

An Introspective Look: Beauty

by Vivienne Miller

I'm told I have long eyelashes for a boy. At first I wasn't sure what to do with this information, but as I grew up and entered high school, I learned to use this physical quality for personal gain. Girls like boys with long eyelashes; they like boys who stand out. I stand out and a lot of girls, understandably, are attracted to me. I have black curly hair which I keep sleek and silky and it compliments my eyelashes rather nicely. I also have Swedish blood running through my veins that make my features even more appealing for some reason unknown to me. In general, I'm pretty "easy on the eyes."

The clouds are white and this lecture is repetitive and there is no way I can pay attention because I'm sitting by a window, looking at the ever-changing sky. I'm thinking about how my teacher could use a few lessons in holding attention, but I am more so thinking about the beauty of the sky in its entirety. It is purely amazing how something so naturally simple can be so breathtaking.

Right now, a fish is swimming in a little bowl waiting for the water to be changed. There is a dog who lays in the backyard, tied up, waiting to be fed. And somewhere, just like me, a plant sits by a window trying to reach closer and closer to the sun, starving for more sunlight. It's common knowledge that living things long for that something that keeps them surviving. Such mundane living things exemplify true beauty. Nature is truly refined and uncomplicated.

Shouldn't *human* nature be the same?

On the contrary, human nature is the exact opposite of simple. It's so complex that I can barely stand it sometimes, I drive myself insane. I rarely see the beauty in human existence, but I do see it. I tend to drown myself by over analyzing the horrors and monstrosities of our world and it leads me down paths no human being has any business going down. Humans can be so many things, it is truly beautiful. But it's also so messy and hideous at the same time.

The bell rings and I'm thankful that I was able to finish my internal monologue or else I would be annoyed all day. It's the smallest things that get to me. I see the debate classmates I eat lunch with waiting for me in the hallway. I approach them with a smile.

"Hey guys."

"Hey Peter!" "What's up, Peter?" "Yo!" "How was class, Peter?"

It's nice to get this response whenever I join a body of people. "My teacher gave us a very boring lecture today so I just ended up doodling in my notepad." I laughed, they followed suit, and we headed to one of picnic tables in the courtyard.

I mindlessly converse with them about something or another and when I have the opportunity, I sink into the amenity of my mind.

I know I am beautiful inside and out, it's just a fact. I need to be watered, I need to be fed, I need the sun so badly, it disgusts me. I crave praise and applause. I am the way I am because I need people to like me and I utterly hate that about myself. I will never be satisfied until I am the only one who is an exotic flower in a field of weeds. My feelings impair me so greatly that there is constantly a war going on inside of my mind. I am beautiful; I am disgusting. I am selfless; I am the most selfish person in existence. I am amazing; I will never be good enough. I am worth it; I am worthless.

“Peter, do you want to go bowling with us tonight?”

No, I'd rather stay home and watch Netflix by myself. “Oh, that sounds like a lot of fun! I have plans with my parents tonight, though, I'm sorry.”

“Awh. You'll come with us next time we go, right?”

Probably not. “Definitely.”

I deal with all of this on a daily basis. I thoughtlessly interact with people to make sure that I get their approval, but it's not genuinely me. I do whatever I do to make sure people like me because I am incapable of liking myself. It's strange, though, that I can believe in beauty so indepthly and even see it in myself but not truly accept myself. Everything about me is extraordinary and ridiculous. People will agree, but they will agree for the wrong reasons.

It's almost painful that I have to spend most of my life at school. Though I am constantly reassured of what a wonderful person I am, this is the place where I feel like I don't belong the most. I am surrounded by people who give me what I seek and I could never feel more fake. I put on this mask to get recognition and I get it. It makes me momentarily happy but I always remember that it's not really me who they all admire, it's an image I have to create every morning. Being surrounded by so many people and the constant weight of my instinctive lies makes me feel so alone and in result I feel pathetically weak. I prefer not to talk about the result of feeling weakness.

Days pass by and by and everything is so predictable and common. Every minute of every waking moment, I am stuck in the middle of the war raging in my mind and the longer it continues, the more I feel like a lost and pointless soul.

I will always think this way, and when I woke up one morning to the sensation of my mother poking my cheek, I had no way of predicting that everything I believed about humanity and about myself would start to change.

