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Mirror, Mirror on The Wall

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The girl stared at her. How ugly she was - with her big hips, fat face, huge legs. How could she live with herself?

She turned her head away from the mirror, face blank, but her mind full.

She was her body, and her body was ugly. And so, it was simple: she was ugly.

She was caught in a sea of beautiful, skinny girls. They surrounded her, she was trapped, being swept away. Blonde, petite, in crop tops, tight shorts - gorgeous and completely different from her. The mirror appeared in her head. She loathed even the thought of it.

She wrestled on her rashie, desperate to cover as much skin as she could, desperate to cover as much of herself as she could. The other girls lay by the pool and splashed each other with water, carefree and happy in their colourful bikinis. The girl caught one look at herself in the reflection of the water and walked away.

She declined the birthday party invitations as they came. She made the excuse that she was busy when friends asked her if she wanted to hang out. The girl couldn't bear to be seen in public - not like this.

It seemed like there were mirrors on every wall, their sole purpose to torture her. Yet, she was drawn to them, her mind obsessively focused on the girl she saw staring back at her. The girl she hated.

She scrolled through her Instagram page, and then the pages of girls at her school. She scrolled through the pages of models and celebrities, feeling worse with every click. Tears welled in her eyes, as she made the silent vow. Surely this would do something.

And so, she began to choose apples over a burger, and then a salad over a roast, and then water over a salad.

She noticed the difference a few weeks in and was happy. Until she wasn't. She was trapped. Again.

The girl's mother sat on her bed and asked if there was anything going on. The girl opened her mouth, an invisible stream of thoughts circling her, trying to escape, trying to make their way out. She burst into tears and her mother held her, weeping silently at the pain her 13-year-old baby was in.

She sat in the waiting room, her nails creating crescent moons in her palms, and her lips close to bleeding from the bite marks. Her mind was filled with possibilities, worries, anticipation.

The girl's name was called, and she flinched, unclenching her fists and willing herself to place one foot in front of the other.

She sat on the couch, the couch that she hoped would bring her back to herself, the one that didn't need the mirrors. She heard the words, 'body', 'dysmorphia', 'flaws', 'appearance', 'unhealthy'. The words that had dictated her life for the past year. The words that had shoved her in a deep, dark hole.

But then came new words. Words that brought hope. 'Help', 'strategies' and 'recovery'.

The girl was walking on air as she made her way out of the room. There was hope for her, a future for her.

The girl sat on that couch every week, and as time went on, she began to feel lighter, less burdened.

She began to accept the invitations again, easing her way back into the life she had taken for granted.

She stopped scrolling, stopped comparing, stopped checking the mirrors as she walked by.

After months of hard work, the girl decided it was time. She peered into the mirror that had brought her years of pain, expecting for this same pain to come rushing back.

But all she saw was her. Her smiling face, bright with colour; her beautiful body, nourished and healthy; and her identity: no longer found in her flaws and in her skin but in her heart - once broken by pain but now healed with love. (655 words)

Body dysmorphia is a serious mental illness that affects 1 in 50 Australians, most commonly women. It involves an 'obsessive focus on a perceived flaw in appearance', and is caused by low self-esteem, bullying, perfectionism, genetics and anxiety, among other factors.

By creating more awareness for this condition, we can provide more support for those effected, something that is vital in the lives of women with this disorder.