn't feel like going.

Rift woke early the following day. It was Monday, and Mr. Steward knocked on the door. Steward, who knocked as if he were the police, was soon admitted into the house by Rift.

“Hello, Stew,” Rift said.

“Hey, Dad.” Kit followed.

“Hey, kids.” Stew said, unaware of how much this bothered Rift, being called “kids” by the old man.

“What's up?” Mr. Steward asked.

“Oh, not much, just getting ready for work at the library,” Rift told Stew.

“Well, who's this little fellow?” Stew asked.

“This is our new son, Rascal,” Kit told Stew.

“Oh, I see!” Steward said.

“He takes after his Papa Stew,” Rift told him.

“Well, I saw Quest the Queer sitting on his porch with his new boyfriend. You two need some new neighbors. This black lady next to you is always drunk, and so is her Son!” Stew went on. “I would say invite them to church, but I wonder if they're ever sober long enough to go. And what about that queer, does he drink?”

“Yes. Everybody that lives here drinks except us.” Rift told Stew.

“Why don't you drink anymore, Rift? It's good you quit those spirits, but you can drink wine if it isn't in excess. The Bible says so.” Stew said.

“Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic.” Rift teased him.

“Well?” Stew stated.

“Well, I don’t think so either. But I can’t have anything, no matter what the Bible says.” Rift concluded.

Mr. Steward hung around a little bit longer but soon left. Rift got out a book he had discovered at the Library, Atheist Evolution. “Who put this in the library?” Rift thought. Someone must be an atheist nearby, he thought, but who? It didn’t matter. Rift was alone in his disbelief so far as he was concerned. He began to read again. Rift read into the evening about scientific atheism. Rift continued to read into the night, after supper, and after taking out Rascal a final time, which he reminded Kit wasn’t his responsibility.

At 4 am on Tuesday, the phone rang. Stew asked Kit to come over and drive him to the hospital. Why Mr. Steward didn’t call 911 was beyond Rift’s understanding. When Kit and Rift got to his apartment, they found Mr. Steward in the driveway: dead at age 66.

“Things change.” Rift thought. Steward was dead. Rift was free to confess doubt. Rift knew that it was a “good” thing to backslide.

“Being a backslider is a means to an end in itself,” Rift said. It was a good thing to return to his atheist self, to have back his Godless identity.

Old Devil

Rift Slider was a bit older now. Rift was old enough to be considered middle-aged, which Trikipedia listed as between 45 and 65 years of age; however, several other online sources suggested that it was between 40 and 60 years of age. Regardless, Rift was in an older circle at age 45. A lot has happened since our earlier chronicle. Grandma Allwell will turn 100 in two weeks, just before Rift turns 46. Jo Sot had not been back around since Rift had a "lapse," and Rift told Jo she needed to get off meth even if she had to turn to alcohol.... Jo took offense to it and said alcohol was just as bad as "the shit." Rift later realized this was probably true. Also, during Rift's drunken "lapse," Rift went to Kit's "rededication" baptism drunk, after which Kit took off to her mother's. And even their dog Rascal was gone. Rift and Kit gave him up for adoption because he was nearly killed by a Pitbull that climbed over its fence to attack Rascal. But Rift scooped him up in his arms, and the Pitbull ran back and over the fence again. To sober up and get Kit back, Rift decided to go to Hope House, Inc. It was a drug and alcohol rehab.

And off Rift went to the Hope House, which he heard the patients referred to as the Dope House rather than call it the Hope House. Rift was assigned to clean the toilets every morning during his stay. Rift thought this to be ridiculous, to have to work while in rehab. Sure, it might teach some poor souls the value of a work ethic, but this was just an excuse by the Dope House to justify forced labor because most of the residents were court-ordered and didn't have a choice but to clean. But everything was going as expected, and Rift assimilated as best possible to institutional life at the drug and alcohol rehab.

Another thing he was expected to do but not officially required to do was to attend AA meetings. But Rift refused to do AA. The reason was that Rift was an anti-theist, and he had realized it. He was not just an atheist but in a rebellion against God.

Rift did well. It was like group therapy, just all day, every day. Except that at group therapy, he wouldn't have had a "mental breakdown" as he did at the Dope House. It was on his seventh day and involved a man known as Diablo. That is why Rift Slider says he "played a chess match with the Old Devil." Diablo arrived on the 6th day of treatment. On the 7th day, the two men, Rift and Diablo, sat down to play a best-out-of-three chess match, a mini-match that would be a set of "street chess" games, according to Diablo. Rift didn't mind, and it reminded him of Skitz chess, which was almost what Diablo had meant by "street chess," as it was actually "prison chess." Either way, Rift won the first game. Diablo won the second game. The 3rd game was a draw, so a fourth ensued, and now, the mini-match is being decided. Rift wanted to play the 4th and final game the next day after they had rested, but Diablo, taking advantage of Rift's tired condition, insisted they play it at once.

