

The Gymnasium

Freshman Year

Elyria High School, Ohio

1998-1999

Besides giving me exercises to increase my bust size Judy Blume had me prepared to dread gym class. I just knew I'd be walking into a locker room and out of a public shower with only one towel that covered either my breasts or my crotch but not both. I was readying myself to be judged by the other girls for being flat chested and absent of pubic hair.

At freshmen orientation we toured the locker rooms with bewilderment. There were two gyms, the one we were touring was the freshmen gym. It was decidedly gross. Especially in comparison with the main gym where the pep rallies and sporting events were held.

A group of us entered the freshmen locker room with a look of apprehension on our faces that seemed to say "We have to shower? Here? What? In front of other people? No thank you." After a general tour of our new high school we went back to the main gym and with our class schedules in hand we were set loose to try to make our way from home room to last period, free to find various

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routes and short cuts that could get us from class to class before the minute bell rang.

Walking the halls alone in my new skirt and wedge sandals I felt like a new creation. Sort of. Middle school had been surprisingly difficult for me, not from an academic standpoint I made the National Honors Society. But from a social and emotional one.

Windsor Elementary School was located on the north side of town where an overwhelming percentage of the residents were white. I was often the only black girl in my class, one of three in the entire school. I didn't have a problem with this at all. I did not see a difference between myself and my peers. I knew I was a different color but I wasn't aware that that actually meant something, at least not until I got that lecture from my mother about needing to work harder and be better because I was black and female, two strikes against me in a three strikes you're out American society. But even then it didn't register, not fully. I talked just like my friends in elementary school (think Valley Girl), dressed like them, and spent as much time as I was allowed to with them. Not once did one of my white girlfriends ask why my hair was different or reference my skin color.

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Ironically it was me who inadvertently broke the ice. It happened when the school nurse came to our third grade class to check our hair for lice. Each student had two number two pencils ready and the nurse made her way from head to head. When she approached my desk I said, "this is pointless you know, black people don't get lice."

"that's ridiculous" she said.

"no, it's true!" I fired back, "it's because of the grease I have in my hair bugs can't survive in it!" My classmates giggled at my assertiveness, and I bowed my head as the nurse took my two number two pencils and worked her way through my hair. Like I said it was a futile exercise my hair was braided into what looked like rows of corn and my scalp was fully exposed, the hair grease reflecting the fluorescent lights of the classroom ceiling. You could see from ten feet away I had no bugs in my hair.

It took a long time for my "blackness" to reassert itself after the "lice" incident and this time it was not initiated by me. A year or so later a new family moved up the street from us. Stephanie and Larry were an interracial couple. Stephanie had two kids from a previous marriage named Kevin (who was my age)

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and Brandon (my little sister's age) who were of a very fair complexion. I suspected that their father was either white or mixed himself although I never asked. Stephanie was a fair skinned African-American woman and her husband Larry was white. Stephanie and my mother took to each other instantly. Suddenly Windsor Elementary's participation in Black History month became a top priority and on February 1st Stephanie and my mother marched into Windsor Elementary and demanded a display case in order to bring awareness to the struggle and achievements of Black people in America. Because I was the daughter of the co-conspirator I was bullied into reading a passage from a book about famous black people every morning over the loud speaker after the morning announcements.

It was embarrassing. No one in my school cared, I didn't care, the only reason my mom cared was because Stephanie cared, and Stephanie only cared because she was overcompensating for the fact that she was married to a white man. I may have only been in grade school but that much was obvious to me.

At home there was no talk about "blackness." The Black Entertainment Channel (BET) wasn't even allowed on there. With the arrival of Stephanie and her family we suddenly had that stereotypical African print cloth on hand (purchased from Jo Ann

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Fabrics by the way), were jamming to a cd called "The Sounds of Blackness," and were seriously considering celebrating Kwanzaa. Which by the way is not even an African holiday. But let's not get me started on that.

I could not wait for February to be over, every week either my mom or Stephanie were at the school to change the display and feature another famous black person. Eventually Stephanie and her family moved away again and Black History month at Windsor Elementary went with them.

