

Lucy grealy

Experience, Human Nature



What is beauty? Beauty, by definition, is, “ the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit” (Merriam-Webster). Throughout her life, Lucy Grealy struggles with her own definition of beauty. To her, beauty equals happiness. As a cancer patient, she underwent many surgeries which left her with a disfigured face. Since she did not think she was beautiful, she was not happy, or rather, she would not allow herself to be happy. “ I didn’t deserve it, and thus I shouldn’t want it.

She blames all of her unhappiness and misfortune on the way her face looks, when in reality, she is causing herself to be unhappy by dwelling on the negative aspects of her life. She says, “ I again named my own face as the thing that kept me apart, as the tangible element of what was wrong with my life and me. ” To Lucy, it is easier to assume that everyone thinks she is ugly and to wallow in self-pity than it is to try to live her life normally, and to try to be happy with herself. Throughout the book, it sometimes seems that Lucy is almost proud of her condition. It gives her a chance to focus on herself very closely. Even when her face is restored to normal for a short period, she is not happy. Something was wrong: was this the face I had waited for through eighteen years and almost thirty operations? I couldn’t make what I saw in the mirror correspond to the person I thought I was.

It wasn’t only that I continued to feel ugly; I simply could not conceive of the image as belonging to me. It even seems that she actually enjoys being unhappy to an extent. No matter what happens in Lucy’s life, she always finds a way to be dissatisfied with it, and thus cannot move on towards becoming happy. It is almost selfish of her; she can own her unhappiness,

and no one can change that. Not her family, friends, or even cancer. It is something that she can always be sure of ; it is the one stable thing in her life. As she grows older, Lucy looks to other places for fulfillment.

She turns to sex as a way of acceptance. “ I thought I could use my body to distract people from my face. It made me feel worthy: I even got dressed up to go to the supermarket. ” Even though she still feels “ ugly,” Lucy believes that having lovers will bring her happiness. It doesn’t. In the end, she is still unhappy as ever, and this makes her feel even uglier. She does manage to make friends, and these help her self-esteem to an extent.

She saw her friends as she wished to be seen. She says, Through them I discovered what it was to love people. There was an art to it, I discovered, which was not really all that different from the love that is necessary in the making of art. It required the effort of always seeing them for themselves and not as I wished them to be, of always striving to see the truth of them. Lucy wished that people could see her this way. She longed for them to look past her face and see what was inside of her. However, she herself focused on her face so much that it was almost impossible for someone to look past it.

Looking back on her life, Lucy states, I used to think that truth was eternal, that once I knew, once I saw, it would be with me forever, a constant by which everything else could be measured. I know now that this isn’t so, that most truths are inherently unretainable, that we have to work hard all our lives to remember the most basic things. Society is no help. It tells us again and again that we can most be ourselves by acting and looking like someone

else, only to leave our original faces behind to turn into ghosts that will inevitably resent and haunt us. I do not think that Lucy was ever totally satisfied with herself. I think she spent all of her life focusing on what was wrong with her, and she never gave herself a chance to be happy. She could have been happy, had she not blamed everything on being “ ugly.

” Her own self-perception became a self-fulfilling prophecy that she could not undo.