If I were to reckon, I’d say that the pretty clothes had probably been the first thing to go.

When she was living with her parents, it had been easy to stay one step ahead of the curb. Hadley was probably never going to like, walk down a runway or anything, but back when we were in high school she had always been real fashionable. Lots of bright colors, lots of variety, lots of brand names. I mean, she’s still *got* most of ‘em—they just don’t fit her anymore.

Shit, Hadley’s got clothes from *last month* that don’t fit her anymore. I don’t know why I said that like it was a surprise.

Anyway, they’d probably been the first thing to go because, well, Hadley had started puttin’ on weight *real quick* after we graduated. I mean considering how vocal she was about the diet she’d been on in order to look good for our cap and gown photos, no one was really all that surprised. Hell, I put on a few pounds after I moved out of my momma and daddy’s house too—the freedom to eat out more often just so happened to coincide with a little rebound weight, is what we figured.

That first Summer, with her living with Josh for like a month and then spending the rest of it as his wife, was fuckin’ *wild*. This was before Conner and Kaitlynn went off to college *and also* before Conner met Justin and crawled up his ass, so we were all just ho’ing around with married fuckin’ *Hadley* hookin’ up with random guys behind her husband’s back. And then, instead of going back home, we’d sleep over at their house because Josh’s older brother that he was livin’ with at the time could buy us *beer*.

Y’all.

Let me tell you that I drank—*so*—much.

Shit, I’m sorry, I’m gettin’ distracted.

But… no, well, I’m *kinda* on the right track.

Y’see, so Josh’s brother Trevor was 22. So even though me an’ all my friends were 18, he’d buy us all beer if we all gave him twenty bucks. But *the house* always drank for free, y’see? Him an’ Josh weren’t gonna not have beer, so that meant that *Hadley* wasn’t not gonna have any beer. And they kept so much around the house that it ain’t surprisin’ that she developed a taste for it. Even when we weren’t getting shitfaced at their house, Hadley was daydrinking her way through the Summer. Like, Hadley drank a *lot*.

And like, I’m not *judging.* I love Hadley—she’s *literally* like my *best* friend. I’ve got plenty’a stories just from *that Summer* because’a drunk Hadley. And *everyone* parties when you get out of high school—that’s what you do when your town is like three stoplights long—but at the end of the Summer, we all, y’know… got jobs or went to college and junk.

Not Hadley.

Nope.

Hadley rolled into Autumn with a hangover and about thirty extra pounds of what not doing anything other than laying around at home would get you. Apparently her parents put their foot down towards the end of their daughter’s “honeymoon” and forced her to get a job or they’d stop helping them out with buyin’ groceries and whatnot. She didn’t tell us that at the time, of course. She just all the sudden got a job at the Meat-n-Three like it was nothin’.

Meanwhile, I had started taking classes at Community College with Kaitlynn. Conner had already gone off to Clemson. We were all taking steps towards who we were all gonna be, y’know, *after high school*.

Not Hadley.

Though I guess, that’s kinda taking a step towards who she’d wind up being after high school.

Okay, so, obviously we didn’t all just go our separate ways immediately. Conner, obviously yeah, but me and Kaitlynn used to hang out with Hadley all the time. Hell, we’d still get Josh’s brother to buy us beer. Sometimes she’d meet us on Campus and we’d use our credits to treat her to the Café or something. Like, we were still best friends, we just saw each other less.

But after a while, the two of us began to notice just how different our lives were shaping up to be when compared to Hadley’s.

I think the first time that *I* really noticed was when Kaitlynn and I went over to their house one day after class. Our 3pm class got cancelled on a day that Hadley usually had off, so we figured that we’d swing by and hang out for a l’il while.

Hadley let us in and like… it was two in the afternoon, y’all, and Hadley still didn’t look all the way awake. She’d been dressed in one of Josh’s shirts, her tits stretching out the chest and her lovehandles bulging against the side, hair up and barefoot while the TV blared behind her. She’d clearly been nesting on the couch by the time we got there, and like there was all this junk food, and…

Remember, this was my skinny li’l friend Hadley. Like, the girl who went on a diet so she’d look good underneath a baggy blue robe. We didn’t say nothin’, but I remember looking at Kaitlynn and seeing her do a double take too. Like, for me it was a combination of the angle I caught her at, belly hangin’ out of her shorts, ass out end at the fridge, *and* all the soda cans and bags of chips that made me think:

“Wow, Hadley’s gettin’ kinda fat…”

And, like, I never said anything to her about her weight gain—to Kaitlynn a lot, sure but...

In hindsight, maybe I should have? Because man oh man did she keep packin’ it on month after month after month until she graduated into plus sizes real quick—like, within *that year* following high school graduation, I’m not making this up. And like…

Okay, do *not* tell her that I said this. But I can *kind of* see where Josh was comin’ from back then.

That’s a horrible thing to say, but like… it’s true! I was there for the whole thing—Hadley got married, she didn’t do shit around the house, *and* she’d started porkin’ out? I’d have been upset too if my wife… well, you get my point.