At this point in my young life I wasn't ashamed of who I was I just didn't take kindly to being singled out. If you're the only black kid in the school and your mom is forcing the entire school to celebrate Black History Month all the other students know that its about you. The last thing a prepubescent girl wants is to be singled out from her peers.

By the sixth grade things started to change. There was a slight shift in the atmosphere. Some classmates were starting their periods and calling each other boyfriend and girlfriend. I remember a friend of mine, Katie Elek having a sleep over and we

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talked about all sorts of things and of course menstruation came up. I hadn't started my period yet but most of the girls in attendance had, or at least they were claiming to. I was one of the liars. I took everything I learned from the time the school nurses came into our classroom divided the boys from the girls and popped in this outdated VHS tape about growing up. "Oh my god" I said. "The cramps like almost kill me every time!"

"I know right!" They all agreed in unison.

I had a crush on a white boy in my class named David Thomas. I do not know why, I just know that it was an almost debilitating crush and it lasted from my fifth grade entrance into the GATE program well into the eighth grade. I almost, almost got over my crush on him when he brought his dad in for career day and he showed us live footage of an eye surgery. I was just grossed out enough that I could have called it quits on him entirely. What saved David was his ability to say and spell "ophthalmology" repeatedly for the class after his dad had gone back to work. I'm not sure how I knew how to spell this word, but I was impressed that he also knew how to spell it. The crush remained intact.

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I was still crushing on David Thomas in the sixth grade when a new kid, Andre was introduced into our classroom. Andre was a black boy bringing our school's tally up to five, he apparently came with a little sister in a lower grade. Immediately my friend Desiree Barnett decided we were a perfect match. It didn't occur to me that she considered us perfect for each other for no reason other than we were both black. I was very naive. She fawned over him and so did plenty of other girls in the sixth grade so I decided I had a crush on him too. One day, in world geography he turned around and asked me if he could borrow a crayon. I don't think I breathed for five minutes. Desiree had to slide my 64 pack of Crayola Crayons with the builtin sharpener toward him as I sat there mouth agape in shock that he spoke to me.

Just like Kevin and Brandon, Andre and his little sister moved away before the end of the year and I was back to being one of two black girls in the sixth grade. By the way, Andre chose the other black girl to be his boo, Narquita Davison.

At our end of the year choir concert we sang that tired old song about friendship:

keep smiling

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keep shining
knowing you can always count on me
for sure
that's what friends are for
through good times
and bad times
I'll be by your side forevermore
that's what friends are for...

I cried that day as we signed and swapped each other's yearbooks. All the girls did. When I finally made it home I made a paper airplane out of a goodbye note I had written to my sixth grade classmates. I opened my window and slid the screen aside and launched the plane as tears rolled down my face, the plane plummeted more than glided and I had to fish it out of the thorny rose bush three feet below my window when I had finished being melodramatic.

We moved shortly after that. My parents hired Dale Yost Construction to build us a house in a subdivision named Oakdale Estates. This house was a major upgrade from our previous one and I was beside myself every time we stopped by to document its progress. There was one issue. This new home was zoned for a middle school called Eastern Heights and due to its poor

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reputation at the time my parents were not at all interested in sending me there. So we lied about my address. When it was time to enroll they asserted that I lived on South Maple Street with my Aunt Patricia, because that street just so happened to be zoned for Northwood Junior High, the best of the middle schools in my opinion and where I would have gone had we not moved.

I was so excited to start middle school at Northwood Junior High. It would be my first opportunity to participate in team sports. There was nothing more exciting than shopping for new clothes and school supplies though, I'd argue that fresh school supplies beats fresh wardrobe any given day. On the first day of school I had my Five Star Trapper Keeper and what I thought was the best of my new school wardrobe on and went on my way.

The highlight of that first day was seeing that me and most of my Windsor Elementary friends had lunch together. This solved the "who will eat with me" conundrum I had been deliberating throughout the morning. My friends were already seated and as I approached the table I realized there were no extra seats. I was going to pull up a chair when one of the girls, I can't remember who, asked, "Aren't you going to sit with them?"

