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E Block

That Big, Scary Monster We Call Change

I used to think of life as a game. If played strategically, you would come out as the victor. In any other case, you would be fortunate enough to get second, even third place. Take the lottery for instance, only one person wins the big sum. The rest are those who hope and take the leap of faith to try, but are always turned down. It’s like what we learned in biology: if there are two species occupying a shared niche, one would always have an advantage and find a way to thrive, while the other would cease to exist. I believed that I was the organism that would die in the shadow of another. The player who would always come in last place.

I grew up with stereotypical Indian beliefs. I was to be at the top of my class, to pray to God for all that He has given me, to never lie or show too much skin. I was destined to cook and clean for my future family, to be an altruistic mother, sister, daughter, and friend. All of this was expected from me without complaining, to comply with these burdens that only weighed my down. I felt as though I was a bird locked up in a cage instead of one soaring free underneath the endless sky.

In middle school I was picked on for the way I dressed and acted. I had a reputation for being smart, but I was also see as this weird, shy girl who could be easily taken advantage of. The moment I stepped foot into high school, my life began to crumple. I realized that I wasn’t as good looking, as smart, popular, or talented as some of my other peers. I felt like a complete failure and disappointment. I never thought I could be any different and I just had to learn to accept that. I grew up putting myself in a negative light. My outlook of life was that of a glass half full. I could feel the burden of all those expectations I carried on my shoulders. I realized then that it was not only my parents who thrust this weight on me, but I also put all this pressure on myself. I couldn’t handle it. I felt like I was drowning and that it was only a matter of time before my lungs would run out of air.

I began to resent my parents, but more importantly I started to resent myself. I began hate myself for not living up to my expectations, for not being someone my parents were proud of. I would see how my parents were really close with my brother, how they all bonded over sports and chess, even over math. I wanted that, I wanted to feel accepted for who I was, but all I could feel was an empty void. I would spend hours painting and dancing, watching movies and going to the mall. I felt like an outsider in my own family. I felt like I wasn't loved, or at least not as deeply and completely as what my parents felt for my brother. I wasn’t anything special. I wasn’t anything that deserved any attention. I remember those late nights I would crawl up onto my bed and just cry. Sobs would choke me half to death, until sleep slipped me into a drowsy haze. Tears streaked my cheeks from a pain rooted deep within me. No one would ask me if I was okay. I believed that my parents thought that I was either overreacting or they simply didn’t care enough to even acknowledge my pain, so I hid my scars deep under my skin. It was only later that I realized that they didn’t even know.

I’m not particularly talented in any way. I truly believed that I was nothing, that I didn’t matter and had nothing to contribute to society. I remember the overwhelming nauseating sensation that crept its way into my stomach just moments before I took my first steps on stage, during a dance performance. I remember thinking that I was the weak link in the chain, how I was an embarrassment to my dance school. I remember the cry that would escape my mouth after losing competition after competition. I remember days I would explode with anger or say something without thinking, which I knew I would later regret. I was never able to openly express myself and I kept those feelings buried deep beneath my surface, never letting anyone truly see me.

I didn’t know what to do with myself. I needed an escape from reality and books became my poison. It was a drug I couldn’t live without. I would spend hours living vicariously through scientists, wizards, singers, swimmers, or just any old mundane character. I lived, loved, laughed, and cried with them. I felt a connection with the characters of these novels, like they could understand me and I could understand them. I marveled at the fact that when you read, your world would just fade away and you were left with a new reality. Reading taught me a lot about myself. I realized that I was a pushover, a people pleaser. I was ignorant to fact that I had a loving family who only wanted to see me succeed. I realized that I needed to make a change. There is a part of every book you read that will stay with you forever. That part forces you to grow and change as a person. Reading was my therapy, inspiring me to be more open with my thoughts and feelings. It was hard at first, but I learned to confide in my parents. I was surrounded by people who truly supported and cared for me.

I was starting to learn that giving up was not an option and that you have to persevere when times get hard. Dance taught me this lesson of not settling for the least but pushing myself to the limit. During practice I would give it my all. I would force myself to perform solos and the knot in my stomach slowly began to dissipate. My losing streak didn’t matter as much anymore. I realized that I was performing to share my love for dancing, and so what if I messed up? It’s just for the experience of getting up on that stage and proving to myself that I was good. I could fix those mistakes and become a better dancer. I actually began to feel like a winner, even though I knew I wasn’t the best.

I think I’ve always acted as the victim. I would attract the negatives, manipulating every situation onto one of misery. I think that maybe I enjoyed that void of darkness, that feeling of pain, because at least I felt something at all. I refused to leave my comfort zone, my own protected bubble. I was afraid of change, what I couldn’t control. I guess I still am, but I hope one day I won’t be. I can still hear the echo of my mom voice telling to take control of my thoughts and not spiral out of control. I was always very obstinate and I had a tendency to hold a grudge. I’ve been working on that. I realized that I was holding myself back, this was my fatal flaw, my own hamartia. I had already made up my mind that I wouldn’t amount to anything, so it was so surprised when nothing did. By becoming more open minded, I developed a tenacious attitude, ultimately being more successful in anything I did. Dance has molded me into becoming a more resilient person, one who is content with what she has, but also willing to fight for what she wants.

I realized that your GPA, AP, and SAT scores don’t truly matter in the long run. I’m not saying that they aren’t important, which they are, but I have grown to believe that your life can change in an instant and who you are as a person -your personality, what you do for others as well as yourself- will be the only thing that will save you. High school isn’t just a time to immerse yourself in activities for the sake of your college resume, but to find out what you believe and who you want to be. I still believe that yeah, I’m average in every way shape or form, but that’s okay. I don’t have to be the best at everything to be happy. My flaws make me unique and I shouldn’t be ashamed of them. I’ve learnt to own up to my imperfections and I’ve become a better person because of it. I’ve relinquished the demons that were drowning me, those that guarded my scars. Everyone is unique and will make their mark on society, taking the world by storm. I realized that each and everyone of us matters, I matter. The world wouldn’t be the same without us in it. So I guess now I still think of life as a game, one in which there isn’t necessarily one victor. Anyone can become the victor if they truly wanted too and I intend on being just that.

When look at myself now, I no longer see that insecure, mediocre, fear-stricken embodiment of who I was, instead, I see a strong, confident, leader who will someday conquer the world. I am going to initiate a positive change in the world, but my first step will start with me. Who I am now is someone I know my parents would be proud to call their own. I may not fit the stereotypical Indian daughter, but my idiosyncrasies make me who I am and I love that part of myself. I’ve come to understand that it’s never too late to recreate yourself and I intend on doing just that; to become that change I want to see in the world.