

It's funny how recent memory can linger into one's dreams. Random bits of half-realized sensory input just a few hours old mix with jumbled subconscious thoughts in a brain blender and everything comes out garbled. The real and imagined combine together, with the result being something that is largely imagined but feels entirely too real. But once you wake up, those part memory part fantasy cocktails quickly vanish into Morpheus's Realm the moment you begin blinking away the sleep.

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*"Tonigiiii-ey-ey-ey-ight!  
We are yuh-uy-young  
So let's set the world on fire  
We can burn brighter, than the suuuun!"*

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Speaking of cocktails, most people past a certain age wake up, even temporarily, when their bladders are full. It's rarely written about or romanticized, but fewer people wake up feeling "rested and refreshed" than they do really needing to pee.

So it was strange for Buckley Dawson when he woke up not needing to pee and feeling rested and refreshed. The twenty-eight year old deer shifted; not fully rolling over; and didn't quite register the bulky rustling close to his hips as he did so.

What a night, he thought. It must've been. How else to explain that he couldn't remember what he'd done? Nothing like an evening of hardcore partying like back in college to do the trick. Or maybe his mind was just stuck between the waking world and the dreaming one; a figurative loading screen between wakefulness and sleep.

Like most people, the deer only realized he was awake once he opened his eyes, and the final bits of imagined images and leftover earworms evaporated from his brain. A final yawn chased the last of the sleep away as he sat up and felt the room temperature squishiness beneath him.

Buckley blinked and held his breath. Why was there a giant crib in his old room and why was he in it? Of it being his old room, he had no doubt. A person can't spend eighteen years sleeping between the same four walls night after night and not recognize the layout; even if it had been close to a decade since moving out; first to the dorms and then to his own apartment. The light blue paint looked fresher, less worn, but the old oak tree right outside the window was unmistakable.

The walls and the tree outside were easily recognized and catalogued as normal; everything else looked completely foreign: The crib he was in. The rocking chair next to the bookcase. The stuffies just outside the crib. The bins of toys. The changing table, stocked with wipes, powder, rash cream, and stacks of diapers.

A snippet of a memory flickered inside Buckley's brain; likely from watching old home movies at some point in his life. This nursery set up was how his room was back when he was just a fawn. Eventually the toys and stuffed animals all made their way to younger cousins or were donated to charity. The rocking chair and bookshelf were replaced by a trophy case and study desk. The changing table and diaper pail were scrapped for a proper dresser and wastebasket. And the crib had made way for a series of bigger and increasingly mature beds.

It wasn't an exact recreation of his room circa birth to just before age three, however. The toys and bookshelf looked about the right size; but the furniture was off. In particular, the rocking chair seemed a little bigger than it should; not gargantuan but more likely to accommodate more than one person. The crib he was in was much too large to be a child's crib; far too big and sturdy. The changing table, too, looked strong enough to hold much more than a fawn's weight.

Curiously, Buckley reached out and grabbed onto the crib's bars, half expecting them to evaporate. They held firm, though. "Oh..." Buckley half hummed, too weirded out to be truly startled just yet. His arms were the same size as he remembered them being, no chubby baby fingers. No high pitched voice. He should have been panicking, but instead his astonishment was driving him deeper and deeper into quiet exploration.

Toys and decorations remained the same, yet everything that might be limited by a baby's size had been scaled up. The changing table, for example, might as well have been something a masseuse might use. The wipes and powder, Buckley could see, were the same size as normal. The diapers however...

Waking up just a little bit more, Buckley looked down at silky soft bed sheets covering up his waist and lifted them up to see. His eyes widened when he saw the swollen diaper taped around his hips. It didn't even look like an old person's diaper; those weird granny panty pull-ons with the frilly siding. It looked like a baby diaper; a Deweys to be exact. And as in the commercials, little color change patterns of dew drops among the forest stenciling had appeared. Yet those only appeared when...

It couldn't be! Just like with the crib bars, he reached down and gripped the front of it; feeling the sodden padding squelch beneath his fingers. If the appear when wet designs hadn't hinted at it, his other senses confirmed it. That's why he hadn't been woken up by the need to pee! He'd already done it in his pants! Buckley did not scream, however.

As he inhaled through his nose, the faint, almost undetectable scent of stale urine masked by baby powder went into his nostrils. Naked save for a t-shirt and diaper, Buckley ran his hands up from his hooves past his knees and thighs. Up past the diaper he patted his stomach and shoulders, all the way to his nose. He went to grab his antlers, a nervous tick he'd developed at puberty, and his hands only clenched down on air. Shaking in disbelief, the palms of his hands came down on a smooth, furry top.