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"Them" She absently waved her fork away from the table towards the expanse of the cafeteria.

"Who's them?"

"You know, your people." I turned to face the rest of the cafeteria I didn't see anyone I knew just the Goth kids, the nerds, drama geeks, and some rough looking black kids.

"You don't mean..." I couldn't even finish the sentence. I knew exactly what she meant. And I knew exactly what it meant that no one else, none of my other so called friends stood up for me. There I stood bagged lunch in hand being cast off the island, it was as harsh as the Lord of the Flies, and as obvious as a "one of these is not like the other" episode on Sesame Street.

I looked at my "friends" one by one trying to read their faces. And slowly with a finality that broke my heart I walked away and took a seat at an empty table across the room my back to them, an entire table of ex-friends.

I sat there for a week. Lonely, embarrassed, and growing more cold hearted toward the idea of female friendship by the day

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when a tall, well-built, pretty faced girl named Erica Hagler invited herself to take a seat next to me at my table.

"Why don't you come sit wit us?"

"I didn't want to intrude"

"Intrude? What kinna word is dat? You ova here all by yaself. Come on and sit with us."

"sure, thanks." I picked up my bagged lunch and moved to her table.

Little did I know that Mr. McPatrick, my health teacher who also was that period's lunch monitor had been watching the whole soap opera play out since the first day of school.

This new table was interesting to me. There was a girl they called Rambo (and having never seen the movie I didn't realize this meant I should have been afraid of her), another named Paris, Shondel (who was actually my off and on friend since birth), and some other girls I hardly interacted with so they were easily forgotten. I learned quickly I was as much like them

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as I was my last table of friends and by that I mean not at all like them. They let me know it too.

I talked like a white girl.

I dressed like a white girl.

I understood none of their musical references.

I had crushes on white boys.

I was miserable. But with no place else to go I began the process of ethnic matriculation. I started with lyrics.com. From there I'd search popular songs and print out the lyrics, I'd go upstairs and pop a blank cassette tape into my boombox. I no longer listened to 107.3 The Wave, it was now Hip Hop and R & B. I press record if I caught one of the songs from the beginning and then proceeded to commit it to memory like I had once upon a time learned my solo as one of the lead characters in a musical at Windsor Elementary.

The next step was to manufacture a crush. I settled on Brandon Ammons. His mom was one of the administrative staff, I thought

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that'd make him a safe bet. After all if your mom works at the school could you be that much trouble?

Yes you could.

In computer lab where we were still playing Oregon Trail on bright Macintosh computers Brandon would relentlessly tease me. He joked about my acne and joked about me being flat chested and flat butted. Nothing was off limits to him. I was used to getting teased about my face, my mom had begun calling me a raccoon because the skin around my eyes was a very different color from the rest of my face. It wasn't so much what he was saying, he was speaking the truth, it was that he was saying it simply to humiliate me in front of people. When Brandon Ammons was away from his "boys" he was a really nice kid. This type of two-faced behavior should have been a turn off for me but I understood it. We were all out here trying to survive. Plus who am I to talk, I'm the Oreo- white girl on the inside black on the outs. I knew the struggle.

Winter rolled along and First Down jackets and Timberlands were hot. I had to beg to get a First Down jacket claiming that I couldn't be made to stand at that bus stop in those temperatures without a more suitable coat. The truth was Brandon Ammons had a

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First Down jacket. All of these jackets were reversible, and when we went to the store to get mine I desperately tried to remember which color combination Brandon's had. I was planning the whole, "whoa, we have the same jacket how crazy is that?" intro into a conversation obviously when he was isolated from his crew.

I chose wrong. I never talked to Brandon Ammons again. Meanwhile my assimilation with my lunch crew was going smoothly. I had taken a silly song that they'd been singing since they were toddlers and remixed it in a way that made them bust at the seams with laughter. It went like this:

Yo mama don't wear no draws
I saw them when she took them off
She threw them up under the bed
killed the roaches that was already dead

I added a few "hey hey hey's and what what what's" looped the song back to the beginning, had two of the girls come in on the second line, added a lunch table beat and BAM we had a chorus. We were jamming. We even got inspired and remixed a little ditty called "they call me mello yellow".

