

## “How Do I Look” by Lee Trull

She stands in front of a mirror. She looks worried. She sees us and composes herself.

How do I look? Classy? Or Trashy? I can't tell anymore.

She looks back at her reflection, smoothing herself out.

You see different regions of this country want their news women to look different ways. In the south they want big hair and white, white teeth. I nearly went broke buying hair spray when I worked in El Paso. Burned a whole in the ozone big enough to shove the moon through, but my hair wasn't moving. In the Midwest they like their newswomen plain, thoughtful, chaste. Almost like they got them straight out of a library or a monastery. In California we could look a little hipper, a little edgier, not so old fashioned. To me a couple of the women I worked with looked plain slutty to me but hey...to each her own. What about the east coast? I haven't figured them out yet. I start today. Washington DC. Network anchor. The most sought after job in the industry. Tonight twenty million people will tune in to see how I do. So, I ask again:

How do I look?

Intro.

She practices in front of a mirror.

“In related news two South African villages got a surprise visits from funny man Vince Vaughn who was there for the dedication of a hospital and a new school. Vince Vaughn latest film “Up, up, and Away” about a gay superhero comes out this fall.”

She notices us. Laughs.

It's next to impossible to practise the news. You know? Because you never know what's going to happen. So I started making up news items. So I could practise. It's stupid. I come up with stuff like “baby panda endorses Barack Obama” or “bad McDonald's fish filets sandwiches kill twenty in Berlin.” My boyfriend used to love it. I'd think he's asleep but he's only pretending so he can watch me practice. I'd think I'm alone and then hear him snickering from the bed. He said the news I come up with is only barely crazier then real stuff.

(MORE)

2.

I met Greg in when I was working in San Diego. I had only been there a week and I was hating it. Nobody seemed to want me there. The men at the station were awful. Kept calling me the 'new girl'. Every time they introduced me. 'This is the new girl'. 'How's the new girl coming along?' 'What do you guys think of the new girl?' Every time I heard them say 'new girl'. It would sound more and more like 'fresh meat'. The men would watch me as I passed by. Camera men, writer, editors, even my co-anchor...I could feel their eyes on me. That Friday my boss called me into his office. The room smelled like mildew and an indulgent amount of after shave.

"Mellisa, my girl, have a seat. So, you've been with us for over a week now and on the whole, we think you are doing a terrific job. It's just...when we hired you we thought we were getting something different then what we're seeing now. Your tapes you sent from El Paso...we just thought you were a little more of a hot number. You know? A little sexier. That's what we were hoping for we when hired you. A little sex appeal.

Sex appeal? I thought I was anchoring the news. You know? Bringing a sense of clarity and calm to often confusing and upsetting events. I worked my way up in El Paso. Defied the odds. I was the youngest anchor the station ever had. And yes at times I had wore a tighter dress or a little more make up but...so what? I paid my dues. I already went through all this crap. I thought I got the San Diego job because I was smart. Because I was serious. Because I worked harder than anyone else/ Not because I was a 'hot number'.

I was upset. I stopped off at the closest bar I could find and ordered a double vodka tonic. I gulped it down and asked for another. A man sitting a few stools down from me laughed.

"What?", I said, angrily.

"Nothing. You just seem a little stressed."

"No.

(MORE)

3.

I mean...yes, I'm stressed, but I'm fine."

"Is it work?"

"That's none of your business....yes, it's work."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a news anchor."

"Oh are you, really? What's your name?"

"Melissa Ramirez."

"A Latina news anchor. I have a bone to pick with you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Why is it you ladies always sound like Katie Couric for the majority of your telecast, then suddenly when you say your name or any other Spanish names or phrases it suddenly sounds like a telenovella?"

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, come on. You all do it."

"Are you telling me I should be more white?"

"No. I think you should be more Latina. The world has enough Katie Courics. It could use some more Melissa Ramirez's."

She smiles.

And that was that. I loved him right away.

Greg and I lived together for a year in San Diego. He kept me sane. He kept me laughing.

(MORE)

4.

It didn't matter what happened at work. Or how many over weight alcoholic co workers made a pass at me, when I got home Greg would be there with dinner made. Every night he'd welcome me home with a thick Mexican accent:

"Hello Melissa Ramirez."

So, after one year in San Diego I got a call. It was a man offering me a job as anchor at the largest station in Chicago. I went screaming into the living room.

"Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god!"

Greg almost fell off the couch, "What happened?"

"They offered me a job!"

"WBIP Chicago. I start next week."

"Next week? Chicago?"

"Yes. Can you believe it?"

"I can't move to Chicago."

He said he couldn't quit his job and just move. I said I understood and I think he believed me. That is until I burst into tears. I didn't mean to. But I just couldn't stop. I couldn't turn down the job and I couldn't leave Greg. My head was exploding.

"This job means a lot to you?"

I nodded my tearful head.

"And you want me to go with you?"

I nodded again.

"Alright. Then I'll go with you."

