



# Who's the Fairest of Them All?

Madie Van Pelt

She clenched her belly fat once again, or the little bit of it that was left. She was losing weight, but I could hear her whisper the words, “This isn’t enough” and, “I have to stop eating.” I watched her look at herself through me with disgust. She turned her body to see her stomach from another perspective. A tear ran down her cheek, but it turned into a quiet sob. Soon, tears covered her eyes and cheeks, and mucus glistened from her nose. She let go of her stomach and pulled her shirt back over it like she couldn’t stand the sight of herself anymore. Her fingers wiped away her tears and the smeared black makeup from under her eyes and dried her irritated cheeks. She took a deep breath and turned to the door. The doorknob squeaked when it opened, and she left.

She walked in the next morning, spreading her makeup products across the counter. Her hands shuffled through them until she found the concealer she swore by. She smeared the makeup all over

her face, talking to me as she spread it around. “Ugh, I need more,” she whispered. She picked up a stick and lined her eyes with black, saying, “Hopefully, this will make my eyes pop.” The whole process took hours, making her late to work. Once, she whispered to me that her natural appearance wasn’t acceptable, but I see it every day before she packs on her makeup. She brushed her teeth, cleaning off the foamy toothpaste she accidentally splattered on me with a used towel. After hanging the towel on the hook behind her, she faced me again. She took a good look at herself, took a deep breath in through her nose, and out through her mouth. The doorknob squeaked when it opened, and she left.

She threw her purse down with rage on the counter when she got home. A pen and her lipstick bag peeked from the mouth of her purse. Her black makeup was running from her eyes down to her neck. She put both hands on the counter, shoulder-width apart, hung her head, and started to cry harder and louder. She dropped her elbows to the counter and placed her hands behind her head, holding her hair out of the way, repeating the word, “Why?” “All men are the same,” she finally said.

I remember the day she walked in after he asked her out. Her smile gave her wrinkles in the corners of her eyes, and her face was so bright as she twirled through the doorway. She pulled her phone out of her pocket and played music. She danced for a while, throwing her hands up in the air and screaming the lyrics to all the songs she knew. I’ve never seen her so happy, and I could tell he made her feel less insecure. Now she’s just different.

I could tell it wasn’t the first drink she poured when she walked into the bathroom the next afternoon. Day drinking was not something she did regularly, and the last time she did it was when her mother died. She brought the short glass in one hand into the bathroom along with the bottle of Jameson Irish Whiskey in the

other. She set them down to look through the drawers under the counter. Her hands scrambled through the contents, searching for her makeup remover. She was so distraught over her relationship, she forgot to remove her makeup last night. When she found the it, she poured more than needed on a cotton ball and rubbed her eyes vigorously. She threw the blackened cotton ball into the trash bin and took a swig of the whiskey. She took another, grabbed the bottle, and went to drink somewhere else in the house.

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She didn’t come into the bathroom to see me the next day or the day after that. I couldn’t hear anything other than the occasional weeping from the room at the end of the hall. Seconds after I heard the words, “Oh good Lord!” the door swung open and hit the wall behind it. She didn’t even stop to look at me before her head was hovering over the toilet. Maybe it was all the alcohol, but she vomited before she could reach the toilet, and the smell was more than rancid. She softly held her head with her hand. Her hand slipped from her forehead and went limp to her side. She fell forward onto the seat of the toilet and was unconscious for what felt like forever. Slowly, she woke up. She sat there holding her stomach again. When she looked at the vomit around the seat of the toilet and around the floor, she gagged and quickly got up to escape the the vomit-covered floor. When she got up she held onto the counter for her life and took deep breaths. She blinked, but the dizziness went away when she looked straight at me and started to cry. She knew what had really happened to her.

Twenty-five minutes later, she walked back into the bathroom. She pulled the pregnancy tests out of her purse and struggled to

open the box. With a sudden explosion, two pregnancy tests flew across the counter. She grabbed the test closest to her and sat to take it. I watched her, perched on the edge of the toilet, with a horrified look on her face. She reached towards the counter for another test; same result—positive. She stood slowly to grab her phone from her purse. She was too tired to sob. Her hands trembled as she typed the digits of her ex-boyfriend’s phone number. She paused a moment before putting the phone to her ear and listened to its low-pitched ringing. When he answered, she was silent. “Hello,” he said again. He could tell she had been crying, so he asked her what was wrong. “I’m pregnant,” she said.

I could only hear so much between the yelling over the phone. “I can’t do this!” he shouted and hung up. She held her breath and scrolled through her phone, looking for someone to tell, looking

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for help. She called her mother; she knew she wouldn’t pick up. She put the phone to her ear, curled up against the wall, and sat chewing her fingernails as the voicemail played. Her eyelashes stuck together, her eyes bloodshot from the tears. When the voicemail finished, she stood to her feet and turned towards me. Though her head hung towards the counter, her eyes looked up at me.

She opened the drawer beneath the counter and pulled out her brush. Tightening her grip on the handle, she drew her arm back. The first blow left a large crack, tiny fractures branching out. She paused to look at her face, distorted by the brokenness. Screaming, she hit me again and again until I shattered. •

