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My Childhood was a Shattered Mirror

Alexandra Cordill

My childhood was a shattered mirror

In my oldest memory I play with my parents in our Halloween orange kitchen. They chase me as I laugh.

One afternoon in June last year dad said to me, “Be careful of who you date, I know autism can be passed down by parents with ADD or ADHD too. And you would hate to double the chances for your kids.” I say nothing.

I didn’t speak until 21 months. My mom taught me basic sign language instead.

When my fish, Frederica, dies I don’t cry. I bury her in a Tiffany box in our front yard with her favorite pebble.

I cry when we move to a new house and I can’t push my bed flush with the wall, so I can feel the pressure on my chest as I sleep.

I learn to sleep face down.

Every year for my birthday we play Happy Birthday to Me by Cracker

My parents nudge me towards social interaction. I have different friends every year of elementary school.

They all leave me eventually.

My mom's scent is a permanent slurry of Tiffany perfume and garlic from the hours she spends in the kitchen.

I press my face into her growing belly when she is pregnant with Anna. I talk and sing to the floating fetus for hours on end.

When she is born my mom makes me use Purell every time I want to hold her. My hands are constantly dry and cracked from the alcohol.

In second grade I move to public school. My anxiety is so severe that I scratch myself to the point of hives every morning. Just so I can escape to the nurse's office for 20 minutes. My parents take me to an allergist. He prescribes me pills that do nothing for my burgeoning anxiety. I continue scratching and walk down to the nurse's office every morning for my half pill.

When I was twelve I copied down every lyric to Young the Giant's Cough Syrup at least 15 times in one week.

A year later I announce I am atheist. My catholic aunt tells me she is worried about me.

The two movies I feel connected to are The Perks of Being a Wallflower and Into the Wild.

At freshman homecoming I have my fist kiss. Afterwards he tells me he wants to just be friends.

In fifth grade I read Bullfinch's Mythology cover to cover. All the kids at school saw me lugging around a 500-page book of Greek myth from 1863. This did not help me find friends.

I relate to Medusa

At age nine I set record for most words read in a school year. 2.4 million. I devoured at least two books a week. This did not help me make friends either.

I went to day camp for kids of State Farm employees for five consecutive years. The only thing I remember from Camp Wanikskaka is winning the costume contest dressed as an ear of corn.

When I was fourteen my best friend was sent to boarding school. I had to find new friends.

My grandfather asks, "If your husband likes long hair, you'll grow it out right?" I say no and go on some long rant about hair and femininity. He understands none of it

In 7th grade I wrote an essay titled 'The Mercator Projection Shifts Childrens' Paradigm of the World. My teacher tells me I'm too smart for my own good. I don't understand what he means.

Anna bikes to Culver's with her friends, I watch 80's movies with my parents. Ally Sheedy is my spirit animal.

I watch Friends on an infinite loop to compensate for not enjoying the company of my friends.

My therapist tells me I should schedule one social thing per week. I don't.

I am the only 12-year-old at my gym. I make friends with all the 40 somethings doing Crossfit to fulfill some desperate need for human contact while exercising. I go through my teen years lifting weights instead of killing myself on cardio machines like my peers. This does not help me make friends.

My mom cries while watching soldiers come home to their dogs. I don't understand why this makes her sad. She says she's happy crying. That doesn't make sense either.

I lock myself in my room from breakfast to dinner, so I can start and finish my book without interruption.

My sister gets annoyed because we've watched Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat the past five days during winter break. I don't care because I'm five years older and I should be perpetually in control of the VHS player and also because Finding Nemo is stupid.

My dad asks me to grab his shoes on my way to the kitchen. I say, "You have two feet why don't you get them yourself?" My parents get mad, I'm just repeating a line from a tv show and the character's parents laughed. I don't understand why mine are so angry.

I get my hair cut in my favorite sweatshirt, it has a moose embroidered on the front. The hairdresser doesn't wash my hair, so it clings to my skin. I throw my sweatshirt away, it is forever itchy.

My mom buys me a pink striped fuzzy sweater. I feel like a Muppet and I love it. I tell her its itchy, she says it won't be after she washes it. I never wear the sweater.

I am eight I teach myself how to knit and spend hours toiling over perfect, evenly spaced stitches only to get bored. I eventually end up with several impeccable doll sized blankets.

My sister is loud and speaks her mind. I learn to do whatever she wants to, so I can avoid her screams hurting my ears.

My mother forces me to drink water. I hate how the cold spreads down my throat.

I go missing at a wedding reception when I am four. My mom finds me in a back room of the hotel practicing to be the flower girl at my aunt's upcoming wedding. I refuse to go back to the party for another 20 minutes.

I ruin a 9th birthday party because I refuse to watch any movies that are not comedy. We watch Napoleon Dynamite instead of August Rush.

During recess I am escorted by a lunch monitor to the bathroom, so I can brush my teeth after lunch. After a boy called me stinky breath on the jungle gym the week before. This does not help me make friends.

In third grade I punch Paige H. in the butt because she was encroaching onto my carpet square in the library. My teacher isn't that mad because I don't think she likes Paige H. that much anyway.

Paige H. had a baby last month.

In fourth grade I obsessively read Shakespeare and get frustrated when my mom can't talk to me about the central plot of each play because she's never read them. She takes me to see A Midsummer Night's Dream instead.

Two summers later my mom forces me to go with two girls I don't like to see Romeo & Juliet. I have to explain every detail to them and then listen to them gush about how romantic the play was.

I visit my aunt in New Mexico and go to the hot air balloon festival. I sit on the hood of her car to watch all the balloons take flight, she turns on the windshield wipers and laughs. I don't understand why this is funny.

In eighth grade I go to Washington D.C. with my middle school. I become friends with our tour guide and don't understand why people are reluctant to share a hotel room with me.

In preschool my teacher gives us each a bag of construction paper bones and tells us to create a new dinosaur. Forever the realist, I construct a Stegosaurus.

In high school I have a group of friends. I have nothing in common with them but they are friends nonetheless.