How to Survive 4th Period Chemistry

Katie List*

*Iowa State University

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I just want someone to break my nose. I’d settle for, no, I’d beg for a Marcia Brady incident, one poorly aimed football or basketball or baseball or tennis ball. My mother would run out the back door, my face would crumple into tears of pathetic pain. We’d speed through red lights, swearing at every traffic cone until we swerved into the sprawling asphalt parking lot of the sprawling beige hospital. Minivan parked and nerves sufficiently shot, we’d run-walk to the emergency room front desk, where the kindly overweight nurse would put on her half-glasses, look at our insurance card and say “Oh honey, you don’t gotta pay a thing. Now here’s a tissue for that nose of yours. The doctor’ll be with you in a minute.” (She’d have a southern accent, despite living in the upper-midwest). The pain would punctuate and permeate my upper skull, creating a daze of lights and tears and secret, foggy satisfaction that the blood drops had ruined my too-short-too-light-blue blue jeans. Then I’d pass out, rolling into the back of my wobbly, dramatic head.

I’d wake up several hours later, slightly groggy but cogent enough to see, from the inner corners of my eyes, a white bandage on my nose. I’d mumble a question to the equally white shoulders at the side of my bed, which would be attached to gloved arms arranging medicine on a silver tray. The shoulders would turn around, bend over, and become an apologetic female face with just-bodiful-enough dark brown hair around her high cheekbones and freckled forehead. She’d say “I’m sorry, but we had to operate. I didn’t know what your nose looked like before, so I just fashioned the best one to fit your face. I hope you don’t mind.” I’d reassure her I didn’t, then lapse back into sleep. The doctor and I would have a lengthy conversation the next day, in which she’d tell me about the pressures of Harvard Medical School and I’d tell her about the trials and inequities of high school chemistry. She would continually apologize for reconstructing my nose, but I’d assure her that even though I was ethically opposed to plastic surgery, I understood in this situation.

The reconstructive surgery would somehow change my voice, making me sound like Judy Garland when I sang and a
slightly more wholesome Mae West when I spoke. As I left the hospital, three guys would trip over themselves trying to ask me out. I would refuse them all with a scoff of the hand, but they’d still hound me. I’d have to get a new phone number. After my nose fully healed, I would go back to school and immediately be cast as the lead in the school production of “Cabaret.” (The New York Times theatre critic would applaud the “deliciously subversive casting of a young, raspy-voiced female in the role of the Emcee”).

I’d keep in touch with the apologetic Harvard doctor, who would encourage me to study calculus and biology so I could get into medical school at the precocious age of eighteen. I’d cite her as an influence when I received my Nobel Prize for curing cancer. And although I’d never be a model — because I didn’t believe in such things — men and women alike would always turn their heads in my direction. Not necessarily because I was beautiful, but because I was intrinsically fascinating. I just need someone to break my nose first.