

We Used To Be Sharks

by Rachel Yoder

I was sitting on the therapist's couch in someone else's boxer shorts. They were his, of course. The elastic around the waist was wearing thin, as was I, so the frayed cotton slid down beneath my hipbones, which pushed out of me like shark fins, like what was leftover from when we used to be sharks or cod or tadpoles, whatever. In between the bones, I was concave. The pills, the worry: I couldn't keep anything down. Maybe you could try applesauce, the scoliosis-ridden therapist said to me. She was pale, with maroon cardigans and substantial clogs. I often wondered if she had ever had sex. Applesauce. She had no idea.

I sat on the hard couch in her office. She had a potted plant and little stone figurines from an African nation. She had a special area rug, woven with many colors. She had a soft-light lamp on the end table. It was trying to be a living room, but the effort ruined the effect. I tried to tell her about the things he and I had gone over before I came to see her, how I drank too much and how my dad was a bastard. All she wanted to talk about, though, was him.

I had notes on how to handle that. He and I had reviewed how to deal with this very sort of scenario. I'd come prepared.

I'd rather focus on my father, I said. I flipped through my notebook until I found the points I'd enumerated, and then placed my finger there.

She wanted to know how *he* treated me, though, what he said and how he said it. Did he ever lay his hands on me. Did he ever.

These are my problems, I said, pointing to the notebook. These are what I feel comfortable discussing.

A few days later, my old roommate called me and asked would I please come back to the apartment for just an hour, she wanted to talk. I said sure but knew what was coming. When I got there, they were all there, sitting neatly in the living room with their hands in their laps. They were worried, is what they said. They talked and talked and talked. I flipped a switch inside my head so that it made it harder to hear.

After, I watched Natalie smoke a cigarette on the stoop. It was in a courtyard called The Fishbowl. Remember that one night with Aaron and Troy, she said. Natalie had been wearing a short pleated skirt. We went to one party, then the next. We sat on couches. We were teeth and eyes and hair. The streets were dark and lovely and when we walked them we were unalone, unthinking.

I knew I liked you that night, she said. We laughed. Natalie used to be a slut, but then she studied abroad and met this Irish guy and came back engaged for senior year. Maybe I had been a slut, too, but now I had him and everything was different. I held her hand and looked at her pretty ring. We used to drink too much, do guys. We used to say *fuck* all the time. He felt she'd been rehabilitated, however. He felt I could possibly still be her friend.

She blew smoke, and it floated by. I was afraid he'd smell it on me. I was afraid we'd lose a whole night to such a thing. I was afraid I wouldn't eat again, not for weeks.

