

**Helen Ezelle**

Age: 14, Grade: 8

School Name: Altamont School, Birmingham, AL

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Category: Short Story

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## Empty

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I step on the scale and wait. It's 6 a.m. The numbers flash on the screen; 105 lbs. Not good enough. I step out of the bathroom without looking at myself in the mirror. I already know what I look like. I am such a pig. I crawl back into my cold bed and heap the covers over my body. Still cold. I peer out my window. The sun is creeping out from behind the hills. I can hear the earth waking up around me, but I'm not ready to wake up. My mom is making me food downstairs. I think she is starting to catch on to what's happening. I open my door and walk downstairs, making sure not to step on the creaky floorboards. I slowly make my way to the front door and slip on my tennis shoes. I can hear my mom making a ruckus in the kitchen. Good for her. I guess. She is trying hard. But I don't care. She can't make me eat.

"Desiree! I'm making breakfast. Your favorite, blueberry pancakes!"

One pancake is 175 calories and 24 carbs. It makes me want to throw up. I only ate pancakes when I was fat. I don't want to be that fat again. I walk outside and slip a ketchup packet from my pocket. I tear it open and squeeze the liquid into my mouth. My eyes start to water. The ketchup is sitting in my mouth. I can just feel the glucose coursing through my veins already. I take a deep breath and swallow. I tie my shoes and start to sprint down the road. I look at the homogenous neat and tidy houses around me. The beige suburban jungle fills my vision. A girl pulls out of her driveway on a pink bike. I would say I'm ten pounds lighter than she is. I can also smell the maple syrup she had this morning. Disgusting. Even if I don't have many friends or any friends for that matter, I do know I'm the skinniest person on my street. Except for that one girl. I try to stop thinking about the girl who lives two doors down from me and decide to increase my pace back to a sprint. I don't feel so good, so I sit on the sidewalk.

I look at my watch. 6:15. I stop and take a break. I think about my meal plan for the day. 4 carrot sticks for lunch and a rice cake for dinner. That's about twenty calories for the carrots and thirty-five for the rice cake and then about 5 for the ketchup. That's sixty calories. I'll make my goal then of under 100 calories unless my mom makes me eat something. I finally turn around. My vision seems to come and go. I am freezing. I stumble into my front yard. I open the door and stagger up the stairs. I think my mom is taking a shower because I can hear the water running. I get back into my bed. I make sure to get the electric blanket this time. I feel like my bones cracking and my muscles and being plucked like strings on a violin. The sharp sensation makes me cringe. I can see my legs convulsing. The pain is almost unbearable. I slap myself on the arm. *I have to do this, I need this*, I think to myself. I know I'm slipping once again.

I wake up in a cold sweat. I can still feel the searing pains in my legs. I look around me. The light is streaming out of my curtains. I stumble out of my bed and fall on the floor. Grasping the door handle, I lift myself. My arms are shaking. I limp down the hall and the stairs. A plate of cold eggs is sitting on the table. Instead of eating the eggs, 150 calories, I go into the fridge and grab a bag of carrots. I take one and lift it to my mouth. The flavor is a little bit better than the ketchup but tastes like a mouthful of dirt. I just want to spit it out, but I decide to eat just small nibbles. I take the four carrots upstairs and sit on my bed underneath the comforter. It has been three weeks and five days since I really started to curve my diet. I can't believe I ever ate in the first place. The thought of a full and round belly disgusts me, but at this rate, I'll be the skinniest girl in my school, maybe even in my town. I want to be 80 pounds by the end of the month.

I sit in bed and rate every girl in my grade from skinniest to fattest. I would say I'm a close second or maybe even first. But do I eat the least? Yes. So I win that battle.

I look around my room and see my laptop on my desk and slide out of my bed. I grab my laptop and crawl back underneath my covers. I quickly type in my password and start searching. I don't know what I'm looking for, just

looking for something. At first, I start planning out my calendar for the next week. All of my meals, calorie counts and workout regiments. But then I see a new site. I click on it and a blog pops up. Girls just like me fill the screen. Rib cages sticking out, arms skinny, and thigh gaps. All of them are just like me. I have found people like me. I look at the posts on the page for hours. A lot of them have comments like, “Stay strong, beautiful!” and “Skinny is better”. The website has tips and tricks for eating less, workout regiments that work for burning fat and losing weight. I never knew that so many people lived just like I did. I go to my mirror and compare myself to the other girls’ photos. Even though I’m not the skinniest, I feel like I’m a medium range. But now I’ll have help. Soon I will be 85, then 80, and then 75. That’s my goal. Then I will be happy.

I get back on my laptop and keep scrolling. All I can see is my reflection on the screen and the support from people just like me. After about three hours of scrolling, I happen upon a link to a chatroom. I join. I watch as the usernames pop up on the screen

“Hey I’m Kylie, I am 13, 5”1 and I weigh 114 pounds. I want to get to 100 then 90 by my birthday. I am so fat and ugly. Can someone coach me?”

“I am 130 lbs and 5”4. I am so ugly and need to get thin quick. I hate my body.”

“If anyone needs help I can coach. Just text or email me!”

I click on the email link. I start writing my plea.

“Hi, I am Desiree Myers and I am 115 lbs. I am 5”4 and need to lose weight. I am already restricting my diet and exercising. What else can I do?”

I press the send button and wait. I stare at the screen until I see a little speech-bubble pop up.

*Hey Desiree, what I like to do when I’m feeling like I’m out of options is cut. It helps keep my mind off of food! You’re not alone!*

*Xoxo,*

*Your coach*

I go down the steps and grab the kitchen knives. I stumble back up the steps, losing my breath. This should help. I go into the bathroom and hold up my wrist. I start cutting. The blood is like war paint, and it trips on the tile. I keep cutting. *I am not alone.* I look in the mirror and everything goes black.