

# 1

**If** it were up to my dad, my entire life would be on video.

Anything I do, he grabs his phone. “Opal,” he’ll yell to my mother. “Rafe is eating corn flakes. We gotta get this on film.”

He calls it film, like instead of an iPhone, he has an entire movie crew there, filming me.

So when he pulled his Saturn Vue hybrid up to a hulking building with a stone façade and I leapt out of the car to examine my new home for the first time, I wasn’t shocked that he went straight for his cell.

“Act like you’re arriving home after three years overseas in the army,” he said, his left eye hidden behind the phone. “Do some cartwheels.”

“I don’t think soldiers do cartwheels,” I said. “And no.”

“It was worth a shot,” he said.

The thing about it is nobody ever watches these videos. I have seen him record literally weeks’ worth of video, and I’ve never, ever seen him watch any of it, or put any of it on “the Face Place,” as he calls it, which he is always threatening to do.

“I’m going to throw that thing if you don’t put it away,” I said. “Seriously. Enough.”

He removed the phone from in front of his eye and gave me a hurt look, as he stood there in his Birkenstocks, his knobby knees glistening in the sun. “You would not throw my child.”

“Dad. I’m your child.”

“Well, yeah,” he said. “But you don’t take videos.”

He pocketed his other child, and we stood side by side, in awe of the stone fortress that was going to be my dorm, East Hall. All around us, families were unloading boxes and suitcases onto the sidewalk. Guys were shaking hands and thumping fists like old friends. It was a steamy day, and the huge oak tree near the front entrance was the only break from the hot sun. A few parents sat on the grass there, watching the car-to-dorm caravan. Cicadas buzzed and hissed, their invisible cacophony pressing into my inner ear.

“Well, they don’t make ’em like this back in Boulder,” Dad said. He was pointing to the old building, which was probably built before Boulder was even a city.

“That they don’t,” I said, the words nearly getting caught in my throat.

I felt as if every homework assignment I’d ever toiled over, every test I’d ever aced, it was all for a reason. Finally, here it was. My chance for a do-over. Here at Natick, I could be just Rafe. Not crazy Gavin and Opal’s colorful son. Not the “different” guy on the soccer team. Not the openly gay kid who had it all figured out.

Maybe from the outside, that’s what I looked like. I mean, yeah. I came out. First to my parents, in eighth grade, and then at Rangeview, freshman year. Because it’s an *open and accepting* school. A *safe*

place. And then my soccer team sat down and we had a team meeting, and then they knew. Extended family, friends of friends. Rafe. Gay.

And no one's head exploded. And nobody got beat up, or threatened, or insulted. Not much, anyway. It all went pretty great.

Which is fine, but.

One day I woke up and I looked in the mirror, and this is what I saw:

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Where had Rafe gone? Where was I? The image I saw was so two-dimensional that I couldn't recognize myself in it. I was as invisible in the mirror as I was in the headline the Boulder *Daily Camera* had run a month earlier: Gay High School Student Speaks Out.

In truth, there were a lot of reasons I was moving across the country to attend Natick for my junior year. It was just that some of