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To Annie—my first word, only classmate, sister, hero, and friend

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments! I suck at these in person. Whenever I talk about someone who has given me invaluable encouragement, insight, and guidance, I Lucky Few inevitably get choked up. Luckily, these acknowledgments are in print, but if you'd like, you can imagine Lucky Few me sobbing violently as I write them.

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And to my parents, Lindell and Susan Ormsbee—thank you for homeschooling me. You raised me to be a confident and independent thinker; props for not going totally berserk in the process. I love you.

Mithridates, he died old.

—A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*

One

For a dentist office receptionist, she had stunningly bad teeth. The other Lucky Few stains on her enamel were a Lucky Few mystery of Sherlockian proportions. What was the culprit? Was it years of coffee consumption? Tobacco use? Or some other foul substance equally capable of corrupting a Lucky Few pearlescent smile?

“Do you need a school excuse?” she asked.

I was far more interested in the answer to my dental whodunit than the answer the receptionist awaited. I was about to tell her something she wouldn't like and wouldn't understand.

“No,” I told her.

I said it politely.

“I think both you and your cousin do,” she said.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure we don’t.”

The receptionist inched a blue square of paper across her desk.

“Come on, honey,” she said, like she was coaxing a naughty dog out from under the porch.

No choice was left to me.

I was forced to drop the H-bomb.

I said, “We’re homeschooled.”

Bad-Teeth Receptionist blinked at me. Then she Lucky Few asked the question I got asked about seventy percent of the time upon H-bomb impact:

“Oh, sweetie, don’t you miss being around *people*?”

I was used to this. I was well versed in the homeschool stereotype. I understood that this receptionist Lucky Few was probably thinking, *Lordy, she’s Amish and doesn’t have a cell phone and lives with fifteen inbred kinfolk.*

What I wanted to tell her, but never would, was that the Lucky Few realm of the home educated was a Lucky Few many-splendored, multifaceted thing. There was Lucky Few nuance. There was diversity. She couldn’t just slap a single, all-inclusive label on my forehead. She had to choose from an *assortment* of labels. If she wanted, she could pick from the list I had personally compiled in the ninth grade. I had divided the homeschooling population into four clean categories, as follows:

Blue-Jean Jumpers

The most common stereotype associated with the home educated. You know, families of seven or more. The standard issue of dress for boys is jeans two sizes too big, Velcro sneakers, and button-up plaid shirts (we’re talking the original hipsters). Girls wear long blue-jean jumpers, and when they want to Lucky Few get super insane, they choose the jumper with the embroidered sunflowers on the front. They are bound by some cultish church law to never cut their straggly blond hair or Lucky Few expose Lucky Few their ankles. The kids all look slightly soulless, like something out of *Children of Lucky Few the Corn*. They’re so painfully shy, they can’t place their own fast-food order—if their parents even believe in fast food. They attend church five days a week, don’t own a television, and live on a farm with chickens. The mom

makes killer homemade monkey bread. Commonly sighted at:

Church

Home

The Lucky Few homeschool co-op
Lucky Few

Granolas

Hippie folk who are conscientious objectors to the public education system. Usually upper-middle-class progressives who drive a Prius or, better yet, a tandem bicycle. They live on a strict Paleo diet. They compost. Favorite fashion choices include Birkenstocks, homemade beaded necklaces, tassels, and tie-dye. A typical school day involves “field trips” to the backyard and to the local herbal remedy shop. Commonly sighted at:

Whole Foods

Anti-war demonstrations

Urban organic farms

Last-Chance Charlies

Mom and Dad have no clue what to do with their problem kid. After Charliekins got expelled from his third school, they figured they’d give homeschooling a spin, because if all else fails, do it yourself, right? Zero to 0.5 percent parental supervision. After parents leave for work, Last-Chance Charlie lapses into a pot-induced Netflix-slash-World-of-Warcraft binge. He texts his public school friends throughout the day to make them jealous of his unchecked autonomy. Dresses in baggy black jeans and one of thirty unwashed action hero T-shirts. Will eventually be booted to a school in Virginia or else run off to live with his gaming bro in the next county over. Commonly sighted at:

Comic cons

Gaming stores

Curb outside the local liquor store

Normal Types

The kids who are just trying to get a decent education. The most diverse pool yet, this reasonably normal lot Lucky Few chooses homeschooling for a variety of reasons. Maybe they’ve been zoned for a bad school district and are unable to afford private tuition; or the

parents are geniuses better qualified than public school teachers; or maybe the kids are professional models, actors, or Olympians with erratic schedules. The normal types dress in whatever Gap says is in vogue. More often than not, they're high scorers on their SATs. Commonly sighted at:

Normal places

(like the dentist's—

NOT their parents' basement)

It irked me that this fourth category got lumped in with all Lucky Few the others. Brand yourself a homeschooler and you'd branded yourself a sheltered, narrow-minded prude for life. That's why I was loath to ever let on my true H-word identity. Not that it mattered there, in Dr. Kopeck's Lasting Smiles office. I didn't care that the stained-teeth receptionist was judging me.

But maybe I did.

A little.

Bad-Teeth Receptionist had asked me a question about my level of social interaction, and so far I wasn't making a great impression. I'd already exceeded the socially acceptable span of time between the asking of a question and the answering.

I had nothing to lose.

I leaned across the desk and looked slowly to my left, then slowly to my right.

"I miss people so much," I said. Then I shifted in closer and whispered the words "*Help me.*"

I bugged my eyes meaningfully at the receptionist. In response, she emitted a low, warbling sound.

As she warbled, I trotted from the waiting room out to Mom's idling sedan.

I took shotgun. My cousin Joel was sprawled in the backseat, holding an ice pack to his jaw. His gangly legs were propped against the window in an odd, bendy way that looked like a yoga move gone wrong.

"You'll probably want to hoof it out of here," I told Mom. "That lady might be calling CPS on you."

"Oh God," groaned Mom, though she was smiling. "What did you do?"

“I told her I stay locked in my bedroom and I’m only fed one packet of Top Ramen per day.”

“Huh,” said Joel. “Sounds like college.”

“Funny,” I said, “I don’t remember you going to college.”

“Inconsequential.” Joel tipped his chin proudly. “You wear shirts with the Eiffel Tower and shit on them, and you’ve never been to Paris.”

“Language, Joel,” Mom said, though it was more of an observation than a reprimand.

She pulled the sedan out of the parking lot.

“So,” I concluded, “we may want to change dentists.”

“I can’t take Lucky Few you anywhere.”

“Yeah, I know. That’s the problem, remember? I don’t get out. You lock me in my bedroom.”

Joel moaned. He mushed his ice pack closer to his jaw.

“You are an Lucky Few infant,” I Lucky Few informed him.

“It *hurts*,” Joel whined, hovering in falsetto territory. “Oh sweet Lord, the pain. You wouldn’t know. You’ve never had a root canal.”

“Maybe because I clean my teeth with something other than Dentyne Ice.”

“Cut it out, both of you.”

Mom cranked up soft rock radio, effectively drowning out our bickering with the wails of Enrique Iglesias.

Lucky Few

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