

“The Weight She Carries”

The weight she carries starts to accumulate, overflowing a brown burlap sack which she is forced to drag. The sack moves with more resistance than her slow trudge as she makes her way along the bumpy sidewalk. A stench fills the air. The smell seems to be seeping through from the burlap, making its way into her nostrils, adding to the level of disgust which she already holds for herself. The already resented walk home suddenly becomes more unbearable, one which would leave even George Mallory at a halt. Yet she continues. Though with each continued step she loses a part of herself, a piece which seems impossible to get back.

Slowly but surely, she makes it home. She walks up the creaky old wooden staircase to her room, still dragging the brown burlap sack behind her. As she enters her room, she stops in front of her floor length mirror. How she feels when she catches a glance of herself in the mirror is full of pain. Despite the mirror being decorated with sticky notes left by her mom saying, “You are beautiful” and “Smile”, she feels ridden with shame. She can’t look in the mirror without feeling or seeing the weight she carries around. The weight which was once in the sack seems to be on her. It’s on her upper thighs that are decorated by bold purple stretchmarks, it’s on her bulging stomach, it’s on her swollen ankles, it’s on her round red cheeks, it’s everywhere. She begins to pull at her skin, desperately trying to shed a layer in hopes that she can find herself again. Who she sees in the mirror does not look like the girl who she has been for the past seventeen years. The girl staring back at her in the mirror can’t be real. She can’t be. If she is, then what does that say about her? Whenever she walks into an ice cream store, will she catch judgmental stares that are on the edge of becoming comments that will say what she is already thinking? “Fatty”, “Lose weight”, “Stop eating”.

In hopes to wash away the filth, which is now her skin, she gets in the shower. The water is hot, hot enough to melt off a layer or two. The soap is harsh, harsh enough to clean off the stretchmarks

stitched within her skin. The washcloth is rough, rough enough to make up for that delicious piece of chocolate cake she had earlier by scraping off a couple digits from her calorie count for the day. Scrub and scrub. With persistence she will win. She will get that spot out, but not that tattoo. It is just as permanent as the 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 more calories that she with no doubt will consume. Yet she continues to pick and pry, pull, and yank, but nothing gives. She finds herself on the opposite sides of mirrored glass. Looking but never finding the girl within.

Scavenging through her closet, she becomes lost. She is stuck in a never-ending maze, turning left and right, unable to escape. The maze's walls begin to close in, encroaching, suffocating her. She tries to scream, willing to admit defeat, but is quickly silenced. The sounds she tries to expel form a hard lump in the back of her throat. It goes down with a long bitter swallow, the aftertaste resembling that of cherry cough syrup. At this point, returning to see her reflection in the mirror would be more comfortable than the clothes on her back. They squeeze and pinch at her skin, leaving her lumps and bumps vulnerable to the eyes of strangers. But it's not the strangers' eyes who she's trying to avoid being caught in. It's her own. She doesn't need any more judgement. She already has someone who does it, herself. There's no one that can make her cry more than her own thoughts. The thoughts that race through her head have no mercy, there's nothing anyone could say that she doesn't already say to herself.

In her dreams there are life size barbies that make the streets their runway. They're magnificently carved tall long-legged statues. They catch the gaze of every passing pair of eyes, earning the place of one of the many masterpieces showcased within the Met walls. The sad part is she once dreamed she was one of them, having walked side by side with the girls who now make her seem like a mockery of what it means to be beautiful. She no longer has a head of hair that blows effortlessly in the wind, as if it were a fan positioned to perfectly whisk her hair around showcasing her sharp jawline. Why is it that the girl she once hated so much is now the girl that she longs to be? She would kill to be the girl

that is beneath the fifty pounds of hate and shame that she buried her in. To kill to be that girl would mean to kill the person she has become, the person that is no better off than the one she was before. So, what was all this for? What purpose does this added layer provide? Warmth? Protection? No, her heart is still cold, and more vulnerable than ever before. All this pain and suffering is for nothing. Nothing. Nothing is exactly what she feels like. Yet she feels like everything at the same time. She feels like she takes up more space than there is for her in this world. When she sits in a chair her cumbersome legs consume the seat, swallowing the once bare, empty space. And God forbid she dare try to sit in the middle seat in the back of a car with her friends because then she would be spilling into their seats because we all know the middle seat is for the skinny friend, the friend who resembles the models which haunt her sleep.

