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A few hundred miles from the woods Gia grew up in, memories of a childhood friend entered her mind. She was her first female friend. And she helped Gia realize that she was also a girl. They explored what gender meant together, in the woods, somehow. Gia couldn't remember her name though. It had been fifteen years since they last talked and eleven years Gia had visited her parents at their childhood home. This friend was her best friend from her earliest memory. And she was imaginary.

This was why Gia suggest that she and her partners visit her parents for thanksgiving week. By Christmas Gia's parents will move into there new home that is walking distance from Gia and her partner's house. They're all starting a family together. Gia was so excited. This week was the last week she could wander around her childhood woods. Gia's last chance to fulfill a promise she made fifteen years prior.

"What are you thinking about?" Olivia asked. She spoke softly as to not wake up Valorie and Ava sleeping in the backseats.

"My childhood. Excited to visit where I grew up."

"Yeah I'm excited to get to spend the week with your parents" Olivia said completely sincerely. Olivia had this way of saying things that said from anyone else you'd assume the opposite meaning.

"I think I'm at the beginning of a psychotic episode." Gia stated. She and Olivia have spent many hours discussing Gia's delusions. Olivia was someone she could be straightforward with in a way that was useful.

"Oh neat. How do you notice that is happening?" Playful curiosity, her default respond to most things. Depending on Gia's mood it felt dismissive or encouraging.

"As a kid I had an imaginary friend I'd play in the woods with."

"Was this the one that help you realize you were trans?"

"Yeah. We'd try out feminine outfit, play games, stuff like that. I didn't actually see her but she still felt real. Right before I came out my freshmen year of high school, I saw her and we talked. I think she was my first experience with psychosis. First one I can remember."

Olivia thought about her response for a moment. "What did y'all talk about?"

"It was so long ago. I don't really remember the exact conversation. But basically she was a fungus from the future here to prevent climate change."

"That's pretty cool. So did she look like a mushroom person or something?"

"No she looked like a regular girl my age at the time who also happened to be really cute. She explained that she could interface with my mind because I was schizophrenic and she had been practicing how throughout my childhood."

"So you where 14, 15 that was before you where diagnosed right?"

"Yeah I was diagnosed in college for something completely unrelated. Honestly I blocked out this disillusion and only became aware of it recently. I've actually never talked about it with anyone."

"I appreciate you sharing with me." Olivia said as she so often does.

"Yeah. And she told me that she was about my age and was raised to be compatible with communication with humans. That her mother was her main interface with what is essentially a hivemind of fungus that exist throughout the planet. That me and her were an attempt to bridge the communication gap between humans and her species."

"So like ambassadors?"

"Yeah basically. We talked for a really long time that day but I don't remember most of it. Just that it was night when I came back from the woods. Before I left she asked that I come back for one more conversation and that she'd prove that she was real."

"Did you?"

"Not yet."

"So that's why you never wanted to visit your parents before they moved."

"Yeah."

"And why we never visited them into now."

"I think so."

"How can I help."

"Yeah I guess I want the week to go well. Just help me stay grounded. I need someone to talk to about it that I can trust to not believe that the delusion is real."

"I can do that." She smiled. "Although it would be nice if such a thing did exist. Would be reassuring to know that it wasn't all on us humans."

They kept talking for the rest of the drive there. The conversation wasn't particularly memorable. But an the time engaging and a happy distraction. The sun was setting but the time they arrived at Gia's parents double wide. As Gia helped unpack and felt more and more disconnected from her body. She remembered her mom saying that she "looked fried." Olivia introduced folks and the interaction felt positive. She said something about how Gia drove the whole trip there. Gia carried her mostly empty bag into her childhood bedroom. There were two mattresses. One on the floor. Gia laid down in her old bed and tried to connect to her body.

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"So this is the spot" Olivia said looking at a rock off to one side of the meadow.

