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Boy in the Mirror

by Lawrence von Meer

Thin, bony shoulders poke beneath soft grey material spattered in black and white paint in the shape of a cathedral motif pattern. With my chest bandaged in Ace wraps and other constricting strips of stretchy, medical material normally used for sore wrists or sprained ankles, a small bust is easily hidden beneath the shirt's baggy shape and a slouch makes things harder to see. Rounded hips are concealed under a navy blue pair of Dickies shorts—everything concealed. No princess seams to highlight the curve of chest to hips, no tight low-cut jeans or skin-baring tops with sequins and cropped sleeves.

There's a boy in the mirror. Cropped black hair and blue eyes and soft skin, but passable. The dressing room in Kohl's buzzes with ladies trying on tailored suits and early summer wear, but I'm grinning like an idiot. There's a boy in the mirror. Digging out my Samsung, I snap a picture of him before he can vanish.

My mother calls out "Christina," and the illusion evaporates.

"I'm in here," I shove the phone into my pocket. Pulling the door open, I'm hesitant to look at her face. There's a five second silence.

"Okay...these look really big on you."

"That's how it's supposed to look." I tug at the shirt hem that hangs seven inches below my hipbone.

She insists I'm too small to wear this style and leaves for the boys' section to find something a little slimmer. She'd rather not see me swimming in my clothes, she says. I don't have the height or muscle tone to pull it off—shoddy logic, she has. I turn back to the mirror. The boy is still there, but he looks deflated.

As You Like It pretty much sums up my life. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts." I'm almost the modern-day Rosalind—a female passing as a boy. I'm unlike Rosalind too. She wanted to be a woman again. I don't. I'm also not a character in a play. I have my likes and my dislikes, my thoughts and troubles. I'm a female body, male mind. A sociologist. An ex. An aspiring writer. A roommate. A friend. A twenty-something. A vegetarian. A former band mate. An amateur model. A bitter enemy. Bad at mathematics. Overly organised. Shy. Lost. On this stage of life, I'm just reading the script and dodging rotten tomatoes.

My mother knocks on the dressing room door. She hands me a grey set of skater shorts and a brown girls' tee with a cupcake on it. I frown.

"Isn't this cute?" she laughs, handing it off. I skim over the sparkly print—*muffins are just ugly cupcakes*. The haughty cupcake itself employs scratch and sniff technology but to me it just smells like sugar and spice and everything nice—

everything I'm not. I prefer snails and puppy dog tails. I make a face and hand it back.

"It's uh...it's funny." Mom looks dejected and traces over the badly-drawn cupcake's face. My heart sinks in embarrassment and I avert my gaze. I sincerely hope to myself she didn't want me to try it on.

"Okay, well try those shorts on and let me know how they fit. I'll be downstairs in the shoe section." I nod and wait until her footsteps are gone before reaching for the mom-approved set of shorts. Much to her credibility, I look less like a swampy clothes monster and more like a polished, casual male.

I sincerely wish I could tell her why I'm doing this. Why I didn't want to wear the cupcake shirt. Why I showed no interest in the girls' section. Why I'm trying so hard to cover up curves. Why I insist on keeping my hair short and my nails unpainted. Why I flinch at the word 'girl' and 'she' and my birth name. I've gone through rehearsals—where we would be, what I would be wearing, the words I would use, the quotes to strengthen my thesis, the mental flowchart of this particular scene. I wish with all my heart I could skip to the end of my story but I'm still trapped in this linear frame.

Does Lawrence vanquish his inner demons? Does he get the girl? Does he ride off into the sunset happily ever after? Does the kingdom rejoice and feast with their newly-discovered prince? Or does he take his own life under the stress? Does he keep it all in and suffer wordlessly for five, six, seven, eight more years? Will he break? Will he champion?

"Hey Mom, I'm--" I'm a boy. I'm a boy. I'm a boy. "I'm going to get these shorts. I like them."

Amid the forest of styled shoes and brown boxes haphazardly stacked among shelves below, my mother nods. She holds the ugliest pair of Sketchers I've seen in a long, long time. They're moss green and some kind of tan you'd see in cat vomit. I frown at her.

"Those are really ugly."

"But I want something comfortable," she defends her choice. I sigh.

"Well, you can have comfortable and non-ugly shoes, mom. I think you need some Vans, or Converse. Those are cool." Leave it to me to be stylish. Digging around the shelves, I find a pair of Keds, black with cerise eyelets and seam-stripe in her size. We almost have the same size feet. At first, she's skeptical but once I talk her into the pair, she's starstruck. She raves about how cute and cushy they are, about how she'll wear them on her cruise soon as she prances around in front of a mirror.

Soon, soon. Soon I'll be able to tell her the truth, and then I can only hope she'll accept the fact that her daughter is long gone.

Lawrence von Meer is currently studying the intricacies of sociology at Central Connecticut State University. With two semesters until graduation, he has been honing his skill in various creative writing classes in the hopes of writing professionally. This is his very first publication. Born American, his heart is lodged somewhere between Württemberg and

London and prefers to use S rather than Z in words like *modernisation* and *criticise*. Fortunately for him, his way of spelling was readily accepted in Preston, England, where he studied creative writing and sociology at the University of Central Lancashire. Many plans have been dreamed up for future travel including host clubs in Japan and butler school in the Netherlands, but for now he resides in a quiet shoreline town in southern Connecticut.

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