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Awake 12:48 AM

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Author Bio

Meghana Jagarlamudi is a sophomore public health major studying at Nova Southeastern University. She is a member of Razor's Edge Research, the Farquhar Honors College, and the Dual Admission Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine Program. Besides her passion for health communication and policy research, she enjoys writing poetry and visiting art museums.

Awake 12:48 AM

MEGHANA JAGARLAMUDI

When she found herself wearing makeup that day,
 only then did she think “pretty.”
Pretty never considered her before, but always teased her —
 teased her for being born smart, she could never be “her.”
Her time was spent looking through posts and tutorials.
Her patience was spread thin as each hair strand had to be straight.
Her routine was wasted to become the woman who is fair and lovely.
It was never for the male gaze,
 never for the female gaze,
 but for her gaze.
Yet, she knew deep down,
 if they never called her pretty,
 she would truly feel ugly.
No, she wouldn’t win
 unless she looked in the mirror,
 and thought she was “her” .
Even if it’s our human nature to compare.
Even if eurocentric beauty standards or any standards at all.
Even if everything.
Even if that boy made you hate the color of your skin so much.
Even if you quit the sport you loved most so you wouldn’t spend
another second in the sun,
 No, it was all so you wouldn’t be their next taunt.

And society tells her to persevere, even if.
Even if.

Author Statement

"Awake 12:48 AM" was written during one of my sleepless nights. All of the memories from growing up as a second-generation South Asian kid came together to create a moment of self-realization about the pressure we face, not just beauty. When I first wrote it, the repetition of 'even if' showed my frustration of society telling us to find ourselves worthy even though it secretly favored another. Today, 'even if' has a different meaning to me; it should be a source of our determination despite any limits we face."