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I was in and just when it was getting comfortable I was snatched by my arm out of the cafeteria by the onsite police officer, who was really just Northwood's DARE officer back when the Drug Abuse Resistance Education curriculum was in just about every school, and dragged down to the office.

I was sat forcefully into a chair across from the guidance counselor with whom I had a hot and cold relationship with. She always seemed to second guess my status as a member of the Gifted program. This day she had a self satisfied look on her face.

"We've been getting reports from teachers and other students that you're involved in bullying."

"Excuse me?" I got that from my mother. I was daring this woman to say it again. She did. "By who?"

"I won't say. But there have been complaints that you have been giving other students a hard time and teasing them for getting good grades and being good students."

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"Get my file, look at my own grades. I'm in the NATIONAL HONORS SOCIETY!!!" My voice started to escalate. I was embarrassed and baffled. "GET MY FILE!!"

"Calm down."

"CALL MY MOTHER RIGHT NOW" this was one of those moments that I knew for a fact my mom would straighten out. The guidance counselor looked like a police officer who thought they were about to hear a confession but instead heard, "I'd like a lawyer please."

"The DARE officer seems to believe that you've been inducted into a gang of sorts. Mr. Mckitrick is concerned about your change in friends as well."

"I'm not in a gang, I'm not bullying kids, and those so called friends DUMPED ME CALL MY MOTHER NOW!"

They did. And they were very sorry.

I could have come out of this ordeal hating white people. My counselor was white, the DARE officer white, Mr. Mckitrick white. But I didn't. I truly felt I wasn't a part of either

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world and stood somewhere in the middle not accepted by one group anymore and faking my admission into the other.

Sports saved me. Being on the volleyball team forced some of my Windsor friends to become my friend again. I was elated about this most of them I had known for at least six years. The basketball team was a mixture of demographics and the track team well, we all know what the track teams look like.

My hustle on the volleyball team earned me the respect of my peers. I was not a very good basketball player. I was very fast with no ball handling skills so most fast breaks ended with me running back to get the ball that I left behind because I would outrun my dribble. Track and field earned me a little street credibility with the black kids and having found my path to survival I never strayed. High school though would be a different beast altogether.

The city of Elyria had two high schools one public and one private. All of the middle schools fed into the public high school: Elyria High. I was proud to walk those halls my dad went there and my older sister went there too and now I was going there. My dad and Uncle Gene were enshrined in the school as two

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of the best wrestlers Elyria High had ever had. Being a Madison in sports meant something at Elyria High. So I was feeling myself walking through the halls trying to find my way from class to class. I had gym early in the day and I couldn't help but wonder if I'd be forced to shower or be teased for being musty. I couldn't decided which outcome was worse.

Turns out we didn't have to shower at all, hell we barely broke a sweat and if your underarms did get a little funky, we'd just hit them with a pass of deodorant and go on to the next class "nice/nasty," a term I later learned in college meaning you may smell nice but you're actually just covering up the nasty.

I loved physical education classes. In middle school I had set myself apart as an up and coming athlete to watch winning the City Championships (the biggest most important meet in the world for a middle schooler) in the 100 meter dash and the long jump. My gym teacher, Ms. Kobelka expected me to put those talents to use in her classes. I was never able to have an "off" day when I was in her class, and by "off" I mean only seal one base and not three, or pass the ball instead of taking the jumper (or attempting one).

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My favorite game of all times was one we called Gillman ball. The rules were simple. It was exactly the same game as kickball but with the added twist that you could continue to run the bases until you were thrown out and you could have a countless number of people on each base as well. I found this game extremely entertaining because I could show off my speed, stealing bases and circling all of the bases at least three times before deciding to rest.

It was during this game that a new boy walked in from the north corner of the gym. He walked with the air of a person who owned the air we were breathing. His right hand clutched the excess fabric near his crotch to hold up his sagging jeans. He walked right through the center of our game barely missing the pitcher's bowl to the kicker in waiting.

