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### Dimensions

When I was younger, I tried on my brother's clothes. When I dressed in his clothes, I remember feeling more myself than I ever did in a dress. From the moment I was born, there was something to tell me how to live my life. Whether it was the Barbie doll with short skirts and long hair or princess movies depicting damsels in distress being saved by some guy they just met, the not so subtle messaging was everywhere. I didn't have a woman to look up to who dressed the way she wanted without any constructs. I thought there was something wrong with me.

When I got a little older, I started to explore porn. I didn't think much of it. It was just two people having sex and I was watching. I didn't really understand what it was they were actually doing. Now with more education, I see that porn tends to be pretty male-centric, but back then I just thought that was how things were supposed to be. I thought the woman actually screams out in pleasure the entire time screaming "Baby fuck me harder" over and over again. I think this is when I first started to realize I was attracted to women. When I watched, I didn't just watch for the men. If anything, I rarely focused on them. When you look at a woman's body, you just see her natural beauty. The curves in her hips showing the strength built into her body. The kindness in her eyes when you look into them. The way her face lights up and scrunches when smiling genuinely. The grace in her movements when she walks or talks expressively. There's something about women. The softness, the warmth, the comfort I feel. Of course, to my ten-year-old self, I wasn't ready to admit that.

Fast forward a few years, I walk into the gym locker room getting ready for a cross country practice and I feel a pang of pure anxiety. There are so many women around me. Bodies are exposed and I'm trying my best to keep my eye contact with the floor to not accidentally look at one of my friends half-naked. I'm embarrassed and terrified. Terrified of being exposed. These 15 minutes of every day were absolute torture. There was no way to escape my true desire. During my freshman and sophomore year of high school, I was quite the player. I would talk to guys all the time. I'd have them help me with my homework. I'd have them listen to my problems. I'd have them even go on unofficial dates, where we'd talk for hours. I liked the attention. I liked knowing I was wanted. I just didn't want to commit to anyone.

Of course, I eventually picked my poison and he was probably the most toxic one I could have chosen (real shocker). He had something about him. Something I never had. He had the ability to draw

absolutely anyone toward him with his charm. I was enamored, almost in awe of his skill. He was well-learned in almost anything we talked about. He loved the outdoors and was a boy scout. He loved anything related to superheroes or Star Wars (I like nerdy men). Even if he was all these things, what I loved about him most was how he made me feel. He had a way of making me feel like I was the only person in the world whenever we talked, really paying attention to anything I said. He worshipped my body as if I was the only woman he ever looked at. He worshipped my mind probably more than he worshipped my body, constantly telling me how smart I was. When I was with him, it was ecstasy. My mind was taken to a state I'd never been to before. A level of euphoria that's difficult to explain. It was like he was my drug and I was his. Both feeding off of each other's energies having more stimulating conversations but more importantly mind-blowing sex, hopelessly in love.

But of course, with any drug, there's always a comedown... and like any comedown, it made us both feel like the scum of the earth, more like the scum of hell. His moods were up and down. His insecurities were projected onto me. Any time I talked to another girl or boy, he felt threatened, lashing out with unkind words and insults about my character. He was so rude to my friends from before we dated that they stopped talking to me, making me isolated. Whenever I tried to leave him, he would threaten to kill himself, making me responsible if anything ever happened. But while all this was happening, he was able to continue to attract other people to himself with his charismatic personality and quick wit, which left me feeling even more alone. I was his obsession and I could only be his. There was no room for anyone else in our little escape.

Initially, when our relationship first started, my main anchor was my best friend. She was my rock. My constant voice of reason resounding in my head telling me what I should do. For most of the time that I knew her, her hair was always in a bun, she wore glasses and was always in sweats. This is when I thought she was the most beautiful. Without all the makeup, the clothes and everything else, she was herself around me and that's what I loved best. I slept over at her house almost every Friday night. We would watch movies together and order pizza in while drinking Dr. Pepper as our tradition. I loved her family and she loved mine. It was what I always wanted out of friendship.

When I started dating my ex, relationship lines started to get confused. The time I used to spend with her started to dwindle. It wasn't like it was something that happened in a day but over time we drifted. It started with how much I'd be texting her and later we stopped having our Friday night sleepover rituals. It all came to a head when I told her I may have feelings for her. We had this conversation many times up until that point. She had told me that she would try to date girls while she was in college because she was curious. I told her I always knew I was attracted to women as well. I didn't think much of it until I started to see her in a different way. I didn't just want to cuddle on the

couch together while we were watching a movie. I wanted to be the one to push her hair out of her face. I wanted to be the one to tell her she was beautiful the way she was. I wanted to be the one to kiss her and tell her everything was going to be okay. She was scared. She didn't want to be those girls who came out in high school loving each other. I was heartbroken and felt like my heart had shattered into a million tiny little pieces.

After that, things were never the same. I pretended to be okay with being friends. I went on dating my boyfriend as if nothing had happened. She started dating someone else. I tried to just let it go and live my life as if everything was okay. Later on, we had a falling out and didn't speak to each other again for a long time. I felt sad, almost as if I had gotten broken up with. I'd look at her social media as if I were stalking an ex. I talked about her to others as if everything was her fault. I was a coward and I never owned up to who I was and why it really happened.

The next time I even gave myself a chance to explore my sexuality was during my semester abroad. On my last night out in London, I went to a pub with live music and dancing. I was with my friends enjoying myself (definitely had one too many gin and tonics). I could see the male gaze around me. They watched me as I danced with my friends, ogling at my hips swaying from side to side. I spotted a woman across the way from me and locked eyes with her. She had the kindest eyes I'd ever seen. She was beautiful, curvy, and confident in her body. I walked up to her and told her how beautiful I thought she was. She smiled and started to dance with me. I felt her warm thighs in between mine as we grew closer together. She put her arms around me and started to hum the tune of the song playing in my ear. At that moment, all I felt was comfort, as relaxed as I could be. I kissed her and I felt her soft lips on mine. Her breath tasted of sweet mango. With her lips on mine, I felt numb and my mind raced. I just met her. I did not know where she lived. I did not know who she was. I did not know what she liked. She was just some random person that I chose to have my first kiss with a girl with, instead of the girl I loved but didn't have the courage to.

From the first time my mom caught me wearing my brother's clothes, I felt an impending sense of shame. In my mind, I was born wrong. I came into the world with these feelings I was not supposed to feel for another gender and ideas that weren't for my time. With this shame, I conformed. I let my internalized homophobic thoughts consume me. I denied a part of my being that very much makes me who I am. When I tried to open up, I had the door shut on me. When I confessed my feelings for a girl I loved, I was met with the same fear I had. The fear of letting the world see me as I am.

Today, I am no longer that girl. During my time in London, I got a tattoo to remind myself every day to be proud of who I am. It has two profiles of faces, one facing upward and one downward surrounded by two diamonds. It makes me feel that I am of many dimensions, ever-changing, melding

into something new: a leader, an activist, and a woman finally owning her short hair and wearing men's clothes — growing to be proud of her sexual orientation.