

Memoirs of a Platypus

She stares at the photo for a long time, her eyes whizzing back and forth, trying to absorb as many details as possible. Her eyes lock on something: the blue coat worn by the child in the picture. Her mouth moves, trying to state what the color is.

“Buh....Bluh...um...bloo...” she says, desperately trying to pull the word from the recess of her mind. But the word is lost, and she needs help.

“What is this?” she asks, turning towards the chairs where Dr. Saura and I are sitting. Her voice is that of a small child’s, full of curiosity and wonder.

“It’s a color, Karsyn,” says the doctor, with his endless patience, “blue, like the color of the ocean and the sky.”

“Blue,” she says, rolling it around her mouth. “I like that!” she says, flashing one of her dazzling smiles. I try to keep my composure, but with that smile, my heart breaks a little bit. It breaks because Karsyn is not a small child. It breaks because she is a beautiful 28-year-old woman who should be out seizing every opportunity life can give her. It breaks because instead, she is in a doctor’s office, trying to relearn everything she has ever known. It breaks because I’m the reason she is here.

She walked into my life in the 3rd grade. In the middle of Nature Science, she stood in the doorway, dressed from head to toe in purple, with her beautiful brown curls in a braid down her back. She was the new girl from Illinois that Ms. Wallace had said would be joining us. I watched her as she walked to the teacher’s desk and laid down her note from the office. The way

she walked--she looked like a gazelle or a ballerina or a feather or some surreal combination of the three. Amazingly, Ms. Wallace (bless that woman) told her to float to the only empty desk, the one right next to mine.

“HimynameisAndy,” I blurted out, the words racing each other to leave my mouth. She looked up from her desk where she was organizing her pencils by length, just long enough to take in my huge ears, my freckles, my buck teeth.

“My name is Karsyn,” she said, focusing her attention back to her pencils. Her voice was one to die for, one even the holiest of all angels would wish to have. “Nice to meet you Andy,” she continued. When she said my name, every single nerve in my body sparked, so intensely that I was afraid I would start glowing. My heart started racing, and that’s when I knew I was in love.

By the 5th grade we were best friends. Well, no, best friends is an understatement. We were Siamese twins, joined at the hip and never seen without the other. Every day after school would be an adventure. Often we would go to the creek behind my house and play with the wildlife that called it home. One day we found a snake. Of course she was not afraid of it. She would let it curl all around her arm, giving the appearance of some sort of possessed pipe cleaner. Another day, we were capturing minnows for her fish tank.

“Andy?” she asked, as I chased a particularly speedy one. “If you could be any animal, what would you be?”

“Hmm... a lion,” I said. “They’re strong and powerful and nobody can bother them!
What would you be?”

“A platypus,” she replied instantly. “They don’t really know what they’re supposed to be, but they’re perfectly okay with that.”

“Good work today, Karsyn,” says Dr. Saura as Karsyn pulls her sweater on. “I’ll see you in two days.” Karsyn nods, grabs my arm, and we walk out of the complex.

“Who was that?” she asks me, as soon as the door swings shut behind us.

“Dr. Saura, your memory therapist,” I say, for the umpteenth time. I’m still not sure why I answer her questions. I know she will forget before we even reach the next block. But I think of all she has done for me, and it gives me patience. A sudden gust of wind catches us, and she shivers, drawing closer to me. I hand her my jacket, trying to convince myself that I didn’t need it.

“Thanks for being there for me,” she says as she pulls the jacket on and gives me a swift peck on the cheek. I know for her it is nothing, but suddenly I am the luckiest man in the world all over again.

Our first fight was in the 8th grade. School had just started, and Karsyn had just broken up with Justin, her boyfriend of six months (four years in middle school time). I was friends with Justin, and I would eat with him and his friends on those rare days when Karsyn wasn’t at lunch. One day, she was in a club meeting, and I decided to eat with the guys.

“Hey bro,” said a boy as I sat down. I didn’t know his name; I never really cared to learn it.

“Sup,” I said, sitting down and pulling out my sandwich. I looked around the lunchroom, looking at everything and noticing nothing, contemplating my peanut butter and Nutella. That was when I heard them talking.

“You doing okay, man?” asked one guy.

“Yeah, it’s no big deal. She didn’t mean anything, just a whore who’s a good kisser,” replied Justin to general laughter.

“A whore who’s a good kisser?” I thought to myself, ignoring my sandwich. “Who does he think he is, talking about my Karsyn like that?” I got up out of my chair and, barely noticing the rest of the lunchroom, took all of my newborn fury and punched Justin square in the face.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” yelled Justin, pinning me against a wall.

“You don’t talk about Karsyn like that,” I shouted into his face, trying to kick him. “Nobody talks about Karsyn like that!” I scream, giving no notice to the crowd growing around us. Justin punched me right in the gut, and we fought like animals until a teacher came and pulled us apart. But I didn’t stop trying to hurt him until we got to the principal’s office. Nobody talks about Karsyn like that.