It was nacho day at school. Honestly, it's as if every life-changing experience occurs on nacho day. My abstract self-portrait was voted Best Artwork in Advanced Art III. It's these types of things that set me on edge. Why would a system that singles someone out as better than everyone else even exist? It's disgusting. I can't complain, though. I was happy that I stood above the rest, even though I didn't feel good about being happy. This wasn't what changed my life, though. Today was the day I saw you for the first time.

I get bored with people who try to fit in, so that's probably why I was so enthralled by you at first sight. You were sitting alone on the lawn a few feet away from the kids who play original songs on their guitars during their lunch period and who weasel their way out of assignments. You picked at the grass and stared at the clouds as if you thought they were as interesting as I thought they were today. My classmates called me to join them and I was glad for them since I was very tempted to throw a rock at you just to get your attention.

"Do you know that person, Peter?"

I couldn't say no since that would've lead them to asking why I was looking at you and my answer for that question is probably not very impressive. "I thought they looked like someone from my middle school."

Since then, I couldn't get you off of my mind. Was there really someone my age who thought the clouds were as interesting as I do? Not only did you seem to think they were interesting, you didn't seem to care what people thought about you for thinking whatever beautiful thought you were thinking. That in itself won me over, that in itself is one of the most beautiful things in the entire existence of ever. For a few hours that night, I condemned myself for jumping to conclusions and thinking so meticulously and passionately about you.

You sat in the same spot every day. Even when it rained, you wore a rain coat and brought an umbrella, fully prepared. I wanted to get your attention so badly, I soon forgot about everybody else who was just like me: looking for acceptance and praise. I even forgot those qualities in myself. I was obsessed with a person I didn't know anything about, someone who also didn't know anything about me. I had a quaint solution. During my first period class, I decided I was going to sit next to you during lunch.

"Peter, are you not going to eat with us today?"

Nope, I've got bigger fish to fry. "I have a book to read for my English class so I'm going to go read it over there on the lawn. I'll see you in class!"

"Okay, bye!"

You flinched when I dropped my messenger bag to the ground, and you gave me a confused expression, as if you couldn't comprehend why someone would possibly want to sit next to you. Not only did I want to sit next to you, I wanted to talk to you about the way nature creates such contrasting and vibrant colors and, out of all of those colors, if you had a favorite one. Of course I didn't say anything like that at all. All I said was "ah" as I fished out my book out from the bottom of my bag.

I read a biography of Amadeus Mozart and waited for you to say something, but you never did. I never have to make the first move when it comes to talking to someone I'm mildly interested in. But there I was, more than mildly interested in you, and not receiving the kind of response I was used to. You began to make me nervous.

Sitting next to you during our lunch period was as far as my plan went, so I decided to just go along with that. I would sit next to you everyday and I convinced myself you had no interest in me. I didn't have the courage to say anything to you because of this. I sat next to you anyway because it was simply exhilarating watching the sky with you.

Even though I didn't know anything about you, I had this fantastical idea that you appreciated beauty the way I did. You were so content with just looking at the clouds and playing with the grass, it was hard to believe you might think nature isn't elegant. You gave me a sense of hope that maybe I wasn't the only one who had an appreciation towards beauty and had somewhat of a heart.

I forgot to bring a biography of an iconic artist the day you first addressed me because I was too busy that morning trying to make sure that my teeth looked white, but not too white. I couldn't pretend to read and occasionally glance over at you every so often, so I sat there staring at the lines at my hands, too nervous to look anywhere else. I wanted to look at you and watch your eyes shift from cloud to cloud, but the idea of doing made me feel like a huge creep.

Your voice was quite. "Peter, isn't it?"

You knew my name. I decided to sit next to you all those times because I could practically write a novel about you, and here you sat, existing, being beautiful, and knowing my name. I almost fainted.

"Uh," I cleared my throat and sat up a little straighter. I was in no way prepared to talk to you. "Yes. How do you know?"

"I saw the piece you did for you art class being showcased and you were walking by when I was looking at it. My friend pointed you out."

You were looking at my artwork. I instantly became self conscious. "Your friend?" My voice, thankfully, didn't give me away.

"Yeah, Samantha..." You finally looked straight at me when you said her name. "Samantha Ortega, I think?"

Your brown eyes were so stunningly standard, it was hard not to lean closer to get a better look. "Oh, yeah, she's been in my debate classes all throughout high school. I've been friends with her, it's weird that we've never met before." I was trying not to sound excited to finally be talking to you, though I still wondered if you were able to tell.

You wrapped your arms around your legs and rested your chin on your knees, your short dirty brown hair falling into your eyes. "I just moved here a month ago."

