

Breakfast Delights
By James Shawe

I'd get up every morning and make two raisin bread egg-in-a-hole for my nephew. He'd wake me up early and I'd groan loudly. He'd take out the ingredients, and I'd cook. For ten years, we'd have this routine. That's how I remember him the best, waiting impatiently for the sweet raisin toast with an egg in it. Extra seasoning salt, of course. Honestly, I still think the combination was appalling, but he loved it, so I made it.

I've only seen him once in the past nine years. He grew from waist high to eye high. He still smiled, but not as much or as wide. He didn't call me Uncle James anymore, just James. And instead of being called Ayden, he preferred to be called Maddison. I still have to remind myself at times that people are different than how we remember them. It's staggering how very ingrained memories become. The past gets chiseled into our very bones, and there's no cartographer that can smooth the markings or show us the intricacies of navigation.

It's difficult when it's someone you've known their entire life. Maddison instead of Ayden, niece instead of nephew, she and her instead of he and him. I think about them daily. I wonder how they're handling this confusing time in their life while in the midst of their teens. Their father outright refused to accept it for months. My brothers would call him a "little girl" every time he'd cry for as long as I can remember, way before Maddison even knew the word identity existed.

However, my mother supports Maddison entirely. Which is a strange thought since male-bashing, in any and all forms, was her favorite pastime when I was growing up. She sings about their girl dates together, what clothes she bought Maddison, and how much fun they have together. She thinks it's adorable, in a condescending way, that Maddison has a boyfriend and

that they're in love. As I said before, it's staggering how people can be different from how we remember them. How can a relentless tormentor for many be a radiant beam of helpfulness and unconditional love for another?

Either way, I've found so much admiration in Maddison. I say admiration instead of inspiration because, like motivation, inspiration is fleeting, but admiration is eternal. Growing up with my family, I could never even come out to them as bisexual. I still haven't, even after moving away for a decade and growing to understand them. And yet, this kid has done much more than that. This kid that struggled in every video game he'd pick up and ask for my help. The same kid that'd cry over everything and anything. This sensitive kid somehow managed to face the same people I've chosen to run from, and Maddison unloaded a mountain upon them. Sometimes I ask myself, "What does that say about me? She's done it, and much more. What's your problem?" Perhaps my family truly has changed, and Maddison felt comfortable revealing their true self. That's all I can hope.

When last I saw Maddison, our routine came back naturally. I slept on the couch because I was only visiting, but Maddison still woke me up early. I got up and went to the kitchen. The ingredients were already out, ready to revivify the tradition. I hadn't cooked eggs-in-a-hole for almost ten years since I'm not a fan of them, but the motions and timing came back to me. It's actually really hard to mess up. I asked Maddison if it was still their favorite. They said, "Yeah, but no one feels like cooking in the morning anymore." So, for the week I was there, I made their favorite breakfast every day. That sickly sweet raisin bread and overly salty eggs. I was scared to visit my family for all they've done, but mostly because I was worried I'd somehow ruin my relationship with my niece, my once nephew. But they're still the same kid. Sensitive but hilarious, helpless with video games, and a lover of gross breakfast delights.