Leaving Europe

In 2016, I punched my dad in the face. It was the year I lost everything, the year I ran away from home, and the year that I first had sex. There's lots of things I did that year that I'll never be able to forgive myself for. Punching my dad in the face wasn't one of them. That was one of the few good things I did.

At the start of the year, I was living at home with my mum and dad. I was fresh out of school, working the ultimate dead-end job. Mum and dad had hoped I'd take A-levels, but I wasn't good at anything and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I don't think anyone ever knows what they want to do. People pretend.

I'd quit school as the government announced a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU. Everybody was talking about it. It caused a lot of arguments at home, between friends and teachers. I don't think I had an opinion on the referendum. I don't think I had an opinion on much. I only knew that I disagreed with my parents on everything.

Take religion, for instance. Mum attended church every Sunday, and a crucifix hung in every room of our house. Even the toilet. There had been one on my bedroom wall until I was fourteen, when I decided that girls might not like it, if I ever got to know any. I took it down and stuffed it to the back of my wardrobe. Mum cried a lot after I did that. She said Jesus would never turn his back on me and that I would come to realise what I'd done was wrong. I didn't think it was wrong. It wasn't like I'd grabbed Jesus by the ear, shoved him in the back of my wardrobe and buried him in a heap of old jumpers. It was just a piece of wood.

It was through the church that mum found me the grave-digging job. With hindsight, I think that maybe her intention was to shock me into developing a career plan. Late in 2015, she sent me to our local church, where I met three men in their fifties. Mum hadn't told me what the job was. It was to be a surprise, she'd said.