



Welcome to *UGLY*.

I wanted to make this zine for a simple reason: Beauty gets space. Ugliness does not.

Ugliness is a constant part of our lives, taking many forms: Your lover leaves you. You pick a fight with your best friend. Your classmate gets cancer. You get a zit on prom night. You look in the mirror and cry. But we push it aside because ugliness is not allowed to take up space. We aren't supposed to talk about being ugly. We aren't supposed to be ugly.

When I expressed frustration to a friend about trying to get submissions for this zine, he suggested that I open the theme to beauty and ugliness. "Not everyone wants to talk about being ugly," he said. "Writing about being ugly means looking into parts of yourself that you might not like, and putting it out for the world to see. Not everyone is comfortable doing that. Maybe people would find it easier to write about beauty." But I quickly rebuked this idea — Because, as I told him, beauty already has space. Beauty already gets celebrated. Beauty gets written about, beauty is dreamt about, beauty is on peoples' lips at all times. It isn't hard to talk about beauty; and if you find it hard, you can consult the myriad works of art that focus on it. Where do we turn when we need to talk about ugliness?

It is rare that I get to speak about ugliness; but when I do, it is immensely therapeutic. Recently I was sitting with some friends, talking about the ways in which society has made us feel that beauty is paramount but that our beauty is eternally lacking. Acknowledging our ugliness and how often we wrestle with it reminded me, again, how crucial it is for narratives of ugliness to be more accessible and common. They help us sort out how we feel, help us get a better sense of how ugliness impacts us and where ugliness fits -- and does not fit -- in our lives. And eventually, maybe, we can get comfortable with that.

My hope for this collection of art is to bring these narratives out in the open — to make more space in our conversations and minds to consider ugliness. I hope they do this for you.

xoxoxoxo
M.

UGLY

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“To Put Out A Fire”

Sixth grade. Binging chocolate chip, gouda cheese, cinnamon flakes. Orange juice spilled down my cheeks like the Bonneville Dam in bloom.

A year ago I played Super Mario 64, wore glasses, called myself Hermione Granger; now, here I am, gauging how much sloppy mocha cream I can slap on my face before looking like a stuck-up Bratz doll, cocoa lips and all.

It's matte, without a glimmer, and cold as plastic, smooth as white silk. White silk, what I want to be; white silk, the pale girls strutting at school, harmonized symphony in double-entendre, boys in clutch easier than a pocket-watch ticking time through the hour.

Neutrogena, Herbal Essences line up neatly up and down shiny, silver racks. Plunging to insanity, I rub liquid metal in curly locks, pulling my roots with every tug. In flames, each spiral is flattened into a board, reminiscent of my personality, sexuality, everything about me.

A year ago, I was gonna' work at Nintendo, making crazy-ass videogames for Indian kids waiting for their own Hot Wheels, lunatic battlefield sidekicks, maniac adventure stories in distant realms.

Sephora, MAC from Lil' Mama and Avril Lavigne. Soft melodies under my breath, from days I practiced violin under starry nights with best friends and orchestral audience. Four strings still resonate, deep inside where I can't hear, only feel.

Dripping clear, poisonous fumes; cancerous vibes rummaging through eyelashes, running down teary, crimson cheeks. Fish scales on battered lips, sick from bites and chewing anxiously at the dawn of him, walking down dimly-lit halls.

This is the only way, I think. Painting eyelids like crushed canvasses under my creaky bed, the walls are closing in. They are closing in, trapping me in this cage because if I don't escape soon I'll be stuck here forever, and I'll be doing this lousy junk 'til I'm a hundred and fifty.

Scars on skinny cuts, holes from the surface. Natural doesn't exist in this world, 'cause we were born to be pretty. Razor-sharp in exhalation, I breathe carbon dioxide: there's no oxygen in dying fire.

My mother takes one look, bows her head in disgrace.

For a moment, there is a glimpse to the future: a coffee-colored woman, blithe with sheer ecstasy, cradling comfort in arms stronger than redwood trees. Velvet ash over shoulders, she's perched dear and close to a lovely brown lady, smiling ruby, peering slightly, shyly, nervously.

And there is a daughter, frail as feathers. Eyes glittering in fiery, dark hues, caramel, chocolate, auburn, wild amber, whisked away in dancing sunlight beams far above.

