I know the secret to beauty. It isn't makeup. It isn't body-altering, unrealistically-transforming surgery. It isn't a special, dermatologist-recommended face mask, it isn't dress or style, and it *undoubtedly* isn't fitting the requirements of others. To fully understand the importance of this life-changing secret, I must remember the moment I discovered it and the stunning, world-stopping effect it had on me.

We sink into our squishy, "tempur-pedic" mattress, with our head resting on a typical feather pillow, staring unblinkingly at the ceiling. The velvety grey-blue blanket we joyfully received last Christmas covers our body like fresh snow covers the ground. Our fingertips trace a miniscule star on the sheet beside us out of habit, but the calming effect this simple action usually possesses is absent tonight. As energy is not everlasting, our pointer finger eventually becomes tired, and we turn to our right side, catching a glimpse of the glowing green numbers on our digital clock: eleven forty-six. Our inability to sleep is only another piece of evidence of our restless mind.

Although we put on a mask of one who is calm and collected, we cannot deny our inner storm. We are a mix of confusion and chaos, like a jumbled up ball of string that no one can untangle except us. Our mind is flying eighty miles an hour and we cannot slow it down.

We tell ourself, _____, *We are beautiful. We are loved. We are made in the image of our perfect creator, and we are his masterpiece.* We pause. *We are his masterpiece,* we repeat. *He makes no mistakes. We are flawless, _____. We are created exactly as our heavenly father intended*, we whisper to ourself, purposely emphasizing "exactly." Knowing that these words are written in the Bible enforces their

truth, but somehow, we don't entirely believe them. Everyday, our body and mind are bombarded with photoshopped images of celebrities and models, along with misleading beauty tips and false instruction. It is more than difficult to rebuild our young mind's twisted image of perfection.

We remind ourself to let others' opinions and comments slide off us. If we don't let them under our skin, how can they hurt us? Yet no matter how hard we try, a popular Instagram post or judgemental glance always manages to unpack our self-conscious feelings.

One evening after school, everything changed. Our racing, whirlwind-of-a-mind from several nights ago skidded to a stop. That impossibly tangled ball of string had organized itself into a neat pile in the blink of an eye. Our world flipped upside down.

Why? Because we *finally* understood, and our understanding was impossibly important.

Confidence is the best beauty secret.

It took my uncomprehending brain seven whole seconds to frantically sort out what I had just discovered. To aid in understanding, I experimentally tested my theory.

Step One: look in the mirror. My wondering reflection stared back at me, daring me to love myself. *Step Two: pretend there are people around you.* I imagined people from age five to one hundred, from all walks of life, gathered around me. Some of them were walking past, and others were standing in semi-circles, chatting gleefully about their lives. However, I felt as though all were silently judging me. Immediately, my confidence evaporated into thin air, and all I was left with was an empty shell of a girl.

Her face was pretty, and her hair was cute, but she was only a shallow image. *Step Three: imagine all those people have left, and now you are in the presence of those you love most.* I glanced back at the mirror and saw a entirely different girl. This girl was smiling. Her eyes were bright, and her skin was glowing. I sensed her confidence and determination and felt her strong, unbroken energy. She wasn't worried what others thought of her because she realized their opinions didn't matter; she was content with herself exactly the way she was created.

My experiment, I later understood, boiled down to one significant idea: beauty is natural. From this idea, I redefined beauty. Prior to my realization, I believed beauty was measured in relation to outward appearances, such as the quality of makeup, hair, or clothes. Now, that is my definition of "pretty", or "cute", or "gorgeous". Being beautiful, in my words, is being happy and confident with oneself and accepting one's individuality. Yes, I believe appearance matters, but an individual's physical features are not among the most pressing issues of the world. Accepting one's natural self is infinitely more important than fashion or facial complexion.