

Agora Journal Volume 11, 2020

Dear Memory

Jordan Frederick

January 3rd, 2020

Dear Diary, or whatever.

Okay, that sounds fake. Let me try again.

January 6th, 2020

It's been a few days since I've written in here, but I'll give it another try.

Because it is the single most ironic thing I could do, I've decided to name this diary Memory. Because I don't have one—a memory. Not for the first nineteen years of my life, anyway. Which, considering I *am* nineteen, is a pretty big deal.

Long story short, I was in a car accident. According to the people I'm told are my parents, I was driving home from college for Christmas break when the car ahead of me hit some black ice and went berserk. Witnesses said there was no way I could have stopped in time. I hit the ditch. Hard.

And then I went into a coma for three weeks.

I don't remember any of this. I don't remember *anything*. Period.

God, this is exhausting. I'm going to end it here for today.

Later.

P.S. I'm told my name's Leisal. I don't know why I'm telling this to an inanimate object.

January 7th, 2020

Dear Memory,

Look, I actually started my entry properly this time. Yay, me.

It feels weird that I know how to write and read. It seems even stranger that I know what a TV is, and what kinds of sounds a dog makes. I mean, if I have no memory, shouldn't I literally have *no* memory? Of anything?

Apparently not, according to Dr. McKenna. She says I have a severe form of retrograde amnesia that resulted in me having no memories before waking up in the hospital. I asked her if I'll ever get them back. At this point, she said, nothing is certain.

I'm not as upset about that as I should be. I mean, I *was*. But now that I've had my entire crying fit and made Liam and Olivia (my parents) feel worse by pulling away when they tried to hug me, I guess you could say I feel sort... empty. Neutral. Either way, I'm not devastated right now. All I want is to get out of this hospital and then, I don't know, move on. Try and see if I can get into college again. If not that, then I guess I'll try and figure things out. I could even get a job. My amnesia shouldn't prevent me from doing that. And if it does... fake it till you make it, I suppose.

Liam and Olivia (and the doctor) seem to agree that writing in a diary will help me "process" everything that happened and maybe even help me remember things on my own. I'm skeptical, to say the least. Maybe I'm being pessimistic, but I kind of doubt my memories are all going to come back in some glorious flood. I don't think I'm going to suddenly see the light and throw myself into my parents' arms for a tearful reunion. And I have a reason for feeling this way.

Try as I might, whenever I look at Liam and Olivia, I don't feel any sense of familiarity. I don't feel safe around them, or as though I've known them my entire life. I don't feel any kind of affection, either. At best, I get a vague sense of *déjà vu*, but that's not enough to go on. It certainly doesn't change the fact that these people feel like strangers to me—never mind how weird it feels to call them Mom and Dad. No matter what I do, I just can't make myself see them as my parents. Honestly, if Dr. McKenna hadn't backed them up, I might have thought they were trying to pull off some kind of scam.

I know that my lack of familiarity hurts Liam and Olivia. Every once in a while, Olivia will reach out as though to offer physical comfort, only to pull back when she realizes how uncomfortable that makes me. Instead, she and Liam have started talking about taking me home. Everything will be better once I'm "home," or so they seem to think. I don't have the heart to tell them I'm dreading it—dreading living with two people I don't know and meeting the family members who are still around.

What I really want is to be left alone. To not have people giving me hopeful looks or to be expected to act in a certain way, only to end up a disappointment.

I'm not leaving the hospital for a few more days, though. Best not to worry about everything ahead of time.

That's all for today.

Later.

January 9th, 2020

Dear Memory,

Well, that was a disaster and a half.

Liam and Olivia have been visiting me every day since I woke up in the hospital. They've been the only ones to visit me, which I've secretly been grateful for.

Until today, that is.

Apparently, I have (or had) a boyfriend. Up until today, he'd been waiting not-so-patiently for a chance to see me and finally got fed up with the constant roadblocks. Which is why a strange (although handsome) man appeared in my room this morning.

Liam and Olivia barely had any time to explain anything before he rushed over and hugged me. Still, I got the gist of it.