To change her would be a tragedy, a tragedy beyond catastrophe.

“write drunk, edit sober”

I'm not going to start out by saying, “I haven't written in so long” because you know I haven't, and I don't want to waste space by talking about how I haven't done so.

School just started.

It's still shit.

Phantogram is still a band.

Coffee is still delicious.

My hair is still a mess.

Last time I was here, I was thinking about marriage and honeymoons. I had long, dark hair. I always had my nails painted, my lunch prepared, my classwork ready to hand in and my life was neatly organized into compartments in my brain.

Now, I'm here with my third coffee of the day. My eyeliner is going on day three and it's bleeding into the bags under my eyes. I have eleven tattoos, and no goals, hopes, or aspirations for the future. My hair isn't done, my nails are bitten down to the nub, and I keep tapping my black boots against the chair across from me because I am anxious about the future.

I have nothing planned out, and I have no idea where I'm headed next. I don't have any relationships that I wish to follow me into the future, and I don't have any neatness in my life what so ever.

It's the most relaxing, frustrating, calming, and alarming thought in my head right now.

My laptop doesn't have a cover anymore, and in some way, that is the best way to explain my life right now.

Last fall, I was prepared, protected, and pampered.

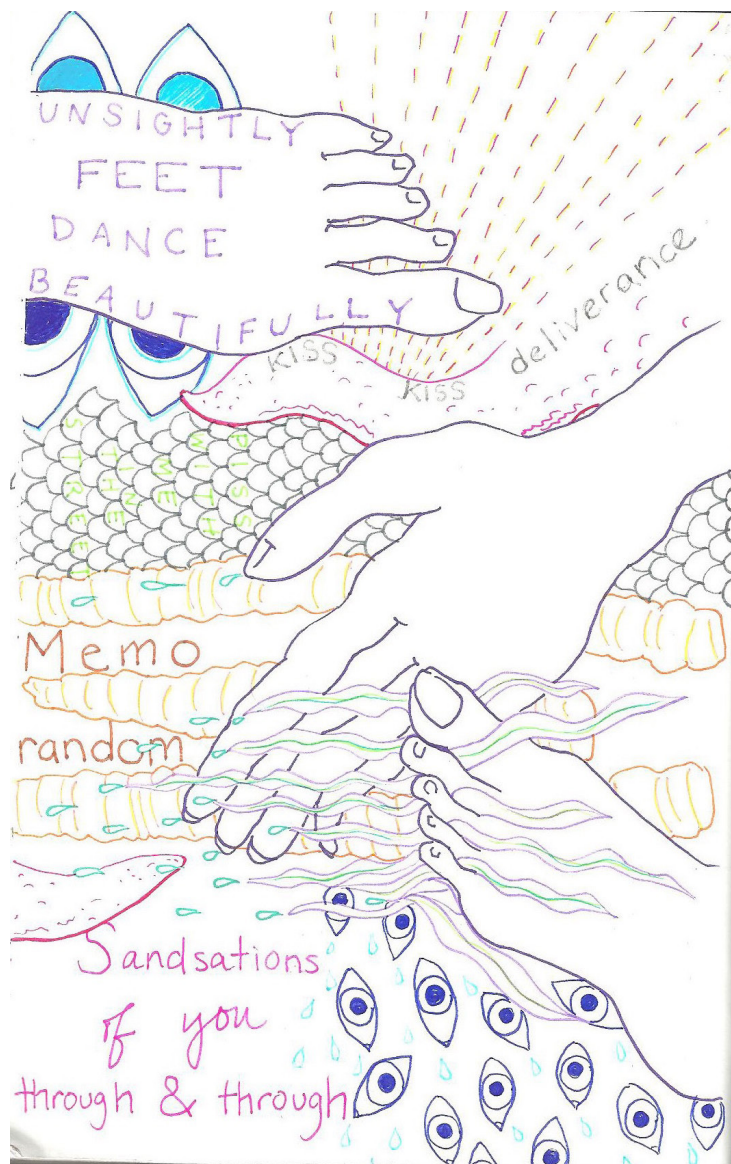
Now I am vulnerable, naked, and cold.

I've been at school for not even a week and it already feels like I've been here forever.

My coffee is cold now.

My hair is still a mess.

I'm not listening to Phantogram that much anymore.