We had to take Greg to the emergency room that night because I tackled him too hard. I knocked him onto the hard wood floor and he broke his pinky finger.

(MORE)

5.

He forgave me, though.

So, we moved to Chicago. It took Greg awhile but he found a job. He loved our neighborhood. There was a little bakery he could walk to and get breakfast and a cup of coffee. We were happy. The job was incredible. The station took me seriously. They wanted me to succeed. It didn't take long before I became a local celebrity. Greg and I would get free tickets to a Cubs game or the best table at a restaurant. The people there embraced me. For the first time I didn't like the sassy little Latina news woman. I felt like an anchor. The first person the people in the city went to for there news.

It was a Thursday night telecast. What would become my most important telecast. The one that made me nationally known.

"Hello, I am Melissa Ramirez and this is your local news. A local landmark burned downed last night. The Sit and Sip book store on State st. caught fire at 11 o'clock. The police do not suspect arson. Our mayor had a surprise visit from the first lady of Chicago, Oprah Winfrey. Ms. Winfrey was not expected to attend the birthday festivities but apparently cleared her schedule. And we have breaking news, it appears a 32 year old man was shot on the corner of Davis and Smith st. in an apparent robbery..."

I stopped. Davis and Smith that was our block. This was a live feed. The information was running along the Teleprompter. I couldn't read fast enough.

"The police have not released the victims name but neighbors believe it to be...Greg Jennings a local...I'm sorry...um...oh my God...oh my God..."

I ran out of the studio during the live telecast.

The police hadn't released the name. Maybe it was a mistake. A man who looked like Greg. As the cab pulled up on a corner I saw the police lights and the yellow tape and a crowd of people. The older lady who lived down stairs grabbed me.

"I'm so sorry, Melissa."

I looked out at the crime scene. A corpse. A sheet pulled over the body. I couldn't see his face. Maybe it wasn't him. Then I saw his shoes. The brown Oxford I had bought him on his birthday. It was him. It was Greg.

(MORE)

6.

All the sounds of the city hushed to a chilling whisper as I fell to the ground. My cheeks began to burn. My stomach began to swirl. The whole frosted night was just a prison cell and I was locked inside it. When I finally went home six hours later to try and change my clothes and pour some water on my face, I flipped on the television. The apartment was too quiet. I needed some noise on the background. But there I was on every channel. And not just the local one's. CNN, MSNBC, CSPAN. I was no longer a reporter. I was the news. I shut the TV off and went into the bathroom and stared at myself. The night before's makeup still caked on my face like a mask. A chill went through my body and I started to wipe off. I scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed, but all I could see was a pretty little plastic Mexican barbie. What I never told you, or anyone, is that I have always hated the way I look. I hated my brown hair and my brown eyes. I hated the way men looked at me. Not like I was pretty but like I was trash. Like I was stupid and silly and disposable. I never felt good. Everyone looking at me. That camera staring straight at me. I never ever felt...good. Until Greg. Greg thought I was beautiful. Greg thought I was funny. Greg thought what I did was important. Important enough for him to follow me out here. And now he was gone and it was my fault.

By the end of the week I was a national celebrity. The anchorwoman who had to report her own boyfriend's murder. I was a America's sweetheart. I went back on the air but although I got a lot of support, my heart wasn't in it. I spent my days in bed and my night's on the air. I never went out. Not even for a bite to eat. I couldn't.

Two months later I got a call from the NBC. That want to audition me for the Network anchor. It was a long shot and I knew they were only interested in me because of the notoriety. So, I turned down the audition. My boss told me I was insane. He told me it was the job of a lifetime and that he would fire me if I didn't audition. So, I reluctantly agreed.

I sat in a cold studio, all dolled up, with an ugly intrusive camera staring blankly at me. I read the fake news off the Teleprompter and waited for a response.

"Um...good job, Ms. Ramirez. One thing though, this is network news. You know, the whole nation is watching and on network we tend to try and stick with one vocal style. We try to stray away from anything too ethnic. You know what I mean? Could you maybe not roll your r's so much when you say your name?"

I lifelessly nodded. What did it matter anyway? It was all just a game. I prepared myself to do it again, this time in a more white friendly way. But then the strangest thing happened. I could see Greg sitting at that bar in San Diego. Smiling at me. Teasing me. Making me feel better about myself.

(MORE)

7.

I took a deep breath. Flattened my gaze and said:

“I’m sorry. My names is Melissa Ramirez and that’s the way it’s pronounced. The world’s got enough Katie Couric’s.”

I grabbed my things and I left.

The next day I got a call. The job was mine if I wanted it.

She looks in the mirror. Straightens her clothes out.

So, tonight’s the night. And I know he will be watching. Along with the rest of the country.

Freshly pressed suit. Hair is perfect. Nail’s manicured. Makeup smartly applied. Brown hair.

Brown eyes. I look serious. I look smart. I look pretty. I look like...myself. So I ask again:

How do I look?