

Untitled

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“Do you think he’s gay?” my mom asked in what she thought was a private conversation with my aunt.

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He had brown eyes, was just a tad taller than me. He spoke with a slight country accent, and I knew right away he was not one of those “average negroes,” as my Grandma would say. We had met on Grindr, and I thought this moment in time – after all the chats, sexts, and Snapchat videos – would finally culminate into something I had long been waiting for. I took him back to my room, and he... (to be continued).

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That day, I took to Google and searched “Am I gay?” What appeared in the results was a list of quizzes. I made a habit going through each of them, hoping to reassure myself that the chances of me being gay were next to none.

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9th grade. Gym class. Blue eyes. Very blue, in fact. They reminded me of the ocean, those afternoons when Granddad would take me to the Island so I could watch the crashing waves against the shore. He was the first boy I ever loved. Before him, I had only girl crushes, but the way I felt about him was something different. It was intense; a feeling I never felt before. My heart raced whenever he was present, the same way he used to race the track every day during class. It made me think of all the times I crushed on girls, whether the crushes were genuine or just because that was expected of me. I was watching *The Fosters* at the time, and I thought that maybe this boy could be the Conner to my Jude. Apparently, he was into the show, but I knew it was never meant to be.

He moved away that summer.

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“Are you gay?” a boy asked me at my cousins’ Fourth of July celebration. He was only curious because he insisted over and over that my voice sounded like a woman’s. But of course, I said no. I had to.

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Economics class. He sat across from me. Hazel eyes. Quiet. Smart. We were very much alike. I wasn't sure if he was out at the time, but I knew deep down, he too had his own secrets. Like his life, my infatuation with him was short-lived. He was killed in an accident over spring break.

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"Is he gay?" he whispered to my friend. He was an old friend I knew from 5th grade. Somehow, I was under the impression he was into me. Too bad he wasn't my type.

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The first time I've ever hinted at the fact I was gay was in 7th grade in the locker room of my old middle school's gym. Needless to say, those trips to the locker room were quite the nightmare, not because I was afraid of changing in front of people but because I wasn't ready to accept the reality that I was into other men. And what's a worse place to be other than a room filled with boys in their underwear? I would stand nearest to the exit, trying my best not to look, not to give off the impression that I was anything other than straight.

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"Are you gay?" my mentor asked me, peering at me from behind the desk in an attempt to get to the bottom of things.

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...he just wanted to talk.

"What do you wanna talk about?" I asked, puzzled by how he misled me the whole time.

"I'm not sure," he responded.

"Not sure of what?"

"Of myself, my sexuality."

"Maybe, I can help."

"No, no."

"We don't have to do anything physical," I said, "If you wanna talk, then that's fine with me."

And so we did. We shared our experiences. We talked about life, and this whole process of figuring ourselves out. I saw a bit of myself in him. He reminded me of my past self, when I wasn't sure about an aspect of my identity. Talking to him revealed how much I've grown and matured in an identity I previously rejected.

But even in the midst of all the sexual tension that built up prior to that moment, I'm glad it wasn't a hookup.

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