

WHAT IS A GEODUCK?

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He called me faggot. Not in words but in the way his eyebrows furrowed and his face reddened like chipped wood suddenly turns into an ember. The admonishment was sudden, fiery, and alienating. My shoulders trembled like the earth was quaking, cracks spreading down into my lowest layers; all of me jerking between atrophy and placidness. His intention is to become an inferno upon a home, but I am an inhabitant placed afar, watching as the flame purges a vacant structure. What the flame leaves behind is brittle and blackened, something to be forgotten in the reconstruction. Words are not exchanged afterward, at least none that matter.

There was never an apology.

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The fatherless generation: 63% of deaths by suicide are from fatherless homes. 71% of all high school dropouts are from fatherless homes. Children in fatherless homes are twice as likely to be abused. Children from fatherless homes are fourteen times as likely to abuse. Children from fatherless homes are 32% more likely to run away.

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She was a diver that faltered in form just before her body pierced the pool because she wouldn't let herself turn in midair. Her failure was in her doubt. My mother's failings weren't in her actions, but rather her doubt. She was an architect without imagination. Rather than planning around the beauty of the earth before her, she attempted a half-hearted replica to match her peers. With the temporary imposition of various utilities, she sought to create an ideal that was never fully fathomed.

With every man that came and went from our lives, that was meant to fill some higher faculty for us, she reminded me of the surrogate fathers I had: My uncle; my aunts' husbands; my

grandfather.

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Captured in an aged picture. Textured blue and grey wallpaper, in the foreground a round-edged wood laminate desk. A man with the beginnings of a bald patch sits with an eager toddler standing on his lap, pointing at a computer screen.

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An August sun strikes back from the green saltwater leaving my cheeks pink. My shoulders grow tenderer with each gyration of the plastic paddle caressing the water's surface, propelling towards shore. My grandfather decelerates ahead of me when I've lost sight of his lime-green kayak, allowing me a moment to shorten the forty to fifty feet between us. We've exchanged few words in the hours we've been together, aside from him advising me to hold steady when waves roll by to avoid flipping over, which I do regardless.

We make shore on an island visible from the beach we had embarked from. We sit on the sand, exchanging few words aside from the offer of a granola bar. Walking back to the kayaks he spotted something bubbling beneath the water's thinnest edge and proceeds to get on his hands and knees, digging up and eagerly presenting what looks like an uncircumcised penis coming out of a clam. His cheeks are stretched into an unfamiliar shape, revealing his teeth. His green eyes have a twinkle to them. My god. He is smiling. Perplexed by this foreign expression, that I'd seen a number of times I could count on one hand in my fifteen years of life, I fumble over my words and inquire, simply,

“what's that?” Disturbingly gleeful he explains,

“Oh, that there's a geoduck. They're all over the place. You can see 'em bubbling by the shore.”

Not knowing how to respond to this unfamiliar situation with him I attempt a demure response that causes his lips to meet once more and he returns to the typical sternness I am accustomed to.

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Tiny hands played with black leather contorted around an elongated heel. The footwear was much too big for his foot but how funny it would be when he ran upstairs to show everyone how he could balance on the enormous heels. The thin rubber ends make loud impact as they meet the white and pink square tiles, alerting his

audience of his imminent arrival.

His grandmother giggles. His mother is in a full cackle. His grandfather is disgusted.

“You’re going to make him into a funny boy.”

“Oh, Bob calm down he’ll grow out of it, he’s just playing with his mom’s shoes.”

“Yeah, that’s how it starts.”

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Some parents claim that the process of their child “coming out” is akin to a death, the death of who they were before. Grief comes in five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance.

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My mood was quickly stifled by an instigating comment from my aunt informing me that the proportion of my graduation present will be in correlation to my GPA. Infuriated by what I assume is a comment in relation to my failure to perform academically, I turned to my mother who was clearly the only person with knowledge of this situation. It was a shared family interest to spur drama with gossip. In my grandparents cramped kitchen and dining room, everyone prepared for a dispute. Perhaps feigning ignorance she asked,

“What are you talking about?” I sneer back,

“You know what I’m talking about.”

Despite my grandmother’s attempts to quell him, my grandfather cannot remain quiet any longer. In what feels like a full roar he explains

“No. Goddammit, I am tired of him using being gay as an excuse for everything.”

Confused by this random outburst, something that had been boiling beneath the surface of our interactions and not knowing entirely how to react to it, I simply say,

“Oh my god.”

He produces an imitation of me with his voice is raised in a nasal pitch, echoing my rebuttal while flicking his wrist before him.

I force my quivering jaw to hold tight by pursing my lips between my teeth. My body settles long enough for me to attempt a thunderous

“Fuck you” that is muffled by an even louder interjection

“If you aren’t going to learn how to show some respect, then you aren’t welcome in this house.”

I found myself sitting in gravel outside, my face in my knees,
breaths raggedly leaving my body. Both standing above me, my aunt
took the lead in attempted consolation, my mother simply asking me
to come back inside, that,

“He didn’t mean it”

Even without me though, they still sang “Happy Birthday”

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Geoduck (gü-ē-duk), also known as Panopea Generosa, is the
world’s largest burrowing clam. Though it is partially covered by an
oblong white shell with concentric circles, its body is largely exposed
with an elongated siphon that reaches to the sand’s surface. With few
natural predators geoducks live up to 150 years, many abundantly
populating the coastal regions of Alaska, British Columbia, and Puget
Sound.

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The sea is calm between us, quiet. We push onwards to shore,
our feet sinking into the sand before us, as we pull our plastic ships
behind. His eyes keep forward. I want to ask again,

“What is a geoduck?” but the words are mute in my mouth.