"Yeah this is were I'd sit and play with my imaginary friend. And where we had our final conversation."

"Well second to final right?"

"Yeah I guess."

"Are you sure you want to do this right now? You seemed maybe hesitate when we on the walk over here."

Gia was surprised by Olivia insight. Gia couldn't remember what she said to indicate that to Olivia. And Olivia typically doesn't read non-verbals well. It looked like dawn or maybe dusk. The temperature was nice out. Gia didn't have her phone on her.

"What time is it?" Gia asked.

"6:30-ish" Olivia respond unhelpfully. Gia hesitated to ask if it was 6:30 AM or PM. Gia was didn't want to alert her that she apparently lost time. The point was to have this conversation. She didn't want Olivia's questions to pull her out of this reality.

"Yeah I want to do this. This is the right time for it. Just tell me what you notice after we leave the meadow."

"Okay for sure" Olivia smiled. She likes clear instructions on how to be helpful.

Gia sat down on the large limestone rock that was mostly flush with the ground. It was smooth to the touch. See looked over to Olivia who was looking away, past the meadow into the distance of the scraggly wood.

"Olivia?" Gia asked in an alarmed tone of voice "Wh-What are you looking at" her voice shook out. Olivia started to turn toward her in an unnatural movement. This wasn't Olivia. As her face peaked into Gia's perspective. A recognition that she was something demonic entered her awareness.

"Nothing really. Just trying to give you space to do you thing." She smiled looking toward Gia but not at her as she often does. Olivia was back.

"Can you sit beside me?"

"Sure!" A smiley Olivia held my hand and rested her head on my shoulder.

Gia's right hand connected to the reality Olivia lived in. She looked at her left hand. A memory flashed into her mind.

"I connect to you from a neural link they created in your left pinky. When the skin of the last segment come in contact with my mycelium we can talk." The memory of a teenage girl told Gia.

Gia looked down on her left side. There a strange mushroom grew. Gia had never seen it but she knew that was her friend. Gia placed her left hand next to the mushroom. Reality shifted.

The sky changed. The sun no longer below the tree line in one spot. It appeared as those the sun was shining from all directions around the treeline and above stars danced in a permanent twilight sky. And Olivia was gone.

Gia was alone. But she sensed that she called out her friends name maybe they would appear. But she could remember it.

"That's because you never gave me a name." A gentle voice of a woman on her left said. She was sitting down looking into the meadow. "I don't really have a name that translates into anything that would make sense."

"You got older" Gia noticed.

"So did you. It's been a long time since we last talked."

"I guess I didn't expect you to change for some reason."

"I have. Quite a lot actually" was that bitterness in her voice?

"I'm sorry I waited so long to come back."

"No I'm sorry" she sighed "Your here now. And that's enough."

"Last we talked you mention you would prove that you were real on our next conversation."

The face of perhaps the most uniquely beautiful woman Gia had ever seen deformed. It was like she already knew that I'm only doing this so I would feel okay abandoning her forever.

"I can't do that anymore. Preparations couldn't endure fifteen years of waiting. In theory with some time for preparations I could." she paused "Honestly I'm not sure I could prove it to you anymore. I sense this will be our last conversation. And that is okay. After we talk, my ego and my feelings for you will dissolve upon entering the mycelial collective."

"What was the plan if I had come back sooner?"

"Forest fire. The network prepared a section of forest through cultivating and culling tree, brush, etc via redistributing resources between plant. They can chemically start fires somehow and it would be a completely controlled burn. I was to tell you the when and where and the exact number of hectares that would burn. And after it happened you could research and confirm that the number match. The woods we cultivate are ever changing. They stopped struggling to maintain a predictable controlled burn after you left home and the collective gave up on the idea you'd ever return."

"All that for me?"

"Apparently we were the most promising pair that collective has tried to establish communication with. Our connection is special." She paused for a moment as fear filled her face. "Also I've been deceiving you."