That is when Buckley Dawson screamed. A panicked, loud, and prolonged yelp of existential

terror filled up his lungs and was expelled with the full force of someone staring at an oncoming truck in the middle of the night. His antlers! Where were his antlers?! Someone had cut them off!

Out of sheer adrenaline, he climbed to his knees and gripped the wooden bars so that he could rattle his cage in anguish.

Anguish and panic were short lived, however, and replaced by confusion. Through the open door of his nursery bedroom, came his mother. In her early fifties, she came in wearing a pink top and jeans, with the flecks of gray in her fur still clearly visible; completely unchanged from how Buckley remembered her.

“Awww! Buckley!” She said with the concerned yet syrupy sweetness reserved for toddlers. “What’s wrong, sweetie? Did you have a nightmare?”

“Mommy!” Buckley yelped. His eyes widened. He never called his mom, ‘Mommy’. “I-I-I mean, Mom! Something’s wrong!”

His mother lowered the railing to the enormous crib. “Something’s wrong?” She didn’t seem worried or confused as much as patronizing.

“Yes!” Buckley moved to climb out of the crib. In that moment his equilibrium went completely and he started tumbling out, his legs twisted in babyish print bed sheets, and his upper body making a bee line for the floor. “Obviousleeee!”

“Whoopsie daisy!” She caught him by the armpits and hoisted him upright. “Let Mommy, take care of that. Make you feel alllll better.” She didn’t wait for Buckley to respond before she pulled him out of his crib and hoisted him onto her hips, positioning one hand under his padded bottom and the other steadying his back.

Buckley exhaled in surprise, even as his legs wrapped around his mother’s waist and his hands hugged her shoulders. Something felt vaguely familiar about all of this.

It was neither a long trip to the giant changing table, nor a surprising one. Distance wise it was no more than a pivot and a few steps away for his mother. Waking up in a crib and wearing a wet diaper, the twenty-eight year old buck was less than shocked that he was being planted down with a strap pulled across his chest. That didn’t stop Buckley from trying to reason his way out of it.

“Mommy!” he bleated, feeling powerless to so much as sit up. “Mom! I woke up in a crib.”

Mom was busying herself taking a fresh Deweys off the stack and unfolding it. “That’s right!”

“And I’m wearing a diaper!”

She checked the wipes and powder to see if there was enough. “That’s right, too!” She wasn’t even looking directly at him.

“And I don’t have my antlers!”

“Of course not, baby boy. Your antlers won’t come in until after your spots go away.”

“Spots?!” Squirming on the changing table, Buckley wriggled and jiggled trying to see. Sure enough, he could see some tiny patches of white just over his shoulder. Not only had his antlers disappeared overnight without so much as a stump; his back coat had broken out in little white spots; something he hadn’t seen on himself since the start of middle school. “Why do I have spots?”

Mom chuckled and tweaked his nose. “I don’t know any fawn that doesn’t have their spots.”

Disbelief and confusion bubbled up into outrage. “Mom! What’s wrong with you?! I’m twenty-eight! I shouldn’t have spots.”

“Sure you are, hun. That must’ve been some dream.”

“I’m! Not! A! Ba-!”

The sounds of velcro being torn off the landing zone silenced Buckley as his mother pulled open the front of his very wet diaper. “Oh my!” she said. “Soaked! Good thing your father added in that stuffer! If he hadn’t we’d have to send you to beddy bye with water wings!”

A hot blush engulfed the buck, followed by uncomfortable wincing as cold baby wipes were dragged across his lower front and backside. It didn’t get any better when the old diaper was pulled out from beneath him, balled up and tossed in a pail. Neither did he find his voice when the new one made its way beneath him and his Mommy dusted the powder onto him.

“No poopies, yet,” she reported. “If I know you, you’ll probably make boom-booms before lunch.”

The comment didn’t quite register with Buckley. Rather he just kept muttering and stuttering. “I-I-I-I-n-n-n-no?” How had this happened? What in the world could alter him so? Alter his mom, and maybe his dad, too? The only thing he got for his trouble was a skull splitting headache while he gnashed his teeth.

“Uh oh,” Mom said. She reached under the table and put a plastic ring into Buckley’s mouth.

Automatically, he opened and bit down on it. His tongue started wagging and licking it with gusto. A salt lick ring? That was for babies, but for some reason Buckley couldn’t stop himself

from chewing and licking it as if he were a fawn that still needed caring for. The fresh dry diaper being taped snugly around his hips was also decidedly for babies, even if it wasn't sized for them. It was a disturbing sensation to feel his mother pull his tail through the diaper's back and use the back velcro to fasten it snugly.

