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TYPO

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Some Names Have
Been Changed
in the Writing of
this Memoir

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Typo

WEEKDAY YAO

Was a typo.
Instead, it was supposed to be

WEKDAY YAO

, which was a typo.

When he was born, Wekday Yao was supposed to be named Weekday ('WIK.dai or WEEK-dae), but there had been a typographical error, in his birth certificate or sometime later, and forever after he was Wekday. For no reason that Wekday understood, his parents kept the spelling of this incorrect name and vehemently refused to amend it when Wekday asked them to. But it was still pronounced with the long E- WEEK-dae- a correction no school teacher recognized for his entire life. So Wekday had been terrified for his entire life, on account of his parents must know something he didn't and he still hadn't found out what it was, or his teachers knew something, or both, and he'd spent the better part of his waking life afraid of what he might find if he started digging and what he'd live his whole life without knowing if he didn't. Or he was the only one who saw a typo there at all, which meant he was the only one who knew anything or the typo wasn't there and he alone knew nothing.

So he had options.

Regardless, the nametag on the door of his dorm room was wrong because it was ultimately correct. He would have to change it from the typo that it wasn't to the one that it now had to be, but wasn't yet.

He'd known college was going to be confusing.

Wekday took a step back, just a small one, so that he could be a little bit farther away from the mistake, and it got a little smaller. Wekday smiled inwardly at the cleverness of his solution. He took another step back. This method of total spatial retreat went well for three more steps until

Wekday hit a wall.

Cushioned by no fat whatsoever, Wekday's sharp and dangerous shoulder blades crackled against the plaster and bounced Wekday forward. With seven feet of distance between them Wekday and the nametag could still read each other perfectly.

He scanned his surroundings for predators. It had been nearly 45 minutes since he'd arrived at college and Wekday had not seen a single person in this dorm. There were zero people in this hallway, just

Luke Perrotta

enough for Wekday to feel comfortable, but it wouldn't last forever. Something had to be done about this name tag, and quick, before anybody saw.

Wekday uncapped the black sharpie he kept in his pocket for the singular purpose of correcting such errors and took an excruciating series of steps forward, angling the felt tip towards the offending sticker and pushing his hand forward, forward—

E E E E¹

—and stopped.

There were other ways to go about this. Instead of acting he could worry about it, which usually gave him new ideas for things to worry about even more so he'd forget to worry about this problem and it would disappear. Like, say, why he had to worry about this.

At home, spelling hadn't been a problem. Out of respect and as a kind of sop for their treasured and only child Wekday, Claire Xi and Steven Yao decided to change how they spelled the word week in every other context, including their professional lives. Weeks, like the wekdays or Wekday himself, were weks, every day of the wek, no exceptions. They'd done it to make him feel more comfortable in his mistake of a name, but growing up in such an insulated, coddled household added tremendously to the Existential Terror that snowballed up and over Wekday every day. The way Wekday saw it, sure it was great that his parents bent the rules for him now, but when he went out into the real world where the weks were "weeks" and the wekdays "weekdays", how on earth was he going to handle that? Out here in the real world, people picked on the wek. He needed thick skin, his parents hadn't given it to him, and now he was here at School, in the real world.

School is the real world.

Speaking of thick skin. God. Mom. She was one to talk about thick skin. Everything about her was thin, including the end of her rope. She loved screaming at Wekday's dad over the phone about how thin that rope was, or if she didn't love it she might as well learn to so she could do what she loved all the time. Dropping him off here, at School, still she ended up yelling at him. It hadn't even seemed like she had any reason to call Wekday's dad at the time—Wekday remembers that she called him because there the two of them were, Wekday and Claire, saying a tearful goodbye and coming in for the hug that hurts when suddenly she shot back like someone yanked a toy pullcord

1. The sharpie's point of view in all this.

2. If either of them had, Wekday hadn't met/heard about them.

tied to her lumbar. Wekday rushed over to her in the hall, to the spot where she'd fallen and shrieked, and offered her a hand but through his own boiled teardrops he saw his mother already scraping to her feet, goatlegged, ripping through her Otterboxed brick of an iPhone at the man she'd forbade from being here in the first place. She was angry at Wekday's father for not being there.