"How so?"

"When you came back I was so excited. I've missed in so much. In your absence I've expanded my mycelium to be throughout your parents house. I've read their books they never remove from there shelf. Listen to there conversations. And even connected to" she paused "all kinds of things."

"I imagine you felt lonely. I don't feel deceived by that" Gia reassured.

"Well see you're actually laying down in your bed. My mycelium is also all over your room. Once your pinky touch me I may have perhaps over eagerly connected to you."

"But that" Gia paused. *That's why I can't remember how I got here.* "You pretended to be Olivia."

"Yes."

"How?"

"I can read your surface thoughts. I brought you here and tried to mimic what you expected from her."

"I want to leave. How do I leave."

"Will you come back?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Of course you do. It's always been up to you. You have all the control here. All I can do is be patient and hope."

"I can't leave and choose when I come here."

"Of course you can. I'm sorry I tricked you."

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Gia opened her eyes to see light from outside reflecting off her laminated mushroom foraging poster. She scanned it with her eyes passively. The sun had set and the porch behind her window was full of comforting voices.

*I guess that could have gone better.* Gia looked at her left hand then towards the window and got up. An uncertain body stepped out of the room. Gia made it to the front door which connected to the porch and waited. She heard Olivia saying something about whales and step through the entryway.

Valorie, Ava, Olivia, Mom, Dad sat on a wooden picnic table. The old deck wood felt good on her bare feet. The metal roof her uncle built blocked out the stars. Moths circled bulbs in various fixtures scattered around. One of Valorie's playlist was pleasantly audible from her Bluetooth speaker. Things were going well. *I just fell asleep after a long drive.* Gia thought then explained to the group once acknowledged. Gia sat down and took in the vibe. Everyone's words washed over her.

Did the words not matter because nothing was really being said by anyone? *Am I still just thinking of her.* Gia considered whether that counted as the second conversation. Was that really the resolution. Was it over? *Do I want that to be where I leave things?*

No.

Gia's Mom cut through "I made dinner. It's on the stove if you want any." There was a moment of silence. Olivia looked like she was about to say something.

"Yeah maybe" Gia said quickly. She wasn't hungry she just needed time to think.

"I'll heat it up for you" her Mom continued and Gia followed the cues. After a few steps, nods, smiles, and thank yous, warm food was in front of her and she was sitting at the dinner table. Olivia was there too. Gia's Mom rejoined the others card game.

"You alright?" Olivia's voice felt so real.

"Could I get some water?" Gia asked. *I could have gotten that. I know where it is. I'm not a child.*

"Sure thing!" Olivia smiled "Where are you cups?" she continued to smile in her incomprehensible way. Gia pointed and within a few moments water was in her hands. She drank.

"I'm not really hungry. Do you want this?"

"Actually yeah" Olivia ate and they sat in a comfortable silence. Olivia slide the plate back over to her "Are you sure you don't want any?"

"Yeah. I don't think I'll be eating much for a bit." Gia explained. Olivia left the plate in front of Gia.

"So let's talk. What's going on?"

"How are things going with my parents?"

"Everyone seems to be getting along I think. I was surprised to see how sound asleep you were. I held you for a while. You must have been really tired."

"I don't think I was actually asleep. Was there anything else that seemed strange compared to how I usually sleep."

"Your body was really rigid I guess." An awkward silence started.

Olivia looked causal. She seemed perfectly comfortable in that silence. It didn't matter that Gia's responses were confusing. That's Olivia secret she's always confused. She looked comfortable. *I could say anything and it wouldn't be a big deal.* "I talked with her." Gia said softly.

"How did that go?" Olivia asked.

*Did she even know who her referred?* "She's older now"

"That makes sense. How was she?"

"Bad I think. Lonely. I abandoned her I guess."

"Right. Is that what she said or what you assume?" Olivia was taking this way to literally.

"It's all in my head so there's not really a meaningful distinction."

