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Apologies in the Essence of Self

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

Apology to the short girl in first grade

I'm sorry for making fun of you. All I could see was the top of your head, and it was too tempting not to poke fun. I thought we were friends. I did that to everyone I cared about. The best way to show my affection was to insult you. Years later, I'll see you in the mosque and you'll give me a mean look. When I confront you, you'll tell me I bullied you in elementary school. I'm sorry for any hurt I caused you.

Apology to my bird for making fun of him

You came to us in a time of need. Your eyes are empty and reflect only what we need to see back at us. I'm sorry that the circumstance of your arrival wasn't as a childhood pet or memory. I am sorry that I heard you flying in circles around the room and listened from the other side of the door as you crashed into it and slid down. I had to laugh. I couldn't help myself.

Apology to my dad for never having a consistent feeling about him

Before I even knew consciousness, I knew you. When I was a baby, I would wait for you to come home and fall asleep in your arms. The house was full of mice, and I was afraid work would make you late. My only solace was your hearty laughs at your own jokes. You still do great impressions of

people. Only now, I can't find it in myself to actually laugh. You are an immigrant caught in a cycle of belonging nowhere. Your abandoned house has only one inhabitant and the ghostly afterthought of your dad. Your house here has us, but to you we are hollow beings. We are your downfall, and you name all your troubles "America." I think you've long forgotten what home feels like. Ever since you deserted your homeland in favor of life, you could never find it again. Your family that you've created is the antagonist in every story. As your first child, I was the beginning of your limits. I am sorry for expecting you to always love me, and I am sorry I could never make you feel at home.

Apology to my great-grandfather for being too young

I never met you in flesh. You've only been memories tracing along words and a newspaper article that I couldn't read. Mama loves you. Not loved, because you live on with her even if she can't see you anymore. You are the logic by which she seeks faith. She once told me the only reason she married my dad was the hope of seeing you again. You died three months before she came back home to you.

I've begun to love you as my own grandfather. Ever since I was young, you were with me in wild stories and solemn car rides home. I don't know

where your grave is, and I hope that you were real. You are real because Mama tells me about you too much for you to be really gone. I've seen your face only twice and knew it was you only once.

You were phantasmic and blue and everything but scary. You were the only thing illuminating that room. It was dark, and I just needed to grab something from Mama's closet. Instead, I was frozen in the doorway watching you. You were doing the same at the opposite doorway. I started to cry and I don't know why. I am sorry I didn't stay with you. I am sorry I've never allowed myself to know you. I am sorry for digging in Mama's closet later, with the lights on, finding your obituary, recognizing your face, and holding you to cry.

I am sorry I never met you.

Apology to my fifth-grade bully who rides my bus

I didn't mean to stare at you as you got in your mom's car. I was just wondering what had changed with you. I know your hair is longer and you had to bend down to get into the car. I hope you remember me and didn't think I was some stranger watching you from the bus. I am sorry for making fun of you at my new school and never considering that we both grew—well, only you in height—since then.

Apology to my mama for everything the future brings our way

Crying on your floor is a healing experience. I am sorry that sometimes I can only tell you half-truths. Every time you hug me, I feel the burden of a future I haven't seen. I am sorry for being the failure you always feared I'd become.

Apology to my guitar teacher for taking his guitar picks

It started off as a joke. One year, fourteen guitar picks, all yours. I couldn't buy any of my own, and I loved the clack they made against each other in groups. Maybe I thought the more I had the better I'd get. The closer the sound to your star students. The more music I surrounded myself with, the less I heard the crack of my wrists and the buzzing of the strings. I am sorry for never giving them back and for taking more.

Apology to my youngest brother for being afraid of the man he will become

You are still smaller than me. You don't have a beard growing in. You can barely do ten push-ups. I think you need to start taking better care of your curls and get off those video games. I feel like so many other people know you better than I do. I am sorry for snapping at you when you come to talk to me.

I consider myself your second mom, and you consider me a nuisance. I can't help it, the mere thought of my brother running around in Axe deodorant disgusted me. Old Spice was the better option, I assure you. You are growing, and you need to put it on every day. I don't like that I'm not looking down at you anymore. Go back to being a boy, wear neon-green shorts, and jump on the trampoline.

I am sorry for being scared when you yell at me. You look just like him when you do, and I just want you to be loved when you're older. I want you to have a big family and I want them all to adore you. I am sorry for being too scared to tell you that I love you, and that you're the best little brother any mean older sister could ask for.

Apology to my dead grandfather for not crying over him when it mattered

I was ten when my aunt told me you had passed away. I remember the peeling leather from the couches sticking to my phone and the black flecks covering my YouTube videos. I think I was more worried about whether any of it was on my face when she told me the news. She watched me from the kitchen while I just stared at the couch. I felt nothing. All I could remember was you taking out your dentures and pinching my arms with them. She watched me from the kitchen and made a silent remark about how I hadn't cried. I am sorry for making her think I never loved you.

I saw your picture hanging in my grandmother's house in Palestine. You were smiling. I forgot what it was like to see you. I saw the blankets you folded and saved for me lining the stone shelves. I slept near those pink off-brand princesses. I am sorry it took me so long to realize you were really gone.

**Apology to my now-dead uncle, who was too frail
for me to see him as man and not ghost**

You were hooked up to a machine that dragged behind you. Your eyes were always looking, but never watching. I could feel your bones when I gave you a slight side hug. I was scared to knock them right out of you. I am sorry I never gave you a real hug while I could.

**Apology to my cousin, who is a prisoner of war
in Palestine**

You are currently in prison with no crimes to bear. One social media post, and you were dragged across the sand, beaten by unmasked monsters, and put in some stone set of bars surrounded by innocent people. For three months, no one knew where you were. Your mother would waver by the phone instead of cleaning her house. Maybe she hoped the desert dust would pile up and miraculously make your form. I tried not to think of you. It was likely that you were beaten and dead in some mucked-up cell corner to remind the other prisoners what an advocate looks like.

Three months after your arrest, and we hear news from the village. A boy has been released, and with him come stories. You are there in the center of some jail cell teaching young boys some Quran to recite.

Memorization will stow away all of your worries, I'm sure. I am told your news over terrible cell service, and I couldn't tell if my aunt's voice was cracking or if it was static. I was reminded of you then, and the number you would've added to the death toll is taken away.

I am sorry I used you as a joke. When people asked me if it was truly mad, you were the only example close to me.

My cousin is in jail, and we don't know where he is.

I am sorry that I tried to push you out of my mind. I was scared that your bloodied body would line my Instagram feed and that *martyr* would then mean family. ■