At that point, Rift had lost his passion for the mini-match but trudged on, only to resign after a few moves into the game. Diablo at once raised two arms in the air and said over and over: "I'm the champ. I'm the champ." Rift was angered, but he could do nothing; he had let someone win at chess, something he never did. And this was why, he thought.

Rift went to his room, lay in Bed #2, his assigned bed, and passed out as soon as his head hit the pillow. Rift awakened around 5, around 5 am. Rift awakened, roommates were not to be found. Instead, just two, there were empty beds. Rift went and asked the worker where they had gone, and the worker said they had to be moved but didn't say why.

Rift tracked down the guy in Bed #1 and asked him what had happened. The guy in Bed #1 said Rift had threatened the guy in Bed #3, that Rift had told him: "You probably won't make it to morning." Rift defended himself and said that he had told them he had horrible dreams of murder and being murdered and that he must have been dreaming. But no one believed him, and Rift felt he was ostracized.

So, after the eighth day, he left the Dope House, aka the Hope House, Inc., which was run like a jail instead of rehab. And life went on... Grandma Allwell turned 100, and Rift read a verse from the Bible even in celebration of her long life. Rift got his apartment at the Lodge. It was a rundown place but a new start. Kit still came to see him. And only a few days later, Rift turned 46.

The Good Book

Rift Slider and Flint Harrow would have crossed paths before. And now, a backstory about them. In the end, Flint Harrow would do whatever it took to become included in the conversation of Gossip: he changed his political party for the church he joined. And in doing so, Flint lost most of his identity. At least he was no longer the Flint Rift knew from childhood.

Flint and Rift grew up in the Gossip Community, just a fraction of the small town of Backwards, Amerika. Some say it is God's country. Rift would say it's just another shithole town in the South. And when Rift was only 18 years old, Flint moved in with him for a moment.

It didn't go well.

The foremost annoyance with having Flint live with him was Flint's habit of crumpling up paper towels as he paced around the house. They lived in a four-bedroom brick home that had belonged to Granny Slider. Flint had inconsiderate habits, accusing Rift of being possessed by the Devil.

One evening, Flint said to Rift:

"You are living in sin; the Devil has gotten a hold of you! Out of you, demons!" He shouted.

"Out, you Old Devil!" He continued.

Rift suffered the abuse as he sat and drank a few beers. But after a few more drinks, a few shots of whiskey, and then a whole empty fifth of it, Rift was ready to put up a fight.

"You say I'm the Devil? Well, I say your fat ass can't do even one pull-up!?" Rift said. "I'd have some actual respect for you if you could do that." Rift mocked Flint's inherent portly figure, something Flint didn't have actual control over, as Rift assumed. But neither did Rift have control over his alleged sin: Rift's "drinking problem."

Flint did not disappoint. Instead, he impressed Rift in that he did try with all he had to do a pullup... But gravity was against him: Flint was too obese to do even one pull-up. And so he lashed out at Rift again. This time, Rift threw my empty whiskey bottle at Flint, but Flint managed to duck under the dining table where he and his friends played poker. The bottle didn't even shatter as Rift thought it would. Enraged, Rift grabbed Flint's copy of the Bible and, as Flint tried to crawl out from under the table, Rift walloped Flint with the Good Book... Rift did it to knock some sense into Flint.

"Thud." The Bible went as it impacted the flesh of Flint's backside.

Some friends calmed Rift down, and later, on Sunday morning, Rift told Flint that he had to move out. Rift took Flint to his father's house and dropped him off.

A few years later, Rift went to college at the urging of his Granny Slider. At one of the colleges he attended—and Rift had attended several—Rift ran into Flint. They talked a couple of times, and Rift could tell Flint had changed and become more liberal with ideas from the influence of college life. Several more years later, after Rift failed to complete college, he found himself back in Gossip. This time, Rift was homeless: He lived in an old, abandoned house with "tweakers." Rift had nothing against tweakers, but he didn't want to be one, either... not anymore.

Anyhow, Rift was living with a tweaker couple. Flint said Rift didn't need to do that and that he needed to come and stay with Rift Slider. It didn't last but a month. But it was how Flint Harrow had forgotten Rift's transgression and forgiven it. This let Rift know Flint was a good guy. However, after being kicked out of Harrow's house by his landlord, Rift lived at a group home called The Nook in Plateau. Flint had mentioned it to Rift and told Rift how much Flint had loved living there, where Flint received a Fixed Income that he and Rift would from then on live their "crushed in spirit" life upon. "Crushed in spirit," as the Bible refers to having a mental illness.

Rift did not like the Nook; it was a hellhole to him, but Rift stayed in one for four years. Upon leaving, Rift contacted Flint again, but he had reverted to his conservative roots: Flint attended Crux of Christ, a church where Pastor Dover taught Flint the world's evils and reformed or regressed him. The important thing is that Flint Harrow helped Rift Slider out of the goodness of Flint's own heart, not because the Good Book told him to, but who knows?