"That's fair sorry. So she's upset because you abandoned her?"

"No."

Olivia waited. She didn't know what to say. "Do you want to talk with her again?"

*No! This was it. I'm done. I want this to end. I want to be in reality.* Gia's body went cold and posture sunk. *Is this real right now?* Gia glanced at Olivia and reality shuttered. What was behind that concerned look.

"Maybe."

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Gia laid on a beach. The sun was out and it felt pleasantly warm. She was alone and the sounds of waves made her feel at peace. Gia had the vague notation that she was on an island. A bird that Gia would guess was a seagull lands in front of her.

"Hello there" the bird squawks.

"A pleasure. What brings you to this island that we're on?" Gia asked.

"Fish" the bird stated. "And to talk with you."

"That's nice what shall we talk about? Perhaps I could hop on your back and we could fly around?" Gia suggested.

"I'm too small for that" the bird said quite rationally.

"Well why don't you eat this" Gia presented a flower that was in her hand "It's a magic flower" Gia lied "If you eat it you'll grow big and I could ride you."

"I don't believe in magic" the talking bird said.

"Right well what do you wish to talk about?"

"I was wondering if you wanted help sleeping?" the bird asked warmly.

"Aren't I already?"

"Maybe but say you were having together sleeping and I, a talking bird, could help you fall asleep and feel rested. Would you want me to do that?"

Gia considered her response. "Is there any potential harm or side effects?"

"No it should be fairly safe. Just precisely timed melatonin micro doses."

"But if you messed up the dose couldn't that like bork my sleep cycle or something."



"Well sure but I know what I'm doing. I went to bird school. It's perfectly safe."

"Well consider me informed and consenting doc. Wait but how do you know how to do that. I'm pretty sure this treatment is only theoretical."

"For humans sure. But I'm a bird."

"Right. Birds are cool. Love how you guys flying around all the time. Except for chickens. Poor chickens."

"I do dream of flying too you know. Being able to walk would be pretty neat also." the no longer bird said.

"So what are you then. If not a bird. Was bird school a lie!?" Gia felt herself drifting into warm unreality.

"I'm your friend" a soft voice said.

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Gia awoke with Olivia holding her. *What a strange series of dreams.* Gia thought. *No.* She had actually gotten up in the middle there. She remembered brushing her teeth and her mouth felt as those that was the case.

"Did you get any sleep." Olivia asked in her ear softly. "I felt you moving around more than usual." Olivia always seemed aware of how Gia slept when they slept next to each other but also somehow seemed to get enough sleep.

"Yeah I feel great actually. What time is it?" Gia asked.

"I'd guess 7 or 8-ish maybe. Based on the light. it stopped being blue a bit ago." Both had their phones within arms reach but neither reached for them. Instead Gia turned toward Olivia and looked at her gorgeous face. She was looking slightly down and smiling. She kissed Gia's cheek once then a few more times.

Gia lingered in the warm with Olivia then entered the cool morning air of her bedroom. She left that room with Olivia silently watching. In a pile on the couch in the living adjoined to her bedroom was a bunch of her old clothes. Gia's mom asked her to look through them with they were here. On top was her old jacket she had worn most days in high school.

She'd patched it, hemmed it in places, and realized she missed it. *Why did I leave it? it's not like I stopped being a punk after I left.* Gia put it on. *Still fits. No surprise there.* Gia hadn't eaten since yesterday morning. She hurried past the kitchen. She heard her mom somewhere in the

backroom but she didn't want to be noticed right now. She sat down in the main living room that adjoined to the front porch via the front door and laced up her hiking boots.

Gia managed to get into the woods without a single interaction. This was a great relief. She gently dropped the ability to mask she'd been holding onto. The mask of someone not considering engaging in an ongoing dialogue with her mycelium based friend. Gia was determined to test the reality of this by taking it seriously.

