

# Dysmorphia

*Written by Donovan Russo*

He put his hand up against the mirror. He looked at himself, tears in his eyes. His fingertips shook and his jaw jittered. He cringed as his phone continued to buzz, keeping it on the floor. He did not even mean to have his phone on him. But it was originally in his pants' pocket, and he was far too deep to stop. He stood up straight and continued to watch himself. He sucked in his stomach and flexed his scratched abdominal muscles. He then turned to his right and struck a lat pose-- his back had scratches and bruises as well. His head then dropped with disappointment. His phone began to buzz again. This made him grab his phone and leave the bathroom. He put his phone on his kitchen counter, face down, so he could avoid the missed call alerts that plagued his home screen. The kitchen had no shades opened and the floors had tiny dust ball in its corners. A small ant farm also formed by the garbage can that was against the wall straight ahead. He proceeded by heading back to the bathroom and looking at himself again. He then took a seat against his bathtub, putting his face into his hands.

A few hours ago, he had met with his friend, a curly haired man who had known him since he was a child. They met at an old baseball field that they would always play at, having a catch.

“Can you believe it’s been all this time?” The curly haired man threw the ball to him.

“I can,” he threw the ball back.

“Why do you say it like that?”

“I was answering your question.”

“We had some nice times here.”

“*You* had nice times here. I was shit.”

“You love baseball.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that I was shit.”

“You’ve been odd these days.”

“Because I don’t feel like getting all sentimental? That makes me odd?” He threw the ball back.

The curly haired man looked at his friend, who had bloodshot eyes and scruff that uncharacteristically covered his face.

“Can you stop doing that?” He glared at the curly haired man.

“What am I doing?”

“Looking at me like I’m deranged or some shit.”

“You’ve been scaring us.”

“Who? Who have I been scaring?”

“Everyone in town. They’ve all been talking.”

“Fuck everyone in town. And fuck you for even entertaining them.”

“You never leave your house.”

“I’m here now, aren’t I?”

“They hear you yelling.”

“Who hears me yelling?”

“The people spreading the rumors.”

He looked at him long and hard before storming off the field. The curly haired man followed.

“Why can’t we just talk?”

“Because there’s nothing to talk about.”

“There’s always something to talk about.”

“Well then there’s nothing that *I* want to talk about.’

“Are you and I still friends?”

He stopped in his tracks. “What?”

“Are we good with each other?”

“Why wouldn’t we be?”

“This is the first time I’ve seen you in months.”

He put his head down, unsure how to respond.

“Come stay with us for a while. Melissa and I would love to have you.”

“I’m not going to abandon them.”

“You’re not abandoning anyone.”

“That house is all that’s left.”

“They’d want you to be happy.”

“I am happy!”

“You are?”

“I just said I was.”

“It sure as hell doesn’t look like it.”

The word “look”. It triggered something in him. His mouth became dry and sweat started to penetrate from his forehead. And then slowly, the words fell out of his mouth.

“And what does it look like?”

“It looks like you’re on drugs or something.”

He felt like his friend stabbed him slowly with a hunter’s knife that was twisted into his flesh, squeezing out every drop of blood that kept him alive. *Drugs* equaled weakness and weakness equaled being skinny. And if he was skinny, then he wasn’t muscular. And if he wasn’t muscular, then everything that he had done had been a waste.

“Your eyes are bloodshot, your skin is pale. You don’t look well. You don’t look well at all,” he continued.

So there he was, sitting in his bathroom with his hands to his head. He then went on his knees and put his forehead to the floor. He began to whisper to himself.

*He doesn’t know. How could he know? He’s clueless. He’s just jealous of my success.* He then stood up and faced the mirror again. He glared at his body and then proceeded by smacking himself in the face, roaring with rage. He then headed to his garage, which is where he kept his weight set. He refused to go to public gyms. He would only train in his home, within the safety of his own privacy. His shirt would be off, music would be loud and the lights were always kept dim. He began to perform sets of incline bench press but tears began to stream down his face.

“No!” He re-racked the barbell. “Stop!”

He grabbed a brown leather belt that he kept in the corner of the garage in a blue bucket and started to whip himself with it, holding in his grunts as best he could. His face reddened with stress. His mind then went back to the conversation he had with his friend.

“Drugs? You think I’m on drugs?”

The curly haired man put his head down.

“Have you seen me? Have you seen the body I’ve built?”

“What?”

He ripped off his shirt and threw it at his friend. “Do you see this? Look at me! Look at what I’ve done! Look at what I have achieved!” He pointed to his body, which was lean in body fat, defined with muscle but layered with whip marks.

“What did you do to yourself?” The curly hair man was mortified.

“I’ve busted my ass! Training each day and night! Eating only what is pure! I’ve given it everything! Everything I’ve got!”

“Have you been hitting yourself?”

“That’s what you take away from this? Are you too stupid to see what I have built?”

“You’ve lost it! You need help!”

“You’re the one who needs help! How much do you weigh these days? 220? That’s pathetic! Terrible! You look like a fat lard who swallowed a greased up pig! And I need help?”

“This isn’t you,” the friend’s eyes widened. “I don’t know what this is. But it’s not healthy.”

Another key word: *healthy*.

There was a mirror in his garage. He crawled over to it, barely able to look at himself once more. But he did, and the tears continued to pour out of him. His mind flooded with pictures. Pictures of his mother, his father and him, but as a baby. His body began to shiver and his arms broke out into hives. He huddled himself into a ball on the floor and shut his eyes real tight, resting his skull on the concrete.

He turned his back on the curly haired man that day and walked away, ignoring the shouts for him to come back. He got in his car and sped off. He thought he was at his best when

he was alone, focused on his goals and only his goals. He didn't need people, as they were just a distraction and he didn't need love, as that was already taken from him. But as he rested on the concrete floor of his garage, he thought to himself, *what would happen if this failed too? What would happen if I never amounted to this vision of what I'm supposed to be? What if I did just let go of everything and headed to paradise? Run off into the sunset? Or maybe even the water? And what if I just let myself drown, be one in the wet sand with the multicolored sea-shells barricading my cold corpse? And what if, I wash up on sea one day and do find them? Finding everything I ever wanted? Everything I ever needed?*

He suddenly stood up, and grabbed that belt again. *What if, my metamorphosis is not meant to happen here?*

A few hours later, the curly haired man stopped over and found him, using the spare key he was given long ago.

**The End**