

The Temporary Girl

We aren't vagrant, but five states, ten homes, and eight schools have not added up to stability. My mom and I moved frequently because my interim-father worked in the hospitality business. We followed him from Connecticut, to Nevada, to Florida, and around California. Thus beginning my life as a gypsy student.

The word "hospitality" kept me invulnerable, I just didn't know it yet. To my peers I was virtually a blur, jetting from one coast to the next, concluding 9-month-old friendships to ignite new ones. With every relocation I lost a shirt or stuffed animal, but over time, those materialized and my chronic desire for consistency lingered. Time and time again I lost connection with my world. I learned to be the Temporary Girl.

When I was 11, my prominent "hospitable" father-like figure breached a contract. He was with my mom far longer than I wanted—I never really liked him; he ordered us around, barking "Where is my oatmeal!" every morning like we were the help. But we were vulnerable; he slinked his way around us and his own businesses. We began to lose our stability, and at our worst, he stole my idealized foundation out of my mother's bank account and etherized in the middle of the night. Without being able to handle the weight of a new year living in the reminder of my hijacked future, we fled California to colonize in our new land of Portland, Oregon. Stress became our new norm and my mom its newest victim. My only rock, my only stillness in a never-ending moving truck was depleted with an illness we did not have the money to cure. Cancer meant death to me as I witnessed my sophisticated, independent role model slowly shrivel. In doctors I had to trust, but three years of chemotherapy, five surgeries, and torture by needles will make anyone question their faith. I didn't feel at home, life was uncertain and

changing in the worst possible ways, and I was stuck in a new town as a foreigner with no support, without my only friend. I feared I would lose the last thread holding our lives together.

We migrated back to California for my freshman year of high school. Dependency became my challenge, independence a goal. My mother grew stronger, but I looked and felt out of place. The halls of my not-so-“90210” school were flooded with lifelong friend groups in a mostly Persian-Jewish community. My last-season locks of copper and freckled face did not fit in, to say the least. Finding silver friends with golden potential would prove more difficult than ever before. Initially, I met Clarissa, an adoptee of the Wild West Hollywood. Her gay fathers were slugging through a bitter divorce, one of them sick and wheelchair bound, the other a pushy holy roller. My time dedicated to her cause was unappreciated and disregarded. Her five-finger discounts and constant boozing didn't exactly align with my values. I knew she was damaged, but that didn't stop me from making her my new project. Slowly, my donations to her mental illness distanced in our relationship. I made her battle my own, then she left me. This was new and unusual for me. You see, for so long, “Priscilla” was synonymous with “abandoner.” This time, my efforts were no longer essential or popular—I'd been used. I'd never been used before. Clarissa defeated my compassion and matched it with her resentment toward the life she'd been handed. It was unfair and cruel. So, I did what anyone who just got dumped would do, I found someone new. Emma, the unconventional, fun addition to our little friend-family. She was a little overweight, she had dark brown, short hair, acted a little egotistical, and admittedly cut herself for the sake of image. She wasn't broken to us, just chipped, but nothing that a little love and warmth couldn't fix. But, by the end of freshman year, Emma was diagnosed with Leukemia. My friend group's hearts compiled and shattered. How could this happen to such a young, creative,

spontaneous girl in *our* friend group. She didn't deserve it. But not long after this somber discovery, we uncovered a scheme she orchestrated and kept hidden for months. Emma did not have cancer. (Reread the last sentence for dramatic effect.) Why she would yank out clumps of her hair and concoct stories of chemotherapy or radiation, we will never know. But Emma was crippled in more ways than we previously could've imagined. Our open arms were pushed away by her deceit. We couldn't fix her—we couldn't help. Mainly, *I* couldn't help. Nor could I protect her from her demons, so had I to let her go. Reliant to mold to the stereotype or magnetize toward the rich crowd, my few other mismatches proved the school's culture to be a tough nut to crack. I felt unsure about my ability to adapt, which I thought I mastered somewhere around fourth grade, so I shifted my focus from the worry-free and mansion-grown students in search of some financial reprieve.

Hospitality... hospi—tal—ity... hospital—it—y... the term never clicked until I began my internship at The Beverly Hilton, an “iconic and historical piece of the Beverly Hills culture” (meant to be read in an ironic British accent). Home of the Golden Globes, the 25th Annual Def Comedy Jam, and me—the fiery sixteen-year-old ginger intern, their youngest, most inexperienced front office employee.

—“Yes, this is where the late Ms. Whitney Houston passed, is there anything else I may assist you with?”

Demanding customers, corporate structure, and executive office work forced me into a maturity that neighbored with a constant reality check. I was young! I still am young. And, I was weighed down by extreme expectations and responsibilities I had to learn to adhere to. My goals have always been to work independently to form the shining star I know I have the potential of

being. However, I felt too closely paralleled to the disturbing, masculine predecessor of hospitality I had so long detested. Yet, I, unlike some, discovered the diamonds of companionship, generosity, and respect. My work opened my weary eyes to a starry sky of possibilities. My competitive drive bulldozed that unhealthy comparison to dust. I was successful, in fact, I still believe I am successful. Because, not only was I able to enhance my resume and communication skills, but my sense of stability finally began to blossom. I've learned that I can't rush happiness and I can't rush satisfaction, but with a strong work ethic and a willingness to be independent I can find a gem of a life.

I can't complain about where my journey is taking me; I'm not typical, and that's okay. I appreciate how rich I am with experience at such a young age. The amount of lives I've touched and that have touched mine will continue to grow. The empathy I've gained will transfer to my future connections. The resilience I hold will humbly guard my self worth. And with all the moving and despair this gypsy student has learned what may be the best lesson so far—that life is fragile and we are mortal so I am grateful for everyday wherever I am. Expectations in check. Baby steps.