

# Seen

*by Emily Ralph*

Hello, my smile says, are you looking for me?

You hesitate, your thumb hovers above a one-dimensional girl whose face is no larger than your cuticle, a flatscreen Thumbelina begging for one moment of consideration.

I'm sprawled across a picnic rug, propped up on my elbows, my long hair cascading around me to let you know I'm both feminine and carefree.

My age isn't listed and you don't check my details.

You scroll through my other photos for a full body scan. How do you know I'm not hiding a protruding belly or thighs more muscular than your own?

Screenshots of a life – birthdays, graduation, a wedding (as a guest, obviously) – fly past as if I were dying and unbidden memories flash before my eyes. You linger over me in formal wear, a tight LBD, but it's not what you're looking for.

You pause.

Bingo.

Bikini shot.

A glass of wine in hand and standing next to a less thinner, less taller friend who has no idea she is under a microscope. It's a small betrayal and one frequently committed.

You examine me from head to toe. I'm slim but not bony and curvy enough that your friends are unlikely to make fun of me.

Go ahead, zoom in. That's what it's there for.

You're disappointed I haven't just emerged from the water, vulnerable to a cool breeze and unaware of the flash of a camera, but you linger just the same.

*hey*



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Finally, contact.

*nice pics*

You can see I'm online so I respond.

*thanx*

That's all the encouragement you need. You flick back to me in the bikini and, for lack of a better word, prime yourself.

You send me photo of your handiwork, a self-portrait of sorts.

*now u*

I lower my phone down to my knees and take a photo. Hit send.

I look at the image of one leg lying next to a steel prosthetic.

I want you to ask me what it is. How it happened. What the last few months have felt like.

I want to tell you.

I want to tell you how it feels to be seen and invisible at the same time.

But you don't ask and I disappear from your screen as quickly as I arrived, replaced by the next face in line.

Hello, her smile says, are you looking for me?



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