The game was paused as the Ms. Kobelka had a chat with the new kid on the block. He showed her his schedule, she asked him if he had shorts to wear. It was a stupid question we could all see his basketball shorts, if he hadn't been wearing them under his ill-fitting jeans his entire ass would have been exposed. He went into the boys' locker room and when he returned murmurs echoed across the gym and classmates peered at each other through their peripheral views. The new kid was on house arrest

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and was rocking his ankle tracker like it came with his Air Jordans.

I knew instantly he was someone I wanted to stay away from. Perhaps it was wrong of me to judge him so quickly after just a precursory once over. But there's this thing we humans have called intuition, a gut feeling, and sometimes they are based on stereotypes, overgeneralization, sometimes past experience, but all of them in one way or another right or wrong help you navigate your environment in a way that makes you feel safe and comfortable, I take no shame in that. Besides, it only took him a week to prove me right.

DP (what we'll call this person for my privacy) was consider short, he was probably 5 feet and five inches, but had a larger than life smaller, and very white almost perfect teeth, he wore a diamond earring and sported a large chain. Although he apparently got into enough trouble to be on probation he charmed the pants out of most of the girls in his circle, and a lot of teachers took to him too. *He couldn't be so bad* I had started to think, and I let my guard down some. Instead of being deliberate about standing on the opposite side of the roll call line from him I began to not really care where I stood. I did not make it

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a point to stand next to him but if he ended up beside me I didn't walk away as I had the week before.

The unit on Gillman ball had come and gone and we moved on to Table Tennis. This change in sport required us to line up in the small gym for roll call but to make the trip up the stairs and down the hall to the main lobby area where the tables had been set up. Now, just to fill you in I love table tennis. We had a table in our basement and my father taught us how to play either by destroying us in games, or sitting us down in front of the television to watch a video he rented from the Elyria Public Library on how to play the game. I guess he was trying to train us to become his future ping pong sparring partners. It was no surprise then to my teacher when I showed up with my own paddle from home preferring not to play with the cheap school issued one. It also was not unusual for me to be the last person to leave, wanting to always squeeze in that one extra game before the bell.

On National Geographic the scene is almost always the same. A herd of gazelles smell a predator on the air, they panic, and start to run as a group away from the danger. But there's always a straggler, always one who's nose wasn't to the wind, that

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didn't sense the danger until it was too late, only to be pounced before the actual flight of fright could take place.

This describes perfectly what happened to me as I walked nonchalantly from the main lobby to the corridor that would take me down the steps and into the small gym. I opened the door to the stairwell and—RIP! My knockoff Adidas snap pants fell to the floor every button ripped off so aggressively I thought maybe I had gotten myself caught in the door. I had that “silly me” shit grin on my face when I turned to see my pants were actually in the hands of a smiling DP.

I held out my hand. “My pants please.”

“Come and get them”

I stepped forward reaching out to snatch my pants away from him. He stepped back as gracefully as Floyd Mayweather avoiding a week right jab.

I lunged forward this time, the momentum carrying my body into his as we both slammed into the brick wall. A small exhale escaped from his chest as I grabbed my pants and ran to the locker room mortified. I was shaking from the humiliation of it

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all as I proceeded the time consuming task of buttoning each cheap plastic clasp.

Things had been going smoothly for about a week or two and I began to think that my depantsing was an isolated incident, perhaps it was just a simple prank, an isolated incident, no need for further alarm. The bell rang announcing our dismissal from gym class, I headed toward the same corridor and climbed about three stairs before I was aggressively pushed against the wall. DP's body was pressed against me with so much force the handrail was beginning to shift my sacrum under the pressure. His face was inches from mine. He tried to kiss me on the lips but I turned my face so quickly he planted a nasty wet smack on my cheek. Humiliated by my lack of enthusiasm about being kissed by him he took his left hand and held my face away from him, essentially forcing me to keep my face turned away like I had from his initial attempt. This time he dragged his tongue from my chin to my hairline. When he was done he released my face pressed his body against mine, palmed my crotch through my jeans and whispered into my ear, "you shouldn't be so damn pretty." He released me then and walked away. I tried to continue on to my class, but had to make a detour to vomit in the bathroom along the way.

