

Femininity in the Seasons

By Lily York

Winter

Winter is the perfect season. Snow will grace my apple cheeks as it floats down from the sky.

Peppermint hot chocolate will warm my heart. Winter coats will bundle me up and distort the shape of my body so no one knows how much I binge-ate last night. And, best of all, Christmas movies will play the music during the credits so loudly that no one has to hear my sobs. It gets dark so early that I can confine myself to my room, dormant and alone. I can labor for hours doing my dreadful chemistry homework, trying to distract myself with polyatomic ions. And maybe, if I can avoid being alone with my thoughts, I won't remember how wretchedly unlovable I am.

Winter is the perfect season because I get to bundle up and see the snow. I get to listen to Christmas music while I lock myself in my room and do hours of studying. I can eat my dad's blueberry buckle as I write my wishlist to Santa detailing my want for new clothes, AirPods, and therapy. Of course, the therapy was a joke. Just because I had burst into tears multiple

[SCAFFOLD: A SHOWCASE OF VANDERBILT FIRST-YEAR WRITING](#) | Vol. 5 | Spring 2023

Scaffold is a digital collection of first-year writing curated by the [Vanderbilt Writing Studio](#). To highlight the developing writing processes and learning experiences central to the growth of new college writers, the collection pairs each piece with a recorded reflection from its author. Visit [Scaffold's website](#) to listen to the authors reflect, learn more, and tap into this resource for college students and instructors alike.

The copyright to this work rests with the author. Proper attribution required. Vanderbilt retains a non-exclusive right to distribute the work as part of this collection.

times during class with no explainable reason doesn't mean I need therapy... I swear, Mom, there is no reason why...

Your body is just wrong. Your thighs should not take up so much space while you sit down. Your boobs should make your shirt taught. And let's not forget: you are way too tall. You are practically a man. You will never find a boyfriend. From the back, while you were wearing your coat, I genuinely couldn't tell who you were you looked so fat.

... just because I get a little emotional at times, doesn't mean I need therapy. Just because I am not as thin as the girls I've grown up with and haven't had my first kiss and can't seem to control my eating habits and will obsess over a 100% mark because my only source of validation is from the "good job" texts my mom sends immediately after grades are posted and and and doesn't mean I need therapy. Girls that need therapy are the ones that bleach their hair in the bathtub because their dad didn't tell them he loved them enough and they slit their wrists to make up for some of that lost attention. Ugly girls need therapy. The girls that aren't popular need therapy. And that is not me. I am fine. I am working on being thinner by starving myself. I wear the cutest dresses to class because I won't even try to fit into jeans, and I am so effervescent and well-liked by my teachers but not by any boys and that's what really matters.

...

My cruel pattern of self-mutilation began the night before Valentine's Day. It began in winter. I had no Valentine. I had no worth. I should have been snatching up boys and breaking their hearts, as all the other girls around me had been doing. I

did not occupy the heart of anyone. Rather, as I listened to Mitski's "I Want You," I became Michelangelo creating a sculpture from my flesh. My silver tool painted red so that maybe one day I'll be loved as David is. If you were a boy, you'd be loved. You are tall. You are loud. You are smart. You would have bitches fawning over you. You wouldn't be worthless. I wouldn't be worthless.

Spring

Spring might actually be the perfect season. During spring cleaning, the melodramatics of winter will wear off, and I can stow away the bulging coats that make me look 5lbs heavier and shed what no longer serves me. The flowers I am named after start to bloom and soon enough it will be my birthday. Daddy's little girl is growing up... unless I kill myself now. You do not deserve to be 17 when you are still a virgin. When no male has ever shown the slightest interest in you. I have not had my first kiss or even been told someone has a crush on me. It's because you are ugly. You don't sexualize yourself enough online... You won't ever send pictures, though. Pathetic. Your best friend has guys crawling after her... why don't they want you? You will never be loved. You are worthless. I am worthless thus I do not deserve to be 17. Let me go home from school. Let me take my pushup bra and winged eyeliner off. And just let me be alone.

My mom will say I'm just emotional. My dad will say I'm a bitch. My sister will say I'm the most intolerable person she has ever had the misfortune of gracing the Earth with. I will not say anything. I cannot say anything, yet my internal dialogue never misses a beat when comparing myself to the other girls. I am

paralyzed in my depression. I hate everything about myself and I hate how I cannot be the perfect daughter. Perfect sister. Perfect girl. I hate the scars I keep reopening that form the shape of a heart because I heard that manifesting love worked for one girl and I pray that maybe if I just opened up my arm and dropped a little rose quartz in then I could get a second glance from someone. Anyone.

Spring is the perfect season because I can wear my long sleeves and roam out in the bluegrass and pretend I am the perfect flower in bloom. Ready to pick. I am studious – a nerd. I am passionate – a loud-mouth. I just got highlights in my hair that beam in the sunlight – desperate. I am pretty, please just let me be pretty. I'm trying so hard. I am ready to be loved.

Summer

I don't like summer all that much and I need to escape. It's far too hot and I'm only prepared to shorten the length of my skirt, not the length of my sleeves. I guess the heat forces things out of you... like sweat... like secrets. My performance could not be kept up. Once my parents made eye contact with the unnatural texture of the porcelain skin on my forearm I could not go back. One thing about being a girl is that I have to hide so much it becomes second nature. I have to hide when I'm hungry, so I'm not a pig. I have to hide when I'm on my period. And, I definitely had to hide that for the past 6 months I had fallen into a trench of depression and had nearly attempted suicide. Successful girls do not have depression, they have a smile on their face. But the jig was up. At first, my parents were astonished. I had everything going for me. I finished junior year

as a straight-A student, I had a stable friend group, I was elected to be the president of multiple advocacy organizations within my community. I didn't have a boyfriend... but I'm a feminist! I don't need a man. Once my family knew about my ruse, I gave it all up. I couldn't disappoint them, because if I didn't have a boy to give me validation, I would seek it from my parents. I don't like summer all that much but this summer saved my life. My charade was up. It was perfect.

Fall

Fall might just be the perfect season. It's still warm from summer, and as the breeze begins to tickle my skin and shake the trees, my focus is turned inwards. In the fall, I began therapy. Which, turns out, I did need back in the winter. During the peak of my depression, I was unable to reflect at all about my behavior. My brain just wanted to shut itself down and my body just needed to survive. In the fall there is none of that. In the fall I can finally let myself think.

I was my own attacker. I was the one comparing myself to other women. Telling myself I wasn't worthy because I wasn't 115lbs or because I didn't have a boy wrapped around my finger. I told myself that being upset in public was shameful. My sadness was so suppressed that I could only reach inside to pull it out when I was in the confines of my room... in which I would fall asleep with tears streaming and wake up with puffy eyes... and if I didn't put mascara on in the morning then I risk letting everyone know I'm not as chipper as I make myself out to be. Cutting myself was far too masculine – too violent – so it became a secret I had to overcompensate for in the daytime. In winter and spring my femininity was a mask I was expected to

wear to cover my depression. I still had to dress up. I still had to spray my Marc Jacobs Daisy Love perfume. I still must be this perfect archetype of a young lady or else you are a failure and no one will want you.

In the seasons of my depression, I gendered myself. I truly believed all my problems would be solved if the flesh of my lips had made contact with the rough lips of man. I forced myself to believe I had no worth because I was not a good enough girl. Thankfully I was forced to break my silence. To hang the mask up. Now, instead of forcing my femininity, I let myself heal. In hopes that one season I can live my truth and be happy with it. I believe I am in that season now.