“thoughts on my eating disorder”

it's much quieter
 now,
 no longer demands to be thought
 because my mouth
 has memorized it's commands

“Ugly Thoughts from an Unexpectedly Warm Winter”

— Lots of what-could-have-been thinking. As a rule, the ugliest form of thought to torment the brain at rest.

— If I connect-the-dots with the moles on my torso, it sketches out a frighteningly vivid portrait of L. Ron Hubbard. Instead of watching scary movies, my girlfriend and I startle ourselves with this activity.

— Going to the gym more because my mother and my boss say I'm too skinny.

— When staring into bright light, or scrunching our noses to keep glasses in place, the men in my family make an awful face. It's a rough expression, a mug more appropriate for feeling heartburn and smelling garbage at the same time: nose scrunched up, too much gums, a brow of consternation. My brothers and I call it The Dad Face, because of its most seasoned practitioner. I don't believe my father knows we call it The Dad Face.

— I killed a rat at work for being ugly. Doc Martens 1 — Rattus norvegicus 0. (Not really a thought, but it was gross).

— My grandmother is dying and I keep forgetting to call her.

— If I can grow a beard before going bald, everything will be fine.

— The worst part is she's up late at night and is charming on the phone, unlike many grandmothers.

— I think that subbing out my fake tooth for a gold one would make me uglier in a worldly, mysterious way. Especially if I lied about the event. Something more exotic than walking into a glass door.

— No, the worst part is that this has happened before. Seven years ago, my uncle received a grim diagnosis, a rapid decline. As a teenager, I put off visiting him and then he was gone.

— With each visit home, I've wanted to bring a nice camera to her house. At the kitchen table, she sits on a wobbly piano stool — the Irish Catholic have long preferred discomfort. Smoke pours up from an ashtray placed on the day's paper, wafting up to a chandelier made of fruit. She sits at the table with her white hair, matriarch to the family, confidante to anyone who enters the always-unlocked door. But I haven't done it. She hates cameras and I'm afraid it will acknowledge that the piano stool will be empty next winter.

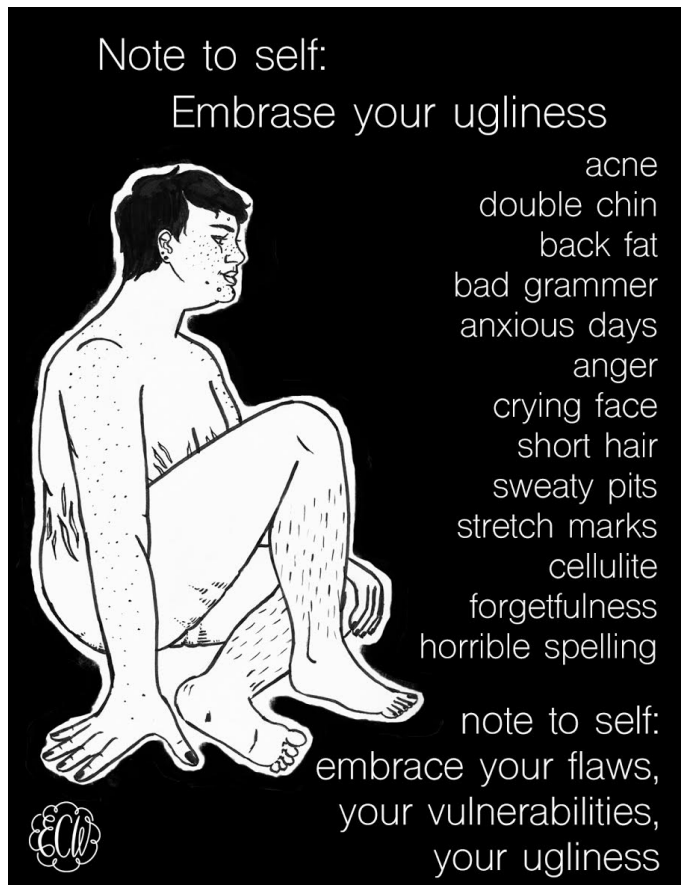
— My dog is very ugly and I love her to death for it.

