

## Half-Life

“That dress does nothing for you.”

He said this as I prepared dinner. Facing the stove and examining the backsplash, I continued to stir the macaroni while the Bolognese made the day before was covered and simmering in the adjacent pot. The grey tile revealed a muted image of myself, features like the first chisels of a bust. It was Monday, the most trying day of the week for a teacher in the first grade, and the dress was worn to ward off the *shit-fest* that would typically ensue after a weekend without discipline. A weekend is primary grade’s equivalent to summer off as students unlearn routines as minor as turn-taking, hand raising, and hygiene. Most teachers opt for jean day if they’re able or the comfortable slacks reserved for errand running or bathroom grouting.

I’d never been one at a loss for words, but every so often, someone would toss a curve, and time was needed to process what he’d said to me, his wife of just three years. It may have seemed an awkward amount of silence because it was, but what does one say in response to that? I kept stirring.

If he’d any sense at all, the inappropriateness of his comment would’ve been immediately evident, followed quickly by an embarrassed and blundered, *I didn’t mean it like that*, as if it could be received any other way, but that was my fault for letting comments like that roll off my back in the past. However, this, by far, had been the worst.

What sort of person allows someone to address her in such a manner? The strong and independent me would have lashed out and delivered a fast and furious open-handed bitch slap. Rewinding the moment back in my memory, it’s the response of choice, but the defeated me simply wondered what I hadn’t seen in the mirror.

While grating the cheese, I realized perhaps I should have taken the time to freshen up on the way home from work, as spending a day in a room filled with twenty-four six-year-olds alters one's appearance from morning to afternoon rather drastically. In the bathroom, my reflection was of shoulders slumped, lipstick faded, and an allergy-induced eye-rubbing during recess that had smeared what little was left of the eyeliner haphazardly placed there at six this morning.

The timer went off as I returned to the kitchen. While pouring the pasta into the strainer, I thought about the compliments I'd received from two people earlier that day. Perhaps they liked the dress, but they would have preferred it on someone else, maybe with different shoes. I can't really say. I liked the dress because it was pink and it reminded me of happy.

I opened a bottle of red, poured two glasses, and remembered thinking how being married to someone older than myself would be so wonderful and how I would always feel secure, loved, and desired. I was thirty when I married the first time and thought I'd learned a lot in the twenty years since, but apparently not enough. Imagine how ridiculous it felt to hear such unkind words from a second husband. I'd judged women of multiple marriages; how could they be so incompetent in their decision-making, in their relationships, or both?

Depression came back like the cat I fed once, old reliable, and I couldn't run enough miles to fight it off so eventually I made an appointment. For the record, the general side effects of antidepressants are nausea; increased appetite and weight gain (which makes no sense at all); loss of sexual desire and other sexual problems, such as decreased orgasm for women (seriously?); fatigue, drowsiness/insomnia (How is that even possible?); irritability, and finally, anxiety, making the drug of choice for depression in the nineties, cocaine, but this was freaking two thousand-eighteen for fucks sake. Why can't they create a pill with some useful side effects?

What kind of message are the drug companies sending us? Stop being a baby, take this—get fat, constipated, nauseous, dizzy, blind, and anxious. I was put on the lowest dose.

Weeks later, I cried at the nail salon because the shade of pink I'd chosen reminded me of the dress that did nothing for me. I wondered why I was taking meds when there was nothing wrong with me, and unless there was an anti-rejection pill on the market that I've not heard of, I shouldn't be taking anything at all.

When I returned home, I put on the pink dress, did my hair and make-up, threw on my nude sling-backs, and inspected the reflection. There she was, the woman I remembered. The one who survived all this time looking somewhat like a well-aging eighties porn star. Nothing was cooking when he came home, just an opened bottle of red and when he walked in, I poured myself a glass and raised it for a toast,

“This marriage does nothing for me.”

I downed it and left.

Or, was that the me I wish I was?