



Proudly Presents

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE

WRITTEN BY BRIDGET GRACE SHEAFF

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No one ever warned me about raising a boy. No one ever said, “Be prepared for dirt!” or “Buy extra Band-Aids” or “Don’t paint your walls white!” But that was all stuff I could have guessed. I mean, I could have guessed that a boy would be messy and rambunctious. I’m not stupid. I think the hardest part about raising a boy is that, as he grows up, you watch him become a man, like his father. Let’s be honest. He can’t become a man like his *mother*. No, no, that’s not how that works. You only have a little boy for, like, ten minutes, and then poof—he’s the spitting image of your husband. He looks just like him. He acts just like him. How are you supposed to get boys ready for adulthood? It’s like you get this gift from God for all of ten minutes, and then they’re all grown up and leaving the nest. If all you have is ten minutes, how on earth can you prepare them for life? Ten minutes. That’s what it feels like. Sometimes, it even feels like it’s less than ten minutes.

Evan. We named him after my husband’s father. For those of you who don’t have children yet, that’s often how choosing the name for an unborn child works. We had no idea there was anything different about our son, until Evan was three. He had always seemed withdrawn. But that’s just, you know, something you can expect from small kids, right? Sometimes they’re shy around new people. It can be overwhelming, especially if you’re an only child. It’s perfectly normal to feel this way, right? Then one day, I came into his room. Evan looked up at me—and he was terrified. He looked at me, as if I was someone he had never seen before. I said, “Evan? Honey, are you okay?” He kept scanning my face, as if he was desperate for some indication as to who I was. Evan looked at me like that for a while, and then he said “Are you—are you my mommy?”

I cannot describe to you the horror I felt at that exact moment. Evan didn’t know who I was. He had no idea. I called in Bill, my husband, and Evan hesitantly guessed that he was Daddy. We then showed Evan pictures of people he saw every day or almost every day. Nothing. There was no reaction. He had no idea who any of those people were.

We went to see a pediatrician, and he referred us to another doctor, who then referred us to someone else, who finally told us that Evan was ‘face blind.’ Prosopagnosia is the correct scientific term. I had never heard this word before. Trust me. There is nothing more terrifying than hearing a doctor tell you that your one and only son has a psychological condition. Apparently, Evan doesn’t have the ability to recognize faces. He can look at you, and even if he saw you this morning or sees you every day—he doesn’t know who you are. He doesn’t have the ability to recognize Bill as his father. He doesn’t have the ability to recognize me as his mother. He lacks the ability to distinguish people by their faces. Something doesn’t connect with this part of his brain—the part that recognizes traits or differences in people’s faces—which, of course, explains his shyness and why he has so much trouble making friends. How can he possibly be expected to make friends? Evan doesn’t know who anyone is. Think about it. 99.99% of the world’s population is able to differentiate people by what they look like; however, for those rare few individuals living with Prosopagnosia, the only way to distinguish one individual from another is by a person’s mannerisms—or vocal variances.

If you’re diagnosed with this psychological condition, you soon learn that very little can be done. There aren’t many options really. I mean, there’s no surgery, no drugs. What we must do for Evan is work with him—to try to retrain his brain in a different way.

We hired a specialist who quizzes Evan on faces. She shows him two pictures, and then she asks Evan to point to his teacher or his grandfather. Evan only gets it right 50% of the time. For Evan, it’s really just a game of guessing. One time, I was standing in the room, and Evan couldn’t figure out which of the two pictures was me. He was so frustrated. So was Bill. Who am I kidding? So was I. He doesn’t say it, but I think Bill feels responsible—like somehow this is his fault. How could it be? I was the one who gave birth to him. I fed him with my body. How could it be anyone’s fault but mine? Doctors keep telling us that no one is at fault—that it’s an anomaly. It’s just something out of our control.