Now when he pooped, his tail wouldn't get dirty.

IF he pooped! IF HE POOPED!

WHAT WAS HE THINKING?! HE WASN'T GOING TO POOP! NO CHANCE!

"I bet that feels better," Mom said, dusting her palms together. Leaving Buckley on the giant table, she crossed the room to Buckley's closet and came back with only a t-shirt. "Let's get you dressed for breakfast."

"Mommy! Stop! I'm twenty-eight! I'm not even in highschool anymore!" That particular argument felt like it had the most weight in Buckley's mind. Never mind his bachelor's degree, apartment, and steady job in the next town over, the fact that he graduated highschool felt the most important right then. How queer...

Mom unbuckled him from the table and sat him up. "Oh honey," she waved off the argument. "That's so cute. You've got a long way till highschool. You're still in nursery school!"

Buckley spit out the ring. "Mom!" he protested. "That's not-...!" He stopped long enough for her to yank the old t-shirt off and pull its replacement over his head and thread his arms through the sleeves. "That's just not true! I'm obviously not a baby! Look how...how... how *big* I am!"

Mom didn't bother arguing. "Of course you're not a baby." Again, she shifted him over to her hip in a feat of amazing strength. Again his body went with it. "You're my big boy! One year old and getting bigger every day!"

"That's not what I meant!"

"Uh-huh".

The young buck's protestations did nothing to break his mother's stride straight to the kitchen where an equally absurd highchair stood waiting for him.

With practiced ease and surprising strength, Mom plopped him into the highchair, buckling him in and clicking the tray in place before the grown deer could even protest. Even Buckley's body seemed to betray him, his arms going through the straps and his legs spreading to make it easier for his mother to reach the connecting buckle. A bizarre form of muscle memory to be sure.

Not that he needed to deliberately spread his thighs, the sized up diaper was doing most of that work for him. The crinkling sound every time he shifted in the slightest scratched in his ear like static.

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*“And sometimes you close your eyes  
And see the place where you used to live  
When you... were young.”*

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Buckley closed his eyes and shook the earwig out of his brain as his mother busied herself tying a bib around his neck.

“Hi honey!” He heard his father’s voice, and immediately opened his eyes. Dad hadn’t lived with Mom since...well since Buckley had had his spots.

Mom had wandered to the refrigerator long enough to get a bottle of milk and a cup of pink yogurt. She trotted back and looked up at his father in a way that Buckley only barely remembered. “Gimme some sugar.”

The two kissed. Their bodies were as old and late-middle aged as Buckley remembered, but their posture and body language put them as practically newlyweds. “Make sure to put some of that sugar in your coffee at work,” Mom said.

Buckley was more disturbed than disgusted at the affectionate display.

“Daddy?”

The old buck regarded him for a second. “I haven’t forgotten about you, sport.” He quickly gave Buckley a kiss on the forehead. By Buckley’s memory, the most physical affection his father gave was firm handshakes. “Be good for Mommy,” he said. “Be good at daycare.”

“Daycare?”

Daddy was out the door and Mommy was back in front of him with a cup of yogurt and a bottle. “Daycare is what some grown-ups call Nursery School. Now, open up and let’s get some num-nums in your tum-tums.”

“Mommy!” Buckley tried to protest. He almost bit his tongue in frustration “I mean, ‘Mom’! I can feed myself.”

His mother stirred the yogurt with a plastic spoon. “I know you can, big boy. Just like the mac-n-cheese you had last night.” She dipped it in and took out a huge glopping glob of what Buckley hoped was strawberry flavored mush. “That got messy though, and we don’t have time

to clean you up.” The spoon started inching up towards Buckley’s muzzle. “Let Mommy help.”

“Mah-!” Buckley’s protestations were cut off when the first spoonful of creamy strawberry yogurt spilled onto his tongue. ‘Mmmmmm!’

“You like?” Mommy asked.

The young buck nodded his head. “Mmmhmmm!” It was true. He had had yogurt many times over the years. Who hadn’t? But there was something particularly *addictively* delicious about this. It tasted better than he’d ever remembered the stuff ever tasting. Correction: it tasted exactly like he’d remembered the stuff ever tasting. Not as he remembered it but as he essentially remembered it. To Buckley Dawson, sitting in his giant highchair cushioned by an overly large disposable diaper, the sweet stuff tasted like the very idea of yogurt; tasted like his first time.

“Open up for more!”