But it’s true! Hadley and Josh got married *way* too young. He was dumb as a box of rocks to begin with, and Hadley was still such a princess she’d never done a dang chore in her life. So when Hadley started bawlin’ to us about how she thinks her husband was cheatin’ on her…

Well yeah, honey, what’d you think was gonna happen?

Hadley and Josh spent their one-year anniversary drunk and yelling at each other in their front yard, before I picked her up and took her back to my parent’s place to help her calm down. She wound up staying with us for a few days before moving back with her parents while they settled everything out.

And just… y’know… that’s a lot.

We all kinda thought that getting Hadley back into the Gated Community part of the county and out of the Bumfuck Nowhere part of it would do her some good. Kinda straighten her back out after getting a little too much freedom, y’know? She and Josh could stay away from each other while they got divorced, and everything would get better and Hadley would go back to normal.

And… okay *some* of that happened.

She got her some better clothes, she kept her job at the Meat-n-Three, and she was *talkin*’ about taking classes at the same community college me an’ Kaitlynn were going to, but nothin’ ever came’a that last part. While the divorce proceedings went on, Hadley’s parents were really accommodating and welcomed her back like she were the Prodigal Daughter—no chores, they let her sleep in until noon on days she didn’t have to work, not havin’ to pay rent—really just tryin’ to pick up where they left off with her.

So, okay, *here* is I think where things got kinda set into stone. Like, if Hadley was just drinking a lot and maybe let herself go a little, it could have been reversed from this point.

But in hindsight, moving back in with her parents was probably the thing that wound up codifying some of Hadley’s bad habits.

Eventually she started dating again. You’d think after splittin’ up with Josh, she would have wanted to take it slow, but she was on Tinder like… two months after they’d broken up. They weren’t even divorced yet. So occasionally she’d show us pictures of some guy that she was hooking up with, and we’d all try to be happy for her, but after like four guys one month after the other, it was kinda hard to deny that Hadley was kind of a hot mess.

And y’all, Hadley was *fat* now. Like, she had sort of thickened up after high school like you do, but it wasn’t just… she didn’t just have a little tummy or a big butt anymore, y’know? She probably weighed two fifty by the time she started complaining about her parents not liking her boyfriend, and—

Oh *shit* I didn’t tell y’all about Hunter.

Okay, so Hadley was seeing this guy named Hunter. And let me tell you, Hadley had a type by now. Like, say what you want about Conner’s husband or Caitlynn’s ex-husband, but at least they weren’t Hunter. He worked the line at the BMW, spent his free time muddin’ and huntin’ and drinkin’ and just bein’… Well, fuck, there ain’t a nice way to say it, but in general just actin’ like a redneck.

So whenever Hadley wasn’t workin’ or sleepin’ until noon, she was out hangin’ out with her new boyfriend Hunter. Not even divorced from Josh yet, already got herself a man. One who liked that she could drink, thought she gave good head, and that liked her big ol’ butt the bigger an’ wider it got.

And we were happy for her, but like… okay, you know what it’s like when someone gets *way* too invested in their relationship? Like, it’s obviously a rebound thing, they’re overcompensating about how much they love their new partner, and it’s just kind of awkward to watch?

Yeah, that was Hadley.

Most of my interactions with her at this point were just through social media. One day her profile pic changed to her spread-out over the back of Hunter’s truck dressed in shorts and a tank top that were *waaaay* too small on her, and it just… never went back to normal. Now, her Facebook page was all about Hunter and his truck, hanging out with his sister and her trashy friends, or the occasional stolen meme from the Country Gals of TikTok.

She was kinda pullin’ away, and I was kind of pullin’ away, and Kaitlynn had just transferred to USC after her last Summer home. I got a promotion at my job and I started my Junior year… it was kind of a lot, and whatever weird phase Hadley was going through was just kinda not on the top of my to-do list.

Eventually, I’m not sure when *exactly* this happened, but Hadley convinced her momma and daddy to let her move in with Hunter. And apparently they liked him well enough, because they gave her their blessing and even helped her move her stuff outta storage and into that little shack out to Easley where Hunter and his buddy rented. At some point she stopped working at the Meat-n-Three and started…

Fuck, I don’t think she had a job at that point.

Honestly, that explains a lot considering that she was *constantly* on Instagram or TikTok. Just posting 20+ batches of what were essentially the same pictures of her trying to look skinny around Hunter’s house. She started wearin’ his hunting caps and his camo jackets and stuff, stopped keeping up with her bottle blonde and her roots got all dark…

And like, to contrast, I almost had a bachelor’s degree. Conner was engaged by this point. Kaitlynn was working towards a law degree.

And meanwhile, every picture that Hadley took, you could see her face get a *little* bit rounder. The Skinny filter made it a little trickier, but in pics that she was tagged in without ‘em, you could see that she was gettin’ real chunky in the face by that point. She had a little double chin, her cheeks were all chubby, and the straps on her tops were cutting into her fluffy shoulders and chest. I didn’t think nothing of it because, by this point, I had kind of accepted the fact that the only thing keeping Hadley skinny had been cheer practice. But it wasn’t until I got to *see it* first hand that I realized just how quickly Hadley was porking out.