Trinity

I know what it’s like to be god. Casting judgments from on high, a height of six feet and three inches to be exact, well… with shoes on. Those judgements likewise are returned to me by the world I’ve created through my perception of it. I feel the rebound of my judgments as I navigate as though blind, like a bat who not only defines its world, but itself through its echolocation. I know what it’s like to be god. Weeping when the will of others is contrary to my own, but nonetheless glad that choices can be made. It is the choices I make, and the ones that I don’t that define my position. I know what it’s like to be god… the trinitarian god, for I grew up as one being, holding 3 separate names, and by those names I called myself on separate occasions. The purposes of those versions of me were fraught with their similarities and differences, but those names I wore and wear are the chalk that outlines the being of my dead past, ropes that hold me taught amidst the tumultuous present, and the chains that bind me to my uncertain future.

I was born like many people have been, and with that birthing I was gifted three gifts. Gold, frank’s hot sauce, and Myrrh weren’t trendy gifts anymore, and so I was given three names instead. Liam, Corben, and Alexander. There might have been an art to naming once, perhaps names held a prophetic hint about what a child might end up becoming, who they might be, but if ever an art existed, it was done away with by the eurocentric propensity to repeat your Phillips, Louies, and Henries. Once more adding to the list of things monarchs have ruined for the rest of us, that imagined naming art is no more, and no amount of guillotines could ever bring it back.

With my oldest sister, my parents established the trend of calling all of us siblings by our middle names. To my family, and eventually my friends, I’ve always been Corben. Legally and officially though, I’m Liam. This never presented any intrigue or excitement in my life until I got to school, where I discovered the discord such a phenomenon could cause.

It was easy enough in the early years of my education, I knew myself as Corben, just like I thought everyone did. I learned how to spell my name with the same crayons that I’d scrape my teeth on, enjoying that waxy flavor that is known and beloved by all. Red Orange was always the one that I enjoyed the most, and I will strike down any who dare to tell me otherwise. I’m sure my parents would step in to settle any confusion that could’ve befallen me, assuaging my teachers with the notion that I’d respond best to Corben, and that I wasn’t too aware of who Liam was yet. I eventually figured out that he was me, and could correct my teachers on my own as I moved up in grades and time passed under my watchful gaze.

When I beat the odds and made it to highschool, I experienced a newfound dissonance. I was tired of correcting people about my name. I think my parents knew that such hardship would build character, and relish in the fact that they subject me to it. I gave myself a rule that if I had friends in a class, I’d correct my teacher, let them know that I’m Corben. If I had no friends, I’d just stick to being Liam. Liam became a studious quiet kid, with no friends to distract him, he did pretty well in those classes. I became serious in my pursuit and studies, and dedicated my time to making sure my grades in those classes flourished. Corben was busy hooling, not caring too much about the classes he found himself in. I had my friends, I could smile, laugh, crack jokes, annoy substitute teachers with my smarmy witticisms, and once again, hool.

Life is a constant battle between the forces of good and evil, likewise, my high-school experience was a constant battle of good grades and evil ones. The few times that Liam was addressed at home usually had to deal with missing assignments and lackluster report cards.

“Liam!?... Six missing assignments!?”

“Liam, get in here NOW”!

“ Liam, you have 10 seconds to turn off your game!”

I find it ironic that the me who cared so much about my grades ended up being the one who got in trouble for the other guy’s shortcomings. These moments of seriousness, where my first name was rarely taken in vain, only served to further cleave that split between Liam and Corben.

I wasn’t suffering from DID, I didn’t have split personalities, in this I was nothing like the god of the catholics, but I did feel like I was living different lives. When I wanted to cloister myself off from the world, seal up the pearly gates and ignore all phone calls, I would think of myself as Liam. When I wanted to be social, wanted to be acknowledged and appraised by others, remembered as the jealous being I am, I thought of myself as Corben. It dawned on me like a sun gifting new light to the earth, that my names became manifestations of my introversion and extraversion. In my naming, I fell into the throes of destiny that had me living these two lives, toiling and laboring as two men in the same body.

One semester of highschool, I was enrolled in both orchestra and concert band. I had an entourage of fellow hooligans with me in orchestra who I could mess around with the way the greats of classical composers always intended. I knew next to nobody in concert band, and anyone in that class who tried to say they knew me… I knew them not. Liam was a band kid, and Corben did orchestra. This wasn’t an issue, but the conductors for each class shared an office, and would oft regale each other with tales of praise for me and my antics. It was only realized as the semester ended, that the “Liam” Mr. Vale had been talking about this whole time, was the same person as “Corben” in Ms. Boehme’s class. Not only was my divisive nomenclature an internal dispute, it also had effects on the world that spent so much time judging me as well.

