

CATHARSIS

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S TARES

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I am confident. I parade into my first-grade classroom, a Hello Kitty backpack gripped tightly against my shoulders and a genuine smile plastered across my face. My hot pink leggings are matched with a loose-fitting tank top covered in vibrant sunflowers that bobs up and down with each fearless stride. My mother shields her face behind the hallway window in hopes of hiding the tears slowly dripping down the side of her cheek, but she knows that I am ready to take on the world. I am beautiful. I am unique. I am powerful. That is what my parents always told me, at least.

Stares

I am comfortable. It wasn't long before I made friends within my elementary school bubble. These friends weren't the type who just hung out with me at recess because my house was remembered as the best 6th birthday party in Mrs. McGlynn's entire class (the secret is a bounce house, that always wins them over). Instead, they were my friends because we giggled nervously at the back of the classroom when the teacher made a mistake, passed notes about this week's crushes, and stayed up way too late at sleepovers talking about how we wished that the school cafeteria served pizza every day instead of only Fridays. I had found my place with the people I was meant to be with, and nobody could take that away from me. That was until a little twerp approached me at recess, spitting ferocious fire out of his hateful mouth, "what is wrong with your face?!" The words sliced through my skin, leaving a trail of blood dripping down my body as my whole world crumbled between pursed lips. My friends stood in silence. What does he mean? My mom told me I was beautiful. I thought I was unique. I was supposed to be powerful. Have my parents been lying?

Stares

I am puzzled. I stare deeply into the mirror, desperately hoping to get rid of the foreign face glaring back at me. It has been added to my nightly routine that as I lay in bed, I pray to God that He can fix this broken doll to look like all of the others, perfectly pursed lips delicately placed upon sun kissed skin. I used to yearn to be picked out of a crowd first for intense games of kickball or tag. Now I wished nothing more than to blend into the painting, my body spreading outwards until I slowly begin to fade into a sea of hues that you can't tell apart from the others. My mother attempted to soothe me with the idea that He chose me to be different because He knows that of all people, I have the determination and compassion to handle it. I can only imagine the laughter erupting from my classmates when I tell them this the next time they make fun of me.

Stares

I am lost. My brain finally comprehends the fact that what I look like is not normal, but does knowing this reality make it any easier? Defect. The word has become my only definition, throwing me in a box placed in the back of the room to be returned. Defect. It becomes the sole topic at endless doctors' appointments and awkward conversations with family members and close friends. It pierces my ears when it is said aloud, making my face burn with embarrassment and rage. Defect. I retract until the lack of light allows me to fade into eternal darkness; the word can't reach me here. There is no cure for this.

Stares