Wekday'd asked, "Are you okay?" and the interruption bothered her so much she screamed at Wekday's father about it, and left, and presumably continued to scream after that.

The name and the divorce were the only two things Claire and Steven agreed on. If they weren't on the subject of their son's name or their extremely intelligent and mutual decision to get a divorce, they were very dependably arguing. Really it seemed like they were both dependent on arguing. Both of them insisted to each other that they'd found other people they loved², but the hatred they felt for each other was truly unique and resembled an undying bond more than anything Wekday had ever seen. Either one of them was at home (in Wekday's teens that meant one of two different places, once Steven moved out and away from Maine to Massachusetts), shouting over the phone at the other, or neither of them were home but Wekday could be sure that wherever they were, they were shouting over the phone at each other. Before and after the divorce, they both worked 10-12 hours a day, 6-7 days a wek, and thus left Wekday at home with plenty of time to resent them and nurture his Existential Terror into a living, breathing entity, which at first loomed over him like a downy woolen blanket but eventually learned to befriend him and swaddle him with warmth, like a downy woolen blanket.

To be clear, he didn't hate his parents. Wekday really did love his mother, and he loved his father too but since Claire had legal custody Wekday's father never handled his legal documents and could never please give him that E, plus Wekday never got to see him. The love Wekday felt for his dad was more defensive empathy than anything else; whenever his mother was shouting Wekday would wince, and if anyone had asked him in high school if he loved his dad (which they hadn't) Wekday obviously would have said yes indignantly, because that's what you were supposed to do.

Since both parents were so distant, emotionally and often physically (they both traveled for work), Wekday learned from a young age to resort to the internet for comfort and the answers to his questions, and by fifteen, after spending roughly eleven thousand hours watching Youtube videos and taking advice from dubious but very trustworthy and threatening war veterans on message boards, Wekday

had become the world's foremost expert at worrying, misplacing his anger, and keeping terrible secrets. The last two were especially easy, since online message boards were a perfect outlet for this and Wekday's parents were exemplary role models seeing as they blamed each other for everything and Wekday hadn't heard anything about their terrible secrets. So obviously they had some.

The thought of Wekday's parents enraged him. The thought of his parting with them terrified him, and both thoughts together left him strangely physically exhilarated. He decided that yes, he was going to blot out that E. Yes. Problem solved.

Wait.

Which one?

The question of whether W█EKDAY or WE█KDAY was better didn't solve anything because he didn't like either of them. Which would be worse? was a more fruitful question, since he felt all sorts of terrible things about both. On the one hand, blotting out the first E was the honest thing to do. Put it out there right away, for everyone to see. Look the ugliness in the face. Then, though, everyone's first impression of him (or, second, seeing as how the W came first) would be of suspicion and mystery. Which is the sort of thing people asked questions about. Fortunately, he could blot out the second E, totally solving the first problem and creating an equally bad second situation wherein everyone he knew would find it pretty suspicious that he was hiding a secret that far into his name. Also, what if they assumed that the blotted letter was a G, or a C? Wegkday didn't exactly play music with your mouth, and Weckday was somehow worse than everything else that sounded like it. Although then he remembered how A and T are like way up there in terms of letter frequency in English and so Weakday/Wet K Day³ were also both bad.

The utter revulsion Wekday encountered while considering these options brought him a jolt of elation as he came to the realization that the feeling would push him to a decision, until he thought about how using any of those letters in place of the first E wasn't much better—Wäekday, or any of the unintelligible Wgekday/Wtekday/Wcek-day scenarios. Didn't roll off the tongue.

Fuck it.

Throwing himself at the door with too much momentum to change his mind, Wekday slammed the sharpie at the nametag so he would finally pick one, but ended up blotting out both E's so that now he was W█KDAY.

