

ROLE MODEL

A hairy man with eyebrows as thick as Ernie Kovacks' kneaded my upper back and murmured in his hypnotic voice, *Relax, let your muscles soften*, while prone on his table I tightened at the scent of gardenias he exuded. The doctor dug his thumbs into my spine, humming like an humongous dwarf, an entity far beyond what I, at fifteen, had ever known. He told me migraines were messages from my body, spoken in a language I could learn if I was sharp. *Sit up*, he said, *and listen*. The first lesson: my profusion of hormones was natural, a state without shame. Second: no masturbation. It would weaken my system. Third: work out. And fourth: avoid entanglement with girls. Is that all? The same messages the priest I had avoided like the plague had taken the boys aside last year to give. I wanted a pill for my headaches. I wanted to get out of his office and take a shower, to hide my shame in a book. A vague craving began to unfold, a thirst to prove the quack completely wrong—my first step toward medicine.

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