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"I shouldn't be so damn pretty?" I wasn't sure what I was more baffled about, his molestation of me, or that he thought I was pretty. This last thought shamed me into self-blame. After all of the relentless teasing about my body and my skin in middle school I began to say a nightly prayer asking God to make me beautiful so that the teasing would stop. But this? This was not what I was asking for was it? Did I bring this on myself?

In high school news travels fast in some circles and I guess my little encounter with DP was a hot story in his crew. Enter: KJ. KJ was another new kid to our class who also was on probation and sported the ankle bracelet tracker. KJ was different though, he was polite, didn't intimidate the people around him but did command some respect from the likes of DP and his homies which led me to deduce that whatever KJ was on house arrest for was far worse, carrying more weight in the street, than whatever it was that DP did.

KJ was nice to me too, my alarm bells didn't go off with him like they did for DP. In fact, I liked KJ enough to accept his number and risk calling him from our secondary land line in the guest bedroom of our house. I hid between the wall and the back of the futon curling the telephone cord nervously around my

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finger as the person that answered my calls yelled, "KJ there's a white girl on the phone for you!"

We talked hurriedly about a range of topics and with each passing minute my heart raced faster as I pictured my mom walking in at some point mid conversation and blasting me for 1) using that specific telephone without permission and 2) calling a boy. When I could take it no longer I ended the call abruptly by telling him I'd see him around school.

When we'd have home basketball games some of the members of our freshmen team would walk to McDonald's for a pre game meal. Hardly the best choice for fueling up before an athletic event but this was better than nothing. My teammates and I were walking back into the school and towards the locker room when KJ materialized in front of us. One of the girls on my team was his cousin, and through some convoluted social web she was sort of my cousin too. KJ and she struck up a conversation as I finished my burger. KJ turned his attention to me.

"How about a kiss for good luck." he said this in a tone that implied that it wasn't a question and leaned in. I was speaking when his head jerked back as if he had been punched in the face,

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"onions? Were there onions on that burger?"

"yea. McDonald's always has those little onions on their burgers"

"no they don't. you did that on purpose so that you wouldn't have to kiss me"

"Have to? I don't ha—" the words I was in the process of communicating had literally been slapped out of my mouth. My face burned where his hand made contact with my cheek. My eyes watered, and a rage that I had welled up so deep inside from being picked on, put down, touched, and now slapped manifested itself in the form of a right hook that landed with my full weight behind it into KJ's soft midsection. He raised his hand to slap me again, this slap was nothing more than a quick tap to my right eye as he was clearly still stung from my defensive maneuver. His cousin, my fake cousin, stood between us screaming that she couldn't let us fight that even though KJ and I weren't cousins she was both of ours.

That's a small town for you. Domestic violence stopped on the grounds of familial ties- otherwise carry on. I played an

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average game that day and told my parents the bruising on my face was from on court scuffles and rebounding mismatches.

The following day I was briskly walking home from school toward my mother's bank where I'd wait for her in the lobby or conference room until she was freed up and could drive me home when KJ intercepted my path. I tried to side step him and keep going but he grabbed my hair and my backpack and half dragged half threw me into the alley. *This is it* I thought. *I'm going to be raped now.*

I was not raped but I also don't remember what did happen in the alley either. I remember looking at the clock when I entered the downtown branch of my mom's bank and thinking I'm only three minutes late.

Whatever happened in that alley took three minutes to do, and I walked away with my clothes perfectly arranged. Only my hair and the wrinkled papers in my backpack told a different tale.

Gratefully, after the "alley incident" I did not see KJ at school again but DP was back and in full force. Immediately my morning and after school rituals revolved around choosing entrances, exits, and other routes where we would not cross

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paths. When we did it was the same routine, him over powering me, groping my a-cup boob, palming my crotch, licking my face, tearing my clothes. And his mantra, "you shouldn't be so damn pretty," whispered into my hair.

Well, if I was "so damn pretty" why were the only two guys in the entire school who were showing me any sort of attention abusive bastards and criminals on probation nonetheless. What was it about me that said, "wanted: to be the lustful target of juvenile delinquents and their abusive behaviors?"