Shit.

W█KDAY cracked full-force into the door of his dorm room

and thudded off, his forehead grabbing some baby-blue paint to bring with them on their vacation to the floor. The hallway tasted faintly like iron now, from down here, and was making W█KDAY's mouth a little wet. Forgetting that he wore a short-sleeved shirt, Wekday wiped his mouth on zero sleeves, painting his wrist a pleasing crimson, and looked up at the door which had changed since he'd slammed his face on it but not in any way that solved the problem of his name, which was still W█KDAY.

That wouldn't do.

Wekday found his feet and backed up mentally so he could see the entire door and its two name tags for the first time:

BLAKE

And

WEEKDAY

And this changed everything. A multitude of possibilities struck and burned all at once, each lighting the way to a new and terrible omen according to the Zodiac:

1. Housing, Friendliness & Collective Facilities Coalition & Community (HFACFCAC) had somehow misread Wekday's name as "Blake" and by horrifying coincidence put him in a room with somebody else with the correctly spelled name of Weekday. Aside from the identity crisis Wekday would inherit by rooming with another Weekday, Wekday was aghast at the thought of people calling him Blake. This is because Wekday has never in his entire life heard of a Blake who his entire life did not hate. Neither has Existential Terror, who admits that even in the grand scheme of things and considering all the death and suffering in the world it is a pretty bad thing to be named Blake or to have to know anybody named Blake⁴.
2. The words "Blake" and "Weekday" were not names at all, rather units of the university's prevailing alien language that Wekday did not understand and was somehow unaware of until now. Communication and ultimate attendance of the university would be impossible, were this to be true; it couldn't be, though, since it was clearly the best alternative and could not possibly have occurred.
3. HFACFCAC had legally changed Wekday's name to Blake without his knowledge in some cruel demonstration of

bureaucratic power. Compared to this, the first option was a walk in the park. Because in this case someone had to have looked at Wekday/his application and thought:

- This Wekday is inferior to the other Weekday, so we will change this one's name;
 - And, worse, this Wekday looks like/could be mistaken for a person named Blake.
4. Wekday was terrified of this option in particular until he realized that there was one more worse option, None of the above;
 5. Because that, Wekday only just realized, would mean that Wekday would have to room with a real person named Blake and all of the tennis shoes he came with, a misfortune that made the possibility of Wekday's existence as an imposter Blake almost as desirable as Wekday's favorite thing, which was unexpected conflict avoidance or Saltines (Wekday had not been able to pick a clear winner out of these two by avoiding the mental conflict that bubbled up whenever he thought about them, though if Wekday had thought hard about that it probably should have been clear which one he liked better).

A dark temptation to blot out Blake's name was shoved back into Wekday's subconscious. ***But then he would be gone*** There was no need to worry about Wekday ever losing control enough to do a thing like this ***and it would take care of him*** no he wouldn't.

The *snap* of plastic on plastic, cap clicking back on marker.

You're making this harder, E.T.

It was entirely possible that actually entering the dorm room would solve Wekday's problem. Then, he wouldn't be able to see the signs on this side of the door and if a person named Blake/Wekday wasn't in there either then everything really would be fine because they wouldn't exist and Wekday could pick for himself he didn't want less. And then he'd have a single.

Around the corner, a door slammed. About three seconds of tinnitus and trap music ricocheted off the walls and the bass punched Wekday in the nose, which must have been the cause of the bleeding that had started earlier. A thunderclap closed the door. Wekday heard no footsteps, but if someone was quiet enough, the rug-layered floor wouldn't betray their approach and Wekday would only have seconds to act.

In a panic, Wekday uncapped the sharpie with his incisors and

blacked out his entire ***nobody will ever know*** so now Blake's roommate was named

██████████

which actually sounded pretty hip as long as people pronounced it right. Immediately, Wekday bobbed and weaved past all his bags (he had been too preoccupied with this naming issue for the past 45 minutes to open the door and move them inside), flew in silence over the rug to the stairwell, and flung the sharpie down the stairwell pit to the first floor, where nobody would find the evidence ever again.

