

The Year of Rewinding Hearts

Mellow (the girl, not the feeling) strung soft yellow LED lights through cassette tapes before hanging them up on the wall. Each cassette was named after a year in her life.

The Year of the U-Haul (not because Dad was in the military, for once).

The Year of Band Practice.

The Year of Holding Hands (doodled hearts).

After recent events Mellow considered ripping the last one off the garland of lights. The glow that fuzzed through the plastic, woven between the circles spools of plastic magic was the same glow that had once fuzzed in her chest. Now she was acutely aware of the silence. Gracie had always been the one to rewind the cassette once it ended. Gracie could rewind, unwind, wind again all the jumbled tapes of Mellow's soul. They were the two wheels of tape within the cassette. That is, only together were their souls allowed to sing.

The Year of More Than Holding Hands.

The Year of College Applications.

The Year of the Skinny Dip.

She'd always wanted to go skinny dipping. There was a lake right near the only college they'd both been accepted to. Mellow on a combination of Dad's G.I. bill and scholarships, Gracie partially working partially relying on parental support for her music. They went together, under cover of darkness and performed self-hazing for their little sorority of two. College meant they could be whoever they wanted to be, together. Together, bare and goose-fleshed legs grazing against each other as they treaded water close enough to kiss.

The Year of the U-Haul (moving in).

The Year of Midnight Music Gigs.

The Year of the U-Haul (moving out).

The way Gracie whispered, “Mel” half against Mellow’s lips half against the pillow her head was pressed against. The way Gracie’s touches were always soft, despite the guitar calluses toughening her fingers. The way Gracie knew exactly what to say to make her feel better, to rewind the cassette tape within Mellow. The way Gracie knew exactly what to say to stab her in the gut. Mellow’s music lately had been anything but her namesake. Everything was discordant, off, wrong. Gracie would have known how to set it right.

Mellow (the feeling, not the girl) glanced out the window. Rain darkened the pavement out front till it was black as the spools of a cassette. A spool unwound and strewn about across the city in long, loping, overlapping and winding piles. She knew exactly how to follow the cassette spool to reach Gracie’s apartment. She tapped her nails against the latest cassette. She hadn’t hung it up yet, because the year wasn’t out (Mellow began this tradition in June, so her version of New Year’s was 1 June). Here was a tipping point: The cassette could be labeled after her jumbled noise, or maybe it was her turn to rewind the tape.