It didn’t take long for breakfast after that. Buckley did everything he could to get more and more of the stuff into his mouth. He swallowed it down and opened his mouth for encore after encore of the dancing flavor. He was still opening his mouth and saying “Ahhhhh!” when she was scraping the bottom of the yogurt cup.

That made it all the easier for the bottle full of milk to find its way into his mouth. Automatically, his lips clamped down and began to pull at the rubber teat, sucking down the milk even as his eyes looked down over his nose. It tasted good. Very good, in fact!

He only hoped it wasn’t breast milk.

“Go on,” Mommy coaxed him. “Hold your ba-ba bay yourself.” His hands grasped the bottle, and he tilted it back to help the milk flow easier. “Good baby! Getting to be such a big boy.”

That snapped Buckley back to reality. Huffing indignantly, the adult fawn guzzled the milk before he could properly respond. “I’m not a...URRRRRRP”, the belch felt powerful enough to rattle windows.

Mommy was already unclasping his tray and unbuckling him from the highchair. As the river flows to the ocean, so did Buckley’s body flow back into his mother’s arms. “Let me help with that.” She patted and rubbed his back and it wasn’t long until his first thunderous burp was followed by several more.

“I bet my baby boy feels better with a full tummy and no more burpees left,” Mommy cooed on her way out the kitchen door. In one fell swoop she grabbed the car keys while toting her fawnified son right into the garage.

Buckley felt something, all right: Frustration and embarrassment for starters. Much like with the highchair he was barely able to resist being put into the carseat. He was hoping that this wasn't something he'd have to get used to. The idea that it might be left a bad taste in his mouth.

On the car ride over, he made one last ditch effort attempt to reason in an unreasonable situation. "Mommy," he asked. "When do you think I was born?"

She gave the correct answer, right down to the date.

"And what is today's date?"

Again, his Mom gave the correct date. Way more than a single year had passed in between those two dates.

"So why do you think I'm a baby?" An annoyed, almost angry mewling was creeping into the twenty-eight year old's tone. "That's obviously longer than one year old!"

"Sure it is, sweetie." Mom replied. She sounded like she was humoring him.

His feet kicked and he rattled at the harness restraints. "I'm not a baby! Not even close!"

"Like Mommy would change a grown-up's diaper." He could see her eyes condescendingly rolling in the rearview mirror.

This wasn't going anywhere. Desperately, he looked to the outside to see someone else stuck in his position, another grown man or woman being treated like a baby; perhaps in a neighboring car, or being pushed along in a stroller.

No such luck, it seemed. At the moment, he had no company for his misery.

How did he even wake up in this mess? He racked and racked his brain trying to remember anything from the previous night; any cause to explain the effect; but the most he caught for his trouble was a pounding migraine every time he thought about it.

"Gah!" He muttered with eyes slammed shut. What a headache! He hadn't gotten this kind of a headache since his binge drinking days back in college. It was worse than a hangover! Hangovers at least had the 'worth it' feeling of hazy memories of a good night. This? This was crazy!

The hangover metaphor actually gave him some comfort. His reality might have turned upside down, but at least having access to it helped him reassure himself. He wasn't a baby. He wasn't so much as a college student. He'd gone through all of that already and had outgrown all of this. He'd outgrown childish things, including binge drinking, and with any luck this would all go away on its own like a bad nightmare...or a bad hangover.



The hangover metaphor also distracted him; made it harder for him to recognize familiar streets and pathways taken long ago.

“We’re heeeeeeeere!” Mom sang, turning into a strangely familiar parking lot.

“The Cuckoo’s Nest”: The sign read. (MORE PROOF HE WASN’T ACTUALLY ONE! ONE YEAR OLDS COULDN’T READ!) The logo on the front with the pastel pink and blue eggs, one with a bow, the other with a bonnet sitting in a nest, didn’t give Buckley any comfort. This was most decidedly a daycare.

A daycare? With babies? Actual-factual-could-measure-their-lives-in-months-children? And here he’d be damn near thirty, and wearing nothing but a t-shirt and a dry diaper. Nervously, he looked down between his legs and patted his front. Okay. Yes, a dry diaper.

“Mommy,” Buckley started to shake. “Please. Wake up. You’re dreaming or something.” It came out in the pathetic quiet monotone of a man on death row.

Mommy didn’t seem at all bothered, yet alone winded as she hoisted the grown buck out of the adult sized car seat. “Silly boy,” she replied. “This isn’t a dream.”

Point of fact: It was a nightmare.

“CUCKOO!” The sensor bell rang out as Buckley was carried in. Cuckoo was right. This whole thing was cuckoo.