She got to the meadow quicker than she'd imagined. These woods were smaller in reality than in her mind. Paths she made exploring as a kid remained and she recognized very little as changing. This was the setting to the first half of her life. The second was vans, punk houses, occupations, and sky hammocks. For so long since leaving these woods she was part of a collective. Here she was herself.

Gia found the slab of limestone and brushed off leaves that had completely covered it. She sat down and feel the soft hardness of the smooth slab. Being careful not to harm the patches of fluffy green moss sharing the slab with her. *Very kind of them.*

No mushrooms were visible around the slab but it was no matter. Gia uncurled her left hand. She realized she'd been keeping it in a fist. She gently let her pinky touch the soil. Most of her hand still on the limestone. The exposure of her pinky to soil seeming almost incidental. She looked off into the distance. And tried to imagine what Olivia was looking at in her dream. In that distance saw a green bird. Like one from a pet store. Gia looked closer and there was a few of them. She'd seen such a site in a city park once. Likely feral friends that escaped their cages and now struggled to survive.

It was weird to see them out here though. She focused on them for a while and listened and focused on their squawks. The sun was gone from the sky above and had decided to fill every part of the horizon leaving Gia in a permanent twilight. She was now circled by strange curly mushrooms that were plump like a succulent but maybe a bit less.

The stars once still, broke their social tension and began mingling with each other. That's nice, I hope they make friends. The woods around her felt teemed with social interaction animals, grass, flowers, and trees all talking as a warm crowd. She was in an ideal city square environment. No cars trended here. The meadow was comforting and she was taking it in while she waited for her friend to arrive.

"I so glad you decided to meet with me again." the woman she was waiting for stated and sat down at her table in the set across from her. Gia hadn't notice until now that there was a beautiful, old brick building peaking its way through the treeline on the other end of the meadow. Behind Gia the comfort of a lively cafe.

"Of course. When we last spoke things didn't feel quite resolve. Also this is the first of our conversations I've chosen. So the others don't count. I promised I'd comeback once more to chat. So this is me doing that." Gia said trailing off.

"What do you think of the locale? I tried to pick an environment we'd both find pleasant."

"It's quite lovely. I'd love to live here" Gia joked.

"That is an option" the woman said coyly. Her smile was warm and comforting. She looked Gia in the eyes for a moment. Gia looked down to see their hand touching slightly on the table. She didn't move and looked back up.

"Why do you look like a human?" Gia asked as her hand moved slightly away.

"Well my body is subterranean so there isn't really a meaningful way visualize my physical appearance. Honestly I'm not even sure I could if I tried. Our brains are in many ways similar to humans, based on it in fact. Visual representation is common way from us to comprehend and be comprehended. We normally don't look like humans but since my birth I always have."

"How old are you?"

"About your age. I was formed to be a pair for you specifically. I was raised to have a stable ego with limited interconnection with the collective. The idea being I'd better be able to understand and communicate with you." the woman said then paused "I was made for you."

"That's a lot" Gia stated then decided to ignore red flags for now. "So others of your kind don't have stable egos?"

"Yeah for them self is very fluid and ever changing. A self appears for a purpose, even if that purpose is just to have fun, then dissolves into other selves when that purpose has ended. I've never experience this first hand. My purpose to exist is much longer lasting and I am very persistent toward that purpose."

"You said earlier your mind is based on humans. Is that because the collective formed you to be more like a human mind?"

"Actually yeah but I meant that we where designed and engineered by beings that considered themselves human and shared a lot of your DNA. In our timeline, a few centuries into mass extinction, humans discovered a way to create a symbiotic relationship between engineered fungus and human neurons. That lead eventually to a fungal human hybrid that could survive off much less and more diverse calories. Also they look basically human. They called themselves Mycans. But the planet continued to die in new, interesting and unpredicted ways.