Fully aware that he was the only person present at the scene of the crime, Wekday rushed to the bathroom. Here there would be other people who could provide him with an alibi, were there any questions to be asked.

He threw open the door to the bathroom and was punched in the nose once again, this time by the sound of a Blake-voiced guy singing Fetty Wap in the shower as loud as his diaphragm would let him.

Wekday did not want it to be Blake.

“SEV-EN-TEEEEEEN THIRREE-AIGH.... AI-”

p: Wekday does not want it to be Blake.

q: It is Blake.

p → q.

What are you implying?

Fetty Wap's song *Trap Queen* was blasting on Blake's expensive portable speaker. The song broadcasted far and wide throughout the entire dorm building whenever the door was open because the bathroom had a high ceiling and lots of empty space for the music to ripple and bounce through. The song was just beginning, and in the moments before Blake heard the dog-whistle screech of rusty door hinges, Blake scream-sang, “See yo pretty ahh, soon as you-” Soon as Wekday actually did *came in the do*’, Blake cut himself off, and, now off-time with Fetty, peeked his head out the side of the shower curtain and with bulging eyes yelled, “*HeywassupHELLO!*” and retracted his head back into the shower immediately afterwards.

Wekday said, “Hey, what's up, hello,” back, trying to keep up the game. The song played over his lips and drowned out the words, though, so it appeared instead like he said, “introduced her to my stove,” which is something Fetty says in the song. Good thing Blake wasn't looking.

No need to be mortified. Alibi secure. As long as Blake did not come out from the shower, wet and naked, to complete the introductory handshake/dap situation that Wekday has a zero percent chance of

doing correctly, everything will be fine. All that he had to do now was go back to the room and act normal until Blake came back. Wekday left the bathroom and went back to his and Blake's double to put away his bags and see what he could learn about Blake by looking at his things.

On the way, Wekday racked his brain for subjects which he and Blake might disagree on. Hearing his parents argue for so many years had taught Wekday that normal interactions were not characterized not by open disagreement. He'd avoid that at all costs, opting instead for demeaning streams of invective which hid his real intentions and feelings; hours of studying online message boards had made him incredibly well-equipped for this. If Blake liked that kind of thing (and for some reason guys Wekday's age really did) he'd be golden.

Wekday opened the door, propped it with a suitcase, and moved his luggage inside, making a mental list of his roommate's half of the room while he did. On a plain, very well-made bed rested a thirty rack of Natty light beer that was already sweating and dampening the bedspread. A poster nailed⁵ to the wall above Blake's bed depicted a bunch of tattoos with a gray scale rapper inside hotboxing his own aura of coolness. Wekday didn't recognize the name, partly because he couldn't read it—though text was printed in the lower left-hand corner of the poster, the background was layered with the exclamation, "Ay" so many times that it was impossible to draw any coherent meaning from the poster (later, Wekday would learn that the rapper's songs were like this, too ⁶). Leaning against the wall was an old lacrosse stick and a heavy duffel bag covered in a thin white powder lay on Blake's desk. Otherwise, there were just a few unpacked suitcases and dirty clothes strewn all around this side of the room.

Wekday checked his phone for the date. If he remembered right, today was the absolute earliest anyone could even move in. How Blake had gone through four shirts already was unclear.

Wekday hadn't turned any lights on in the room, so when everything went black he didn't understand at first that Blake had appeared and blocked off any path for light by filling the entire doorway with his bulk. Then, entering, Blake hunched really far under the doorway although he wasn't so tall that he needed to, and stood facing Wekday with a hand on the white towel wrapping his waist. Wekday remembered that he was in the middle of the room, directly in Blake's path if he wanted to get to his clothes, and that it looked like Wekday had been trespassing and looking at Blake's things, because he had been.