My last name in those early years only served as a loose thread, a horse’s hair, to tie me to my cousins and extended family. I knew who my immediate family was, they lived in the same house as me. When we moved houses as we did so much in those childhood years of mine, they migrated with me like Monarch Butterflies, the only monarchs I’d consider sanctioning. I am an Alexander, that now means more to me than it did then. If any name of mine is damning, it’s this one . Alexander was great, and I’m sure my family thinks themselves so, but the expectation to be just that has always hung over me.

I never got the brunt of it like my older brother did, “the firstborn son,” but it was instilled in all three of us boys, that we carried with us the name Alexander, and that meant something.

“Whose son are you? Jason’s? Jason what? Jason Alexander?!”

No matter where I went, how I proposed to live my own life, the tie back to them, to my family, would always follow me. I would be representing those who raised me, those who came before whether I sought to do so, or not. I can’t say I’ve done many things, mostly what I’ve seen my father do, and so like him I decided I would serve an evangelical mission for my church. During the two years in which I would be predicating a religious message, I would shed my usage of Liam and Corben, and only be known by Alexander, Elder Alexander, as missionaries for my church are commonly referred. I traveled 6,000 miles, three flights to a city in the heart of Argentina, only to discover that the expectations, always accompanying that last name, had followed me. This was a new familiarity, never so extensively did I represent more than just me, now I was a full-time representative for a church I belonged to, and a full-time representative of my family, no escaping the name that was ever present carved into the tag on my chest.

I grew to love what it meant to be Alexander, as I came up with my own definition of it. I think Alexander of old was great because he defined it for himself, and likewise, in this time when I was just Alexander, I would define what greatness could mean to me. The summer sun beat down hot in Argentina, a humid heat that refines in its immolation. The winter winds off the coast would chill with a humidity that can’t be layered against. The two years I spent there were brutal to me, but I learned a worth in that brutality. There’s an inherent part about evangelical preaching where you’ve done all you can do, and any further actions can only be taken by those with whom you’re sharing your message. The acceptance of a religious message is a personal choice that anyone has to make on their own, despite the amount of names they wield, and any delusions of Godhood. It was in the forgetting of Liam and Corben, the embracing of the newness Alexander offered, that I grew to love the choices I could make, and how they further defined me, while respecting the choices of others with my judgments reserved. Many of the people I interacted with down there, would always ask me “How could you leave it all behind? Don’t you miss your family? Two years away from them?” My answer came in the form of that which I always thought of as an old rusty chain, passed on from generation to generation to bind each member to the family, and all responsibilities associated with that great name. It was because I loved my family, that I could leave them behind. I found personal power in those expectations that kept me going every day. Maybe there’s a shortcut to greatness, achieved by simply slicing through whatever knot or obstacle bars your path, but I found that for myself, the Alexander that I am, I needed to unravel those knots, take the time to loose the threads that bound me, to realize that they also hold me steady. Alexander learned that even though greatness sometimes feels like a weight on your shoulders, that burden could give you god-like calves, (not the golden idolatrous kind, the leggy kind.) The distance that Alexander offered to Liam and Corben helped unify them all as one, because essentially, they all just want what’s best for me.

God is many things, but there’s much more that God isn’t. The burdens of our expectations would hardly be felt by God, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t there. If God was everything that anyone wanted him to be, the contradictions of his character would be innumerable. Focusing so much on that title, we forget the being behind it. Is our belief in God tied to what we think the title “god” means? Likewise, is our belief in ourselves, do our actions hold significance because of the names we’ve been given, the titles we bear? A name can be a burden, it can restrict you as a coarse fraying rope, tied tight around your wrists and ankles. The trains coming now, you hear its whistle blowing in the distance, and you know it’ll be on you soon. You’re tied to the tracks and your fate is seemingly sealed. A name can limit you so… but it can also be a tether, keeping you from falling to a timely death as you scale the precipice of life. Anchored to the icy crags, tied and secured to those who know you tried and true, the ones who know that Liam has the answers to the homework, know Corben is the one you call friend, know that you’re an Alexander, and the dependability that means.

I’ve enjoyed using the names I’ve been given, I’m hoping to wear them rough and ragged as time passes more under my watchful gaze. I think I’ll keep them for the time being, but as that quest of life calls me out, and my future progeny demand existence, I look forward to the new names and titles I’ll adopt then. Resurrecting once more the cycle, the burden of greatness, the safety line tied round my waist, that Alexander has been for me.