

ONE

Paunches and Folds.

Paunches and folds were all I could see whenever I looked in a mirror. The folds below my chin. My paunch. The folds close to my back and every nook and cranny of my body. I honestly didn't like the sight of them and felt bad whenever I saw them. Like one of my crushes said, "It is a displeasing sight."

I sighed for the umpteenth time within three hours, as I scrolled through my friend's (turned model) IG page. She was body goal. She was the only one among the both of us, which got what we both dreamt of - the perfect body and fame. I gave my phone power button a gentle push, switching it off as I stood up from my bed. It wasn't too late to start losing some weight. I began jogging on a spot, but the hard tiles of my room began hurting the under of my feet, which made me stop and start jogging about instead. I forgot to set a timer and before I knew it, I was panting and gave up. My heart was beating really fast and, my legs became so weak and shivery. So, I fell on my bed and checked the time, I didn't spend up to five minutes. It wasn't long before I started sweating, still panting. "You're a lazy goat," I whispered to myself. I sighed as I adjusted myself on my bed, shutting my eyes tightly when my head was rightly on my pillow. My mind gave my body no rest, as my awful life began to play in my head. I sighed out into my room, gradually opening my eyes to stare at the roof of my room. I spent almost three minutes staring blankly at the white ceiling of my room. It was like I was gone for a couple of minutes, thinking of arrantly nothing. But, the rumble in my stomach, brought me back to realization, making me get down from my bed and headed for the refrigerator.

Staying in a one-man room, had its advantages and numerous disadvantages. I love my space, fair enough. But, the more I stayed in my space, the worse it began to become for me. It made it harder for me to relate with people, always wanting to be alone, because of the excessive peace and quiet that came with it. My room was pretty large, large enough for a four-man room. I sometimes loved it, but also sometimes despised it. My friend since elementary school - Tolani, used to come to my hostel every now and then but she became too busy with her modelling business that, she couldn't even visit once in three months. I only saw her occasionally in class, and sometimes occasions. We also lost contact. It wasn't like we didn't have each other's number anymore, but rather because she became too busy and I became less social, letting paranoia and self-shaming take over me. She wasn't messaging, and I wasn't also. So, to an extent, we had no friendship left anymore.

I fetched a medium sized ice-cream from my room small sized fridge and a plastic cylinder of Lays from my shelf. I sat down with wide open legs on my bed as I began to dive in, picking my phone from where I dropped it. The very moment I unlocked it, I went straight to my Netflix app, whispering to myself, "You had enough for today dear." I smiled to myself when the Netflix logo popped up and the movie started. It was one of the most enjoyable moments of my life.

The serenity of my room, my self-space, no shaming, enough sugar, and a movie.

TWO

Body goal.

Body goal was all I ever thought of. In the morning when I woke up, it was on my mind. When I had my breakfast, it was on my mind. Even when I took a shit, I still thought about it. When I slept, I slept to it; and when I woke, I woke to it.

It was the last day of my two weeks holiday, and I still hadn't lost weight. I promised myself before the two weeks that, I was going to lose weight, but I couldn't achieve it. I jumped down my bed with a sigh, walking straight to my wardrobe in shaky steps as I got my bra top and put it on. I picked my phone from where it was charging close to my reading table. I set my phone timer to thirty minutes and began to jog on a spot. When the spot began to hurt, I began to jog around. It wasn't up to twenty minutes before I became tired and felt the urge to stop. But, I used the timer to keep pushing myself as I kept on jogging. "Just a little more," I whispered to myself every now and then.

The very instant it hit thirty minutes and my timer began to beep, I fell to the floor as my knees had weakened. It was almost as if I couldn't walk anymore. My entire body was shivering. "Beauty is pain," I tried to assure myself as I laid on the floor panting.

It really was pain.

THREE

Social Anxiety.

Social anxiety was something I unwillingly possessed. Most people presumed me proud and arrogant but, most of the time I simply didn't know what to say to people and was super scared I probably had an annoying voice. I felt I was too fat and would inconvenience a lot of people with my presence, and probably my ugly face. So, I mostly stayed on my own and wished people wouldn't talk to me.

But, people would always talk to a person no matter what. Jon was the only person who really spoke to me and paid me attention. It was strange how he managed to be friends with me when he was so handsome and had lots of girls rushing him. I love talking to him and spending time with him but, his friendliness and friendship still scared me all the time. At times, he'd try to talk me into talking to people and making more friends but, the last time I tried, I was asked 'What are you doing with all those extra fat?' It still rang in my head like it was only yesterday. Sentences like that, made me hate school and class, but each day I push hard and move on.

I've had people directly tell me I had an annoying voice, and how uncomfortable I make them feel with my presence. But, words are words, I still try to move on. And, Jon was always of help.

