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## Austin, Texas 7 am

by Michael Strayer

Austin awoke from her celluloid-laced dream. Her body withered in the cool morning. She brushed the side of her bed and knelt pleading and spilling her guts to God. Austin always spoke with the Creator and craved His divine approval.

Rising from the soft carpet she removed her designer sleepwear and slid awkwardly into the shower. Austin's skin bursted red as she scrubbed her body attempting to cleanse herself of everything dark and demonic. Her hair was thinning, and with it her self-confidence. The sensation was dreadfully wonderful as the steam flew from the cracked shower door, migrating to the bathroom mirror and doorknob. Austin's heart pounded in her red chest. The hot morning steam continued to travel, but this time it was driven down the ventilation shaft. She wiped the mirror and there she stood, revealed like the moon at dusk.

Austin's hips were sharp. They threatened to pierce her olive skin. Her ribs hung like a ninth grade biology class model skeleton. Every time she looked at her ghostly bones her stomach cramped up and heaved compulsively. Austin questioned when she would be normal. When would she be beautiful? When would she be perfect?

Austin tugged at her raw skin and drawled, "disgusting," she paused intently analyzing her naked body. Magazine advertisements, television clips, film stars, and celluloid magic fired inside her brain overwhelming her, "I feel fat..."

Austin dressed and faced the humid Texas day. Another day of disgust, of dieting, of competing with other women, only to be revealed tomorrow in front of her steamy bathroom mirror.