Hoping to get off on the right foot, Wekday raised a hand and said, "HeyWassupHELLO!"

Blake stood so still afterwards, Wekday wasn't sure if he'd actually said anything or just imagined himself saying the wrong thing. But after a second Blake turned his head to the wall on Wekday's side of the room in the direction of the bathroom, and back to Wekday after that, with the slow and exaggerated movements of a silent film actor miming hugely and obviously for the benefit of a dull audience.

"Oh, that was *you*," he said.

"Yeah," Wekday responded. "I'm your trap queen." Wekday stepped forward to get out of Blake's way— he was a huge person— and Blake stepped forward too, offering his hand to Wekday for a firm handshake with the hand that had been holding the towel in place. Wekday took the hand, but could not meet Blake's eyes because he could not tear his own eyes from how the towel was so quickly beginning to loosen, prefiguring disaster.

"Blake," Blake said.

"Blake," Wekday nodded, smiling.

Blake withdrew his hand. "What?"

"Oh, I just—"

"Your name's Blake, too?"

"No, no, I was just agreeing."

"Oh." Blake nodded to show he did not understand. He looked over his shoulder back at the room's door, which had the nametags on the other side of it. Blake looked a little like Superman and this X-ray vision thing he kept doing was unnerving. "Then who the hell is [REDACTED]?"

"I am. I'm [REDACTED]."

"Nice to meet you, [REDACTED]."

"Hey, you said it right! Nobody does that."

"Sweet." Blake nodded, producing vibrations in his body that further tugged at the towel's integrity.

Jesus get ur shit together

"So where are you from?" Wekday asked as Blake crossed the room in gargantuan steps.

"Hanover, New Hampshire."

That place sounded fake, but Wekday didn't say anything.

"How bout you?" Blake's towel, almost falling off, almost fell.

"Atlantis."

"Where's that?"

"Underwater."

"Oh, in Maine."

"Yeah, exactly. Northern District."

"It's by Dartmouth," Blake offered. "Hanover, I mean."

“Oh.” That had to be even less real.

“Yeah. I didn’t get in there,” Blake said, “but they almost recruited me for lax.”

“That’s okay. I heard everyone who goes to Dartmouth is Christian, gay, Jewish, Irish, or Atheist.” It was a gamble. Wekday held his breath.

Blake spun around. His shiny tight face tilted down a little and shaded itself with big vague polygons. “Whoa, man.” He laughed nervously and sort of inched from foot to foot, made nervous by Wekday’s joke but too confused to know if he was supposed to be offended.

“I’m just kidding,” Wekday blurted. “I love the Irish.”

Blake, nodded, relaxing. “Oh, sick.”

The towel fell to the floor. Instead of turning around, Wekday looked Blake right in the dick and said, “Don’t worry. I’m not looking at your dick.”

TURN AWAY TURN AWAY. But Wekday knew that demonstrations of wekness were deadly around apex predators. He proceeded to make himself as large as possible, like you do with bears.

For a moment all was still. If Blake was fooled, then everything was cool and maybe Blake and Wekday would be cool. They’d get along. Maybe more— Wekday’s mind jumped days, weeks, months forward— they’d go to parties together (cool), eat dinner together (also cool), become actual friends instead of two people forced to put up with each other’s company (very cool). Maybe Blake would invite Wekday to his family’s exceedingly cool Thanksgiving dinner, where they raised, slaughtered, and ate the turkey on the family yacht. Or maybe quails? The possibilities were endless.

Or this was the end. Blake would call Wekday’s bluff, and presumably eat him. And his obituary would only remember [REDACTED].

“Share the love, bro,” Blake laughed, turning and bending over to pick up some boxers so that he gave Wekday a better view of his pornstar plumber’s buttcrack. “Drink it in, baby.”

Wekday took a deep breath, drinking it in.

Success.