FOUR

Depression.

Depression was never really something I could overcome. I was fighting it quite alright but, overcoming it was as good as impossible. The fact I stayed alone, contributed greatly to it. It was like, every time I closed my eyes, all I could see was darkness and me being pulled into it. The bright colors of my room and in my room was supposed to keep me brightened and calm. But, they rather take me to a place of lonesomeness.

Jon comes to my hostel once in a while but, he's the outing type, while I'm more of an indoor person. We weren't the same in almost all. The days he didn't come, I spent thinking of my life and being sad. There were days I tried to encourage myself. Put on a movie I loved, and supply myself with enough sweet things. But, it didn't take long before I start becoming conscious of my folds again and feeling the urge to go hide under something. I start comparing myself to the movies cast. Even their so-called fat people weren't even as big as I was. I would groan to myself a lot, until I gave up on the movie and cover myself with my duvet, trying to hide my displeasing body as I cried.

Days like that were my worse.

FIVE

Friends.

Friends come and go, they're like the season. They never really last, no matter their promises. Some of them become total strangers, that when they see you on the road, they pass like they've never met you in their entire life; while some still try to wave or at least say hi. But, there are very few - hardly any, who aren't like the season and actually stay. They're the ones who pull through with you, try to understand you, try to help, and a lot more.

Jon was that friend who actually stayed, for me. I hardly felt the urge of needing new friends. He was mostly there for me, and never let me feel different or left out. But, he felt I needed more friends and kept urging me to go out. My answers were usually "No". But, I one day reconsidered and decided to follow him. He was happy because, he thought he finally convinced me, not knowing I was tired of hating myself and wanted to give the world a chance. It was a gathering of his friends, who also came with their friends. Jon didn't want to leave me and kept hanging around me, even when I had reassured him that I was okay and survive on my own. It took me several words, reassurance, and cajoling to finally get him off my back. I stayed in a corner of the room that was being used, hoping no one was going to come talk to me. But, people really don't know how to read a situation. "Hi," a dark, slim, and pretty girl said to me, not long after Jon left. Not wanting to be rude, I replied her and we got chatty. She was a really nice girl and didn't drop gross or mean comments about me to me. But, it wasn't too long before she revealed she wanted Jon's number. I smiled at her, but couldn't stop beating myself over the fact that I believed I could make new friends and be social. All people ever wanted from me, is to use me. Unfortunately for me, she wasn't the only one who came for his number, some other girls came for it. I didn't mind being his DUFF (Designated Ugly Fat Friend) so, I gave every single one of them.

"Simpletons," a grumpy voice came from my right, making me turn hastily. It was another slim and dark beauty. I instantly presumed she also wanted Jon's number, so I started saying it for her, hoping she was going to start typing. But, she kept on looking at me strange, like I was silly or something. The look made me stop my recitation as she said, "Who gives a damn about some person I don't know number?" And for the first time in years, I met someone who simply wasn't like 'the rest'.

I tried to show her Jon but, she still didn't care. Funny enough, we both began to talk. She was the kind of girl who looked tough, talked toughly, but was very sweet and soft on the inside. For many seconds, I thought she was simply pulling strings and was still going to use me. But, she didn't for once, use me or even tried to use me. She simply interacted with me and flowed with me. We had a lot in common and yet a lot of differences. We chatted animatedly for hours, that I didn't know

when it became time for Jon and me to leave. I was glad I met her, but also didn't know how to tell her in words. We simply said our goodbyes, without exchanging number.

I didn't stress about her number because I knew, happiness for me was a onetime thing.

SIX

Friends.

Friends are low-key easy to make but new friends, are really hard to find and make. The real ones are mostly broken and hurt that, they're too scared to open up to people once more and try to survive on their own. Life is messed up.

Jon mostly had lots of reasons to wait back in school after lectures, but with my inability to socialize and make friends, I either rushed to my hostel or find a comfy place to stay till Jon was free and ready. It was a usual day that day, but I decided to wait for Jon rather than simply leave. I went to stay in my usual secluded place. It was a class that was mostly vacant. But, that day, someone was in the class. The person was way too focused on their phone that, they didn't notice when I entered. But, it didn't take me more than a second to recognize who the person was. It was the dark skinned girl from the get-together I followed Jon too. It was almost a month since I saw her at the party. I instantly became confused. I didn't know if I was simply going to sit down and act like I didn't know her or have never met her, or I should simply greet her and then act like we had never spoken before. It was during my internal conflict that she lifted her head up, she squinted her eyes for a while before her lips spread to a wide smile. "I know you," she said excitedly as she adjusted herself, so she was facing my direction fully then she continued, "You're the interesting girl from the party." It was one of the most awkward moments of my life. I didn't know what to say to her in return, so I stood there like a fool with a wide smile. She simply shook her head slightly with a smile as she tapped the space beside her and said, "Come seat." I was almost about to rebel, but she was super nice and addictive, so I obeyed her.