A large desk, practically a chest high wall greeted them. Behind it, an old cow; her gray locks up in an old biddy’s bun. “Buckley’s here!” she bellowed to the back. Then in a less loud voice she said, “Good morning Mrs. Dawson. Good morning, Buckley.”

Legs still wrapped around his mother’s hips, Buckley did his best to take in the new surroundings. There was something familiar- vaguely, hauntingly, familiar-about this place. Was this his old daycare? He’d woken up in a facsimile of his earliest room, so it’d make a twisted kind of sense for him to be carted off to his earliest school.

“Good morning, Daisy,” Mommy replied. The cow slid a red binder across the table, and Mommy flipped it open. “Checking in!” It had the same logo of the two eggs in the nest brandished onto the firm red cover.

There was something familiar about that book too...

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*“Pull the sheets right off the corner*

*Of that mattress that you stole  
From your roommate back in Boulder.  
We ain't ever getting older."*

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The familiar club song came screaming back into Buckley's mind in all of its poppy techno glory.

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*We ain't ever getting older.  
We ain't ever getting older.*

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Less flashes and more bits of intuition, half remembered sensations of murmurs and raucous laughter as bodies shook on the dance floor and young men who thought themselves old tilted back longneck bottles of beer while the girls hugged and laughed like they'd never parted ways...

All of that and more came and went in the time it took Mrs. Dawson to finish signing her son's name and jot down the time that her not-so-little one was being turned over to the care of strangers.

"Come on, big boy," the cow opened a gate and took Buckley away from his mother. She groaned, but only theatrically. "Wow you're getting heavy!"

One more chance. "I'm twenty-eight!" he practically howled.

"O-ho!" the woman said. Buckley felt her pat his bottom, checking his diaper. "You're twenty-eight now, are you? They grow-up so fast, don't they Mrs. Dawson?"

Mommy laughed and started walking away. "That they do, Daisy. That they do. He woke up feeling very silly this morning and it hasn't gotten out of his system."

"We'll let him get his sillies out," the cow lady called back even as she took Buckley deeper inside the building.

"Nuh-uh!"

"Uh-huh!"

"Nuh-uh!"

"Uh huh!"

Again, the magic of familiarity overtook Buckley and he whipped his head around to follow the

source of the voices.

“Nuh-uh, ELVIS!”

“Uh-huh, KATHERINE!”

“Don’t call me that!” the fox girl growled. “My name is Kit!”

“Elvis?” Buckley Echoed. “Kit?”

“I think somebody hears his friends,” the cow woman chuckled. She put Buckley down on the ground. For the first time since he woke up this morning, the young buck stood on his own two feet. Arms splayed and legs jiggled clumsily.

“Elvis?!” Buckley yelped while trying to maintain his balance. “Kit?!” Elvis and Kit were friends. Buckley was sure of it. He’d known them for a long time; a very long time. But not since infancy. Not even close.

Legs finally buckling, the man-fawn landed squarely on his cushioned backside. Only his pride was hurt, but there was so little left, he felt, every ounce mattered.

The hound dog in the shortalls looked away from the pink-bowed fox and regarded Buckley. “Oh. Hey Buck! Good to see ya!”

Buckley blinked in confusion. Two of his dearest friends were standing in front of them, and they looked almost as ridiculous as he did. Almost. Kit wore a bright pink sundress with matching socks in lieu of sneakers, and the denim shortalls Elvis had on stopped just above his knees. More significantly, it was easy to notice the rounded bulge in Elvis’s pants and see a hint of padding beneath the gentle swaying of Kit’s dress.

They were dressed like big babies just like him. Relief flooded Buckley looking at the familiar sight. He really wasn’t alone in this madhouse he’d woken up in! Far from it. All around him, people who were just as old as he crawled and toddled and crinkled and giggled and babbled like the babes they were dressed as. They wore onesies, rompers, and decorative skirts; a number wore just t-shirts and diapers like Buckley. A few lacked the t-shirts.

More disturbingly, nobody else seemed to mind so much.

Two friendly hands, one brown and one red, reached down and helped Buckley to his feet. “Easy there Bambi legs,” Kit teased. She’d called him that freshman year when he’d tried, unsuccessfully, to show off his dance moves. The name had stuck. “Baby steps, ‘member?”

“Yeah,” Buckley agreed, not really listening. It took him three seconds to compensate for how the diaper made him stand to feel like he had some semblance of control over his legs. Three seconds is a surprisingly long time. He looked up at his buddies. “Are...are you guys wearing diapers?”

