

“To thine own self be true,” wrote Shakespeare 400 years ago. People will like me as I am, my Mom insisted. How could they not? So *just be yourself*.

She stood behind me in the bathroom mirror, brushing out my freshly sprayed hair. Growing up in the 80s gives you some kind of supernatural styling power, I’d swear on it. Apparently, you have to separate the curls after using a hot iron. I wouldn’t know, the smell of it makes my stomach churn. Soon enough, invisible bobby pins and a giant hairclip covered in glass crystals supported a mad construct of an updo on the back of my head. Turning in the mirror, I could see the blue and gold moon pinning the bun in place. The little bit of my hair left out of it framed my freshly made-up face. I did that myself, probably overdoing the glitter. I like being shiny. This is something she has conceded to. *If you look like a Barbie, the boys will think you’re fake*. Mom slips the diamond dust lipgloss into my hands.

“In case you need to re-apply,” she says with a wink.

Mom helps me into my dress. The first time I saw myself in it, I cried in the department store dressing room. The silver-blue fabric rippled into a beautiful rich purple as I moved. A captured aurora borealis. I couldn’t stop spinning. Something in me felt so light. I closed my eyes and it seemed like I would take off into the sky. It has pockets! It didn’t make me want to crawl out of my skin! Both things were so rare to find in dresses.

The lining was smooth and softer than my bedsheets. It flowed over my body, sitting just above my ankles. An asymmetrical slit ran up one side, for dramatic posing. We had it altered a little, for my height. Mom wanted the seamstress to slide the neckline down and

cut the slit higher. I looked the older woman in the eye. *Let me have this, please let me have one thing the way I want it.* She seemed to understand, but Mom thought I was a prude.

She ties the back and leans into me. With the shoes, I'm a little taller than her.

"Pretty as a picture, boo."

I've always been told we look alike. I only saw it then, in that moment, remembering she wore blue to senior prom too.

The doorbell rang. He was here.

His parents and mine both insisted on pictures. I grabbed his hand, trying not to stab him with my glossy nails. Both of our palms were sweaty with nerves. He gave me the corsage. I didn't know what to do with it. Mom helped. We stayed hand in hand down the porch stairs into the night. I couldn't bear to look at the cameras, at their faces. Every time I did, there was a sharp stab of shame. Of guilt.

Is it lying if you don't say a thing?

When we got in the car, Reese dropped my hand like it was burning him. I knew he didn't mean to be rude. I felt the same way. I reached into my pocket and put on my ring. Mom told me not to wear it, the black steel clashes with my gold jewelry. I've told her it's my lucky ring, she told me to take it off for pictures anyway. She wouldn't get it if I told her.

Reese is not my boyfriend. He never was. We both found it easier to stop correcting people. To smile and nod. The thought of kissing him makes me want to vomit. I love him, I really do,

but never like that. My best friend, the most important person in my life, but never my boyfriend. But people see what they want to see. It's kinder that way. It's safer that way.

Reese was the first person I ever found just like me. Reese is the only person I've ever been myself around. He smiled, sheepish. We were going to have a great time, regardless.

*"You can tell me anything, you know that boo?"*

*"Yes, Mom."*

*"I'll always love you, just the way you are,"* you told me every night.

But you won't. I hear everything else you say, too. You tell me what I'll want one day like my eyes are your mirror. If I told you the truth, you'd cry like I'm dying. Then we'd both be liars.