Lies Told to Strangers at Bars About My Scar

- I got stabbed.
- I had a cancerous skin thing removed because I loved the beach too much.
- Bullet fragment - I didn't live in a great neighborhood in college
- Car accident in high school, severed a vocal cord (therefore answering the voice question and the scar question)
- Drug Cartel put a cigarette out on me when I taught sex ed in Limón

The truth of The Scar is obviously less exciting than the drug cartel. The Scar is from a plastic surgeon who put a cauterizer on my chest instead of an instrument tray during breast reduction surgery. He realized a mistake had been made when he smelled burning flesh, and threw some stitches in before finishing the surgery I had wanted since I was 14.

The Scar is a keloid one, red, raised and ugly. It's only slightly right of the center of my chest, two inches below my collarbone and very visible in approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of my wardrobe. The Scar used to dictate so many more clothing choices and dominate so many of my self-deprecating thoughts but now that it's been 3 years, I hardly see it anymore.



But other people see it.

My patients, shopkeepers, vague acquaintances stare and ask-

"This may be none of my business.." Its not.

"I have to know.." Do you?

"I'm sorry to be so invasive.. " Are you really?

I smile blandly at patients, defer others to collagen and keloid scar information. Nicaraguan women would cluck their tongues, "que fea la cicatriz" and I would feign gringa misunderstanding. In situations where the truth is unavoidable, the indignation about a poor 21 year old girl's chest RUINED for life is irritating at best. How DARE that surgeon put such an UGLY scar? Im dying to tell someone to fuck off about it, that the sight of it doesn't bother me, that I'd really rather everyone stop commenting on such a superficial problem on my body and focus on greater problems in the world like global warming and the fact that I'll probably never see Van Morrison play Sweet Thing. I don't think that would go over really well though, so I usually keep my mouth shut.

You always wanted to do this. It was the perfect time. The first time you found freedom in the way you looked was here. You walked into the bank. Banco de Chile. You needed to exchange money. A little girl looked you in the eye, pointed, yelled, "Mommy! Mommy! Look how white she is!" You laughed because it was true and because you had always wanted to hide and because here, you couldn't. You already stood out everywhere you went, why not? It's only hair dye. People do this all the time and don't need to talk about it. But for you it felt big. Really big. A physical act of rebellion that would show you'd changed in these months. You would return home with a physical alteration that would serve as an outward symbol of your inward growth. A big Fuck You to the self you'd been before you left. The self you hated.

Your friend asked the cool girl with the fire engine red hair in her art class where she buys her dye. Turned out you couldn't just buy hair dye in drug stores in Chile. Art class girl gave a few names of markets. You went to those markets and picked out the right shade of purple and the right strength of bleach. Your friend said she would help you, that it would look amazing. You put the supplies on the shelf in your closet and waited for the right time. Months passed, you put it off. Soon you would have to go back to your town to work your desk job, give eager high school seniors tours of your school, live your real life. On the last day you were in Chile, you put the dye in a bag and put it under a bench by the beach. Maybe someone would find it and have the courage you didn't. This would just be one more thing you almost did. A person you almost were.

'my body is slowly whittling away at every edge. and i'm having this strange experience with it. it feels so temporary. our bodies are all temporary states of being. we are always grasping for something better, prettier, more this way or that, but it will all be temporary until it dies.

i am going to lose a lot of weight, i think. but it will all be temporary until i die. in the same vein, no one knows how long i would stay thin, or how long it would take it me to gain some or all weight back. no one knows how long i will longer care what my appearance is.

enough to pay attention to it. how long it will take it look old. to gain scars. to have children which stretch it all out.

i should start to see my body as the temple of my creation, but i haven't yet.'

"IAMA GARBAGE - COLLECTIVELY A NOUN"

i want to write a poem titled:
make love to me on chocha beach
because that's gross
and people might laugh
or get mad at me
i will laugh

part of any great love
is a lot of swallowing rite
swallow your anger,
swallow your sadness,
swallow your correcting
swallow your mother's cow-eyes,
swallow your friends' liquor
swallow what other men whisper
on slanted roofs in Bushwick

i want to dedicate all my verse to you
you are a battlefield constantly
your fat breasts smell like curdled milk,
are mountains for guerrilla groups to climb on
your lips are sandtraps for the enemy
your soft fingertips are wiretapped phones
click...click...click..click...