Kit and Elvis exchanged looks. “Yeah?” Kit said. “Why wouldn’t we be? It’s not bathtime, is it?”

Buckley blanched. “Bathti-? BATH-? You’re in diapers! You look like babies!” His tail flitted around nervously, eliciting a crinkle.

“Yeah,” Elvis answered. “We are babies. We’re one.”

It was worse than Buckley had dared to fear. His parents were affected. Older people were affected. His own friends were just as toddlerized as he’d been, but they didn’t seem to mind or remember differently, either.

Foolishly, he’d thought his friends were planning an escape or attempting to rationalize these extraordinary circumstances. He sniffed and caught a faint whiff of something fetid. He really hoped it wasn’t coming from one of them. “What are you two even bickering about?”

Elvis’s eyes lit up in excitement. “Oh oh oh! Good idea! Buckley, you decide.”

“No fair!” Kit stomped her feet in such rapid succession that she was almost jogging in place. “Buckley’s a boy, so he’ll be on your side! We need a grown-up!”

Exasperated, Buckley felt the need to ask. “What do you need a grown-up for?”

“To tell us who has cooties,” Kit explained. “Boys or girls.”

“It’s girls!” Elvis proclaimed.

“No, boys!” Just like that, the fox and the hound were in each other’s faces like bickering littermates.

“GIRLS HAVE COOTIES, KATHERINE!”

“DON’T CALL ME KATHERINE, ELVIS!”

This...this seemed all too familiar. He’d been here before. Not that long ago, either. This was neither a deeply buried memory, nor a vague sense of *deja vu*.

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*“Baby, baby, baby, ooooh!  
Baby, baby, baby, noooo!”*

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Among old pop tunes, Buckley had seen this scene play out, tonally at least. Kit and Elvis had been arguing. About what, Buckley couldn't remember. What he did remember is that the two were more than just good friends. To him they were long lost best friends. To each other, they were husband and wife. Married?!

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*"Baby, baby, baby, oooh!  
Baby, baby, baby, noooo!"*

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An internal record scratch as strange fingers pulled back the waistband of Buckley's diaper to sneak a peek inside. "Hmmm..." the skunk lady said. "It's not you, Buckley. Thought I saw you lift your tail a second ago." The skunk, only a year or two older than him, gave him a reassuring pat on the shoulder and moved to Kit.

Kit's arguing with Elvis went on without Buckley until the back of her dress was hoisted up and her diaper checked. 'Found one!' Kit ended up being cradled by the skunk lady. "Come on, little lady."

With the same bizarre strength that every adult possessed- every adult that acted the part, anyways- the daycare worker walked off with the overgrown fox pup. They didn't go far, just across the daycare's carpeted floor, not even out of sight. Out of decency, Buckley wished they had.

Buckley watched in horror as Kit was laid out on a changing table and her dress was hiked up over her hips. It took the fox's diaper being opened for Buckley to register what he was watching.

"Ha!" Elvis laughed. "Poopy is filled with cooties!" He held his hand high over head as if waiting for a high five. Buckley used it as an opportunity to avert his gaze. "Boys win!"

The buck gulped and returned the high five. If Elvis and Kit really were married, Elvis didn't seem to mind that someone else was literally up in her business. Based on the giggles and cooing coming from across the room, Kit didn't sound to mind too much either.

And nobody, not Elvis, not the adults, and none of the other kids seemed to mind. A woman was being stripped, wiped down, powdered, and re-diapered out in the open...and nobody cared. The velcro adjusting; the cooing reassurances; the giggles; the opening and shutting of a plastic lid; just more ambient music to add to a nursery rhyme soundtrack with childish chattering and toys clattering.

Kit fairly skipped up to the boys; her dress flapping up and down over her fresh infantile

underpanties. "I win!" She stuck out her tongue.

The hound pouted. "How did you win? You had poopy pants! That's not winning! That's the...that's the...OPPOSITE!"

"I'm not wearing pants!" Kit retorted. In her hand she proudly dangled a set of rainbow colored plastic keys. "And I was so good, teacher lady gave me these. Cootie girls wouldn't get keys would they?"

Elvis's mouth dropped open. "No fair!"

Likewise, Buckley had a similar expression but for completely different reasons. He was anything but jealous, but just as incredulous.

"It is too fair!"

"Is not!"

"Is too!"

"IS NOT!"

"IS-!"

