

“That’s Okay”

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Saying good-bye to my best friends after a long night of uncensored language and fun in the finished basement of my mother and stepfather’s house, I slid the glass door across its tracks. Breathing a sigh of tiredness and relief, I stumbled through the kitchen into the back pantry with hunger clouding my judgment. I suddenly felt no need for food as the deep fog of my mind cleared, and the exhaust of a new train of thought began to roll through.

I turned off the lights in the kitchen and proceeded to my living room where a dirty couch—with history—welcomed me into its chocolate milk stained arms. The white Christmas lights flashed above the white-framed windows, and the ocean calmly waded on and off the muddy shore. I did what any insightful and introspective teenager would do while thinking deeply, and scrolled indiscriminately through the endless square photos of a cleverly named app.

I had never been an uproarious or rebellious child. Even as I transitioned into my adolescence, I was a treat for my parents. They couldn’t say a bad word about me, except that I often lost my temper at my little brothers. When my middle brother hit puberty, my mother told me that she had just now realized how good of an adolescent I had been. I tried to conform to the standards set by society, by which I don’t just mean saying please and thank you. I strived to be normal. My parents only knew how to raise a boy based on the gender stereotypes of their time. I kicked the ball around. I shot nerf guns. I ate with my hands. I slept through the night even though I was scared to death of the crocodiles at the end of my bed. I didn’t know anything else.

Walking slowly to the base of the stairs, the soles of my bare feet were shocked by the quick transition from warm wood floors to cold ceramic tiles. I placed my hand on the maple railing, quietly ascending into the top floor. The wall on my left is dented, scratched, and streaked with several rambunctious accidents. My whole family was asleep. My stepfather, and my mother beside him, sleeping in a king-sized bed, my baby sister, under her pink, princess sheets, and my two brothers, both sound asleep on their separate beds, dreaming of field goals and home runs. I couldn’t help thinking that I might be different.

I played soccer when I was a kid. I think it was because I was the first born child, and my parents didn’t think that a boy my age was interested in anything else but sports and getting dirty. Truth be told, I despised soccer. I didn’t feel like I was in the right place while I was kicking a soccer ball around— just one of the guys. After I quit, I hadn’t thought much about it, but by quitting I segregated myself from an entire social clique of guys. In the years following, I traded the ball for the smooth polyester of a certain blonde bombshell’s hair and her permanently tiptoed feet. I only had one other chance of readmission into the arena, and that came when the football coach noticed my broad shoulders. He asked me to tryout for football, but all I could do was laugh. I knew I wasn’t a football player.

Upon reaching the summit of the stairs, I sauntered across the hall to my room. The green shag carpet soothed the bottoms of my feet. The fan atop my bureau was at its highest setting, trying relentlessly to beat the heat of the late summer. A vintage chair sat in the back left corner of my room, adjacent to my bed. That chair had been in that house for ten years. The pattern on that chair looked as if it should be on the set of *The Jetsons*. Its sickly green fabric planted a disease in my mind. Once my mother moved into the house, that chair was exiled to my room, where no one would see it. It was isolated to the corner. Despite its discomforting appearance, I sat in that chair, where I contemplated my role in the world. Like that chair I was also isolated. Isolated from the world, my family, and myself. As I sank deeper into the springs of the chair, I grew more intense in thought.

During the summer before high school, my stepfather invited a family who he knew from his work to our house for dinner. They hailed from the city of Portland, which is just twenty five minutes south of Yarmouth, where they planned to move before the start of the school year. They had a daughter who was my age. I felt inferior in the presence of someone who was so cultured. She had lived in a city and gone to a school with twice the number of students of Yarmouth's schools. She might as well have been living in London, England. I was enthralled in our conversation. She seemed like a true individual. Having lived in a city where diversity was not uncommon, she had the means to be who she wanted. In Yarmouth I was a clone of every other white male in the school. The extent of individualism in Yarmouth was liking old music or taking an art class. I was unique, but I chose to cover my distinctive characteristics with a thick quilt of geometric squares, fit rigidly together to construct the perfect image.

I started to cry. I realized the possible consequences of the recognition that I have come to accept about who I am. Curling into a ball, I sobbed softly into my dark-washed jeans. The sickly green fabric of the chair wrapped around my shrunken body. I couldn't continue living a lie. I couldn't pretend to watch sports or eat tons of red meat anymore. I needed to be myself.

After about a month of Mesopotamian history, my high school had a club fair where all of the clubs at our school were represented by their presidents in the cafeteria. What had seemed like a closed minded school now blossomed with diversity. Every activity, political party, and notion was represented at our school's annual club fair. I wasn't very interested in most of the clubs, but it is almost a tradition for the freshmen to sign up for at least nine or ten clubs. Global Action, Young Liberals, Playmakers, Spanish Club, Outing Club, Newspaper, Model UN, and Play in the Street, our school's literary magazine. A particular booth caught my eye. Every color of the rainbow was represented on the one, small table where the Gay Straight Transgender Alliance was giving out starbursts and lollipops. This club was different. I actually planned on attending its meetings. I president of the club gleefully welcomed me to the booth. She didn't conform to the typical female stereotype. She was wearing a sports sweatshirt, her hair was cut short, and she was extremely outspoken. I needed to be apart of this family. Naturally, before I signed up, I needed to find a friend to sign up with me. I searched the cafeteria for any of my friends who might join. Out of the fifteen-or-so friends I had, only one would show her support with me by signing up. I knew then that I had someone.

Alone in my chair I picked up my phone, tears running down my red-stained cheeks. I could only trust one person. My fingers glided across the keyboard. Few words were needed to express the person I had always been, but chosen to hide.

“I think I am gay.”

Without hesitation, she answered.

“That’s okay.”