

# Jigsaw Youth by Tiffany Scandal

written by Alex Kalamaroff | April 27, 2015



*Jigsaw Youth* by Tiffany Scandal

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On the one hand, love is a dastardly invention. It will drive you to do just about anything. On the other hand, what would we be without it?

“Red Lips,” the opening story in Tiffany Scandal’s novel-in-stories, *Jigsaw Youth*, explores the painful situations love often leaves us in.

Hope is a pretty girl who meets Ella “at time where all I could do was sleep, I was so angry at everything,” Ella tells us. Together they enjoy the pleasures of a doomed romance in its early days: the hand-holding, intense conversations, fucking through the afternoons, and that intoxicating mix of desire and affection that makes Ella think “I was in heaven for one month.”

It’s the story of how one month can seem like forever right up until that forever ends. Ella struggles to escape their relationship, which turns abusive. Trouble is the morning after another night of wanton cruelty, Hope says, “When I’m with you, I’m grounded. I feel beautiful, I feel loved.” Hope isn’t lying, though she is a shithead who mistreats Ella to feed the monsters inside herself.

“*I love you,*” Hope writes in lipstick on the vanity mirror.

And Ella wants so badly to be loved, except not like this. “[I]t didn’t hurt as much as I expected it to, but it hurt enough,” she thinks after finally ending things. And so Ella takes all that fury and turmoil leftover in her soul and puts it to good use. She starts a band.

 *Jigsaw Youth* is a mix of things: queer bildungsroman, punk rock origin story, and tour diary of the heart. Over the course of sixteen stories and five italicized interludes, we come to know the intricacies of Ella’s life—her Californian childhood in a Mexican-American family where she is raised by her grandmother; her deep-felt friendship with Mensa that’s shattered when Ella comes out; her random jobs and workplace humiliations; her first black eye, which is treated as a prize cause she gets it in the mosh pit; and her cross-country adventures as the member of her own awesome band.

In “Kurt Cobain,” elementary-school-aged Ella mourns the grunge star’s death and eventually learns about Riot Grrrl. “Women screaming into microphones and playing instruments,” she thinks. “Their music sounded like my pain. I felt like I had found home.” In “The Rules We Will Always Break,” Ella and Nic talk about their past passions and frantic hearts while drinking PBR. Scandal

writes about Ella's days as a waitress and punker in Portland, Oregon, with clipped directness. Emotions are described as is, without metaphor or elaboration. Pain, like love and the cruelty of truth, is confronted head on. Try not to flinch.

How we do reconcile our lives? Scandal seems to be asking in each of these stories. What are we to do with the pain that accrues from rejection and abuse? How can we scrape meaning from the worst of it?

The love that Ella seeks is finally found within her community of friends, fellow musicians, and Suicide Girls. It is a DIY kind of love, a love that throws elbows at the expectations. At the end of "Bad Bitches on the Road," Ella reflects on these expectations, the "unspoken rules" that women are supposed to follow, thinking:

We don't live that way.

We are human beings and not anyone's property. We don't owe anyone anything. We make our own rules and break them whenever we feel like it.

Here is Ella's creed. This is the truth she's been striving toward; it's a truth she sings once she's freed herself from the expectations and the secrets and the shame. You can hear this truth when Ella screams-a-long to the song "Eat Shit and Die" by Tampons on Fire, and see it when she hurtles back home to Portland in her '65 Rambler. In "Quitting," Ella finally tells it to her jack-ass boss at JOE's, an "artery-clogging" greasy spoon. She's done with his bullshit, crappy food, and misogyny. And in a later moment, after they've broken up and she's rocking out with her band, Ella tells it to Hope: "fuck off," Ella says, and then returns to her own wild song.

Wave your middle finger at the world and grin.

Every scar and every tattoo has got a story, and *Jigsaw Youth* is a collection of these stories. Scandal's writing—direct, willful, violently alive—asks us to listen in on these tales, all of which could be shared over a PBR as we waited for the sun to rise above the Willamette. *Jigsaw Youth* is a book that makes you want to say "fuck off" too, and then move to Portland to pursue those dreams you've been keeping quiet about for a while now. It makes you want to jump into the bloody pit, get two big, badge-of-honor black eyes, and start a ragged band.

*Featured photo by Derek Sapienza.*