"GUYS!" Buckley shouted. He clapped his hands over his ears, trying to shut the world out. "STOP IT! STOP FIGHTING ABOUT STUPID STUFF!" He made himself wobbly again, jumping up and down in frustration. "WE'RE NOT ONE! WE'RE NOT BABIES! WE'RE IN OUR LATE TWENTIES! WE SHOULDN'T BE HERE! WE SHOULDN'T BE WEARING THIS STUFF! WE SHOULDN'T BE TALKING LIKE THIS! WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE HIGH SCHOOL FOR CHRISAKES!"

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*"Is you say Daddy's home.  
Daddy's home for me.  
And I know you've been waiting for this love in your day  
You know your Daddy's home.  
Daddy's home."*

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Behind his eyelids with his ears blocked, Buckley remembered a very different night than the morning he'd woken up to. One with dark lights and strobes and music playing too loud for most proper conversations to take place. Three dear friends huddled up and drank and reminisced.

No thriving club, just a repurposed highschool gymnasium. The people huddled together were

not highschoolers; having long since outgrown it; but taking a night to wax nostalgic about days long past when they were young and would have the whole world at their fingertips as soon as graduation came.

The present came tumbling up back to Buckley as he fell back down to the floor. The daycare's comfy carpet took the place of a gymnasium's wooden floorboards. Baby clothes pressing against his skin were back in place of the three piece suits and gowns folks had been wearing to impress each other last night. And for a split second, Buckley looked around and realized that there were more familiar faces than just Kit and Elvis.

"High school!" Elvis cheered. "What a great idea, Buckley!"

Kit helped as Buckley stood up for the second time. "Easy Bambi legs. Walking's tough."

"What's a good idea?" Buckley asked, trying to cut through the fog of his own mind. Foolishly, he hoped some flash of memory came back to his friends with his own.

That hope was short-lived. "We should play school," Elvis explained.

Kit was clapping and jangling her hard earned plastic keys. "That's a great idea!" she said. "We can pretend to be big kids!"

"We're not-" Buckley didn't even have time to unpack how off Kit's statement was. They weren't babies and anything 'kiddish' was still far too off the mark for how they should be seen and behaving. They weren't big kids they were-

"And Buckley can be the teacher!" Elvis grabbed ahold of Buckley's hand.

"Great idea! Buckley's super smart!"

They dragged him from the middle of the play room into a separate alcove. A rough, mock classroom with plastic chairs and a well used and dusty chalk easel. "Teach us, Mr. Buckley! Teach us!"

Desperate times...

"Okay..." Buckley said, more to himself than them. "Okay." He grabbed a thick piece of child-friendly sidewalk chalk and started drawing numbers on the board. "We were all born in the year-"

Elvis's hand shot up. "Mr. Buckley! Mr. Buckley! What's for lunch today."

"I don't know. It's still early. Listen. Right now, it's the year-"

“When are we gonna learn our Ay-Dee-Sees?”

They didn’t even know the alphabet... “I don’t know,” Buckley fumed.

“You don’t know letters?”

“We’re only one.”

Buckley was losing control. “We’re not talking about the alphabet, we’re talking about math and if you’ll just think for a seco-”

“Mr. Buckley! Mr. Buckley! I hafta go to the bathroom!” Kit interrupted.

The young deer couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You just got your diaper changed!”

“I know,” Kit giggled. “I’m just pretendin’ cuz highschool.”

“Guys!” Buckley slammed the chalk back down in the easel’s tray. No amount of math or logic was going to work. “Think! Remember! We’re not one year olds! We’re all adults! Not grown-ups! Adults! We’ve been friends for close to fifteen years. We met in highschool and THAT ended over ten years ago!

“He’s not very good at this,” Kit said to her once husband.

“Yeah,” Elvis agreed. “He hasn’t even taken ‘tendance yet. I keep wanting to say ‘here’.”

Kit nodded sagely. “He’s trying, but teachers always gotta look in their roll book first.”

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“I wish we could turn back tiiiiime  
To the good old days  
When our Momma sang us to sleep  
But now we’re stressed out.”

The old school gymnasium was fully decked out. Stereo. D.J. Classic hits. Modern stuff too. A giant banner was strung out where the basketball hoop used to hang. “WELCOME RETURNING GRADUATES!”

A highschool reunion was its own kind of rite of passage: One wherein people who had aged out of such rites communed for a night to remember back when they hadn’t. For one night people who had drifted apart had a chance to drift back together and live in the past.

The thing about living in the past was that it couldn’t be done other than juxtaposing it with the present.



"This is such bullshit," Elvis complained as they looked for their nametags "The past is dead." He regarded the elderly cow. "Sorry Miss Boveen. Language. I know."

