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How Would You Have Him Understand Her

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How Would You Have Him Understand Her?

In the middle of adolescence, at the apex of his foolishness, Carlo thought he knew himself. He thought that his understanding of himself was thorough and complete. To him, the world seemed to make sense; he was so sure of his path, his future, and his sense of self at that time. To that, his future self would like to offer these words with all the love, care, and pity one could offer their past self: Bitch, you ain't seen nothin' yet.

It was here that Carlo would find the language for new feelings, such as romantic, sexual, and platonic love. Among the styles of love, Carlo would discover the love of oneself. He would find these monikers of love in Greek terms, such as *Philia*, deep love in friendship; *Pragma*, a mature, developed love in long-term reciprocal relationships; and *Eros*, love affiliated with personal infatuation and physical pleasure. Among them all, he would discover *Philautia*, either pronounced as fee-lau-tee-a in Romantic terms or more commonly as fee-lau-shuh in modern U.S. English. *Philautia* is understood as a healthy form of love where you recognize your self-worth and don't ignore your personal needs. Self-love begins with acknowledging our responsibility for our well-being. No one is going to care more about you than you do, and no one is more responsible for your happiness and wellbeing than you are. Keep this in mind; this will be plot relevant.

Most pertinent to this writing, Carlo would acquire language for discovering and understanding what it means to be born a different gender than what one wishes, hopes, and believes oneself to be at their core. Carlo would come to find out what the term *trans* meant, and more specifically, he would discover the phrase *trans-female*. The phrase, as per literal definition, means one who experiences being a woman but was assigned male at birth. Another bit of language that came as a package deal with *trans-female* was the term *gender dysphoria*, defined as the distress a person feels due to a mismatch between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth. These words shook Carlo to his core. He wasn't sure why these words felt so daunting, so heavy. For a while, and potentially during the present day, he would wonder why these phrases felt right, tasted right when spoken, yet seemed to expose and spotlight an uncomfortably genuine, vulnerable, and unknown piece of himself. These words made him feel more than seen. These phrases and terms made him feel exposed.

Third person pronouns are fun, don't you think? For example, this assignment could have had the words *he*, *she*, and *they* in equal measure and refer to a single individual. To make good on that idea, it was here, in Carlo's adolescence, that *He* would wish. *Oh god*, he would wish. He wished, over and over, unending to this day, that he would be, and would have always been, *She*.

It was here that Carlo would wish to be Jade.

But despite this new language, this new understanding of herself, Jade couldn't understand what being trans meant to her at the time. Hell, she's still trying to figure it out to this day. How would Carlo understand himself as *herself*? How would he understand Jade? How would you have Carlo understand the implications of wanting, begging to have been born female, begging to be referred to as a daughter, not as a son? How would you have Jade understand the ways this would inform and influence the way she meets new individuals, inwardly feminine, outwardly presenting as masculine for a multitude of reasons. She wanted to adhere to a status quo, have stability in her household and create existing social life.

She didn't want to feel like a bother or a new anomaly to those who knew her before she was Her. She was afraid of making an unalterable, potentially dangerous, decision that would shift her norms to their core. With that in mind, can you imagine the sense of freedom and new possibility Jade felt when she left for college and met people who didn't know her old life and persona? That sense of freedom was intimidating, yet welcomed. She felt the need to get this right, but the idea that she could essentially build herself from the ground up in this new place, in the eyes of new people, felt unreal for a time and still does to some degree.

So, how would you have *Him* understand *Her*?

Would you have Him understand Her by the way society understood His wish to become Her? To break this down, even if being trans isn't a societal norm in many places—or any place—there is a stigma and a standard trans individuals face. Society expects many trans individuals to model themselves after and conform to this expected standard. Some may believe conforming to the societal ideal of the trans individual is the journey of “passing” as their genuine gender through the process of transitioning. Jade would come to find that not all trans individuals go through this process nor should any trans individual be expected to want this process. There are many ways to express one's self and gender; the societally expected norm is merely one option. Jade found the idea of seeing gender not as something we *are* but as something we *perform* to be both cathartic and healing. She likes to fashion herself a good (if not great) pretender—in more ways than one.

Would you have Carlo understand Jade in the way Her parents may never see, by the way she may have to act as He around Her loved ones, by the guilt she felt for throwing away Her name, so lovingly crafted and given by Her mother? Despite their wonderful care for Her upbringing, he could never be the son Mom and Dad wanted nor the child they thought they had this whole time, despite their wonderful care for Her upbringing. After some time, His name, given by loving parents, felt viscerally wrong. Repeating it to herself felt like a lie to her nature, a falsehood, but a necessary one. It felt necessary, so she endures its use from Her loved ones, more afraid of them knowing than being jabbed and stung by Her own name. At least, she could get used to the jabs and stings. She could get used to acting as He. Over time, Jade has come to mind even less, making cognizant changes to Her understanding of its use, not just as a name, but as a title Her loved ones use for Her. If Jade thinks of *Carlo* as a familiar title, it hurts less when that name is used to address Her.