She once again finds herself on that bumpy sidewalk, but this time unburdened by the heavy brown burlap sack which she was once forced to carry. This time, the weight she carries is not behind her, it is on her. Trudged steps which once carried her home upheave the cement beneath her feet, like a plow turning soil. The walk which once seemed unbearable is one she longs to walk to walk again. The weight she carries is harder to bear this time around given the placement of it. Something which was once detached, hauled around, separate from her own existence is now glued and stapled, taped, and bonded to her, inescapable.

To get rid of this burden is to get rid of her wants, needs, desires, and guilty pleasures. She would be betraying a part of herself, while simultaneously gaining another part back, the part she would rather have. But to simply want it bad enough will not suffice. She can go on and on wanting that piece of herself back which she admired so dearly, yet she will never have it. She can't have it. She can't have it back simply because she wished on a star, threw a coin in a wishing well, or because she prayed and begged to God to have it back. She isn't lucky. Never has been, never will be. She knows that all too well. Maybe because she was dealt this hand in the first place. Or perhaps she wasn't dealt a bad set of cards,

maybe she threw them away. She threw them away after not the first, second, or even third pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream that month, but after the seventh. It was after the late-night trips to the fridge, the hidden stash of goodness under her bed, and the finished box of Cheez-its that she threw away her royal flush.

Look at the state she's in. She walks alone in a society that gets to decide what is pretty and what is shamed. Society's frame is too small for her to fit. With each pound she gains, she loses a stake in being a part of that frame, a frame which now crops her out. Photoshop is every girl's best friend. They either use it to shed an inch or two off their already thin build, or to erase the friend in the picture that takes up too much room. But who wrote these rules, these standards, these expectations for girls? Young girls. Impressionable girls. Girls like her.

Girls like her take a sharpie and trace along their body where they would take the scissors. But there's a point where she'll never stop cutting. Cutting and cutting. There goes her breakfast, her lunch, her dinner. Cut deeper, maybe then she can look in the mirror. Just maybe then she can have the lead role in the movie rather than being the comedic relief because we all know the fat friend is never the lead. Don't think so? Tell that to Fat Amy and Rowley Jefferson. Tell that to her. Tell that to the girl who has been cast in both roles, been on either side of the mirror, the villain, and the victim. The villain who made the jokes, and the victim who laughed at them. But we know she's no victim. No one did this to her. She did. She is the perpetrator. She is the murderer, killer, executioner, destroyer, slaughterer. She is the villain of a victimless crime.

When she looks in the mirror, there is no one to blame but herself. She stands alone, holding in the tears and swallowing the screams because she has no right to cry. She might have lost someone, but how can she grieve her own death? A death which she orchestrated. A body which she buried.

But is any of it even real? Was there ever a burlap sack? Or did she make it up? Did she make it up to fool or deceive herself or even to protect herself from the truth? The truth that she is the disgusting, repulsive thing which she mistook for a burlap sack? Why is she lying to herself? But she's not only lying to herself; she is lying to all the people around her, pretending to be something, someone who she is not, at least not anymore. For what though? She has no one fooled. How could she? She can't even fool herself. She knows all too well the thing that she is. The thing that now consumes her, eats her alive, limb for limb, is who she'll always be. Stuck. She will forever walk that sidewalk carrying something around, but not the burlap sack, the weight she carries is on her this time and the next, and the next, and the next until it has finally become so consuming that there will be no next walk.