'Pffft," the cow said. "I'm retiring at the end of this year, Elvis, and you're not a student. Curse as much as you like. I don't even work at this campus anymore. And you can call me Daisy if you want."

"Nooooo thank you, Miss Boveen." Buckley chuckled. His friends echoed the sentiment.

"Well that just makes me feel old," their former Dean laughed and handed out name tags. "Working here would make me feel older."

"Seriously," Elvis grumbled. "Being here makes me feel old. Can you believe they turned our old highschool into an elementary school?"

"Redistricting happens," Buckley shrugged. "They built that new highschool across town and needed more space for the kids."

The hound dog was practically baying. "I walked by the old science building and now there's drawings of rainbows and fingerpainting and shit! They turned it into a Pre-K, Buckley! A Pre-K!"

"Not even a Pre-K, actually." Miss Bovine smirked. "Most of the kids in that building are too young to even potty train. It's more of a daycare."

"A daycare, Buckley! A daycare! I bet the whole gym smells like dirty diapers or something!"

Kit put her hand on her hubbie's shoulder. "The gym never smelled that great to begin with, babe." Elvis shook his head, his jowls flapping, but he was calming himself. "Come on," Kit said. "Let's go have fun, catch up on old times and do the kind of stuff we never got to do at Homecoming." Kit always had a way of seeing the upside of less than pleasant situations.

"Before you go in," Miss Boveen slid a red binder across the folding table used at check in. "Sign in, please."

Buckley signed his name last, and scanned the page. Plenty of other old classmates were waiting for him inside the gym. He took a second to look at the front cover. The logo was of a nest that had two eggs in it. One with a bow and another with a baby bonnet. Definitely not his alma mater's mascot. "Huh." Must have been something thrown together...possibly borrowed from the aforementioned daycare.

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That had been minutes before Buckley went into the gym last night and got shit-faced plastered. With a gasp of realization all of it came streaming back to the present day.

That wasn't all that was streaming. Buckley looked down at his diaper and felt it warming up in the front. "I...I...I..." He was peeing! Right there in front of his friends! The diaper soaked it up almost instantly, becoming pulpier and squishier; drooping slightly and expanding as it did its job.

Its job wasn't finished. Buckley's tail twitched up and his knees bent slightly. This time his legs did not buckle. Uncontrollably his body started pushing and warm mushy scat started filling the back of his pants. Except that he wasn't wearing any pants. Anyone who knew what to look for would clearly notice dew drop patterns forming in front and the ballooning mass in back.

Betrayed. Betrayed by his own body. Finishing and feeling the mass settle gave Buckley no emotional relief. He started walking away, panting to near the point of hyperventilation as he looked for some way, anyway, out of this mess.

Mess...

Poor choice...

Elvis reached out and stopped him. "Hey teach, where you going?"

"I...I...I just hadda accident!" Buckley was on the verge of tears.

"So? Me too." Elvis seemed to be missing the point. "Do you not wanna play anymore?"

"We don't actually think you got cooties if you're poopy," Ever helpful Kit chimed in. "That was just part of the last game!"

Buckley was out of words. Completely and utterly. Words had failed him. He had no more at the moment. Instead he simply let out a long bleating wail of panic and existential terror. To the untrained ear, however, it simply sounded like a poor little fawn having a bad time.

The skunk lady was on him in a jiffy, fresh diaper in hand. Was she a daycare teacher normally? Had whatever magic that had trapped them here ensorcelled the stranger, too or was she part of all this? "Come on Buckley. Looks like I checked you too soon. Don't worry. You didn't do anything wrong."

He had done something wrong. He had done something very wrong. Writing his name down in a book for instance...

The diaper change that followed was worse than the one he'd woken up to. No Mommy, just a pretty stranger. No privacy. All of his little friends including his besties could see him, legs up in

the air getting his own scat cleaned off of him just so that the old diaper could be replaced with a new one and some scented cornstarch to cut the stink. Not that they cared. None of them had any shame. They'd be up there soon enough if they hadn't been already. Multiple times a day too, more than likely. To them this was normal.

As far as the rest of them knew, they all had close to three decades experience of being "one".

Buckley's wails turned into quiet mewls as the nice fresh diaper was taped on him. The teacher, just a year or two older than him yesterday, gave him a pacifier and his lips auto latched on, just like with the bottle.

"I think someone needs some quiet time."

He couldn't say anything, but Buckley agreed. As he was carried to a quiet room with some cribs and tucked in, the only thing that Buckley could hope for was that when he got signed out of that special red book later today, he'd get to be a big boy again...