



4-1-2017

Hide and Seek

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Recommended Citation

Colombo, Ashley (2017) "Hide and Seek," *Calliope*: Vol. 48 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/calliope/vol48/iss1/1>

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HIDE AND SEEK

ASHLEY COLOMBO

One... Two... Three...

You nestle among your clothes, t-shirts printed with Winnie the Pooh and dresses covered in strawberries, picked by a mother's careful hands. Boxed in the corner by shelves and crates full of stuffed animals you'll forget with time. You're safe here. No one will ever find you.

Not your friends.

Not your parents.

The game is yours to play. As long as you're here, you make the rules.

Four. Five. Six.

You fiddle with the hair of a naked Barbie by your feet. Giggle a little. Why was it so fun to strip down all those dolls, anyway? Lay them bare to the world?

Cover your mouth, silly girl. Noise draws attention. Your silence is your best defense. A soundproof barrier that wards off questions, knocks back visitors. Protects you from searching eyes, suspicious whispers, your father's looming mental crisis when he takes one step too far into the shadows with you.

Lose this first round, and you've lost them all.

Seven. Eight.

You hear movement outside. Someone passing by, finding their own place to hide. Somewhere more open than yours.

Less lonely.

It's okay. You don't want them in here anyway.

The world can keep spinning without you.

Nine.

You burrow further into the darkness, tuck your face into your bent legs.

But what if you get tired of being alone?

What if you start to miss your friends?

Your parents?

Don't let them worry.

You know you can't avoid them forever, no matter how badly you want to win.

Please don't let them worry.

You were never that good at hiding.

Ten.

The door creaks open.

A sliver of light pours in, catching the toes of your shoes.

Another little girl squeezes through the gap. You don't recognize her, but you know she's not here to give you up.

She smiles at you, all soft round cheeks and bright eyes.

You trust her.

One day, you'll know her.

She shuts the door again, shimmies through your forest of clothes. Her small body squishes in beside yours.

She's warm against you.

You hunker down together, sharing safety in the breaths
passed between you.
Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad to be found.
Not when she's here.
Come out, come out, wherever you are!