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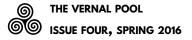
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BELINDA CELINA GARCIA HE CALLED ME FAT



My little sister came from school with crestfallen cheeks and droopy eyes. No gummy giggles, no cookie cuddles, no sprinkled stories; nothing but bewildered hesitation.

After an hour I lifted her to her bed. She was as light as her empty smile. When she finally spoke, her words poured; and I was not prepared.

Among her six-year-old broken syllables I pieced the words *He-called-me-fat* and sunk in her sobs.

He called me fat acidly ran down my throat, *He called me fat* clenched my lungs, *He called me fat* plucked my heartstrings.

But it wasn't the comment or the words; it was the sound. Her voice echoed a resounding familiarity that demanded instant comfort; so I fed her sweet compliments. I fed her flattery treats.

She smiled through her red eyes, but my candied compliments wouldn't last. I knew because my mother fed me those same sweets when I clung to her.