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Buying Beauty

- I. She wants everyone to look at her,
And you do.
You make eye contact, and your mouth turns down.
She's much too young, just on the cusp of eleven.
Her eyes rimmed too dark, her lips too severe.
She's shaking the hourglass, willing it to spill faster.
She's so beautiful, her skin unmarred,
Yet the envy in her eyes as she looks at you tells you she doesn't see it that way.
Her mother is waiting in the next aisle over, oblivious to what she has done--
What's so wrong with being young?
- II. You see her next, a more appropriate age,
A sour mood is twisting her face.
She runs her hands over each bottle,
Ghosting over each that exclaims "Full Coverage!"
She sees you looking, her skin turning redder,
Each bump on her face vying for attention.
She wishes she could disappear, in that moment,
She wishes she could think of anything but their scorn.
But you were her once, so instead you smile,
Miraculously, she feels herself return it, and she walks out of the aisle.
- III. His eyes are darting restlessly, praying for no recognition,
His eyes stop wandering, mirthful as he gazes upon rows and rows of color.
Oh no, he's caught now. You've caught him.
His hands are clenching, unclenching. He worries his lip.
He won't look at you, but you don't expect him to, do you?
Your thinking nothing of him being here, but he's thinking of his father.
He's thinking of every slur and harsh word thrown at boys like him--
Boys his father doesn't know are like his own son.
But you know a secret-- a secret you'd like to share with him,
You'd like to tell him what he can never believe--God, he can't breathe!
You'd like to tell him how good he looks on himself-- there's nothing quite as beautiful

as bravery.

- IV. She comes in like a storm, as beautiful and as disastrous.
 Each click of her heels punctuates her very existence,
Click!--Money--Click!--Status--Click!--Allure--
 Her eyeliner is sharp, just like her tongue, and her lips are as rich as she,
 You feel her pull, she is important, she is what everyone here dreams of being.
 But--But--Oh, what's that you see in her eyes?
 You see the desperation, the hunger as her eyes devour the words "anti-aging"
 You feel her pull slacken, and instead you are aware of her eyes on you, you! of all
 people.
 No, not you exactly, but what you embody, youth, youth, youth, slipping through her
 fingers as she desperately looks for a handhold.
- V. Now, shall we talk about you?
 You, so carelessly beautiful, shopping for simple things in a simple store.
 You see them all again, and you feel the pit of something low in your gut.
 The young girl, her eyes dancing and twirling and bleeding as she gazes upon you, you're
 so grown up, don't you know.
 The teenager, her skin a hill she can't seem to climb, a blood-soaked battlefield.
 And yours, look at it now, clean, clear, and perfect. She worships what she could have.
 Him, his eyes flashing with barely contained jealousy. It's all so simple for you, isn't it?
 And her, you will never forget her. Her hands clawing at Father Time's arms, trying to
 twist them behind his back.
- Do you see now? Don't you see just how lucky you are?

Reflection

My poem is addressing a young woman as she encounters different people in a makeup store while she's shopping. Each stanza describes a different person she sees as she moves from aisle to aisle, and each stanza helps reveal each person's insecurities. The theme I was trying to portray in this poem is that of envy, specifically in the form of beauty. Each person the woman encounters is trying to improve some part of themselves, while the woman sees nothing wrong with them. I wanted to show it is often you yourself that judges your appearance, not others.

I also try to employ the use of many questions throughout my poem to empathize the doubt people feel when thinking about themselves. Many people question if they should or shouldn't do something based on what they think people will say. I also used a lot of repetition to symbolize how people sometimes get stuck looking at one piece of themselves that they dislike, instead of focusing on everything that makes them beautiful and unique.

I. To start my poem, I wanted to start with someone that seemed almost out of place at a store dedicated strictly to makeup--a child. I believe that too many young girls want to grow up too fast and I really wanted to bring that subject to the forefront. The girl I used in the poem desperately wants to be rid of her youth and strives to look like the woman whose perspective we see from. I illustrate her hunger for aging in the line "She's shaking the hourglass, willing it to spill faster", symbolizing her forcing time to move faster. I also intended this stanza to be a foil of sorts to my fourth stanza.

II. My second stanza features a teenager with acne prone skin. I wanted to include this character since I feel like acne is one of the major reasons people wear makeup at all. At the end of the stanza I wanted to give the impression that though someone with acne might not like their skin now, it will get better, and that everyone's had acne so it shouldn't be something to be ashamed of. I also tried to keep the lines in this stanza a bit shorter to make it feel as though the girl doesn't have much of a presence, to emphasize the girl's want to disappear. The last line is the longest to show the girl starting to come to terms with the way she looks and the diminishing need to disappear.

III. In the third stanza my goal was to negate a stereotype that makeup is only for women while also bringing to light a social issue. I wanted this stanza to normalize any person, regardless of gender, liking and wearing make up. This stanza was really meant to illustrate acceptance, but also the fear of not being accepted. The longer lines in this stanza are meant to symbolize the boy's panic and anticipation, believing that the woman is going to judge him for being there. The longer lines also symbolize, for me, the woman's sadness, as sadness usually has a sort of dragging feel to it. Her sadness that the boy is fearful of her and what she might think of him helps create this longer stanza.

IV. The fourth stanza is used as a foil to my first stanza, in a way. The focus of the first was a young girl wanted to be older, while this one focuses on a older woman desperately trying to stay young. The difference between the two is that everyone looks at the older woman because she has class and money, while everyone looks at the younger girl because she's vying for attention.

The older woman captivates everyone in the store, but soon they realize she's just like the rest of them, desperate for something that will make her "prettier". I used onomatopoeias to narrow down the attention to just those words, the same way everyone's attention narrowed down to the older woman.

V. In my final stanza, I wanted to bring everything full circle and focus on the woman observing everyone. I used small flashbacks to connect each of the observed people to one common thing--the woman. I used each of the people to be envious of one feature that makes the woman "the ideal": her age, which would be somewhere in her mid-twenties, her gender--which makes her love and use of makeup more "acceptable"--and her skin, which is clear and blemish free. This stanza was really meant to show what is beautiful to one person, can be ugly to another.