Oh. That made sense as to why I've never seen you before. "Oh."

“So,” You looked at me again, almost smiling. “Why have you been sitting by me these past weeks?”

I could practically feel my blood freeze. I was so embarrassed, it was like I got caught going through your closet instead of sitting next to you during lunch. “Well, I saw you sitting here and you looked content and I thought if I did the same thing I would be content, too.” I am very convinced that I am smoother when I’m under pressure than in any other situation.

You laughed. I guess it’s pretty obvious how you affected me, so I don’t have to give a detailed explanation of how I felt every time you had a reaction to something I did. Like I said earlier, I would end up writing a novel.

“Do you use lines like that on all the girls?” You looked me in the eye and smiled.

“Not really...” I was growing more and more insecure throughout the conversation. I’m not really sure why, but I definitely didn’t imagine you being so straightforward. And honestly, I didn’t use those kinds of lines on girls. I would just smile kindly and compliment them, that usually did the trick. But even though I was feeling a little uneasy, there was no way I would stopped talking to you.

“Sure.”

“What’s your name?” I finally asked the question that was on my mind since I first saw you. I was actually pretty proud of myself.

I vividly remember the look you gave me. Your eyes were scanning my entire being as if you were judging whether or not to tell me your name. I was caught off guard by this response and I grew so nervous. What if you decided not to tell me your name? Would that mean we wouldn’t be able to talk again?

The significance of letting someone know your name is kind of a beautiful thing, now that I think about it. We go through our entire lives specifically known as this one title. Whenever I hear your name, a flood of emotions and memories come rushing forward and I have a sense that I truly know you. I get all that by knowing and hearing your name, and if you never told me your name, I would never have this beautiful feeling.

Ever since that day, we’ve been friends. I continued to talk to all my other classmates to keep my balance of self-satisfaction and self-loathing, though I just wanted to spend all my time with you.

“Do you want to come over play video games or something?” It was getting easier and easier to talk to you the more we hung out, but I still wasn’t able to be as smooth as I was with everybody else.

“Yeah, that sounds fun. I’ll meet you by the front entrance after our last class.” You stood up and picked up your backpack. “I’m going to call my dad and tell him I’m going to go over to your place, then I’m going to head to class.” You looked at me for a small moment and smiled. “I’ll see you after school, Peter.”

“See ya.” See ya, I said. Who says that? Apparently I do when I’m around you. Instead of having internal monologues whenever someone talks to me, my brain goes completely blank and all I do is listen to you. It’s nice, but I’m not used to it and I always have to say the first thing that comes to mind.

Your friends think you’re weird and that has never made sense to me. In my eyes, everyone is weird and crazy and you’re the only sane, normal person in my life. You’re so fun and comfortable to be around. I still have the same thoughts looming in the darkest corner of my subconscious, but I don’t have time for them when I’m with you. When I’m with you, I’m able to cover it up. It really is fantastic

It’s summer vacation and we’ve become so close. I’ve gotten to know your personality and you’ve gotten to know mine and you, indeed, do think nature is beautiful. I know this for a fact since we go star gazing every weekend. We’d sit on blankets in the bed you father’s truck and just experience how it felt to be surrounded by true artistry.

“What’s your favorite thing about the sky?”

“Well,” You didn’t look at me when you responded. “I like how we’re not really looking at a thing called the sky, we’re actually looking at this galaxy, and I think it’s interesting how there’s so much we don’t see and yet it’s still beautiful seeing it from this point of view.” You briefly glance at me. “If that makes sense. What about you?”

“It’s amazing, really. How something that is a part of the background of our life can change so much. There is an unlimited amount of colors the sky can hold and it’s so impressive that it can go to puke pink to jet black. It’s just... It’s-” I cut myself off. I don’t have a word for what it is.

“Can’t think of a word?” You asked.

“No.”

“Beautiful?” I could hear the smirk in your voice.

“Don’t make fun of me.” I smiled.

“But that’s the only source of entertainment for me since we’re together all the time.” You say it so seriously, I can’t help but laugh. You laugh with me and it’s so comfortable and it feels so right.

“Peter.” Your voice is always so quiet when my name is all that you say.

“Hm?” I kept my gaze at the vast sea of trillions of suns.

“Do you think there’s a point to life?”

No. “No.”

I felt you gaze on my face and I could feel my face heat up, so I didn't look back at you. I'm not used to being so open yet.

"Why do you keep on going through life, then?"

