

Dogface

DOGFACE was attacked by a dog when she was seven, which causes the other children at school to provide her derogatory nickname – an identity she never fully escapes from. She alternates between describing the experience and reliving it.

DOGFACE: This is how it happens: One minute, you're just another awkward second-grader. And then your mom takes you and your brother to her friend's house, out in the country. You get out of the car, and there's a big yellow dog wagging his tail at you. And your mom and your brother go to ring the doorbell, and you get down on your knees in front of this friendly dog, and you're petting him... And then, suddenly, the dog snaps his jaws. And your life as you know it... ends.

The dog never barked, never growled. He followed after me, still friendly and playful. Blood pouring from the holes in my face... and he's looking at me, wagging his tail. My mother grabbed my jacket from the car, and told me to hold it tight against my face. I was crying. I was so panicked I felt like I was choking.

At the hospital, nurses were coming in, mopping up blood and asking questions and trying to establish how much of my face was still there, whether the nerve endings were alive. My face felt puffy and I was light-headed. The nurses were friendly, they wanted me to trust them. And I did. I believed them when they said that doctors would be able to fix me.

They lied. I was conscious the entire time. I was awake while they sewed my face back together. What I remember most is the bright light, and the strangely disembodied voices of my parents and the doctors, trying to keep the patient calm.

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When they finally let me see myself, when they gave me a mirror, I had prepared myself for a Halloween mask, for a horror movie, for a nightmare. But the blood had been cleaned away. It was just neat rows of stitches. I was actually relieved.

But then I went back to school. And then the real trauma began.

by Kellie Powell