"So after a time the Mycans struggled to survive and realized then couldn't live through the time needed for the planet to be healed. So they made us. Fungus was thriving in our dying world and we could survive and help redistribute things with cognizant long term planning. Unlike our unthinking cousins."

"So you have human neurons in your mycelium?" Gia asked.

"No they are modified, optimized and integrated into the cell structure by so much engineering there is very little DNA or structurally in common with your cells. It's more accurate to say we are sentient fungus created by humans and partly in their image. A good analogy is the AI beings in your dad's scifi novels." the woman paused "I guess except for me and those like me. Many of my structure are there to make my cognition much closer to yours."

This was a lot of lore all at once for Gia's mind to make up in the background. But still possible. Gia knew she had enough of an understanding to make all this up. *There is nothing knew here really.* Gia started to consider question to learn new information and fact check later. Then Gia looked up to see the woman across from her distraught, hurt even.

"I have an awareness of your surface thoughts. I was trying but they're hard to ignore. We're not really talking are we. Your testing me. And that should be fine. It's reasonable. I'm sorry I this is very hard for me." The conversations in the cafe behind Gia stopped. The part meadow, part city square fell still. The stars were still. "I don't even know why I'm going into all this detail. This was all stuff that was taught to me that I honestly don't find very interesting. I don't know how my brain works. Do you know the inner-workings of yours? I'm so alone and the only person I want to talk to only wants to focus on the nature of my existence. Which is like not my favorite subject. It's a lot for a first date." She paused "Shit."

It now felt late in the eternal twilight of the meadow. Conversation were started again in the cafe but fewer. The building across the way seemed sleepy and settled. The square was mostly empty. Yeah all social queues said it was getting late.

"I'm sorry" Gia started "Maybe we can start over. I'm not opposed to this being a date. I guess neither of us were up front with our intentions." Not a great apology but Gia realized that's not what she was trying to do. There is danger here whether or not this woman was real. Gia realized and tried to not think about it too hard.

"I'd like that. But it's getting late in real time. Time passes differently here. I can try to explain it later." the woman said starting to get up.

"Why don't we pick a time to talk again" Gia suggested.

"Tomorrow evening work for you. Say your bed at 6pm?"

Gia reflected on the various implications "It's a date."

"You'll be tired. It's a lot of work for us to link" she said leaving from Gia's view. "But don't worry I help you get good sleep" a bird said somewhere behind Gia.

The sun way setting but now only in one spot. *Shit I've been here all day without my phone or telling anyone where I was.* Gia walked back from the woods and braced herself for another hard conversation.

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Gia didn't have good answers for "Where have you been?" or "Why didn't you...?" and so she lied. In the tale she spun, she didn't get any sleep last night. When the sun rose she walked into the woods and fell asleep. And now she had just woken up. Mostly believable and it was almost true. Gia had been back for an hour and was relieved that nobody had yet to suggest she should eat something.

"So what are some embarrassing stories about our Gia?" Ava asked.

"Yeah she never talks about living here. Give us that dirt." Valorie said. Valorie seemed excited at a potential shift toward a good time. *The day must have been so stressful with me missing* Gia thought. No one was blaming her or revealing how it must have been a big deal. *Why am I like this.*

"Well" Gia's mom, Catherine, started looking toward her husband. "She was really close with my Mom who lived with us for a time." A deep chill went down Gia's back. She tried to speak but there were no words and no one noticed.

"Oh yeah they were quite the duo. She watched Gia while Cathy and me both worked in town." Gia's dad, Tom, stated.

"That sounds really nice" Olivia said looking toward Gia now giving her room to speak. A silence persisted for a few seconds but Olivia did not look away from Gia so the silence held as eyes were on her. A twitch of doubt or awkwardness came from Olivia's face. She was about to look away and continue speaking.

*There's no way out but through.* "Yeah me and Gran were close toward the end. She died my first year of high school." *So much for a light conversation.*

"Yeah that was hard for us all. Especially Gia." Cathy said "Shortly after Gia told us she was a girl and wanted to transition."

