**Circuital**

By Kara Pelicano

*circuital (n.): a circular journey or one   
beginning and ending at the same place;   
a roundabout journey or course.*

The fast food restaurant’s counter was just above my head, making the lights underneath bright and blinding to a tiny girl like me. I remember seeing something hanging down from beneath the counter, not knowing that it was a live wire the restaurant had been notified about but had yet to fix. I stood next to my mom and my little sister, Katie, waiting patiently as our lunch was ordered and the air conditioning cooled my hot, summer-soaked skin. The cold, metal railing of the ordering line supported my right arm. Maybe I could pull the dangling cord off of the lights for the restaurant? Maybe I would help them out and get some reward for it in the form of dessert? I reached for the cord as my mom, distracted, chased my sister back into line.

The wire was like a snake as I grabbed it, constricting me. My right hand clung to the metal railing so I couldn’t let go. With a little help from my body, I became a part of the circuit, completing the perfect circle of electricity. My mom pulled and pulled at me, trying to get me to let go as she screamed, my life flashing in circular motion before her tear-streaked eyes. After what felt like an eternity for us both, my mom desperately wrenched my body free from the electrical circuit, wire still live. She tells me that she thinks of this often and remembers the spark of electricity she felt as she pulled on me. I lay there in a puddle of my own pee, lifeless, motionless, my heart quiet.

The electricity bonded with my body, my plasma, to create an explosion, a burning running through my insides, scorching both my skin and the connection of my heart to the rest of my body. The coolness of the metal against my hand was a signal of an anchor for the current that would fragment my body. Once the conductivity of my body had been cut off, my mom, an EMT, desperately performed CPR on me until the ambulance arrived. My heart started and stopped and started again. The skin of my hands completely burned and blistered.

My whole childhood was about explosions and burns. It began with my dad’s temper, which assaulted my senses like the flash of a camera and transferred onto me an inability to express my emotions. I became a closed circuit, internalizing my thoughts and emotions and holding on to the smallest things that would upset me. I became needy without vocalizing what it was that I needed. I went around and around in circles with my emotions.

When I was 27, I began to develop physical chest pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, and strange heart rhythms. I noticed my heart beginning to race for no reason, as though my heart was forgetting that it was supposed to be supplying my body with life. My heart had already taken a beating through my twenties, spending most of my time with a man who put his feelings first with no regard for mine. Those scars on top of these new symptoms created a spark of anxiety in me. These physical issues, as it turned out, were linked back to the incident that happened when I was just five years old in that run-down Taco Bell in Raleigh, North Carolina.

My parents decided that at five, I was too young to appear in court. Instead, weeks after the high voltage incident, we made a video of my testimony. I watch the video at least once a year now. The camera rolls and Dad carefully removes the bandages from my barely recognizable hands. I sit alone in the middle of the frame. I am happy and upbeat, even when recounting that terrifying moment. Mom asks from behind the camera for me to describe what happened. I remember singing “I’m Proud to be an American” with Katie while we waited for tacos. I remember how hot it was outside and how cold the railing felt on my skin. I remember seeing the wire and not knowing it was dangerous because why would it be if I could reach it? I remember reaching for the wire and not being able to let go of it. I remember a black tunnel with a bright light at one end. I remember feeling like I was in the tunnel for a very long time. I remember a tall, dark wizard dragging me away from the light. This wizard is the reason I couldn’t let go. Mom asks if I was afraid of the wizard. I remember that I was only afraid of letting go.

My teens and twenties were a constant struggle to be that same happy and upbeat girl with scarred hands in the video. My relationships were fragile and I was sour toward my friends instead of expressing how I felt. A tangle of dangerous wires had wound tightly around my heart, deafening its beat.

Years later, waking up alone in a hospital after a horrifying surgery-gone-wrong and my emotionally abusive boyfriend blindingly absent, I also found myself unable to let go. To let go of the boyfriend, to let go of the emotional oppression. The circuitry of abuse had been hardwired in my veins. As time passed, after the burns cooled, I felt my heart begin to beat again.

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