i want to write a play for the cia
the f-b-i
the n-s-a
the n-w-a
the p-u-t-a
everybody

i am an artist love me love me
part your young lips and love me
girlwomen who break rules are fun
but only for a moment yeah
break rules for a skateboard you cant ride
break rules for a clean white shirt
break rules like you break yr back;
arching it while twerking incessantly
break rules your red lips
scream are necessary

i want to write a book with only one word
but i've worn too many black clothes to find it
excuses are the most disgusting thing
to ever come out of my mouth
i might as well have projectile vomited bilious semen at you
i forgot you like living, your praxis is fucking
and words are only good if i mean them
and then lick them into your ear

i am a garbage though - i am a collective noun
i am legion for i am many
i am what

i am, i want to write

"I'm loud and ugly that's why I get cut off during political discourse"

lady, sheets
in freak of
streets
but-

you suck
pretty
good dick
for a
misandrist
who
practices
witchcraft
who
kills children
who would
leave her
husband
if she
had one
and-

women are
women
and
bitches are
bitches
but
bitches are
always
women
so-

there is
a woman
90 miles
off the
coast of
Florida
escaped
prison
escapes
death
still

there is
a woman
you sprang
out of

there is
a woman
from
another
island
she didn't
come
to kill
she came
to die

there is
a woman
not really
a woman
but he
calls her
that
as he
sweats
above her

there is
a woman
more
dangerous
than
1,000
rioters

there is
a woman
not called
a woman
standing
on a
freezing
street
corner

there is
a woman
smashed
a glass
at
Stonewall

there is
a woman
whose
flesh
encloses
yours

there is
a woman
who sets
rooms
on fire
and silence
follows
when she
speaks

there is
a woman
whose
back breaks
can you
hear it



“Chemotherapy”

I did a six month course of Isotretinoin when I was seventeen. Six months of raw, cracked lips I could peel off in one piece. Six months of cotton swabs covered in vaseline and stuck up my bloody nose. Six months of dry, red eyes, of learning how to use eye drops, of potentially permanently decreased night vision. Six months of mood instability and depression, of crying about nothing, of my family warned about suicide watch. Six months of sun sensitivity and scaly, blotchy rashes that spread in minutes on our trip to Florida. Six months of every other week fasting blood draws, of monitoring the possibility of liver failure. Six months of state mandated birth control and online sex education quizzes to renew your prescription, of warnings about babies born with deformed heads, of each pill in the blister pack guarded by the image of a pregnant woman crossed out.

Isotretinoin can be used to treat cancer - neuroblastoma and leukemia. I didn't have cancer. I had acne. Cystic acne, first thing anybody noticed about me acne. I eagerly traded six months of side effects in exchange for the moment when a boy - my friend, whom I had crushed on forever, who dated other girls but shared music and secrets with me every night - finally wanted to kiss my newly smooth skin.

but the real problem here is that you don't have to ask me/others what you look like. You need to be able to see what you look like because I think you'd be shocked. And you need to trust me. You are skinny and you are unhealthy. The problem here isn't your body. It's your mentality and you're driving yourself completely mad

I think I do see what I look like

You see what you want to see

And that's fucked up because you want to see yourself as ugly

Because you want to hate yourself

This issue isn't your body

Why can't I just be skinny I can't do

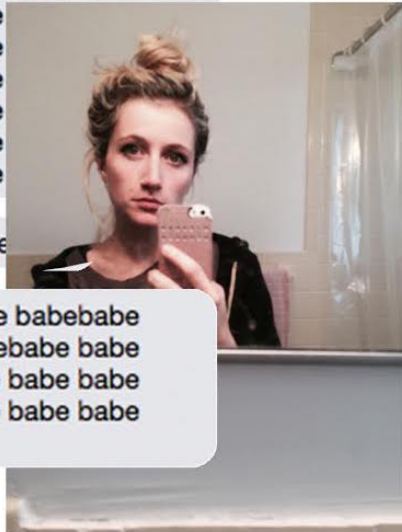
Like I'd rather not live

Ugh you're not fucking listening to me

Ugh you're not fucking listening to me

Ugh you're not fucking listening to me

babe babe babe babe babebabe
babe babe babe babebabe babe
babe babe babebabe babe babe
babebabe babe babe
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babebabe babe babe