Her company was like no other. She made me comfortable that, when Jon arrived, I didn't want to go with him. But unlike the other time, we both exchanged numbers and names. Her name was Toye. She was being strange and unexpected but, anytime I sat down to think about it and decided I was going to keep my distance, I found myself still willing to hang out with her.

She wasn't really the social media kind of person. So, we called a lot and hung out a lot. In simple words, she was amazing and so different. I almost forgot how fat I was whenever I was with her.

SEVEN

Desperation.

Desperation drives anyone into anything.

Since workout wasn't working out for me, I started looking for faster and easier means. I bought lots of slimming teas, different kinds. But, none of them worked for me. I got pills also. I got creams too. There was almost nothing I didn't try.

My desperation only drove me deep into depression. It was so painful that, there was nothing I could do that could help me rapidly lose weight. On some days, I'd look into my room mirror and body shame myself badly. I'd hurt my feelings and make myself feel so terrible and sad; while on some days, I won't agree to look in the mirror at all, I'd rather lay in my bed and mind body-shame myself. It became so terrible and horrible I began to pop more slimming pills and drink more slimming teas until I fell seriously ill.

I was rushed to the hospital by Toye, who - luckily for me - came to visit me that day. According to my doctor, I was in coma and close to death. If she had wasted any more time, I'd have lost my life.

EIGHT

Family.

No matter what anyone faces, there is always a set of people who will forever care and those people are family. Family might not only be one's parents and siblings, but friends can also be one's family.

I spent a couple of days alone in my ward before visiting was allowed. My parents were seriously worried and sad, they were hurt. My mom cried and begged me to please not leave her alone in the world. I couldn't help but cry also, I felt really bad and terrible. They tried to reassure me that I was beautiful the way I was and didn't need to lose some weight. That, my beauty was my fat. I tried hard to listen to them and reassure myself also, but their words didn't really sink in. It was like my mind was made-up. My next means was planned, set, and ready. I was going to go for surgery and my dad was going to pay. I didn't tell them my plan, but I had it deep in my mind.

Set and ready.

NINE

Beauty.

Nobody can ever deny in this life that, they never think of their outward beauty. Even if it isn't always, but once in a while. My problem was that, I thought about mine all the time.

It took Toye a while before she finally came to visit me. She was very mad at me and what I had done. "Beauty comes differently," she said, "Everyone has what makes them beautiful. And you, my dear, are one of the most beautiful people I know if only the entire universe had your heart, the world would be a better place. And besides my dear, some of this beauty stuff gets tiring. It sometimes gets disgusting. It sometimes makes me question myself. I've been harassed multiple times because of my face and body. I've also been shamed, for nothing at all. Some call me slut, while some don't just like me, they think I'm proud because I'm pretty. It's even hard to know who truly care for you and, who truly loves you. I've been in relationships that, all the person wanted to do was show their friends that I'm their girlfriend; while some of my friends or rather ex-friends simply wanted to be acquainted with a pretty face, they didn't really care. It's me of the greatest vanity ever, and it is very frustrating. Until you came along dear, I never really met anyone who actually simply liked me for me, most of them wanted something. So dear, be proud of who you are. No one should make you feel ashamed of the person you are. They should be ashamed instead. The only advice I can give you is that, eat healthy rather. It's better to be healthy. That's all that matter, your health." Her words sank deep that, it rendered me speechless and made me start rethinking things. Toye made me realize that, it was how long a person knows you that shows how big their love is for you. But, their words and actions. Friendship isn't built on years, but rather on love and care.

Jon also came to visit. He was also hurt and told me I was beautiful the way I was, and didn't need to change anything about myself. He encouraged me and tried to make me feel better.

It was that moment I realized, some people don't care about your looks, all they care about is your heart. And the ones who truly care would come and stay.

TEN

Self-love.

Self-love is hard but awesome.

It took me a lot of time to finally concur that, I was a plus size and no one could change that. I began eating healthy and caring for my health - still eating junks though, but not like before. I didn't lose much weight, but I was looking healthy and fresh. Toye was so proud of me. So were Jon and my parents. It was really amazing to finally fall in love with my body and also enjoy the love of family and friends.

I also realized that my **PAUNCH AND FOLDS** didn't define me or make me who I am, but my heart and ways. It took me a long time to realize it all, but I was glad I did realize it. Even if the shaming didn't entirely stop, my self-assurance helped me stay strong and ignore them.

Self-acceptance, love, and assurance are the best thing ever. And one should possess them all.