Untitled

Galadriel Brady

16

Untitled 1

He had a large nose, he was sure of it, but nobody would confirm it for him. When he was in middle school he had watched an anime — everyone had watched anime in middle school, it wasn't just him — where one of the three main characters also had a large nose. People mocked this character ruthlessly for it, and he could identify with the character, even though he couldn't remember the name of the character or the name of the anime really and even though nobody ever made fun of him for having a large nose.

It was horrible to believe something that nobody else would confirm and he couldn't tell the difference between the presence of the people around him vs the people themselves, so he mistakenly believed it was the people themselves who made him feel horrible, and that made him resent the people around him, even though they all treated him very well. His father had beat him as a child but he had also signed him up for group sports so he had turned out well-adjusted enough in the end in that the people around him always tended to like him.

He was unsettled by this because he couldn't see what he had done to make them like him and sometimes it felt so unrealistic that he had a hard time believing it wasn't a joke that everyone was playing on him. Like when he was three years old and his sister had started telling him that he was an alien and not a human, and it wasn't funny but no matter how he tried to argue or prove to her that he was human she could always outsmart him because she was three years older, and she maintained this position for three months until their mother screamed at them to stop fighting and they never really talked again after that. The absurd good will and warmth that everybody outside his family displayed to him could feel in the same way like a senseless lie that other people seemed to find so funny that they refused to let it go. He hated to feel a truth that everybody around him invalidated.

Well, it felt that way usually when he was feeling unhappy in general, for example after he hadn't slept enough or after his sister was cruel or after he watched a French New Wave film where the main characters seemed very alive and in love with each other (he desperately wanted to feel that way about someone) and they had unusual features but not in an ugly way, just in an irresistibly original and beautiful way. If he would have kept a diary tracking his mood he might have noticed that he often felt unhappy after watching these films, but he didn't notice and when people asked who his favorite director was he would say Truffaut.

When he was happy he was a bit more charitable. For ex-

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ample, a girl who watched anime in middle school (he had made fun of her for it, because the jocks made fun of her for it and he spent a lot of time with them) who would later go on to become a critically acclaimed indie actress (he watches every movie she's in in theaters when it comes out now, as a self-made millionaire in his late 20s who still wears Vans to work every day) asked him out to the school Sadie Hawkins dance in 8th grade, and because she was still considered weird then he assumed that she was genuine. She had the sort of unrealistically large bulging eyes that unsettle you in person but mesmerize you when safely contained behind the glass of a tablet or TV screen and then really terrify you again when blown up on a big projector screen. In 8th grade she wore a garish amount of eyeliner though and the jocks didn't like that. Anyway, after she asked him out to the Sadie Hawkins dance, he allowed himself a more charitable thought. Maybe people liked him because the jocks liked him, and he knew the jocks liked him because he played team sports and he could help them with their math homework. And the girl with big eyes who liked anime liked him because he made fun of her. He knew then, with pubescent masculine overconfidence that chicks dug jerks. (He doesn't know this anymore.)

After he reconciled peoples' chummy behavior toward him with an internal model that managed to justify it slightly he opened up to people a bit more, but the indie-actress-to-be went to a different high school so she never got to know this kinder side of him. When he watches her movies now he often regrets not asking her if anyone had ever told her that her eyes were so big. If anyone ever tells her now. He still doesn't understand why nobody has ever mentioned his huge nose. He thinks that maybe she might understand.

Untitled 2

The older boys, who are around the age of my brother, have taken a machete to the giant evergreen tree behind Zachary's house. The tree's branches, coming out on all sides and at all heights from the tree trunks, all slope downwards, as if striving to reach the ground. Its pine-needle fingers are splayed out in all directions, so overall the tree looks as if it is in a dream and just realized with a shock that it forgot to put clothes on, and now it is trying to shield its bark skin from sight by angling and layering its limbs in front of itself as defensively as possible. The older boys have taken advantage of the tree's natural

modesty to create a hiding spot, by cutting off all of the tree's lower branches except those that form the outermost layer of cover. Now, a thick needle-y branch can simply be pushed like a curtain hanging over a stage, and anyone who knows the tree's secret emptiness can slip inside and hide from the scrutiny of their watchful parents.