"We had no idea about any of this stuff. We found the youth center in the city and it had a parents support group." Tom stated.

"I didn't know y'all went to a support group" Gia said.

"I guess it never came up. I think we actually started going to it more after you left when you were seventeen" Cathy paused. "But we were talking about how my Mom turned out to be much cooler than I ever knew her to be."

"Like she was an anti-war, free love, commie like you kids." Tom said clearly a fan. "And I guess we took up some of that after she was gone."

"Apparently" Cathy continued "Gia had told mom about wanting to be a girl but she didn't want us to know. Which fair I did vote republican back then. So mom and Gia went to thrift stores, dressed up and did all regular girl stuff."

"Oh rad. So what, she must have been one of those like 1930's radicals?" Ava asked.

"Yeah that would line up. We never found out all she got up to." Tom said "We learned all this stuff about her after she passed."

"That's some solid opsec if your daughter never realized anything." Valorie noted.

"Well she didn't raise me. I was adopted. We connected when I was an adult." Cathy said "I'm grateful for the time I had with her though. Grateful that she was there to help raise and support Gia in ways we didn't know how to yet. They played in the woods together a lot. Mom build Gia a tree house in this meadow in the back."

Olivia looked at Gia.

"She was a fit old woman right up until the end." Cathy added.

"What a legend. And you're paying it forward" Ava said.

Valorie touched the slight bulge of her tummy "It will be great to have y'all be a part of our little family. But also where's the embarrassing part?"

"Oh well I guess there isn't any" Cathy laughed.

"I don't know Gia's certainly all red" Olivia said.

"Oh honey did we embarrass you?"

"I'm fine. So did y'all do anything fun today besides worry about me?"

"Honestly it's bad but we didn't notice until like an hour before you stumbled out of the woods all dazed like" Ava said. "Me and your Mom went to this cool local museum and had a nice lunch."

"Val, Olivia and I went hiking. Each group thought you were with the other."

"Well that's nice. I'm glad y'all all had a good day. I'll be right back."

Gia got up and went to restroom. Then to the kitchen to get water. As she began to drink Olivia entered.

"They're all gonna play Root but I think I'mma sit it out."

"Yeah I don't think I'm up for a five hour board game right now either."

"Why didn't you ever tell me about your Gran?" *Fuck*. "She sounds a lot like mushroom girl." *Fuck, fuck*. "And she died right when the first conversation with her happened right?" *Fuck, fuck, fuck*. "Sorry I'm not trying to be" Olivia paused.

"Because it's all a lie." Gia admitted.

"Mushroom girl?"

"Gran." Gia said and Olivia waited. "My imaginary friend was real. And it was like I told you. Me and Gran were close but she never knew I wanted to be a girl. After Gran died I was really upset and then Mushroom girl talked to me. And that was terrifying. So I lost both of them at once. After a few months without my pretend world were I got to be a girl I couldn't stand it. So I told my parents I wanted to be a girl."

"That makes sense."

"I told my parents I had a friend who supported me. Then they wanted to know who it was. I thought if I said my imaginary friend who was in fact a fungus from the future then I'd never convince them to give me hormones. So I said Gran. She was died and I was the one who knew her the best. This whole story my parents told was a lie that came from me. And they believed it. And I got hormones."

"Do you plan to tell them all this at some point?"

"God no. My mom loves the idea that her Mom abandoned not because of a well to do family trying to keep things quiet but to bash the fash. My dad talks about her as his inspiration to join the occupy movement he got into after I left home. I spun a story about the past and it became real."

"All things equal, is it better to believe a happy delusion or miserable with the true?"

"If it doesn't cause harm then I'm for happiness."

"Is that what they would choose?"

"I don't know. Do you wanna cuddle?"

"Yeah" Olivia smiled know that there is a limit to hard conversation one can have.