And I have to say, I wasn't impressed with being hugged by a complete stranger. Because that's what he is: a stranger. Much like Liam and Olivia, I didn't feel anything when I looked at this man. At best, I felt awkward, and a little bit guilty.

Not knowing what to do, I sort of went quiet as the man held me. A part of me wanted to push him away while the other part was worried about hurting his feelings. My stupid, *stupid* conscience.

Upon realizing I wasn't doing anything, the man pulled back. He called me Leisal—and to be honest, even my so-called name doesn't feel familiar.

What do you say to the man who is supposedly in love with you? Whom you know nothing about?

Well, probably not what I said: "Uh, hi. I don't actually know who you are."

The look on his face made me want to cry. He looked devastated. For a moment, I wanted to say, "Of course I remember you!" Except no one had told me his name yet, so faking it would be impossible.

His name is Jack, by the way. He must have sat with me for an hour, explaining in detail how we'd met, telling me about our first date. When it became obvious this wasn't setting off any light bulbs, he looked disappointed.

When Jack left, I hugged him and said I was sorry this happened. Despite his pain, Jack smiled and said that it's okay. We'll figure something out; we'll get through this, and he'll see me later.

I'm going to have to tell a man I know nothing about that I want to break up with him.

Happy bloody New Year.

January 10th, 2020

Dear Memory,

Can't these people just leave me alone? I mean, seriously.

After the fiasco with Jack yesterday, I'd been hoping to have at least one day to myself. That didn't happen.

Liam and Olivia just can't seem to leave me alone. Ever. They've visited me every day since I've woken up, and even when Dr. McKenna said I can go home soon, they're *still* visiting me.

The worst part is, they seem to think I shouldn't be left alone for too long. If Olivia goes off to find coffee or to find a washroom, Liam will stay and keep me company, talking about this or that. I think he's trying to cheer me up or something, but honestly, it just makes me more annoyed.

I can't say that, though. And hell, if that isn't another problem. As much as they overwhelm or annoy me, I just can't tell the couple what I want. It's not their fault I got into an accident; it's *definitely* not their fault I don't remember them at all.

So now I've sort of resorted to not saying much at all. I'll sit in silence, give short answers when Liam or Olivia talk to me. True, the passive-aggressive method probably isn't very healthy (not to mention I can tell it hurts them), but right now, it's the only thing I can think of.

At least they're gone now—although that's only because visiting hours are over. Still, I should be able to get a few hours of quiet before my big day tomorrow. Moving “back” into “my parents’” house and all that. Whoop dee doo.

I'll let you know how it goes.

Later.

January 11th, 2020

Dear Memory,

Well, I'm home. And it's pretty overwhelming.

It's all just too much: Liam, Olivia, this house—everything.

First things first, I broke up with Jack. Suffice to say, he didn't take it well. Oh, he tried to be understanding—said that he'd give me a few days, if that's what I wanted, to process everything. Said he'd back off with the whole memory-sharing and let everything come back to me in my own time.

He doesn't get it. I literally have no basis for our relationship. I don't know anything about Jack, or how I felt about him, or how our relationship worked. Him telling me these things just isn't the same as having the memories myself.

I said as much, and that's when he broke; when he realized that things can never go back to the way they were. I don't blame him for getting angry. I don't even blame him for all the things he said to me. They weren't horrible, per se, but they might have been hard for someone else to hear.

I listened as he accused me of not fighting hard enough for our relationship. I listened as he told me I didn't care enough. I just listened.

And when he finally fell silent, I hugged him. He'd said many hurtful things to me, and although I didn't know him, I got the impression Jack never would have said them under normal circumstances. He's not a cruel man. He'd just been pushed to his breaking point.

Even though I felt weird doing it, I gave Jack a light kiss on the temple. He held me tighter then, clutching me as though trying to prevent me from disappearing. Still, I detangled myself from his arms. The redness in his eyes (the defeat) almost undid me, but I held strong.

We said goodbye outside Liam and Olivia's house. I let him kiss me once. It was pleasant enough.

