

LIBERATE



2021 Channel Island LGBTQ+ Writing Awards

Piece Not Titled by Envy Jane

I saw Her again, in the corner of my eye as I turned away from the mirror. By the time I'd doubled back to catch Her, She was already gone.

Instead, it was just me. At least, it was supposed to be; this was who people saw when they looked at me. He seemed perfectly nice: handsome enough, funny, and kind. The people I love certainly seemed fond of Him. I was a fan too, but... He wasn't quite who I was expecting. I tried a smile, but I didn't find Him very convincing.

I had to find out who She was.

Whenever She would appear, it was only for a second. Sometimes I wouldn't see Her for days at a time. Over time, I noticed that certain things seemed to call Her closer, and others made Her almost impossible to see. She was easier to see when I was clean-shaven, so every day, I would fight with my stubborn stubble, wishing I could remove it entirely - but despite my best efforts, it always left me a reminder that it would be back.

Still, it was enough for Her, so I kept at it. I let my hair grow long, and let it down as often as possible. Over time my fashion sense changed as well; I welcomed denim jackets and baggy jumpers into my wardrobe, let them hide my broad shoulders. I liked the changes as much as She did. They softened His features, and distracted from some of the things that had always bugged me about Him. I still couldn't get a good look at Her, but I could tell She was there. My friends noticed there was something different about me, but they couldn't figure out what, and I didn't want to tell them. Some just told me I looked different, which was okay. But one my friends said that I seemed happier, which was a surprise. I certainly felt different, but I wouldn't have said happy. I felt more like a fog had been lifted, that I never even realised was there.

It occurred to me that this was what it was like to feel normal.

Then, it occurred to me that this was the first time I had felt normal in all my life.

The feeling came and went over time. Some days it was harder to find than others. The first time I wore a skirt - in the dead of night, so no one else would see - I felt it; the second time, I just felt deflated. Instead of drawing my eyes away from His features, I felt like I had exaggerated them, like I was lying to myself.

Maybe I was trying too hard, I would tell myself. Maybe I should have just forgotten about Her - what was I even going to do if I saw Her properly, anyway?

I tried not to think about Her. I let the stubble grow, I tucked my new clothes at the very bottom of my wardrobe, I tied my hair back as tightly as possible. I stopped seeing Her, but She was always on my mind. The days blurred together in monotony; colours seemed to dull, and I found myself without anything to say to anyone.

All at once I started to resent myself for wanting to change Him. He was the one people spoke to, and shook hands with, and invited to parties - if He wasn't me, then who could I possibly be? I was just overthinking it, I had to be. Everyone doubts themselves, that doesn't mean they aren't who they are-

But not everyone sees someone else in the mirror. And as hard as I tried to convince myself, when I looked into the mirror, and I saw Him staring back, I knew it wasn't right. I could barely see Him at all anymore.

I didn't know who I needed to be, but I knew I couldn't keep living like this.

Suddenly, there was a razor in my hand. I didn't even think about it. Tears streamed down my face, merging with blood and shaving foam before dropping into the sink. He had to go. I had no idea what would happen when He did, or what people would say, but He was a lie I'd been telling myself all my life, and I couldn't bear it any longer.

When I was done, I dropped the razor, dropped my head, and cried until my insides were coarse and dry. I don't know how long I lay on the bathroom floor, but I was numb when I

finally forced myself up. I caught my reflection out of the corner of my eye as I stood, not wanting to see. But I stopped - something was different.

Slowly, I turned to face Him - but He was gone. Even through the shaving cuts and swollen eyes, I could tell. This was by far the worst I had ever looked, but I could tell it was me.

It was Her. She was me. She always had been. Whether or not I'd have changed, She would have always been there - all I ever needed to do was let her out.

I smiled. For the first time in my life, I saw myself smiling back.