

Unconquer This Territory

Category: In Pain

written by Rachel Schenkel | May 15, 2018

When I was six, good Uncle Hyman's shiny nose enticed me for reasons I now find obscure and incomprehensible. I scrubbed and scrubbed at my own nose to make it as polished as his. It stung a little. But I was pleased.

Until my nose scabbed over in one big sheet the next day. "What have you done?" my mom demanded, and laughed until she couldn't breathe when I told her.

"All I wanted was a shiny nose," I cried. She had to sit down because her giggles made her wheeze.

She told our whole family that I'd abraded the top layer of skin on my nose because of a character I liked in a book, and they laughed at the absurdity. Joke's on them—my nose has been shinier ever since. It's something I changed, earned, suffered for.

That same weird lick of pride has visited me again and again, as my muscles bulked up through sports. As my endurance grew.

As weight slipped from my frame.

At age sixteen and 104 pounds, I was compact. I could drum a beat on my ribs. I was lithe, sleek. My BMI was just over 18.5, so Not A Problem. Never have I owned myself more, even now. Discipline was stamped into my bones for all to see. A regency over flesh.

Denial felt powerful. I was the master of myself, even when I was ravenous.

I will be a doctor soon, and even still I draw on that year of deliberate privation, those old wounds of choice. It is a well-earned lesson to know myself in matters of want and will.

It's an even better lesson to learn to evaluate the want at the source.

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