

Dressing Up by Alayna Lee

6:00 AM: waking up early to prepare myself for the day. Today is the day. Now that I'm older, I can make my own decisions. Seriously... who would go out of their way to come up to me anyway? I'm just a loner, in the back of the class, I never talk to anyone. The last time I spoke up was humiliating. Same with the time before that, and the time before that. To them, my words were a joke. My eyes were foggy, my head was red hot. All I could feel was the sickening glare of their eyes piercing my soul.

Yesterday was my birthday, and I just got my driver's license. This privilege makes me feel so much older than I did a week ago. I can feel my confidence rising just looking at it. I'm finally responsible enough to do what I want.

Shoot, already 6:11 AM and I'm still in bed. Maybe I should start by brushing my teeth, then I can choose my clothes.

6:27 AM: time to pick out my outfit. The hardest decision of my life. I mean, no one has ever seen me with more than a shirt and a pair of jeans. This will definitely be a stretch from that. How about a skirt today? That definitely seems new, but I'm willing to try it out. Maybe a long-sleeve turtleneck would work? The edge of the turtleneck is so tight that I can barely breathe, hopefully this isn't too big of a fashion disaster.

Ew, looking at myself in the mirror doesn't seem right. Should I really wear this? It looks like me... but not the "me" others see. No— why should I care about what others think?! Okay— going back to square one. How about this dress and belt? This doesn't look like too much... but it doesn't go with my hair.

It's already 7:03 AM and I still haven't chosen anything. Okay, Kit, just go with something *you* want to wear. Don't worry about what they think— for real this time. I got it, a plaid skirt and cropped sweatshirt; maybe some accessories too. Maybe a necklace? Oh gosh, I'm going to be late!

Just in time for the bell! Driving to school wasn't as bad as I expected... but hopefully no one witnessed me tumble in like that. Don't worry Kit— just another normal school day.

Already ten minutes in and I can feel the kid next to me staring at my clothes. She is literally looking at me every three seconds. Is it really that bad? Did I wear my shirt backwards or something? The professor wants us in groups too... crap. I can feel the sweat dripping down my face.

Just in a group with one other human being. Just happens to be the person who was staring at me. Nothing much. Her words can only completely break me down. No big deal. Anyway, what are we supposed to be doing? Discussing this problem—

"Hey, so I wasn't paying attention... what are we doing?"

"Oh," that surprised me, "we're supposed to be talking about this problem the professor gave us."

My voice is so clogged up. Hopefully she actually heard me. I'm so

worried about what she's thinking about to even know what part of the problem we are supposed to do.

"Thanks... Kit was it?"

"Yeah, and no problem."

Phew, thankfully she got the memo.

"My name is Elsie. Nice to meet you."

"Hi Elsie, nice to meet you too..."

Such awkward conversation. I can feel the awkward tension rising. I can feel my nails sinking into my palms. I just want class to end.

We have been sitting in silence for almost 30 minutes working on this. My eyes feel heavy and my mind is suffocating, I just want to stop worrying about all of this. The assignment, my outfit, what Elsie thinks. It's all too much. Why did I choose to wear this again?! I'm so uncomfortable with these thoughts. I feel so embarrassed. Elsie keeps looking at me too... is what I'm wearing too different from how I dressed to school before? I need to go to the restroom and calm myself down.

I don't even want to think about the fact I just got up and ran out that door. I can't think of anything right now. Why is this happening to me? Why was I so confident?

"Kit? Are you alright?" It's Elsie. "Yeah, I'm doing okay."

"Do you need help? Do you want to talk?"

My lip hurts so much, I feel like I bit it too hard, "Not really..."

"Okay, I'll sit outside if you need help. Just know, you did nothing wrong," she left.

At least Elsie is understanding. It sounded better to hear her say that I did nothing wrong. What did she think of my outfit? The way she said it sounds like she didn't see anything wrong with it. She still stayed respectful. I mean... I don't think anything about my clothes is wrong anyway. Maybe I can just ask her about it.

"Hey Elsie. Sorry about that"

"No worries. Do you want to walk back to class?"

"Sure but... what do you think of my outfit?"

She paused, "I think it looks really stylish; the necklace adds a nice touch!"

She likes it? "You really think that?"

"Yeah, you have good fashion sense!"

I can feel myself tearing up. I never expected someone to actually compliment my outfit, "Thank you Elsie."

9:30 AM. The bell rang, class was over. I started walking toward the door with my bag. Passing through that door made me feel a rush of resilience. That class felt like forever, but it was the first time I have ever felt accepted. The feeling of happiness reached my face. I can feel my mouth widen with joy. I think I'll try dressing up again tomorrow.

"Dressing Up" is a flash fiction about the main character Kit and her struggle dealing with societal expectations. I chose to write this story in first person to be able to better describe Kit's inner emotions since I wanted to base this solely on her reactions to the situations she encounters. The protagonist, Kit, decides to dress up more for school because of her growing confidence in independence to express herself outwardly through her clothing. The setting, her school, is important to the protagonist's development because of how it features similar aged students who usually have no filter on what they want to say about others. The conflict becomes more complicated when Kit realizes that there is someone starting to judge her for what she's wearing. At the climax, Kit decides to ask the person, Elsie, about the outfit; hoping for her reassurance. This is the very moment Kit wanted to stand up for herself. By describing Kit's shock at Elsie's kind words, I wanted to create subtext. Here it implies that this is the first time Kit has ever been complimented by someone. It was meant to imply a past of hers and how harsh it may have been, especially with her conflicting thoughts she has throughout the story. It also implies Kit is finally able to pass the hard first step in bringing back her self-esteem. Ultimately, I chose to resolve the conflict with Elsie complimenting Kit on her outfit because I thought that would be able to bring out positive character development from Kit. During peer review, my readers enjoyed the satisfaction of the ending and how relatable Kit's inner thoughts were. However, most of my readers suggested that I was to describe emotions visually instead of directly saying what they were. The most helpful feedback I received focused on adding these sensory details in places I could have to better show Kit's emotional reactions. I ended up adjusting these incidents in order to also improve the imagery of my piece— since those parts prior did not have a good description of what the action or item looked like. I was particularly inspired by the descriptions from "Red," because of the way the narrator describes some of the situations. I thoroughly enjoyed the scene of how they described the word red, and how Rothko and Ken were ping-ponging ideas off of each other. It showed me that there can be multiple ways to show different emotions to ultimately represent a certain meaning. I tried to emulate that within my story; and pieced together emotions with their physical effects.