Girl Talk

Ali had spent her Saturday afternoon with her dad’s stepladder, a pair of scissors and a wad of blue tack. Once she’d finished, she took a look at the mess of magazine cuttings on the floor, sighed and crashed out on her bed. She stared up at the ceiling admiring her handy work: a huge collage of beautiful actresses, models and pop stars now adorned the ceiling. It would be the first thing she looked at every morning and would inspire her to be cooler.

Taylor broke the silence, “Maybe you should think about getting some new clothes, Ali.”
“But I like my jeans and hoodies.”
“They make you look like a boy. It’s time to grow up,” Taylor retorted.
She could be a bit of a bitch but she was always there for Ali and neither of them really had other friends. Taylor definitely didn’t.
“Let’s take the dog out for a walk,” Taylor suggested.
“Okay. I’ll let Dad know we’re going out,” Ali said, rolling off her bed. She picked one of her hoodies up off the floor and pulled it over her mousy brown hair, simultaneously shoving a pair of worn out converse on.

Monty, the family spaniel was waiting patiently at the front door for Ali with the lead in his mouth. He must have heard the word ‘walk’ and was very excited.
“Dad, I’m taking Monty out!” Ali yelled out to the garden shed.
“Okay, love. Your mum’ll be home late this evening so grab yourself some chips on the way home,” he called back.

Ali clipped Monty’s lead to his collar and left the house with Taylor by her side. They took a long walk around the block and up to the park where Monty could have a run and act like a mad dog for a few minutes before exhausting himself.

The girls spoke about Ali’s favourite TV show and how pretty the main actress was. Taylor told Ali that if she wanted to be a famous actress she’d have to start wearing make-up first. Ali was fourteen, had unruly eyebrows, frizzy hair and pale skin. She didn’t feel like she fit in with the rest of the girls at her school but it wasn’t something she often worried about until Taylor would bring it up.

On the route home as they approached the bus stop near Ali’s house, they spotted a group of older lads causing trouble. This made Ali nervous and her face turned a funny colour.
“Don’t be such a wuss, Ali,” Taylor sneered.

Monty was pulling at the lead, he was a little tubby and his strength yanked at Ali’s arm; she tripped up a curb in front of all the boys.
“Ha ha, you’re lucky you didn’t crack the concrete with those tree trunks you call legs!” one of them teased.

“Get a proper dog!” said another.

Ali was mortified. She felt the water welling in her eyes but took a deep breath, shot the boys a look of disgust and carried on home. As soon as she turned the key in the lock she burst into tears. Her mum wasn’t around to console her and her dad was busy with his fishing gear in the shed. She headed back to her bedroom, again, stuck with Taylor for support.

“You know, Ali, if you really want to be like those pop stars you’ll have to lose a few pounds anyway. You could show those lads what they’re missing.”

Ali was offended by this but she did feel a bit frumpy at times. She dried her eyes and stood in front of her bedroom mirror. She pulled at her clothes and pinched at her skin, imagining a different version of herself.

“You could shape your eyebrows, get a fake tan… style your hair for once.” Taylor carried on.

“Okay, I hear you, Taylor. How about saying something nice for once?”

“Well… look, I can help you change. All you have to do is close your eyes and focus all your thoughts on the parts of your appearance that you want to improve.” She gripped Ali by the shoulders and they stood in front of the mirror together. “Close ‘em,” she ordered.

Ali was very uncomfortable but she closed her eyes anyway. Things became unbalanced. Ali felt like she was standing on wet sand at a beach as the tide came in. Something was happening to her. Something was changing in her. When she couldn’t bare the intensity any longer she opened her eyes and was shocked to see someone else’s reflection in the mirror. This girl had her eyes and her mouth but everything else was different.

“Oh my god! You did it. I told you I could help. You can be anyone you want,” Taylor said.

Ali was in disbelief as she witnessed the last of her changes. A new hair colour swept down from her roots to her ends, which were no longer split and fuzzy but smooth and glossy. Her face blurred slightly as she shifted into her new skin. Her complexion was flawless, even her eyebrows were beautiful. Her thighs had slimmed down and instead of baggy jeans she now wore skinny jeans - just like the girls at her school. She had bigger breasts and painted nails, she felt brand new.

“What am I?” she questioned Taylor.

“You’re a shape shifter, Ali.”

Ali passed out.
Her mum arrived home from work and found her daughter unconscious on her bedroom floor. She calmly checked for a pulse and watched Ali’s chest rise and fall before shaking her a little till she opened her eyes.

“Ali, what’s going on? Are you okay?” concern paramount in her voice.

“Ugh, Mum? Where am I?” Ali was dazed. She had hit her head on something on the way to the floor. She sat up and rubbed her temples. Locks of luscious hair falling aside her face.

Ali’s mum took a step back. She was satisfied that her daughter was safe, but had then realised how dramatically different Ali looked.

“Have you been for a makeover today? What the…” she took Ali’s face in her hands and moved it from left to right studying her daughter’s transformation—“what have you done to yourself, Ali?”

“I... I changed myself. Well, Taylor helped me.”

She searched around the room for Taylor who was nowhere to be seen.

“Oh, Ali. Come on let’s get up.”

The two of them walked over to Ali’s bed and sat down.

“Listen, sweetie, if you need to start seeing the therapist again we can arrange it,” she said, holding her daughter close. “We’ve been through this Taylor stuff before and you know full well she isn’t real. It’s time to let her go.”

Ali looked towards her mum apologetically.

“Now where did you get all the money for this?” she asked, gesturing towards Ali’s clothes.

“And why were you on the floor when I came in?”

Ali had all the answers but knew they weren’t the ones her mum would want to hear. Instead, she fabricated a lie about a make-over party with some girls from school and how she must have passed out from hunger as she’d forgotten to eat from the excitement of it all.

“Now hear me out, Ali, as lovely as you look in your new clothes and with this new haircut of yours, it’s not you is it? You must understand that you’re beautiful just as you are. These women on your ceiling that you’re aspiring to look like are very rich people with plastic surgeons, dieticians, and personal stylists. If we compare ourselves to them we will always feel inferior. You need to enjoy being a teenager while you can. The awkwardness is just a part of growing up and learning about our selves. It will get easier, I promise. Now let’s wipe all this off of your face.”

She attempted to remove some of Ali’s make-up but it wouldn’t budge. “Gosh, you must give me the number of whoever applied this stuff, it’s incredible. Sort yourself out and get into bed. It’s too late for food now, we’ll have a big breakfast in the morning.”
Ali slept better that night than she had done in weeks. When she awoke it was Monday morning and all her changes had been reversed. As though the magic had faded away overnight and Ali had returned to normal. She didn’t know what had happened to Sunday but there was a dirty plate and empty glass next to her bed so she must have eaten that big breakfast at some point.

She got dressed for school and brushed her plain hair. Her weekend had been quite eventful and she was unsure what had actually happened. She studied herself in the mirror. Closing her eyes, she thought hard about one small change and left the house that morning with beautifully defined brows.