I learned about this from Steve, who is the only other kid my age in the neighborhood, so while he'd rather hang out with the older boys — and occasionally can manage it, which is how he learned about the hollow evergreen — he often has to hang out with me. Every time he ends up doing this — after knocking on the door to ask if my brother is home, and upon learning that my brother isn't, coming inside anyway — he makes sure to look as bored and disdainful as possible, as if I have somehow forced him to play with me. The truth is I don't care much if I am alone or not. The backyard behind my house ends at the boundary of a small forest — the same one behind Zachary's house — and at the other side of the small forest or occasionally running through it there are some train tracks that aren't used anymore, and I still have not managed to follow them to the end, and when the whole world will play with you like that you really don't mind if other kids play with you or not. But I was grateful for Steve's company on the day that he showed me the hollow evergreen tree, because I really needed it at that time.

Inside the tree, everything looked green and soft because of how the sunlight was filtered through the pine needles. The older boys had kept some of the branches that were around head height, so I needed to stoop occasionally when walking around the circular space. With some effort I could pull myself up onto one of these head-height branches, and then I could sit with my feet dangling above the ground. When Steve was in the tree with me, and I discovered this, he made sure to pull himself up onto a branch too, and then for good measure, climb up to another, higher branch, so he could sit with his feet dangling above my head. I didn't mind. I was busy thinking that this tree would be the perfect place to hide out for a day or two, as long as I didn't mind sleeping on the ground and getting my blanket dirty.

We were supposed to move at the end of the week, even though I had insisted that I didn't want to. We were moving to Miami, where there were no train tracks in the backyard forests or backyard forests at all or even, my mom warned me, a backyard probably, and although there were trees the majority of them were palm trees which couldn't be climbed. I asked my mom if we would live on a cul-de-sac in Miami, because kids could play in the streets on cul-de-sacs like ours, and if I couldn't play in a forest or in a backyard or in a tree I at least wanted to be able to play in the street, and my mom said we

would live by a highway in an apartment. So I decided to move into the hollow tree on the day of our plane flights, figuring that if my mom wouldn't want to waste the money on the plane tickets, and that if she couldn't find me she would have to leave eventually. After my mom was gone, I hoped to move back into our empty house, since I knew how to open the back windows even if the front door was locked. I packed myself two sandwiches and some juice, slipped out of the house with a sleeping bag while everyone was yelling at each other about getting their suitcases shut, and escaped inside the evergreen tree in Zachary's backyard.

I lay down on the ground and spent time looking up and around. The pine needle-fingers and branch-arms were all I could see around me, and I had the comforting sensation that the tree was hugging me. I watched sunlight and shadows play across the ground as breezes moved the outer branches, and felt completely at peace imagining my mom walking one-by-one to each of the neighbor kid's houses on the cul-de-sac – without ever crossing the street – and asking if I was there. I was imagining them all saying no, one by one, and then my mom leaving, and just before this could come true, Steve, who lives all the way on the other end of the cul-de-sac and was the last kid my mom talked to, when she was in a complete panic about my whereabouts and he was her last resort, tattled on me and said I might be in the tree. So my mom found about the tree, and his mom – who had gotten invested in the outcome of the search – found out too, and she must have told all of the other parents on the block, and the older kids must have gotten very angry at Steve for ruining their secrets, but I never found out if they decided to shun him (which would have meant he'd come over to mine much more often) because I moved away that afternoon.

Some Names Have Been Changed in the Writing of this Memoir

Julia
Illana

[Genesis 3:2] A *friend of mine* said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the orchard; but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, ‘You must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die.’” The serpent said to her, “Surely you will not die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil.”

Thus she was convinced, for though she had not been on this Earth for long she was given a curiosity that superseded any love of comfort. It was a long climb; she peered up through the layers and layers of branches...