Later that school year during a dual meet our track team was competing against another school although I can't remember which. DP had gone out for the track team but decided he was too cool to workout and wearing the school's cheesy looking uniforms were most definitely out of the question. He sat in the stands.

At home track meets my mom would cut out of work early and bring a cooler of drinks and snacks for the team. She was the "track mom" and my father was one of a half dozen coaches on the team. I was in the middle of jogging my warm up laps when I saw DP and my mother were laughing and giggling together. She put her hand gently on his shoulder as if to say, "oh DP stop it, you're too much!" like a flirty girl from a stereotypical chick flick. DP

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noticed my gawking and shot me one of his charming smiles. He knew what he was doing, and so did I.

I don't remember the outcome of the meet or the races I ran. I remember all of my loses so I know that I didn't lose that day but I was still devastated after the meet as though I had. I couldn't shake the image of my mom and DP together and laughing. Of course she didn't know what was going on between me and DP, but I thought mother's were supposed to recognize bad apples with their otherworldly mother sense. I mean, I felt it his first day in gym class why couldn't she?

I rode in the back of my mom's mini van in silence.

"What a nice boy I met today did you see him, the little handsome young man I was sitting with?"

I met her inquiry with silence. I locked eyes with my mother's in the rear view mirror. I acquiesced and said, "yea what about him" in a tone that I hoped would convey my complete lack of interest in carrying on this conversation.

"He's been through so much, and yet he is still hopeful and smiling. I've invited him over to the house for dinner."

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Another blanket of dead silence emanated from the back row of the mini van this time. My heart was beating so rapidly I could see reverberations of it through my shirt.

"To...our house?" I asked, slightly absentmindedly. My mind was moving 100 mph. *If he finds out where I live I thought, I'll never get away from him.* I had made a decision.

Standing in the foyer of our house I stopped my mother and asked if I could talk to her. I wanted to talk in private but she had things to do so there in the doorway in front of my little sister I began to speak, well stutter.

"Please don't invite that, that boy over for dinner."

"Oh goodness, what is it some high school drama? It will be fine"

"No, it will not be fine. He cannot come here, please don't have him over, please."

"You still haven't told me why."

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I looked from my little sister to my mom bewildered and beside myself that they didn't recognize pure distress when it was staring them in the face. Never mind why. If I ever have a daughter and she asked me to uninvited someone to dinner and she looked like she was on the verge of a complete hysterical melt down I would not ask "why?", I would pick up my god damn phone, cancel dinner, and *then* try to get to the bottom of it.

"I'm waiting" my mom said in a very impatient tone of voice.

"He touches me." I whispered. The shame of it all almost choking me into silence.

"What do you mean 'touches you?' Be more specific"

The inquisition was becoming more violating than the initial acts themselves.

"He touches me inappropriately" I looked around my little sister was watching me with dispassionate eyes and my mother stared back at me with the sort of annoyed expression reserved for a toddler that asks "why?" too many times.

"Well, even Jesus ate with the sinners. He's coming for dinner."

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I made another decision.

I decided that the woman who had birthed me was not qualified to be my mother. Our relationship was irreparably damaged. As far as I was concerned there was no more mother/daughter relationship. I did a better job protecting myself against KJ than my mother did for me.

I've told this story before. Countless times to seven different psychologists over a period of ten years who all agreed that because this incident took place during the very critical adolescent stage in my life it most definitely shaped my personality and framed the way I view my relationships. Ironically, being violated and molested wasn't the traumatic event for me, it was my mother's response to it. I only talk about my interaction with DP to give my strained relationship with my mother its proper context.

I went through the last two years of high school emotionally distanced from her. I spoke when I was spoken to, I was not overtly disrespectful, and I did not rebel. I did not want to be in violation of the "honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12) biblical code although my mom was in clear violation of

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Colossians 3:21 "Parents do not anger your children lest they lose heart" ARAMAIC BIBLE IN PLAIN ENGLISH and Ephesians 6:4 "do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord" one. Two code violations don't make a right so I took what I thought was the high road, and kept my disdain for her to myself.