

Trigger warning for something you probably won't notice anyway (abuse)

He had a large nose, he was sure of it, but nobody would confirm it for him. When he was in middle school he had watched an anime — everyone had watched anime in middle school, it wasn't just him — where one of the three main characters also had a large nose. People mocked this character ruthlessly for it, and he could identify with the character, even though he couldn't remember the name of the character or the name of the anime really and even though nobody ever made fun of him for having a large nose.

It was horrible to believe something that nobody else would confirm and he couldn't tell the difference between the presence of the people around him vs the people themselves, so he mistakenly believed it was the people themselves who made him feel horrible, and that made him resent the people around him, even though they all treated him very well. His father had beat him as a child but he had also signed him up for group sports so he had turned out well-adjusted enough in the end in that the people around him always tended to like him.

He was unsettled by this because he couldn't see what he had done to make them like him and sometimes it felt so unrealistic that he had a hard time believing it wasn't a joke that everyone was playing on him. Like when he was three years old and his sister had started telling him that he was an alien and not a human, and it wasn't funny but no matter how he tried to argue or prove to her that he was human she could always outsmart him because she was three years older, and she maintained this position for three months until their mother screamed at them to stop fighting and they never really talked again after that. The absurd good will and warmth that everybody outside his family displayed to him could feel in the same way like a senseless lie that other people seemed to find so funny that they refused to let it go. It made him so angry to feel a truth deep in his bones that everybody around him invalidated that he wanted to scream.

Well, it felt that way usually when he was feeling unhappy in general, for example after he hadn't slept enough or after his sister was cruel or after he watched a French New Wave film where the main characters seemed very alive and in love with each other (he desperately wanted to feel that way about someone) and they had unusual features but not in an ugly way, just in an irresistibly original and beautiful way. If he would have kept a diary tracking his mood he might have noticed that he often felt unhappy after watching these films, but he didn't notice and when people asked who his favorite director was he would say Truffaut.

When he was happy he was a bit more charitable. For example, a girl who watched anime in middle school (he had made fun of her for it, because the jocks made fun of her for it and he spent a lot of time with them) who would later go on to become a critically acclaimed indie actress (he watches every movie she's in in theatres when it comes out now, as a self-made millionaire in his late 20s who still wears Vans to work every day) asked him out to the school Sadie Hawkins dance in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and because she was still considered weird then he assumed that she was genuine. She had the sort of unrealistically large bulging eyes that unsettle you in

person but mesmerize you when safely contained behind the glass of a tablet or TV screen and then really terrify you again when blown up on a big projector. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade she wore a garish amount of eyeliner though and the jocks didn't really appreciate that. Anyway, after she asked him out to the Sadie Hawkins dance, he allowed himself a more charitable thought. Maybe people liked him because the jocks liked him, and he knew the jocks liked him because he played team sports and he could help them with their math homework. And the girl with big eyes who liked anime liked him because he made fun of her. He knew then, with pubescent masculine overconfidence, that chicks dug jerks. (He doesn't know this anymore.)

After he reconciled peoples' chummy behavior toward him with an internal model that managed to justify it slightly he opened up to people a bit more, but the indie-actress-to-be went to a different high school so she never got to know this kinder side of him. When he watches her movies now he often regrets not asking her if anyone had ever told her that her eyes were so big. If anyone ever tells her now. He still doesn't understand why nobody has ever mentioned his huge nose. He thinks that maybe she might understand.