

My name is Joselyn and I'm fifteen. I've got thick black hair and these deep green eyes. When I focus on these parts of myself, I feel good. I imagine I've got dozens of friends and a booming social life. But I have neither-- nobody wants to be friends with the fat girl. So I spend my days alone, trying not to notice how fleshy my arms are and how many chins I've acquired.

"Joselyn! Dinner's ready!" I plow down the stairs to see what Mom cooked tonight. She's fat like me, so her arms jiggle as she spoons piles of mashed potatoes onto plates. Richard, my stepfather, doesn't seem to mind, though. Him and my mom don't really love each other, but he has this strange infatuation with fat women and he puts bread on the table, so it's okay. More than you can say for my real father. Hell, he can barely pay his rent, let alone child support- he'd rather spend his paycheck on dimebags and cheap Vodka.

After dinner, which consisted of heaping helpings of seconds and thirds, I clomp up the stairs to my room. In my room, I strip of all my clothes and examine myself in the full-body mirror. It sure was a sight, the way my thighs seemed to overlap and the way my stomach hung low.

Suddenly, I remembered what this girl at school told me. I was on my way to fifth period a few weeks ago, when she stepped out of an alcove between lockers.

"You know, smoking makes you less hungry," she'd said. She for one, was very thin. I didn't think much of that encounter until now. Richard has carton upon carton upon carton of cigarettes. I'm sure he wouldn't mind if I took a pack or two... or ten.

The next few weeks, I smoked like my life depended on it. And the girl was right- I was less hungry. Less hungry, but super tired and light-headed all the time. Hey, that's just the price of beauty. The pounds came off like a snake shedding its skin.

As the months went by, and I continued to smoke more and eat less, I lost even *more* weight. A little more than I'd planned, but weight loss nonetheless. By June, on the last day of school, I dared myself to wear a pair of shorts. I admired the way my thighs were nowhere close to touching. Lots of people gave me scrunched up looks and moved away from me in the halls. They were just jealous of all the progress I'd made in just a few months and my abundance of newfound beauty.

Over the summer, Mom and Richard finally opened their eyes and caught wind as to what was going on. Of course Richard wouldn't deal with *his* cigarette addiction, but attempted to stop mine real quick. He put his endless supply of ciggies in a bin and locked it! How dare he? He's just mad I'm not a fatty anymore, the creep.

As for Mom, she pushed more food down my throat than she had before. Mom and Richard sat at the table with me until I ate every last morsel served before daring to pick up their own forks. Little did they know, when finally excused, I ran to the bathroom to throw everything up. That's not to say I didn't eat anything. I usually allowed myself a small cup of yogurt and a granola bar. But after that, I had to stop before I got too carried away. That's pretty much how my summer went. I didn't go outside much, walking too far hurt my joints and driving made me carsick.

By the first day of school, I wore a pretty dress that showed off my skinniness. Wherever I went, I caught snippets of conversation which always seemed to include the words "anorexic", "bulimic", "sickly", or "gross". I always turned around to see who in the hell they could be talking about, but no one ever matched the description. Oh well for the poor person they were talking about.

By lunchtime, though, something really weird was going on. I decided to attempt friendship and sat down with a group of girls who were thin and pretty- just like me.

But one girl, with hair like cornsilk and eyes like milk chocolate looked me up and down, then said, " I'm sorry, but we don't associate with freaks." Her sneer sure was nasty. Her and her posse got up to move to a different table. Oh well. Jealousy is an unbecoming quality, anyway.

The *really* weird part, though, was that it just kept happening. No matter which table I sat at, day after day, they left. Some more polite than others, but they left all the same.

Hmm. No one wanted to be friends with fat, ogre-like Joselyn, and no one wants to be friends with thin, beautiful Joselyn. That means it must be me. Hell, my own father doesn't even want to be in my life! My suspicions were confirmed one crisp, November day. I caught a group of jocks spray painting Ugly! over my locker. No trace of guilt was present as they ran down the hall in a heap of hysterics. That's when my heart broke and I officially gave up. If I'm ugly fat and I'm ugly thin, and nobody wants to be my

friend, what's the point of being here? Nothing's ever gonna change and it's certainly not as if anyone would miss me.

