Myckenzie Downs

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Learning, Knowing, Being- First Year Seminar

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Mirror

My life is stable; I have never left my cozy corner in the basement of my home in North Bend, Ohio. I am a listener, and a watcher; I do not speak but my words are powerful. My job is to reflect the truth. I show you exactly what outsiders will see. How can one see a lie when I am imbedded in honesty? For years I have watched people come, grow and leave this house but I will always stay. I am you. I am your brother, your sister, your friend and your enemy. I give people confidence just as easy as I tear it down. Why do they take it so seriously? Why can they not see what is in them rather than what I can see?

James is a man that I watched start as a child. He moved into this house years ago. As a kid he would hardly notice me unless it was to make faces at himself, he would pull his cheeks apart and stick his tongue out or look at his nose for an extended period of time. I brought him joy, it was as though we were friends. He would run past me quickly on Sunday mornings holding his cleats and soccer ball while his older brothers chased behind him. Levi and Michael were significantly older than James and did not share his innocence or his light-hearted sense of adventure. I have seen Levi and Michael come home with the most awful battle wounds from all of their sports, they were strong inside and out and had no reason to ever worry. I have watched them take the prettiest girls on dates and seen their most impressive grades. But James was different. He was playful and sensitive but he was not extraordinary at anything other than being himself; a far fetch from his beloved brothers.

One thing I respected about James was his incredible relationships. His mother was his best friend. They loved each other dearly. His dad and brothers were so inspirational to James; he wanted to be them and therefore respected them. They had a very close knit family that had an unbreakable bond held together by the love they had for one another. James also surrounded himself with friends. They came from all backgrounds and all shapes and sizes but they were important to him. They could count on him and he made sure they were always welcomed at his home. These relationships held a special place in his heart.

James, just like everyone else, got older. And as he grew so did his admiration for me. He would suddenly dance with me, sing to me and ask my opinion on every outfit, pair of shoes, and hairstyle that he tried. He practiced talking to girls and giving speeches. He would even confide in me. Our relationship grew and grew. I noticed that James was trying to be the reflection of Levi and Michael, but I knew that wasn’t who he was meant to be. He wore similar clothing, played the same sports, and even started talking like his brothers. How could he strip himself of all his uniqueness? This however was a short lived fantasy as he soon came to the realization that he wasn’t his older brothers, as much as he would like to have been. With this realization he cared less and less about what he was wearing and what he looked like. He strayed away from his brother’s hobbies and found his own; he loved to wrestle. But he did not have the typical wrestling physique; he was tall and overweight and lacked the muscle that he needed. He worked very hard to get in shape and I saw some difference but James looked at me and saw a lie. He was never pleased with himself.

Months went by and James began to drastically change. He was 16 now; still a child in most eyes but to him he was ready to break the walls of childhood because being an adult would hold far less judgement and pain. He came home from school one day with anger in his eyes but anger was just on the surface; there was a bottomless pain that was causing a radical change when he looked at me. I could see that his deep dark brown eyes held deep dark secrets. He would tell his parents, siblings and friends that he was just fine but when he looked at me he told me the truth, knowing I would never break his trust. I am after all the most honest being that there is. Where he used to look at me and smile, he now seems disgusted. What am I doing wrong? I am still portraying his tall, chubby teenage figure; he can still see his messy hair and goofy smile. Why is he frustrated with me? Why is he avoiding me? I still see his loving innocence beaming through his acne. I still feel his kindness when he speaks with his mother. I still see his childlike admiration of his older brothers. Is he just upset with the reflection of his surface self? That is something I cannot change, he can only accept it.

I have seen many kids grow and go through the awkward teenage years but never like James. It was as though James gave so much love to those around him that he didn’t have any left for himself. He was breaking down before my eyes and there was nothing I could do about it. Every time he looked at me his eyes seemed to get darker and darker and his body was thinner and thinner. His face lost its once healthy plump shape and was replaced by a skin tight skeleton. Resentment encompassed him. He resented his parents, his brothers, his friends, and possibly the most devastating resentment came from within; he began to hate himself. He was losing himself.

Piles of uneaten food were piled behind me and James began to look sickly. He smiled less, talked less, and looked at me much more. But instead of making faces or singing into a hairbrush he yelled at me. He blamed me for all of his problems. He blamed me for taking away his family and friends. He blamed me for never finding love and never being able to wrestle. He blamed me for the scars on his wrist and the pain in his heart. But what did I do? I did my job. I showed nothing but the truth and left it to his own interpretations. Is his pain stemming from me? Is his downfall my fault? I desperately wish he could see his inner reflection the way I have but there is nothing I can do about it. I have insight but I have no words. The kind, sweet boy that grew up in front of my frame is still within him, but this boy was losing hold of James almost as fast as I was.

“James, please come with us.”

“No mom, I want to stay here. I will be okay. Promise,” James managed to smile through his chapped lips as his mother grabbed her last bag before heading on a family vacation with the boys already packed in the car. She shouted her I love yous, embraced him in the longest hug and was on her way out the door knowing her son would never come with them no matter what she said.

As soon as the door was completely shut and the car was pulled out of the driveway he broke down. I could hear him crying, sobbing really. It sounded like he was scrambling around in the kitchen in search of something important. With a pen and paper in one hand and a bottle in the other he marched downstairs to my little nook in the corner and sat down directly in front of me. With tears streaming down his face he began to write and as he wrote he grew more and more upset. Then he sealed the letter with a kiss and looked up.

“I’m sorry.” He whispered. James stared at me for what seemed like ages. His unrecognizable body was slumped over as though he was too tired to carry any more weight. I knew in this moment that he had let his surface-self get the best of him. James was gone it was only a sickly image of sadness and loss. James threw his head back and flung it forward to me. Starting in the middle and shattering all over the floor, our bodies laid in a pool of our own self resentment and self-pity.