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Imperfection

The panic doesn't wait until I am awake to find me, to pull at my insides and to thump at my chest. Faster, faster. I gasp, clutching at the thin bed sheets as she screams.

"What did you do? What did you do?"

My eyes snap open as my hands stretch automatically to my hips, caressing the bones that jut out there, then running up my stomach to count my ribs. One, two, three, four, five, six. They are there, just like yesterday, so why is my heart beating so fast? What did I do? God, remember. Remember. As my eyes begin to adjust to the dim light of my room, the memories creep back into my brain along with the stale smell of cigarettes and cheap alcohol. The party, the people, the food. Sixty, twenty, fifty-seven, eighty equals two hundred and seventeen. Start over. Sixty, twenty, fifty-seven. Breathe in, breathe out.

"What have you done?"

The bed frame trembles as my foot begins to bounce. Movement burns more calories than lying still, and that small comfort allows me to face last night. It was a Saturday, and my parents had called me over for a "small get-together".

"Just for a couple of hours, darling. Your brother is coming with the baby, and your father and I would love to see you." I had gone like any good daughter would have at the hint of a plea in her mother's voice, and I quickly regretted it. The bright lights, the music, the people. The questions. Constant questions that quickly started to sound like accusations.

"Where have you been? We haven't seen you in ages, is that a twitch or do you just like moving your foot like that? Are you dating yet? Sleep, getting enough of it? You look peaky" and the inevitable yet dreaded "have you been eating properly? You look too thin."

I start moving my frigid fingers and thumbs to relieve the anxiety of not beginning my morning workout because I am held here again having to answer the voice in my head.

I ate to appease my parents, or so I tell myself, their gaze red hot on my fork as I raised it to my lips. Once, twice, three times, four. Potatoes, carrots, lamb, ice cream. Sixty, twenty, fifty-seven, eighty. Two hundred and seventeen.

She screams again, that girl in my head. The child, with a child's body and a child's inability to compromise. So real to me, yet so incomprehensible to others. She screams at me to fix it, to do something, anything, to stop the fat that is already running in thick and debilitating rivulets under my skin. I can feel it, in the new weight to my body as I rise from my bed, in the ache in my joints as I move towards the door. I can see it as I become visible in the floor to ceiling mirror that is my bathroom wall. The rolls of my stomach, the wide hills of my hips and thighs.

“You did this,” She tells me, quietly now. Disappointed. “You lost it. It’s all your fault.”

Vertebrae by vertebrae, I straighten, my back uncurling and my fists clenching. I can fix this. I will. I must. Routine, repetition. My protectors, my saviours. The two things I can count on in my screwed up life, with its constant change and its constant chaos. Routine. Repetition.

The clock says 6:04 AM, one minute before I must, like every other morning, discover the number that decides if today will be a good day or a bad day. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.

The digital numbers shift and change as I step onto the small plastic scale, glowing a bright blue in the dim light of the bathroom. Indecisive they hover before finally settling. Silence. The girl stops screaming, and I am left alone. Finally alone.

It is here, an empty bathroom in a lonely life held together at the seams by the paper clips that hold my baggy clothes tight, that I truly hate myself.