Byte-Sized Beauty

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"Good morning my beautiful girl, did you have a good sleep?"

My infant self murmured back. My moms eyes lit up as if she knew that my response was a true answer to her question.

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"Good morning sweetheart, once you get ready come into my bathroom and we will do your hair for picture day."

I scrambled around my room looking for my favourite outfit to make sure I felt pretty for picture day.

"Mommy! I'm ready" I yelled out as I ran into her room.

I stood there waiting for her approval.

"You look beautiful my love."

She sat me up on the counter as she pulled back my unruly curly hair into pigtails. She tried so hard every morning to make the curls do as she wanted, but they truly had a mind of their own. She wanted to make sure that they did not take away from that beautiful face of mine. The time I sat there she continued to tell me that I was the most beautiful girl in the world.

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The first day of highschool could not come slower. All I wanted was to just stay curled up in bed with the covers over my face. As I peeled myself out of bed my hair stood on all ends and made me look like I was the monster in a horror movie. My hair was unlike a lot of the girls that I saw at school and to be honest, different from a lot of what I saw online. I never knew what to do with it other than throwing it up into a messy bun, not one of those messy buns that all those chronically online people were able to obtain, but instead something that a rat would spend its night in.

"Morning mom" I said as I thumped down our carpeted staircase into the kitchen.

"Maya, oh..good morning" my mom said hesitantly.

"Literally, what now?" I questioned her. The last thing I needed before my first day was to hear about someone elses issue with the way I looked.

"Don't you want to look a little bit better than that for your first day? You know it's important to look your best when you go out."

I looked down onto the clothes that hung off my prepubescent body. The sweatpants that had stains of last night's late night binge on them, and the oversized hoodie that hid every curve and imperfection underneath.

"I like it." I scoffed back as I headed out the door without having so much as an apple before school. My mom always said that breakfast was the most important meal of the day. That

stopped when my pants went from a double-zero to the zero-four that there are now. She never followed her own motto though.

As I opened the doors to Oakwood High School nobody really looked the same as they did before the summer. It was like the sweet innocence of elementary school had completely disappeared and these were no longer girls, but women.

Maybe it was because of my look of no interest, but none of my old friends really took the time to come and say "hi", granted I was not the one that wanted to walk up to Sally and ask her about the three cup sizes that she jumped over summer.

My friends and I had really grown apart over the summer, they had changed. I remained the same, that is mentally not physically.

I kept my headphones in and head down.

Once I got home that day I decided to take a look into when the girls really changed. As I opened up Instagram my feed was flooded with all of these beautiful women that had made sure that when they get to high school they are recreating themselves, I guess I had not got the memo. I stayed off of social media most of the summer, I could not handle the pressure that I felt to keep up and stay posting, while looking my best, despite feeling my worst.

I opened up Sally's profile. All the photos of us in grade six, when we first got our phones, were gone, erased. Her profile now was just of her on all of her fun vacations this summer in

little to no clothing. The way her body had changed took me back. Her carved abs looked

more defined with the summer skin that the sun blessed her with. The sun bounced off of her

and she radiated with glory, and boy was I right about that cup size. Her chested looked like

that of some of the girls that were years above us in school.

I wandered to the comments.

"You are so gorgeous!"

"Damn Sally, I knew your mom was hot but I didn't think you could reach that level"

That one seemed backhanded.

"I wish I was that skinny…" although that was not already a comment, but the one I wanted to

leave.

The more and more I looked the more I could not take my eyes away. I went from profile to

profile seeing all of these sweet girls that I used to know, looking like someone I no longer

recognized. Their perfect bodies filled my feed. I fell into a wormhole.

I came across my own mother's Instagram. There were no more photos of our family near the

top. All the ones that had me in it were buried at the bottom. They were old photos of me

when I was a child. With captions that stated, "look at my beautiful girl go" and "my pretty

girl is growing up too fast". Nothing like that at the top, there were just photos of my dad and

her, even her profile showed more of her than I wanted to see. The comments were filled with behind-a-screen validation.

Tears started to build in my eyes, it was as though she was ashamed of me. From growing up a little girl that she used to call beautiful everyday, to now she critiques the way that I look. As if the way I looked was a representation of her that she wanted nobody to see.

I walked into the bathroom and removed the oversized sweater that had kept me safe all day. As I gazed into the mirror, I felt as though there was a live comments section looking back at me.

"You must be really confident in order to post this."

"I thought we were supposed to lose the baby fat?"

"How could anyone ever love someone who looks like that?"

I pinched and prodded at my own skin, feeling like all I wanted to do was crawl out and be someone else, someone like Sally.

I just wanted to be beautiful like all of those women that I saw online. I wanted the validation of feeling like someone loved me as much as they felt loved through the comments.

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As time went on things started to change.

"No, I am not hungry."

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"Mom, do we have any more toilet paper?" I yelled out from the upstairs bathroom, as I tried to fill the negative space in my already extra padded bra.

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"I am off to the gym," I said for the third time that day.

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"What is the best hair straightener you have?"

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I deleted all of my old photos and started fresh. A photo of me in a bikini with ribs so visible that I finally was proud to show more, straightened hair, with no sign that there were curls

hidden underneath. It reflected back into my eyes from my phone screen. I felt so proud of

the changes I had made.

"You are so beautiful." The first comment on my post. It was left by my mother.