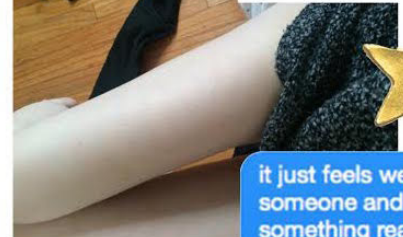


babe babe babe babe

babe babe babe babe babebabe
babe babe babe babebabe babe
babe babe babebabe babe babe
babe babebabe babe babe babe
babe

babc

This isn't how my body is supposed to look... For the first time I think I'm frightened



it just feels weird to be in love with someone and know that there's something really big in the way of you two really being together but at the same time, i think that's true of being with me as well (hi anorexia)

Sufferers of xenomelia feel that one (or more) of their limbs don't belong to them. This is how I feel about my ugliness: that somehow, it is not mine, does not belong to me, but is permanently affixed to my body.

I have put off writing about ugliness because it is hard to write about a constant companion. It would feel like writing about breathing — as soon as I think too much about it, it starts to feel alien. I lose my grip, my rhythm. Ugliness is a hum in my brain I have come to live with.

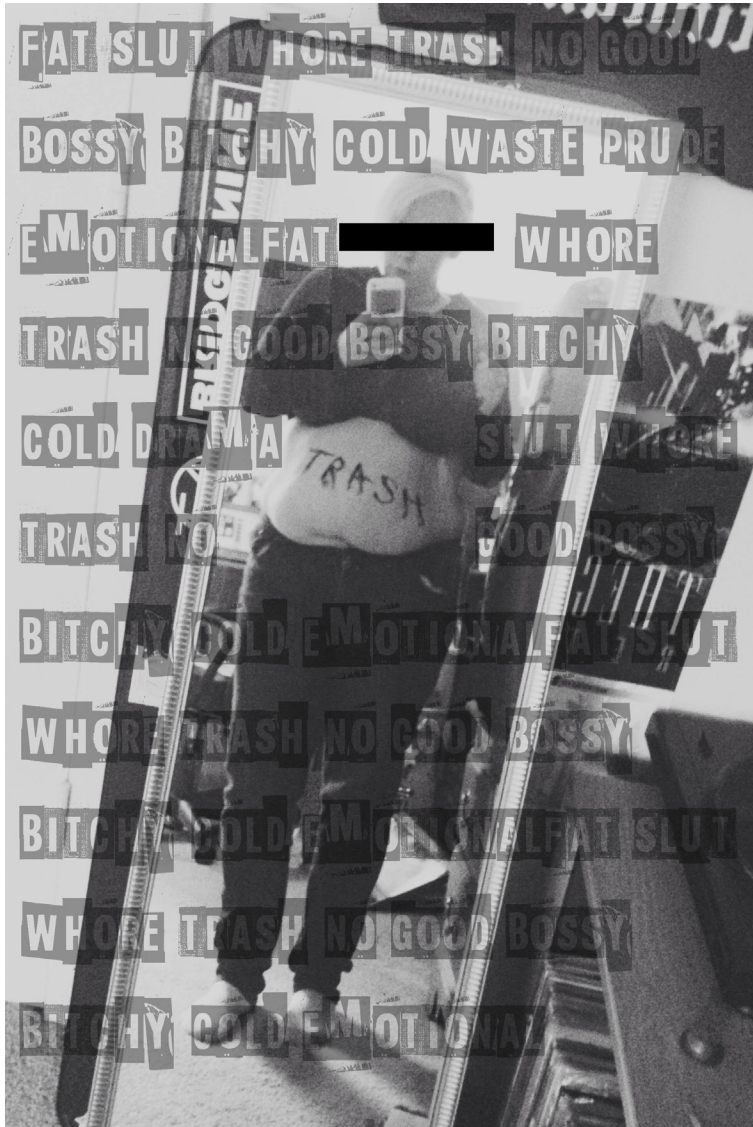
My ugliness makes me wince; the fear of others seeing it in me while I know I can't hide it. Like a scar they pretend to look past, like a difficult-to-pronounce name they stumble over with a faux grace. It is not as if I feel that a particular facet of my appearance makes me ugly, but rather, that ugliness is simply a quality of mine, a constant shortcoming of a goal I must strive towards endlessly like some kind of twisted Sisyphus. It is a weight I carry, and not a particularly heavy one (not as heavy as my temper, my intolerance, my selfishness, all of which shame me in an existential way that ugliness does not), but a weight nonetheless.