Your bluntness usually throws me off and I can't handle it properly. I don't know, why does anyone keep going through life if there's no point? Because I want to be there for you and my family, I guess. "I have no idea."

I held my breath as I looked at you and you were looking at me with so much admiration and no shame at all, it was as if you thought I was as beautiful as the stars, maybe even more beautiful. It was only then when I was looking into your brown eyes, finally as close as I wanted to be, did I realize you could possibly have romantic feelings for me. Of course I had no way of one hundred percent knowing, that is, until you held my hand.

We were still looking at each other instead of the stars when I felt your finger on mine. It's so hard to put into words the feelings that I felt. I can say, though, the surge of energy and yearning that spread throughout my whole body was enough to tell me that you would forever be the best to satisfy my need to feel important and experience true beauty.

You said, "Don't kill yourself."

I wasn't thinking about it. "I won't."

Even though I think you are utterly impeccable, you get to me. Not in the good way. You're so blunt and sure of yourself, two things I can't even imagine being. At first I found myself comparing you to me and that was very self-destructive. Once I got over that, your perfection started to get very annoying. You were too sure of yourself and it was as if you purposely rubbed the fact that I was so unstable and indecisive in my face. It hurt and I never told you before because I knew it was all in my head.

I know you care about me, you're very expressive about it. I just have this problem where I can't believe that I could possibly have good qualities. In general, I'm very happy with myself and I can easily see why you fell for me. But in the back of my mind, under all the positive reassurance, I will never be capable of believing that anyone I actually care about will possibly care about me as much as I care about them. And to say that you don't care about me as much as I care about you probably hurts you so much. And that makes me feel incredibly worse.

I get on these trains of thought that just pull me deeper and deeper into despair and I thought that it was you who put me on these tracks. In reality, you gave me ideas and it was me who corrupted them and turned those ideas into those tracks. It wasn't until you were clinging to me at your step-mom's lake house did I finally realize that our relationship didn't revolve around me.

"You're always saying things and I can never understand!" You cried into your hands and moved away

when I tried to touch your shoulder. “You say you want to be around me all of the time but whenever we’re together, you get so quiet and unsure and it makes me feel terrible.”

“I just.. I don’t know how to communicate with you. You’re so intimidating, I don’t want to mess up when I’m with you.” I felt bad for not crying with you, but I just couldn’t. I was too confused and too frustrated.

“That’s not an excuse.” You looked at me with an expression that completely ripped my heart out. “You say you like me and you tell me how interesting I am but how long is that going to last? How long are you going to be interested in me before you throw me out like an old, boring toy?”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I didn’t want to believe that you thought that I was just merely interested in you like some kind of puzzle. I caused you this pain because I couldn’t properly express myself around you because I’m too nervous around you. I never would’ve guessed that it could affect you this way. “You are not a toy. You’re the person I decided confide in. You’re the only one who knows what goes on in my head and you read me and you might not understand, but you don’t have to.”

I reached for your hand and I was so unbelievably relieved when you let me hold it. “You make sense to me, you’re so beautiful and so right. And I’m this terrible person who can’t express anything and who bottles his emotions up. I’m a narcissistic idiot who doesn’t deserve you.”

“I know you think that way about yourself. You need to realize that I don’t see you the way you see yourself, the same way you don’t see me the way I see myself. I don’t think I’m as interesting and beautiful the way you go on and on about, but I accept what you say anyway because I know you truly believe it. I truly believe that you’re an amazing person who I want to be around all the time. I want to be able to make you happy, Peter. I want to be able to help you get through the terrible situations you put yourself through.”

You’re so straightforward, it almost hurt, but I finally understood. You hugged me and everything was okay. I finally saw that you weren’t this perfect, simple image I casted upon you and I was more than okay with that.

How hard I’ve made it for you, I think. To put up with my mess and care for me as much as I care for you, you really are unbreakable. You know me inside and out and you help me. That is beautiful and you are beautiful. You can’t fully understand the daily suffering I go through but you help me through it the most.

It was senior skip day yesterday and we were two of the seven seniors who decided to stay on campus. We spent two class periods on the lawn just admiring the beauty of the world and our lives. It was when I was talking about how breathtaking it was that something so brown could create something so green when you cut me off and asked something that lead me to an epiphany.

“What do you like about me, Peter?”