I sat through the principal’s lecture without making eye contact with anyone. I spoke only when spoken to and didn’t react to anything she said. I didn’t protest when she assigned three weeks of detention to each of us. I didn’t flinch when Justin swore he’d “take care of me later.” I only expressed emotion when I saw Karsyn walking down the hall.

“Hey,” I said, breaking into a smile.

“How could you do this to me?” she asked, in an unusually cold voice. “You embarrassed me in front of Justin and the whole school.”

“Hu-wha-bu-I embarrassed you? In front of Justin? You’re mad about that? Do you know what that idiot was saying about you?” I spluttered, my voice growing louder with anger.

“Don’t worry about what he or anyone else says about me!” she cried. “Just butt out of my life!” And with that, she pushed past me and disappeared through a classroom door. I just stood there. Somehow, in comparison to the fight and the principal’s lecture, this part hurt the most.

We go to the coffee shop after her appointment, where I always get a decaf and she always asks me where we are. The teenager behind the counter knows our order by heart. We get our coffee and sit down at a booth, the one near the door, same as always. She picks at the apple crumble in front of us, her eyes downcast; I watch her over the rim of my cup.

“What’s wrong?” I ask her.

“I don’t remember,” she said, not looking at me.

“Well, when you remember, be sure to let me know,” I say, trying to make her happy.

“No that’s what’s wrong. I don’t remember. Where I am, who I’m talking to...I don’t remember. Why can’t I remember?” she gazes at me, with those big, beautiful eyes. I find myself gazing deeper and deeper into them, until I lose my balance and get lost.

“I don’t remember,” I say, falling blissfully away.

She was the only girl I even considered asking to senior prom. Now that I think about it, I realize that I would have been in a really bad spot if she had said no. But thankfully she said yes. Tuxedos were rented, dresses altered, shoes found, all in anticipation of the big night. I remember how the weather was on that April night. The night was warm, with that earth smell of spring in the air. I rang the doorbell, and when she opened the door, I almost felt as though I was at the wrong house. The girl who opened the door couldn't be Karsyn, she was too...amazing. Flawless skin, elaborate curls in her hair, a purple dress hanging from her perfect frame. She led me into the familiar living room, where corsages were exchanged, pictures were taken, smiles surrounding everything. There isn't much I remember about the actual dance. I'm not even sure what the theme was. The only thing that was imprinted into my mind is how beautiful she was, and how all she did through the whole night was smile.

College was the first time we were apart for an extended period of time. She went off to New Jersey while I went the opposite direction, to California. We stayed in contact as much as possible, but it was hard, with schoolwork and jobs and the time difference to top it all off. But I listened to everything she had to tell me: how her Modern Living teacher was the farthest possible thing from modern, how she and her hall-mates were planning to make curtains together, how she met Sam, how they started to date, how he was the best thing in her life. I won't pretend that it didn't hurt me. There was a time when I was the best thing in her life, and I wanted it back. But no matter, she was happy, and therefore I was too. In the beginning she would call me every day, her voice bubbling with happiness. I was the first to know when they

went on their first real date, when he said he loved her, and when they shared their first kiss. As time went, however, her phone calls became less and less frequent, soon getting to the point where I would be lucky if she called once a month. Even when she did call, her voice was getting quieter, more monotone. I called her too, more and more as she called less and less, but more often than not it would go to voicemail. I was yearning to know why she was avoiding, what was going on, but whenever I would ask her, she would immediately hang up, and I didn't want to lose any of my rare moments with her. But my curiosity still didn't go. One day when we were both home for break, I went to her house to see her.

“Karsyn,” I breathed as soon as she opened the door. Her eyes were underlined with black, and her hair hung limp around her face. She seemed to have lost almost 20 pounds from the last time I had seen her, a few months ago.

“What do you want?” she said, as if I were some solicitor.

“Karsyn, I wanted to see you, to talk to you. I mi- what is that?” I asked, for she had just lifted her arms up to yawn, revealing a dark purple bruise under her shirt.

“It's nothing, Andy,” she said, pulling her shirt down and shifting her eyes around I couldn't catch her eye. “What do you want?”

“Karsyn, that looks bad. Have you put anything on it, maybe some Neosporin? I can go and-“

“Stop,” she said, quietly but firmly. “It's nothing. It was nice seeing you, but if you'll excuse me, I have to go. Nice talking to you.” And without even saying goodbye, she slammed the door in my face. We didn't talk at all after that, much less see each other. As much as my

heart wanted to keep trying, my mind said no, and that memory was the one I lived with for seven years until I found her again.

We walk back to the apartment, eager to get back to the comfort of home. I throw my keys onto the table by the door and plop down on the couch, where she has already nestled into the hollows of the cushions.

“You know what would look good here?” she says, indicating the blank stretch of wall in front of us. “A mural, of all the different animals.”

“Like a zoo?” I say, playing along. This is one of many decisions made about that wall. It should be decorated by a picture collage, a painting, a tapestry, something different every day.

“No, not a zoo,” she says. “A wild African prairie with elephants and giraffes and antelopes running free while the lion looks over them.”

“And a platypus, right in the middle, completely different from all the other animals and not bothered by it at all,” I think to myself, and with a smile, pull her closer to me.

