

ToS May Apply
Michael Bettendorf

>> Name?

<< Will.

>> Hello, Will. Would you mind sitting down?

The voice is calm. The voice guides me to sit on the couch in front of me. A loveseat. The couch looks cheap, almost fake. Whether the couch is physically there or not does not matter. I sit and I do not fall through its vinyl covering. It is cherry red and possesses a sheen like freshly spilt blood. Rich in oxygen, a lung shot. I think of lipstick.

I am wearing the provided goggles. The elastic band is tight and pulls the hair at the back of my head. A skinny white table is in front of me. It looks like a golf tee.

>> Do you see the remote?

<< Yes.

>> Good, that is good.

I consider leaving.

>> There is a hook behind you, Will. If you'd like you can remove your jacket and get comfortable. The process may take a while.

<< I'm not sure I understand.

>> We've been through this, Will. The user agreement clearly states that upon the cancellation of our services, an exit interview will be conducted. This is part of your exit interview. If you'd like to hang up your jacket and get comfortable, the hook is behind you. When you are ready, pick up the remote and select OK.

I begin to sweat and decide, sure, I'll hang up my jacket.

>> I am sensing you are getting warm. Would you like a glass of water, Will?

<< I don't appreciate being scanned.

>> I can assure you, Will, it is within our legal rights at [REDACTED] to access this information. When you are ready to begin, pick up the remote and select OK.

A glass of water replaces the remote on the table. I realize the remote is already in my hand and I have pressed OK. My vision goes blank for a moment. A blink, a blip. A voice states that retinal controls are being overridden.

>> Your vision will return in a moment. Thank you for your patience. For health reasons, do not remove the provided safety goggles.

I take a drink of water while my vision reboots. Images appear on the wall in front of me. Photographs from years ago. Memories. A digital time-capsule. I turn to look at the wall. The images follow, always in my line of sight. I shut my eyes and bursts of color appear. Wisps of smoke from a snuffed candle. Phantom carbon copies of myself. Images I don't remember.

>> Is something the matter, Will?

<< No.

>> You appear stressed.

<< I'm tired, that's all. I just want to finish and go home.

>> Are you sure?

<< Yes. Please, I'm ready to continue.

Another voice interrupts me.

// Finally, a red for *you*. A red for *all*.

A new image emerges on the wall. An advertisement for lipstick.

<< I'm ready to continue. I say again and press OK.

>> As you are aware, Will, as stated in the terms and conditions, cancelation of our services does not erase your data. Your information is stored and will remain so as mandated for future retrieval. However, your profile and associated contact information will be inaccessible to you and third parties during the duration of your absence from [REDACTED] When you decide to use our services again in the future, your profile information and data will be restored upon completion of our updated terms and conditions.

I press OK as prompted.

>> Do you wish to continue?

<< Yes.

>> Are you sure?

<< Yes.

An image appears in my left eye, along the side.

SPONSORED. [REDACTED] coats, jackets and sweaters 15% off TODAY. Expires at midnight.

Simultaneously, I am hit with several notifications. The advertisement in my left eye changes to several messages in my feed. All from friends I haven't spoken to in years. Family I've never met.

-Hello, Will! Long time no see. How have you been? We should catch up!

-I have an investment opportunity for you! Message me for details. You'll make BANK!

-[REDACTED] is blocking this so I'm messaging you. THIS is what the government doesn't want you to know [REDACTED] is trying to keep the people from learning the TRUTH. Time to WAKE UP!

20% off EVERYTHING. Members only. Sign up with and receive an EXTRA 10% off.

[REDACTED] lipstick buy one get two FREE when you use code LIMITEDLIPS BY 11:59 CT.

Feeling lonely? [REDACTED] has the app for YOU! Download iSolated for a revolutionary dating experience and be lonesome no more!

Get your Premium [REDACTED] account for only 9.99/mo.*

Terms and Conditions may apply. This rate is only offered for the first 30 days after subscribing. For full access of [REDACTED]'s premium account, you will have to read our updated terms of service on the [REDACTED] official website accessible with your free account. Other conditions may apply.

Not enough time on your hands? Let PROletariat-bot do your work for you! Available on the [REDACTED] website.

I close the messages, but they are replaced one after the other. My right eye is an endless stream of advertisements. A digital deluge for sales of shit I don't want. Shit I don't need. Shit I didn't ask for.

<< Cancel my account.

>> The interview is not over, Will.

<< Turn them off. I can't focus.

I finish the water and stand up. I swim through the ads and the live feed and reach for my jacket. I feel the fabric in my hand. It is weightless. It is nothing. It melts in my hand and drips between my fingers to the floor. It disappears.

On the hook, my coat hangs.

My water is full.

>> Let's continue, Will. On a scale of one to ten, how highly would you recommend [REDACTED]'s services to a friend or family?

<< Five.

>> Are you sure?

<< Yes, I don't care what my friends or family subscribe to. It just isn't for me any longer.

>> Thank you for your feedback.

There is a series of similar questions. I reply automatically. Fives across the board. I no longer care. I do not wish to be a part of this any longer.

>> I am sensing you are not being honest with your feedback, Will. It is integral to our user experience that you provide accurate and honest answers. Survey refreshing.

<< You can't do this.

>> It is within our legal rights at [REDACTED] to conduct our mandatory exit interview. This is part of the process, Will. Do not worry. Retinal control override in 3...2...1. Neurological scan will begin in 3...2...1.

>> Name?

<< Will.

>> Hello, Will. Would you mind sitting down?

Michael Bettendorf earned an English degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2012. Currently, he mentors children in Language Arts for the Lincoln Public School district and consumes books, comics, and podcasts. He is busy juggling a couple of novels and a podcast he swears he'll record one day. He lives in Lincoln with his wife, where he tries to convince the world that Nebraska is too strange to be a flyover state.