I had to keep myself from laughing out loud. You're so blunt. I was in such a good mood I just wanted to soak up your simplicity. Sometimes I can hardly believe that you and I get along so nicely, since you are so candid and I am so ridiculous. You catch me off guard most of the time, but it's really funny when I predict what you're going to say when we're having conversations. I can't stand your unshaken sincerity sometimes, but it's definitely one of the top five things I like about you.

When it comes to our relationship, I know I can rely on you above anybody else and I can always have your support in whatever decisions I make, unless they're dangerous or self-destructive of course. I don't believe I will ever be able to be the person I want to be, I will always crave the acceptance of the people who surround me, I will always try to make myself stand out, and I don't think I'm capable of truly accepting myself. I don't know why I'm this way, but I've learned to live with it. You help me keep extreme actions from taking place and you're able to briefly make me believe that I am, in fact, good enough. You do so much for me and I think I've said enough about it.

I gave you a silly answer yesterday and I think it's only right if I give you a proper one. Besides that you're undeniably frank, you are also a many number of things. I can go on and on about the qualities you possess that are alluring, I could write a novel. But instead of a novel, I just wrote this short story, I hope that's OK.

When it comes down to you, there are so many things, so many details that always grab my attention. Like your small stutter whenever you order our meals in drive thru. I also like how you ask if you should dye your hair when you look at a mirror and the smile you smile when I say, "No, but I'll probably like it anyway." I like the expression you make when you're listening to me talk about one pointless thing or another. The way you can't hold my gaze whenever we're talking about mundane things. How you pout and look at the sky when you don't know what to say. That look of relief you get whenever you realize that I don't know exactly what you're talking about. And I can't get enough of that look you give me every time you say or do something you know is going to make me beam.

You're interested in the things that I'm interested in though we express it completely differently. When we first starting talking, I was intrigued by you because I thought you were the most bland person I've ever met. Now I see how wrong I was.

In my mind, everything is so intricate and too reasonable. I could be making things so much easier for myself if I just went along with life in a more candor fashion. Like you. You are such a positive person in my life, I can hardly believe we actually had the off-chance of meeting.

I didn't realize it until you asked me that question. That fish, that dog, and that plant seem so beautifully simple but in reality there is a whole galaxy inside every single living thing that is causing them to want their water changed, to get their food bowl filled up, and to do everything in their power to get closer to the sun. It's not only what they need to survive, it's why they need to survive. To be created wanting to survive is the most beautiful thing I can ever imagine and this fact is just hitting me now as I write this.

As long as I've been in this world, I've been under the impression that I haven't been really living, only surviving. But now that I realize that I've been trying to survive for no reason in particular is a life-

changing revelation. To want to survive for nothing besides the nature of wanting to survive is reason enough, for me anyway, to want to survive. It's so beautiful and arduously simple I want to cry and scream and eminently kiss you.

I realized this within a few short seconds and it was hard not to laugh out loud with pure joy because this all came from you asking what it was that I liked about you. I felt the only appropriate answer after this sudden understanding was, "Your face, I guess. What do you like about me?"

"Your eyelashes."

There it was. You had that insightful expression since you knew you said something that would make me warm inside. In our time together, you've learned that just about everyone adored my eyelashes and you knew how proud I was of them. You teased me so much the day we skipped school to go see your dad's favorite death metal band and so my only option was to tease you right back with your own father in my corner. I instantly thought of that day and how stunningly adventurous it had been and because you knew I would think of this made your answer the best answer you could've possibly given.

I might've been over thinking in everything just now but that's how I am. And you know and accept that. You are so willing to go along with my ridiculousness (and my ranting, my mood swings, my constant ability of using an impressive amount of curse words, and my tendency to turn every case of spilt milk into an epic poem about the beauty of death) and because of that I am inevitably lead to to the question that can conceivably change the soul purpose of my unified reality: can this possibly be, dare I say it, love? Just the concept of love is emotionally exhausting.

Since seeing beauty is a big part of who I am, I used to experience many sleepless nights trying to figure out what was the most beautiful thing. In the end, it really came down to three things. To answer an immortal, universal question, to me beauty is complexity encased in something ordinary. Nature fits into that category, and you undeniably fit into that category too. Alas, there has always been something that I've always overlooked, and that something is me. Not me as a whole, but my thoughts and my corresponding feelings.

Throughout the entirety of my life, I've lived through a plethora of evolving emotions. I have absolutely hated these emotions, but it isn't the emotions themselves; what's beautiful is that I hold inside me a never ending history of what it means to be me. It's beautiful that I'm able to realize and appreciate this. I'm finally able to decisively view myself as incredible.