The weeks leading up to winter break dragged by, and after the locker incident, people took that as their opportunity to add what they thought of me. Most of the stuff they wrote on my locker, I don't even want to mention. Mom and Richard can barely look at me anymore. Well, you know what? I've had it up to here with everyone! I'm going to end it- me rather,- and that actually relaxes me for the first time in weeks. To be relieved of the scrutiny of others based on the way I've so drastically changed my ways makes me practically giddy. I guess I couldn't pay the price of beauty.

On Christmas Eve, while Mom and Richard munch on sugar cookies, trying for once to be the picturesque of two people in love, I sit in the bathroom.

With the bathwater running, I rummage through the medicine cabinet. In my hands, I have Tylenol, Advil, Motrin and other pills whose names I don't know. It looks like I just threw up a rainbow into the palm of my hand. I count out the pills in my hand-seven. One for Mom. One for Richard. One for Dad. One for the girl that suggested I start smoking. One for the girl who denied me a place at her table. One for the jocks. And finally, one for myself.

I ease into the tub, slowly, slowly, and let the water run over every inch of my body. Then, I swallow the pills, one by one, and wait. Eventually, I start to get this tingly feeling and it's like I'm seeing through a kaleidoscope. It's actually kind of relaxing. I think it's working. I feel so much bett-.

"Joselyn! Joselyn! Oh my sweet baby! Jesus help me!" Someone's yelling in my ear. I briefly wonder if I'm in hell, but then I realize it's just Mom. Damn. Reluctantly, I open my eyes. Mom and Richard let out a sigh of relief. Their happiness is put on hold as they yank me out of the tub, toss a robe around my shoulders and take me to the hospital. This all seems very unnecessary.

"Your daughter is going to be all right, but she practically, overdosed on pain medication. Perhaps you should get your daughter some psychological help." I want to punch the doctor in the face. I want to punch Mom in the face. I want to punch Richard in the face. Maybe I should have been more adventurous and jumped off a bridge

instead of the classic OD attempt. Mom weeps like a baby as the doc hands her pamphlets full of local shrinks.

Back home, Mom and Richard look over the pamphlets, both letting the tears stream down their faces. I feel like the Grinch That Stole Christmas, only I wasn't successful. Christmas morning lacks the usual hype and we don't even pretend to be happy when we open the same gifts we give every year.

Mom wastes no time, because the next week she drives me to the least expensive shrink listed in the pamphlets. Her name is Melanie Murdoch and she's even fatter than I used to be. Instantly, I don't like her. How dare this whale try to tell me how to live a life I don't even want?

"Joselyn, please sit." I stand. I don't plan on being here long.

"That's fine too," says Melanie. She looks a little awkward, standing there, her chest heaving, and I start to wonder if I'm her first "patient". If there's one nice thing I could say about her, though, is that she seems relatively nice. Her eyes are kind and she doesn't push me to pour out my feelings. I guess that's what drove me to do just that. I tell her everything, all the way up to yesterday when I opened my eyes and saw Mom peering at me over the tub. The best part about her though? She doesn't cut in every few seconds to say "And how does that make you feel?", the way you hear about shrinks doing.

When I finish my whole ordeal, she says, ever so bluntly, "Joselyn, you have an eating disorder. Anorexia was what you started with, but now you may be suffering from bulimia. Now, don't you fret, I'm here to help you. When you spend time with me, I want to discover just how beautiful you are, inside and out." Melanie goes on to tell me her life story, similar to mine. We talk about boys and shoes and clothes, and even get into deep conversations. It's as if for the longest, I've only been showing the tip of the iceberg, and Melanie was the only one willing to venture deeper into the unknown. For the first time in my life, I feel like I've found a friend.

At the end of our session, Melanie gives me a hug and tells me I'll be just fine. I believe her, too.