When I came back home as a college graduate, ready to start working, I decided to try to see her again. I rang the bell, the door swung open, and her mother stood there, her eyes widening.

“Where’s Karsyn?” I asked, eager to see her. A pained expression came across her mom’s face, and she told me that Karsyn had eloped, that she had run off with “some fellow

named Sam.” I had never thought of her as one to elope, but that didn’t mean much, for there was so much that I didn’t know about her anymore. It had been so long since we had talked, I wasn’t even sure if she remembered my name. Maybe my emotion showed on my face, for her mother gave me a piece of paper with her address and telephone number, and told me to go see her, to make sure she was okay. Even now, I’m not sure how I knew the way. Nobody gave me directions; it was as if my car just knew how to get to that small brick house. I did not go in, for I was afraid of what she would do when she saw me. I don’t think I could have handled her telling me to go away. So instead I looked around, making sure everything was as it should be, and then went home. This became a routine, one which I followed almost religiously. Her house was on the way home from my office, so three or four times a week I would drive by just to make sure everything was okay. I never did gather the courage to stop and say hello; I still didn’t know if she wanted to talk to me or not. Maybe if I had, everything would be fine...

I walk into the bedroom and see her curled into a ball, tears streaming down her face.

“What’s wrong honey?” I ask, running to her. “What hurts?”

“Nothing,” she chokes out, trying to calm herself down. “Nothing hurts, at least nothing that a doctor can fix.”

“Then what’s wrong?” I ask her, now feeling somewhat scared.

“I’m getting wisps, flashes of things,” she says, her brow furrowed in concentration.

“There’s a man, and he’s...furious. There’s fire,” she says, “and pain. Lots of pain,” she says, her voice breaking and unleashing a new round of tears.

“Shhhh, shh,” I say, gathering her in my arms. I let the tears soak into my shirt, and try and keep my breathing even and controlled. Now is the time to tell her, to let her know why she has trouble remembering her name.

It was a Tuesday night, and I was driving home as usual, going past her house to check up on her. But something was different that night. Instead of the lights glowing bright through her window, all the windows were dark, with the exception of what seemed like a fire flickering through one of the windows. I pulled into the driveway, and as I got out of the car, I heard screams coming from the house. The screams kicked me into a new gear, clouded my reason and fears. Instead of knocking, I kicked the door open and saw Karsyn, bound and gagged on the floor, surrounded by a ring of flames. Her husband was a few feet away, shoveling silver goblets and cutlery into a bag, laughing like a maniac.

“Think you have more power than I do? Think you can control me?” he cried drunkenly. “Well you can’t! You will die here and I will be the winner once again!” he declared triumphantly.

“Wrong,” I said, in a voice so saturated with hatred that I’m still not sure it came from me. “I am the winner.” And with that I lifted that sorry bitch and threw him against the wall. As he struggled to get up, I pushed the table against the wall, trapping him there. I grabbed Karsyn, the flames licking at my heels. But even the flames couldn’t slow me. I dashed out of the house and without looking back, tossed Karsyn into the backseat and jammed the key into the ignition. We tore out of the driveway, and I pushed the accelerator harder, urging it to go faster, never mind that we were in a neighborhood. I drove away, as fast as I could, just trying to put as much

distance as possible between Karsyn and that maniac. After a few minutes, we merged onto the highway, and Karsyn managed to get the gag off well enough to speak.

“Andy,” she said.

“Not now Karsyn,” I snapped

“Andy. Andy! ANDY! WATCH OUT!” she cried, but her warning came too late. By the time I noticed the sign pole, my car had completely twisted itself around it, almost in an embrace. My head hit the dashboard, and I slipped into blackness.

When I woke up, I was in a hospital, surrounded by curtains.

“Where is she? Is she okay?” I cried, getting up and looking frantically for Karsyn.

“Calm down,” said a nurse, who I had somehow managed to overlook. “Your companion is fine, Dearie. All her vitals are perfectly normal, the only problem seems to be with her head. She hit it pretty badly, and there’s a high risk of memory loss. We’ll have to see what happens when she wakes up.”

“Memory loss,” I thought. I looked at her sleeping, her curls standing boldly against the white pillow. Everything from the past 28 years, gone, and it was all my fault.

“It was you,” she says, after I tell her everything from that first day. It’s not a question, but a statement.

“Yes,” I say. “I was the one who found you.”

“Well, yes,” she replies quietly, sitting up and drying her eyes. “But every other time, it was also you. You were the one who got me through college. You were the one who defended me in middle school. You were the one who was always there, even when I didn’t notice you.” I don’t know how to respond to that.

“I always wanted to be there for you,” I mumbled, eyes downcast, “even if you didn’t want me to be.”

“Andy,” she says, pushing my chin up so I can meet her eyes. “You’re there in everything. Every picture, every video, every dream. You’re always there with me Andy. You have always been my everything. I’m sorry it took me so long to realize it.”

“Don’t apologize,” I say, and bring her close to me. She nestles into my arms, and puts her hand on my chest, where my heart beats. Finally, she is all mine, for better or worse. We are the lion and the platypus, ready to face the world together.