Would you have Him understand Her by the way she rejected an incredibly healthy male body? Jade wakes up daily, blessed with a body that holds no physiological abnormality, no biological impairments. She's healthy, hearty, and hale as could be, yet she couldn't accept this gifted circumstance, for it felt clumsy, clunky, and wrong. There was nothing faulty with Her physiology. In fact, she is fortunate in that regard. She felt guilty for not being able to accept a body so functional and sturdy, a gift many would kill for, when she couldn't find stability and comfort in one detail that has become so key. Don't get Her started on Her voice.

Would you have Carlo understand Jade by the way cis-females would see Her? Jade would never have had to experience fundamental parts of being born female or what many female individuals have to face day to day, from birth until death. Jade has the advantage of being assigned male at birth. With that in mind, she is much less likely to be objectified or discriminated against in terms of gender. Jade would never have to experience the menstrual

cycle or the ways society makes female struggles invisible and unheard. To this day, Jade feels a certain amount of guilt that she doesn't deserve the pronoun if she hasn't gone through any of that same struggle. This is a detrimental mindset and, bluntly, bullshit, as she would come to find out through the support of others. But even with the knowledge that Her experience is real and valid, she would still lament that many of Her sisters would experience what she could not understand in completion.

Would you have Him understand Her by the way she would play video games, read literature, and identify with fictional characters? Jade would, from that point of discovery in adolescence, play almost exclusively female characters if she had the option. In this way, for a few moments, in a reality detached from her own, Jade could feel the experience of these fantasies reflect more closely and clearly the experience she wished she had for her real body. Jade would feel the need to find connection with many female characters she admires, on which she would hope to model herself. Jade's experience of fiction and literature has been fundamentally changed by this aspect of her existence, as Jade now tries to find ways to relate to, and become more like, female characters she deeply admires. Jade's procural of language was the first step to her understanding of self, and without it, she may have never found the right word for *Trans* even if the feeling was still there, nameless, without a word or term to define it.

Would you have Carlo understand Jade by the way Jade uses *Dungeons and Dragons*, as well as other role-playing mediums, to understand herself more thoroughly? Fun fact: Jade's *Dungeons and Dragons* characters have all been named Jade, either as her foremost name and title or in some other capacity. She did this because, for a few hours, every now and then, everyone would refer to her character, and thus her, by her preferred gender and name, when she didn't have the heart, or trust, to be more authentic about herself to her close friends. At the Table, she could be Her. She could be Jade. No one batted an eye, and every few weeks, for a few precious hours, surrounded by good company, she was called by her preferred name, by her preferred pronouns, even if it did involve some deception and sleight of hand. Through role-play, through being a pretender, she could get a feel for her own sense of gender and identity, often displaying aspects of herself through all her characters.

How would you have *Him* understand *Her*?

Amongst all these thoughts, amongst all His discoveries, Her struggles, Jade's journey, she would come to remember, and be reminded of, another lesson before Her fated words of *trans-female*. She would remember to take days off from physical training when Her body ached for rest, fatigue clinging to Her marrow, bone dry from more than Her physical needs. She would remember to eat after forgetting to do so in trying to finish up assignments

ahead of time to feel deserving of something, the soon-to-be burned out fool. She would remember that, despite Her thoughts of needing to achieve and achieve, to impress via success, to work harder for the sake of better, to earn Her place in this game, to feel like she's not just here because of too many good chances lined up for Her, to earn this pronoun from some higher knowledge of being, some authority of permission, she was, and will be, *enough*. As unbelievable as it sounds, as much of a lie as it feels to Her ears, drunk with self-deprecation, she was acknowledged by Her loves as *enough*. Despite Her nerve deep need to improve, to be better because she can be, to do good by the fortunes that favored Her among so many deserving others, she would remember that, somehow, for many, and for herself, she was enough.

She would remember Philautia. She would remember to understand Her needs and allow herself some glimpse of that forgotten self-worth. Among all, she is fortunate to an ungodly degree to have beloved individuals there to remind Her, beat it into Her head when necessary.

He doesn't have to worry about understanding this much. He, and so too, She, though rarely, would understand that Jade was enough. At least in this way, He would come to understand Her. Now let's hope to fuck that she doesn't forget this lesson anytime soon.