My ugliness is a weight, and I reiterate myself not for a lack of self-awareness about the words I have chosen but because for me there is no separating the two, ugliness and weight. It is a toxic culture in which I was raised that taught me to be small, to value smallness in myself, and I have stamped out most of that desire. Now, I speak up, I brag, I wear bright lipstick, I nudge strangers on the metro. But the constant hum drums on. I know that there is an inverse relationship between how much space a woman's body takes up and how well it fulfills womanhood; I know that it is patriarchal nonsense. I have patiently explained this to nearly every woman in my life willing to listen. But it doesn't matter to the worm in my brain who says that I am failing to be beautiful and that being beautiful is of the utmost importance.

My ugliness feels like a foreign limb because I feel entitled to beauty. I have been handed much while precious little has been expected of me, and these are the conditions under which entitlement grows. I certainly do not think I deserve the things that make my life easy (my steadfast lover, my relative intelligence, my supportive family; not to mention my first-world-ness, my whiteness, my comfortable financial situation, all of which conspire in twisted and systematic ways to give me comfort and give others insecurity, or worse) but it does seem strange to me that with this lovely combination I could still, somehow, be so ugly, so unable to force this body into a standard-definition beauty. Unfair, illogical. (And so physical ugliness gets twisted up with this kind of ugly, entitled spirit; they feed each other; the ugliness grows inside and out.)

I don't want to care to this extent; I even find it useless and depressing when other people do. I feel like a liar, wasting precious energy hating my body while preaching to good word of feminist body acceptance to my sisters (both real and figurative). I write and re-write these words and am filled with shame about the idea of putting them out into the world. How much uglier I will seem for admitting how much I care about ugliness. I want to be a good feminist, who accepts her body at its natural size and still exudes some kind of anti-heteronormative sex appeal, who is desired and desirable without giving a thought or a cent to the beauty-industrial complex. The desire to be this "good feminist" coexists inside me alongside the desire to be beautiful. They shout at each other like drunk lovers, tear at each other's throats like wild dogs. The result is that I am exhausted and bitter, trying to wallpaper over the ugliness that doesn't even belong to me.

Some sufferers of xenomelia ask doctors to remove the (foreign) limbs, but I don't know what kind of amputation could excise ugliness; I don't think the worm can be surgically removed. I can fight my desire to be beautiful, and for a while I tried to embrace a form of radical ugliness: dying my hair unnatural colors, forgoing makeup, getting piercings, wearing unfashionable clothes. I tried to be the demon so I wasn't scared. But beauty would find a way to weasel in, telling me the possibilities were still there for me with the white-blonde hair, pale face, septum ring, plain t-shirt — They were there, all right, but just out of reach. So instead of amputating it, I manage it, the way I imagine that those with chronic illness manage. I manage both the ugliness-as-disease and the hating-of-ugliness, both, treating flare-ups as they occur, breathing easily when in remission. My constant companion is not quite a friend, but she's too persistent to see as an enemy, either.



“Pretty/Dirty”

I want to lick moonbeams and cotton candy from the curve of your cheek
Drown in your pure icemelt eyes. Famed women wear your kind of face; their ballet fingers plunge down yachts. Your softness could sink me, strangled in those gold-spun curls.
Next to you I'm an alley-trash spider queen, soot-smudged lips and ripped tights. You drink tea with the sunrise. I ride last night's high. You've bathed in powdered roses; I'm a cocktail belladonna spark. Have you ever seen an insomniac city? My serrated chipped nails could rip your tulle skirt.
I want to wipe my face on you. With your sheets as a washcloth maybe I could feel clean.

“I let my mind build an ugly thing”

I let my mind build an ugly thing
between us
constructing walls that
never existed and never wanted to be
Look at the picture and assure yourself
the thing between us
is kind and pure
soft, tender,
not fragile like you,
in lesser moments,
assume it to be

We have grown into
and away
from each other
Weaving bonds
stretching over miles
with weeks and months
and bodies and minds
and selves
in between

I let my mind build an ugly thing
between us
an arm's length
We fall asleep at the same time
and wake
ready to start,
the same place,
here,
unchanged by the night
the time, the void

Don't let your fear
convince you of this ugly thing
you are here, still
“we are sentimental creatures”
you say
we are,
we are.
But I still fear
the ugly thing

