

"Obsession"

Liz Bushman

I pull the dress up a little higher-- strapless, it just barely holds on (though I'm sure my family inheritance of a larger than average chest helps immensely), and I know that I will have to periodically step into a corner and yank it up. I flick gold glitter off my fingers, and look critically in the mirror. Dress: check. Hair: blow-dried and straight with a slight curl-- but too much. I pull a little back and secure it with a hair band. Check! Makeup: a little more mascara and I'm done. I'm already wearing more than I usually do (I usually wear none), but the effect isn't that bad. I've still got a few red spots, but everyone's got those.

I swish from side to side, turning, looking at as many angles as I can. Mom got me fresh flowers to put in my hair, so those are still to come, but she always does it perfectly. Shoes must be put on, too, but I won't see them in the mirror, which is only waist-up.

I'm getting ready for my senior prom. My school is small, and while everyone already knows what I look like in my customary loose t-shirt and jeans (much more comfortable than the skinny jeans and skintight layered tops everyone else wears), I do like to look nice everyone is a while. Besides, there is always my date; who, though I am falling out of love with him, is still a good friend. I wouldn't want to disappoint.

I step out of the bathroom to go to mom for a last look over. She's flipping through her drawers to find me the jewelry she got earlier at the department store, and comes up with a few small boxes and a triumphant smile.

The change is immediate; she looks at me, a critical look enters her eyes, and she makes a sound suspiciously like disappointment. She frowns and pinches the fabric of the size 18 dress at the waist, then touches my slight double chin. Her face twists into an attempt at a sort of cheerful "Oh well," and she sighs at me. The smug excitement of looking my best high in my heart disintegrates into a heap of ashes that smolder in shame in the pit of my stomach.

"You look good!" she says with strained cheer, and hands me the jewelry. "Go put these on. Your friends will be here in

a few minutes." She pats my bottom, the familiar "go along" move she's used ever since I could remember, and walks behind me as I make my way hastily to the bathroom again.

I drop the boxes on the counter, jewelry forgotten; though I pretend otherwise, I am furtively looking myself over again. No more than I was this morning, no less than I had been for the past year-- it was still the beautiful girl with the delicate face and the gleaming hair, the perfect makeup and the near-perfect fitting dress-- but now I could see the flaws. I had a waist that was offset by broad hips and large breasts, but it was too large. Look at it from the side-- no hourglass figure there! The double chin-- how could I ever go out in public with that? Why, look down, and suddenly there's just a big, fat face.

I stop cold at that, the yellow light painting my reflection in a garish parody of what it was five minutes ago. What am I doing? When had I started to care this much? No, I think grimly. No. I will not fall into that trap. I know better than to start thinking about diets, I tell myself. It's true you could stand to lose a few pounds, but you will *not* fret about your weight. Mom has done this to you for years (*even when you were the same height four years ago and thirty pounds less, way under the overweight line*)-- no need to worry-- you've been working on eating less and eating healthier, exercising more-- you have more muscle than you did a year ago, and that weighs more than fat-- *you still look great*--

I put the jewelry on with hands that tremble just a little, and I remind myself over and over that the less-than-celebrity rounding will not cost me the battle. I know that confidence is everything; that as long as I treat myself no less than usual, no one else will, either. I *do* look fine, I remind myself, and defiantly look at my face again to prove it, daring the fear that is yawning in a dark hole in the back of my mind to come out and play.

Jewelry in place, I slip on my shoes, ready to go pack everything I'd need for the night into my tiny, accessorized handbag. I stride out of the bathroom and flick off the lights, shoring up my shaken inner confidence to withstand the might of the image-driven gossip-girls and fire back with a brazen volley of devil-may-care attitude.

The mirror grows larger in the dark room as I leave, and,

despite my high-held chin, the black gleam gives rise to the quiet inner voice that tells me I only stand straight so that I look slimmer.

Your overlord has spoken. Obey her!