

An Ordinary Mask

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As I compare my present day persona to my childhood self I believe she would be confused. She would be confused as to how her canorous voice shrunk and how her sparkling eyes had dulled. She would be unnerved to discover that her vibrant personality had been dampened by time. Her brows would furrow as she speculated on the events that would warrant such change and my mind would run in concert as I realized how far apart we've grown to be.

We lived in many communities as our family expanded. My mother's job uprooted our freshly grown settlement and planted a new life for us in a different city. I remember the exhilaration of seeing our new home through the car window, squirming restlessly while waiting to step out. I looked forward to the next home, to the next school, to the new friends. When we moved to Vegas, however, my sentiments changed; I now found myself apprehensive around people. There were very few who looked like me at school, which hadn't bothered me in the past, but now I was completely aware of how "out of place" I was. Aware of my hair, of my skin, of the way I talked, I so desperately wanted to change it all. I wanted my hair straight and my skin fair like everyone around me. What stuck with me even after we left was gym class. My hair was in its natural state, tight coils loose and framing my young face. I called out to my classmate, he turned around and screamed at the sight of my unkempt crown. My 8-year-old mind couldn't understand it then but now when I think back, all I can see are the cold stares gazing upon me.

We arrived at our new home and the past excitement I felt was gone. In its place, there was fear. I feared seeing our new home, I feared seeing my new school, I did not want to meet new friends. It was such an unknown feeling and my mind was deeply confused. It went on the defensive; it put up a mask. It started changing my speech and taste. It trembled at the thought of public speech. It loathed my hair. Through the grades I talked less in an attempt to blend in and the mask did just that. My thoughts were full of unspoken comments slightly gracing my tongue that were held back by my panicked mind. I longed to express myself as I had once done, but the fear was too great. The fear of standing out and taking up too much space, it controlled me and I didn't know how to escape. My ordinary mask became a part of me.

At the end of the decade I accepted it. I accepted the fact that I would never be the girl I once was. I accepted the fact I would never be able to reveal my true self and in the process, I would lose her. I don't remember if I was happy with this, but it was irrelevant now. I achieved my goal and I protected myself. No longer would I be unusual, I would be normal, but I had no way to process this on my own; I broke and shut down. It was visible in my grades, in my energy, in my motivation. I think back and realize, at no point in my life had my bedroom floor been invisible and covered in clothes until then.

I was able to tell my mother about all the pent up anger and sadness I had to process by myself. I told her everything that was hidden behind my mask and trapped in my

thoughts. It was cathartic, energizing even. I remember how thankful I was when she spent days looking for a professional I could talk to, and although I hadn't formed a deep relationship with Him, I thanked God too. I found out a lot about myself through those sessions, things I wouldn't have noticed if I was still shut behind my mask. I peaked out and noticed I wasn't the only one bearing a mask, everyone was. My friends, people I didn't know, they were all full of fear, just like I had been all those years ago. I was not out of place anymore, I was existing and trying to navigate a confusing world like everyone else. My mask fell; I had no use for it anymore.

My mask fell and I rejoiced. I rejoiced for the person I buried and her liberation. That was what it was, liberating. No longer am I confined to the turmoil of a nervous mind, no longer am I out of place. My thoughts are spoken and my hair is loved. Although I'm not the little girl from my memories, I can tell her that her ordinary mask is futile. Who wants to be ordinary?