Press Play

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Recommended Citation

Available at: https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/calliope/vol46/iss1/16

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You are a cliché.

Twelve, depressed, lonely. Scars running deeper than your flesh admits. You start to lose weight around the same time your skin begins to clear. Everyone tells you how pretty you are becoming.

They don’t know that you can’t bring yourself to eat.

They don’t know that you can’t bring yourself to sleep.

They don’t know that your grades are slipping, along with your sanity.

Hell, not even your mom knows. She’s preoccupied. Her other teenager, the one that is disappearing for days at a time, seems to be a more pressing matter.

All your friends are smoking weed and getting arrested and sticking their hands down each other’s pants. You have never kissed anyone.

Years later, your girlfriend will tell you that the average person has seven relationships in their life. She was your first. You were not hers.

Scratch that. Your first abusive relationship began while you were still in elementary school.

Rewind.

Screaming, a fleshy smack, dogs barking. You cower beneath your blankets, curled on the floor next to your dog, in front of the couch where you sleep every night. You try to be small.
You hear your name. Your legs don’t want to move, but before you can stop yourself, you are well on your way down the hallway. Your mom is crying.

“Look what he did! Look!”

You look.

One of her eyes is puffy and red, bleeding from the cheek bone. Cut from the ring on his finger.

And when it happens again, you are there to witness the act.

You hide in the closet (ha, ha), behind your mom’s special dresses. You hear her hit the ground. You peek between filmy pieces of cloth, trembling. He is on top of her. His hands are around her throat. She’s crying, crying.

When you go to school the next day, you wonder how it would feel to tell someone. It’s at your throat, clawing to escape. You imagine purple fingerprints dotted across your collarbone.

Fast forward. You are seventeen.

Your father left you. You are afraid of rejection. You don’t feel pretty without your piercings. You don’t feel happy alone. When you tell your therapist your girlfriend has left you, she has a long conversation with herself about the effect abandonment has had on your relationship choices.

You either eat too much, or you don’t eat enough. You are either incredibly manic or incredibly depressed. You are either entirely in love or disillusioned with the concept altogether. Your life is a series of extremes.

And when it isn’t, it is colorless. Take two pills every night, and your mind stops buzzing. It is still. You don’t want to read. You don’t want
to paint. You don’t want to write. You sit on your bed, patiently
to powering through all of your homework. You go to sleep every night
at nine o’clock. You eat, sleep, drink like clockwork.

You don’t wear dresses anymore. You never liked them all that much.
Your mom deplores your questionable fashion taste. She worries about
the fact that you “aren’t a pretty lesbian”.

You are weak. You have lost all your friends. You have alienated
your family. All because a girl made you feel like you couldn’t live
without her.

Rewind. You are fifteen.

You tell yourself that this is where your problems started.
They ruined you.

You wore dresses for her. She told you that you were beautiful.
Beautiful became okay, okay became fat, fat became ugly. But when she
pulled your shirt off and kissed you like she meant it, you believed her.
And the boy watched from beside you on the bed. Your cheeks burned
red. He rested a hand on your stomach. Your butterflies froze, dropped
down into your gut, dug in like daggers.

Fast forward. Sixteen.

She isn’t attracted to you. She never was. You punch a brick wall. You
kissed a boy that made your flesh crawl. You aren’t beautiful. You aren’t
beautiful. You aren’t.

Rewind. Fifteen.

You used to joke that your dad probably couldn’t even remember
your birthday. You try to make yourself laugh when the phone call
never comes.

Forward. Sixteen.
Smoke billows from your mouth. You purse your lips, emitting small rings as you exhale. Someone is banging, banging, banging on the door, and you can’t stop laughing, coughing.

Rewind. Two.

Your older sister changes your diapers. Kisses your head. Spanks you when you don’t want to share. Hugs you when you clutch her leg and cry for her to “Stay, stay, stay”.

She left you, too.

Forward. Seventeen.

Forward. Seventeen.

Forward. Seventeen.

You are a cliché.

You fall apart when she leaves you. You cry. You beg her to take you back. All your problems started with your father. All your problems started with him.

Two pills make the buzz go away.

You are a cliché.