Acceptable

I stood up and walked out of my room, switching off the light. Too light of a touch. I walk back in. Turn it on. Turn it off again. Too forceful of a touch. I walk back in. Turn it on. Turn it off again.

Perfect.

All my life, I have been haunted by that word, constantly trying to squeeze into the skin of perfection. Everyone says, "You can only do your best, and your best is good enough." I agree, but my perfectionism has often led me to believe that I am not doing my best; so I work harder, striving for perfection, searching for control.

In sixth grade, about two years after I began competitive diving, I started to attend state and national diving competitions which ignited my anxiety. Leading up to the meets, I would use all my energy to banish my fears, which only made me think about them more. I am a decent diver, definitely not at the level of some of my competitors, so it was not so much competing against others that whispered this fear into my mind, but the difficulty of the dives I had to execute.

At the Zones competition in Beaverton Oregon in 2019, my anxiety escalated and smacked me across the face… or should I say the back. I clung to the rails climbing the stairs up to the three-meter board, commanding myself to not be nervous, my white knuckles betraying me. The buzz of the audience felt like mockery; I knew they were telling me I would fail. My stomach tied in knots, I planted my feet on the board. I took my first step, quivering knee threatening to buckle, my second step, hands twitching, my third, shivers down spine, and my fourth, consumed by my fear of failure. I jumped up and launched myself into the air… and had absolutely no clue where I was. I immediately felt the sharp bite of the water on my back.

Failure.

Until that moment, I was haunted by that word. However, that moment of utter failure revealed my true self: a red back, a shattered ego… and strangely, relief. I didn't need to hold myself to those impossible standards anymore. A weary smile spread across my face.

Unfortunately, that didn't last long. I went back to school and diving, and I squeezed back into the familiar skin of perfectionism; but I was at least able to expand it a bit, cutting off some expectations here, shaving off a little anxiety there. I didn't completely transform, but I realized who I was and who I wanted to be. I am not, nor will I ever be perfect. I learned that I wanted to let go of these unhealthy standards and accept me for me.

After I got home from the diving meet, I walked into my room and slipped into my comfy, baggy pajamas. I trudged over to the door and turned off the light.

Acceptable.