✧ ✧ ✧

A friend of mine played the cello for a long while before she went to college. Of all the members of her string quartet in high school, she was on the best terms with the violist. During lulls in practice she’d try and figure out if she was actually interested in him. If he held her hand, would she feel anything? If she kissed him, would she feel anything? As if prodding at a tooth she kept trying to push herself into imagining anything past vague discomfort. He was attractive, she thought—was he? She wasn’t sure. People far younger than her seemed to know a lot about their standards than she did.

She tried to not let him catch her staring. She knew it was probably kind of creepy.

A few weeks later her mom said gently, “I was talking to your violist friend’s mom last practice— you know he’s gay?”

“Oh,” said my friend. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“What do you want me to say?”

“I thought you had a crush on him— I didn’t want you to be disappointed.”

My friend laughed uncomfortably. She couldn’t exactly tell her mom that she was trying him on like a coat.

✧ ✧ ✧

[Genesis 3:6] ...so when a *friend of mine* saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. Then her eyes were opened, and she knew that she was naked; or rather she suddenly knew that everyone else was clothed and the orchard had already been

mostly picked clean... She kept the fruit for years and ate bites of it over time, sure that everyone around her could smell its slow scented rot, and she wandered naked and ashamed about the streets wondering CAN I GET SOME FUCKING CLOTHES THAT FIT AROUND HERE?

✧ ✧ ✧

My friend won the most points for her team out of anyone at freshman year sex trivia. She took home a free copy of TRANS BODIES TRANS SELVES for her trouble and shut herself in her room for the next semester and a half.

✧ ✧ ✧

My friend came out to her mom that summer in a very awkward, sideways, veiled way. After her mother made an absent joke the next day about finding a boyfriend, my friend composed a five-page email with detailed definitions, a list of common misconceptions, personal anecdotes, and an accompanying reading list. The one bolded line in the entire document was DO NOT OUT PEOPLE, with specific family members named as examples of people she'd prefer to continue leading a life of ignorance.

✧ ✧ ✧

My friend went to a Queer Alliance mixer for asexuals. They broke out the Cards Against Humanity deck and one freshman leaned over to her and said, "Can you read the cards for me?"

Thinking she had misheard, my friend asked, "Excuse me?"

The girl said, "I made a bet with someone in the fifth grade that I would never swear again, and haven't done it since, so I can't read the curse words."

My friend took a deep disbelieving breath, because did this girl want to fulfill an eternal-child stereotype, even though she knew it was unfair, and said, "Um— alright."

Five plays in when someone drew a card and asked "What does this *mean?*", *again*, and the whole room of college students with internet access nodded because what *did* it mean, my friend made her excuses and left as quickly as possible. Only when she put it into writing a year later did she realize it was because they hadn't eaten so much as she had. They were all naked like her, and they didn't know enough to be ashamed, why weren't they obsessed with learning every-

thing they possibly could, why weren't they ashamed, why weren't they *ashamed?*

✧ ✧ ✧

[Genesis 3:11] *And to a friend of mine* the Lord God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

And my friend asked, "If you didn't want me to eat anything, why did you put the fruit there in the first place?"

✧ ✧ ✧

My friend stayed up at 2AM watching a clip from BoJack Horseman, a show of which she'd never watched a full episode in her life. Todd Chavez sat in a diner booth, staring fuzzily into a bowl of ice cream.

TODD: I'm not gay!

TODD: I mean, I don't think I am, but... I don't think I'm straight, either.

TODD: ...

TODD: I don't know what I am.

TODD: I think I might be nothing.

She watched it so many times she could practically taste the banana split. The only sound in the room was: "I think I might be nothing." Click. "I think I might be nothing."

If anyone had been in the room with her she wouldn't have been able to explain why she was so near tears— not that it was inexplicable, but that she felt any explanation was difficult for anyone else to believe. She had been reading for years. It was very rare that anything ever read her back.

✧ ✧ ✧

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