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Beauty Is...

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“Beauty is pain,” is what I tell myself as I angrily scrub at the pimple on my nose. Because everyone else has pretty clear skin and I should too. “Beauty is pain,” is what I murmur as I dig my fingernails into the skin of my inner arm, pinching it between my thumb and index finger. My stomach twists and turns as I glance longingly at the red velvet cake resting on the countertop. But everyone else in my family is skinny and slim and I should be too. “Beauty is pain,” is what I cry as I tremble, swaying back and forth on the weighing scale- the longer I stand the more I feel like a piece of meat rather than a twelve-year-old girl. The number it reads is ten digits more than it was yesterday. Silently, I begin planning out my meals for the next day, because all the other girls in my class weigh under 100 pounds and I refuse to be the only exception. “Beauty is pain,” is what I whisper to myself as my mother asks me if I ate breakfast and I smile and nod because, why should it matter, everyone else lies too.

Beauty is impossible. It’s agonizing standards that I will never meet. Long nights spent crumpled on the floor fighting through my last push-up as my muscles cry out for air. It’s ashy burn mark-covered fingers from all the times I tried straightening my hair. It’s scrolling through camera rolls and telling my friends “no, delete that one, my smile was crooked,” or “not that one please, I wasn’t sucking in my stomach.” It’s a Pinterest board full of diet and exercise plans to try. It’s my sad Spotify playlist on repeat as I spend hours scrolling through Instagram, willing myself to look like the millions of other girls out there.

Beauty is conventional. Beauty has porcelain white skin and light blue eyes. She has pin-straight blonde hair that falls to her chest. Beauty does not care for my acne-coated face or the glasses that just will not stop sliding down my nose. She does not approve of my 5’2 stature or my miserable posture for she is tall and lithe and skinny. Beauty has nearly white teeth and a smile that comes easily. She certainly does not look like me.

Beauty is confident. She struts down packed hallways casting winks and turning heads as she goes. Her voice is as smooth as velvet and when she talks her eloquence draws every eye in the room. Beauty would never freeze in front of a crowd as I do. She would never dream of being shy like I am. She does not stutter through every sentence or second guess every word she speaks. There are never any doubts in her mind about her abilities because, why would she ever need to question her own thoughts?

Beauty is ethereal. She is pure and innocent and the entire world swoons, offering up her dreams to her on a silver platter. Her laugh is so dainty and her eyes are so sparkling and inviting that even the stars themselves cannot help but sigh in awe. She is perfection.

Yes, Beauty is flawless but she is also a lie. With her perfect looks and her perfect voice, she is a romanticized illusion created by humankind. An unrealistic but unfortunate standard that, in their darkest moments, every woman has not only held themselves up to but fallen short of. She is alluring and captivating but she is miserable. A pretty smile may deceive society for some time, but it can only last for so long before it too fades away.

I do not desire to live a life full of expectations over ambitions and sorrow over happiness. Beauty may be ethereal and confident. She may be seductive and she may be breathtaking. But she is also somber and drained. She is too conventional and too impossible and, without a shadow of a doubt, full of pain.

Yes, Beauty may not be me, but I do not wish to be her either.