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### The Weight of Tipping The Scales

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## The Weight of Tipping The Scales

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### I:

In the late 18th century, Richard Salter created the modern spring scale as a more accurate alternative to the previous equilibrium weighing scale that merchants used to quantify their goods. The equilibrium scale consisted of two platforms held up by a beam in which users would place a weight on one side and then add or subtract what they were trying to weigh from the other until the scale reached an equilibrium. The introduction of the spring scale allowed merchants to have more precise weights for their goods which in turn helped them to accurately price these products.<sup>1</sup> Over time the spring scale became a basic fixture in all American homes as an emphasis on body weight moved into the forefront of societal beauty standards. The device once used to decipher the value of a good soon became the way to judge the value of a woman.

### II:

It doesn't speak, but it's all too condescending. There it sits, taunting me, beckoning me to venture a step closer. To venture just close enough to see the numbers through the foggy plastic window. Just close enough to see the worn curvatures in the aluminum where my expectations have weathered it. Just close enough to see the rusted edges from when I would step on it after a shower to gauge how the water weighed down my body.

Something about the daunting familiarity of it always tempts me to step on it one more time. I strip down to my most vulnerable yet weightless state before sealing my eyes shut as I step forward and allow my feet to sink into the imprints. Simultaneously I rush to cover my ears before that godforsaken sound pulsates through my eardrums and body with an eerie chill. The

sound of my frail body crushing the machinery underneath me. The sigh it lets out as the springs contract to support the elephant that has just mounted it. The gears squeak along as the gauge flails back and forth, afraid to break the news.

I always stare at the same small crack in the drywall, bracing myself to glance down. I'm tempted to jump off into the abyss without looking down at my worth. My worth is determined by kilograms like a cow being sold as cheap hamburger meat. Am I worthy of sale or slaughter? I never choose myself and get off the scale without knowing. It has an indescribable pull to it, like a special force of gravity that can only be broken by that sinking feeling in my chest once I've seen the number. I count to myself, "one, two, three," as I grip the sides of my body before allowing my gaze to scan the number in a fraction of a second. My heart sinks, and I leap off the scale, completely disregarding the sign of relief that the scale makes as I finally allow it to breathe once more. Every time I reassure myself that I will throw it out in the morning and will never put myself through that type of torture again. Just like an ouija board, I fear what it would mean to throw it out and continue to keep it. Would it continue to haunt me even after it's gone?

### **III:**

Three ten-year-olds encased in baby fat stare entranced at the TV as the upbeat music of the fashion show crawls its way into the most unused cracks of their brains. They watch as all of the world's most beautiful women romp across the stage in the most extravagant diamond-encrusted lingerie as men hoot and holler in hopes of getting their attention from the audience. Even more intriguing than the sparkles and the lace were the bodies that wore them. Each body was longer and thinner than the last yet still adorned with perky breasts and full bottoms.

The children don't speak; they watch as their brains begin to internalize society's first lesson. Each pretty face and long leg is accompanied by a corresponding neuron that begins the all too easy process of programming their malleable brains. The show they watch has no academic or intellectual value, but they learn much about where they fall among the angels.

During the commercial breaks, they each glance down at their calves, meaty from three well-balanced meals. They thumb over the stretch marks on their hips from their ever-growing bodies. Tears well in their eyes as they pinch the small folds on their stomach, unaware that they are only due to the angle that they are sitting at. However, The art of angles is for a later lesson. They wonder if maybe God does give with both hands or maybe you have to tip the scales in your own favor.

#### **IV:**

There she stood, glaring at herself through the hazy bathroom mirror. She reluctantly removed her Tinker Bell T-shirt and relinquished her sanity to society. Her back arched and sagged as she contorted her body into any position she could to create definition. She sucked in from the side in a haphazard attempt to make half of her body disappear, only to be devastated when she inevitably needed to exhale. If she could choose, she would rather be skinny than ever breathe again.

The scissors in her hand felt as if they weighed a thousand pounds as she tried to lift them to her stomach. She thought of the 600 muscles, 206 bones, and 78 organs in her body that occupied an unreasonable amount of space, packing her skin to the brim.<sup>2</sup> Each pulse of her body desperate for a release. She picked up the scissors and allowed the snipping sound to fill her ears as she sheared through the air right next to her stomach as she imagined what it would feel like

to cut away the parts of her body she didn't like. She fantasized about the sound her organs would make as they splattered onto the worn tile floor beneath her. She wondered what the pull of her tendons and muscles would feel like as they clung to her organs and they finally made their great escape. She thought about how her blood would stain the ground, never to be perfect again. Eternally corrupted. She pinched a piece of her lower stomach, placed it between the blades, and gently clamped down just enough to feel the rush of the prongs against her skin but not enough to actually do any damage. She wondered if she would die if she allowed her intrusive thoughts to win and added just a bit of force to the handles. Maybe she would. She didn't care. All she could think about was if she could choose her body in heaven. Maybe that's why they called them the angels.

**V:**

The rest of the models and I were all packed into one small room, like animals being taken off to slaughter. We were all dressed in virtually the same outfit in an attempt to strip us of any form of identity or individuality, as all that mattered was the pale, hungry bodies beneath them. Each of our agencies conditioned us to only wear black to castings as it slimmed and elongated us in a way that was so slight yet so valuable that even a deviation as much as navy wouldn't be tolerated.

Each one of us stood clutching a book filled with our best pictures against our chest. Of course, directors would never open the books as each of us will inevitably just be reduced to a height, weight, and waist measurement. Once it was your turn on the auction table, the designer would wrap a tape measure around each of your appendages. The room was silent other than the designer hollering out your measurements to the director. These numbers would serve as our

“brand” in the casting process. These numbers were the only part of our identity that mattered. The way to retrieve whichever one of us was worthy of being sold to society from the contaminated slaughter pit.

The room has a dull vibration to it as each girl is shaking. Maybe we are shaking because we’re starving, or because we fear making rent this month, or maybe because we know that getting the job only means that we will be the face that little girls see in the magazines that will only continue the cycle. But our apartments are cold with no electricity.



## Endnotes

1. Withings At Withings, and View all articles. “A Short History of the Weighing Scale.” WITHINGS BLOG, 30 Sept. 2011, <https://blog.withings.com/2011/09/30/a-short-history-of-the-weighing-scale-2/>.
2. “Musculoskeletal System: Arthritis, Lower Back Pain, Bones, Muscles.” Cleveland Clinic, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/12254-musculoskeletal-system-normal-structure--function>.