And then Jack got back into the car he'd arrived in and drove away.

I doubt I'll be seeing him again.

January 15th, 2020

Dear Memory,

Well, I've been "home" for four days. I hate it.

In the last few days, I've been introduced to more people than I would have liked—forget about trying to remember all their names. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, even a few cousins. Apparently, this so-called family of mine lives close together.

My head feels bloated with all the stories they keep telling me: like that time my grandparents took me to the beach and I almost drowned. Or the time I did Liam's makeup. Or when I destroyed the kitchen trying to make a birthday cake for Olivia.

No matter how many stories these people tell me, my mind continues to remain a blank slate. Every time someone hugs me as though they've known me for years, I want to push them away and scream at them to leave me the hell alone. Whenever someone asks, "Do you remember that time..." or say "I remember a time when..." Or even, with a forlorn sigh: "You've changed so much."

I'm in my bedroom right now, and even that doesn't feel at all familiar. It's too colourful—my eyes hurt every time I look around. It feels like I'm being screamed at every second. That doesn't make any sense, but nonetheless, that's how I feel.

I'll be seeing a therapist soon. That's good, I guess. It'll be nice to be able to talk to someone who doesn't expect me to act a certain way or say a certain thing. Maybe I'll be able to figure myself out, without being told how I *should* be.

I think it would be nice—to learn what kind of person I am.

My memories might never come back. I'm surprisingly okay with that. It's sad, but to me, it doesn't feel like the end of the world. Although, if one more person tries to dredge up memories that aren't there, I swear I'll rip my hair out.

I know I shouldn't feel this way. Maybe the accident knocked a few screws loose in my head. I don't care. Nothing in this house feels familiar. *Nothing* feels familiar, period. Except for this stupid diary.

I should end this here before I get too worked up.

Later.

February 1st, 2020

Dear Memory,

Wow, it's been forever since I've written in here. The therapist I've been going to is pretty great, so I guess I haven't felt the need.

So, what's new with me? Everything and nothing.

Let me explain. First, of all, no, I haven't gotten my memories back. No, I don't feel any connection to Liam and Olivia.

On the bright side, I got a job the other day. I'm still a bit surprised. I mean, sure, it's nothing special—just stocking shelves in a grocery store. But it's something, and considering how my life has been going lately, I'm seeing this as a good thing.

The pay's not phenomenal, but I estimate if I budget, and find a roommate, I should be able to move out of Liam and Olivia's house in about two months. Thank God, because I'm suffocating here.

Don't get me wrong, I don't blame them for wanting Leisal back. But as far as I'm concerned, Leisal's dead. There's only me now.

You may have noticed I'm referring to Leisal as though she is a different person. That's because, to me, she is. The name Leisal always felt strange anyway. I've given myself a nickname: Ava.

Liam and Olivia don't understand why I want to be called Ava. In fact, Olivia flat-out refuses to call me by that name, no matter how many times I insist on it. Honestly, she's a nice woman, but I'm finding living with her impossible.

At least my therapist understands. She thinks finding myself a place to live is a great idea. A fresh start, she says. I couldn't agree more. It will be nice to have my own place, even if I end up having to share it with someone. I've already started looking at some apartments and have found a few that look promising.

Of course, I haven't told Liam and Olivia—or anyone else in my so-called family, for that matter. They'd never understand.

I'll tell them. I will. When I'm ready.

Perhaps when I've got the apartment secure.

Are things perfect? No, not even close. But they're looking up, as far as I'm concerned.

I always knew this wasn't going to have some fairy tale ending where I woke up one day with all my life's memories intact. I knew there would be no sudden and joyous reunion with Jack, wherein we confess our undying love for each other.

So no, things are far from perfect. But that's okay. I like the direction my life is heading.

My name is Ava. I have no past, so I'll have to make a new one.

To be honest, I'm excited. The world is my oyster, as the saying goes. There are so many things to do (so many things to figure out), and I've got all the time in the world.

This memory-loss thing is freeing, in a way. Imagine that.

But I should end this here. It's time to break the news of my job.

Later,

Ava.