



Naomi and the Shadow that Told Lies

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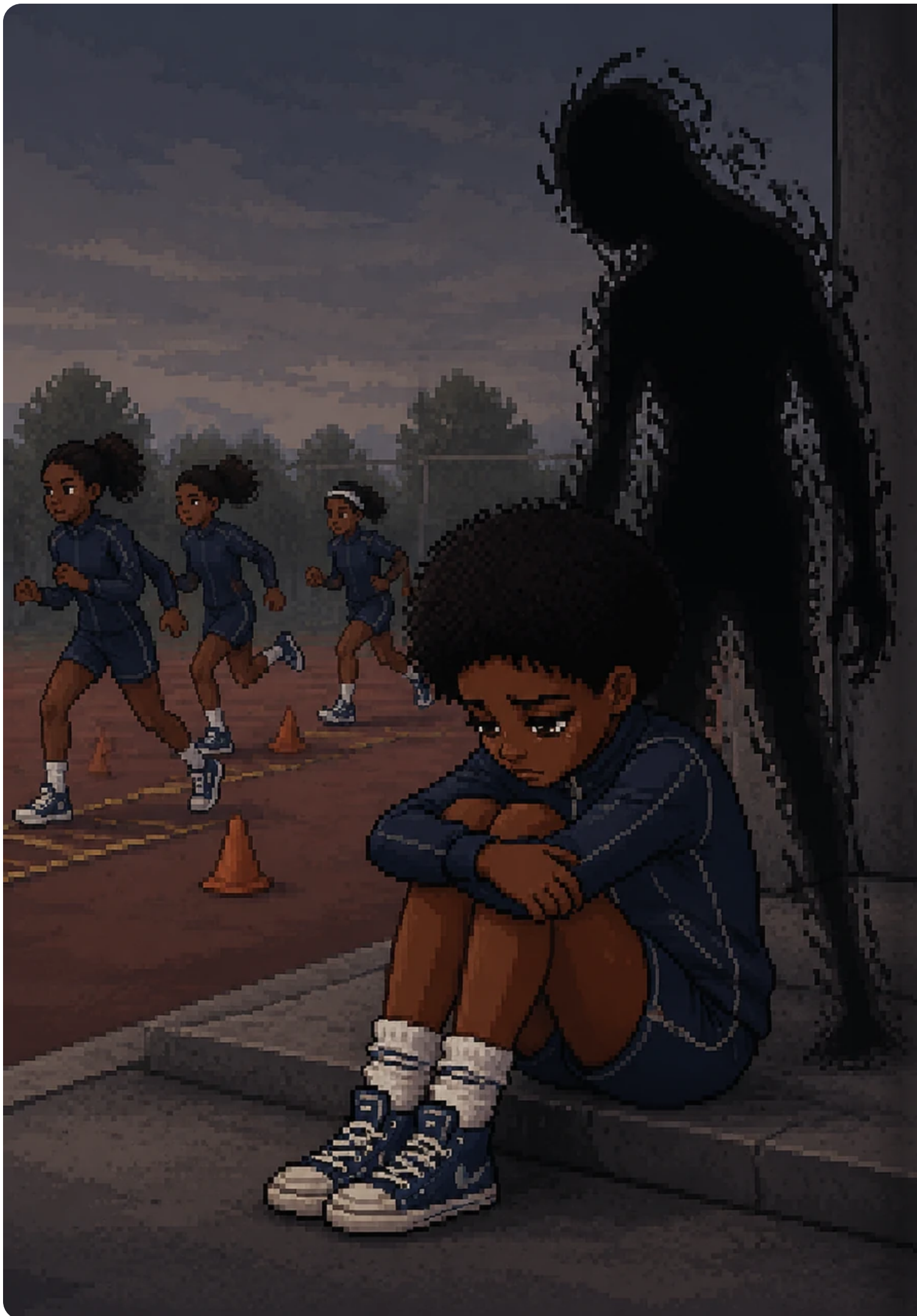
Naomi is a vibrant ten-year-old who finds her greatest joy on the netball court. With a ball in her hands and a smile on her face, she runs across the grass, feeling strong, energetic, and perfectly at home among her teammates.



One evening, while scrolling through social media, Naomi begins to feel a strange weight in her heart as she compares herself to the filtered images on her screen. A small, wispy dark shadow appears beside her, born from the quiet thought that she might not be good enough exactly as she is.



The shadow grows larger, whispering cruel lies that Naomi needs to change her appearance to be worthy. She looks in the mirror and sees a distorted version of herself, leading her to push away her favorite meals and feel a constant, heavy tiredness in her limbs.



The spark in Naomi's eyes begins to fade as she becomes too weak to keep up with her friends during practice. She sits alone on the sidelines, clutching her knees and avoiding the gaze of her teammates, feeling like a ghost of the girl she used to be.



As the weeks pass, Naomi's world becomes smaller and quieter, her physical health declining alongside her spirit. Her parents watch from the doorway with worried eyes, feeling a deep sense of helplessness as they see their once-vibrant daughter slipping away into silence.



Naomi carries the heavy burden of shame, terrified that others will judge her if they know the truth about her struggle. The stigma surrounding mental health acts like a tall, cold wall, making her feel that it is safer to hide her pain than to ask for the help she desperately needs.



A turning point arrives when a close friend sits beside Naomi and gently asks if she is okay, breaking the silence with kindness. This small act of care encourages Naomi to finally share her secret with her family, realizing that she doesn't have to face the shadow alone.



Naomi begins to meet with a kind counselor who teaches her that her value isn't defined by a number or an image. She learns about organizations like Headspace and Beyond Blue, finding comfort in knowing there are many people dedicated to helping her get better.



Recovery is a slow journey, but Naomi practices talking about her feelings and putting down her phone to focus on the real world. She starts to enjoy the taste of food again, feeling the warmth of energy returning to her body as she reconnects with her loved ones.



Back on the netball court, Naomi takes a deep breath and realizes she is stronger than the shadow ever was. Though she still hears its whispers sometimes, she now knows they are lies, and she stands tall as a girl who is valuable, loved, and whole.