In The Dressing Room Daily

An Essay by Anna Miles

In the dressing room daily, a rotation of young women who ate too much last night or drank one-too-many glasses of wine. Young women who talk about their dinners, their mac-and-cheese-and-bacons, their snuck-spoonfuls-of-ice-cream-before-bed, together they groan, joking-but-not-joking, groan and rub their stomachs and laugh with morbid camaraderie, and swear together to do better today, tomorrow, someday. Together they swear to be better. “Be good.”

In the dressing room daily, a rotation of young women seated before harshly-lit mirrors, mirrors invented to show them exactly what’s “wrong” with their faces, every blemish illuminated, every zit-pimple-pore-wrinkle-dark-spot-shadow spotlighted. They spread out their powders and potions, spread layers of pigment over their skin, until they look “naturally beautiful,” at last They highlight their cheekbones and press plastic strips with long fibers attached onto their eyelids, to make their eyes look bigger, so they can be better “seen from stage.” This is what they ready themselves for: to be seen. The groans and the laughter grow in a chorus of laments about this imperfection, that imperfection, the women pop and pick and swear that their faces will look better tomorrow. I’ll do better tomorrow. Be better tomorrow. Be good. Be worthy.

A rotation of women, daily bracing themselves for the moment a dresser backstage pulls the skirt of their costumes tight around their waists, trying to hook it closed, silently praying that their bacon-mac-and-cheeses and one-too-many-glasses-of-wine will not force these waistbands out to the loosest of the adjustable hooks. They brace themselves silently to be reminded of their past failures every time the choreography causes that too-tight skirt to dig sharply into their rib cages. Out loud, they continue the jokes and the groans and laughter, saying “just get it to the tightest hook you can! Good luck!”, and then swear to do better tomorrow, to finally do that Pilates YouTube video they’ve been meaning to do, they swear it will fit better tomorrow. Tomorrow I will be better. Tomorrow I will be happy.

In the dressing room daily, a rotation of women whose jobs - whose lives - are to be seen. To be consumed. To be evaluated. Women who lose jobs - who lose lives - because they’re too fat, too thin, too flat-chested, too short, too tall, or their hair is too brown. In the dressing room daily, a rotation of women who chose their careers because they wanted to tell stories, create art, cultivate their talents, but who spend most of their careers wondering whether anyone will be able to see that passion and those talents behind their too-fat-too-thin-too-short-too-tall-too-brown bodies. Women who stand before thousands, daily, in a theater, or on a movie screen, or sometimes just in front of a few who might as well be thousands, in stuffy audition rooms. Women who stand to be seen boldly, nakedly, heels pinching their feet, women who stand and say, “look at me, here I am, in all my glory, please take me as I am,” only to be told, “lose ten pound, then we’ll talk.” “Can you fit in the costume? We will take a look at your measurements and then think about asking you to come in again.” Women who, daily, hourly, every minute, every second, wonder if their talent and passion can possibly mean anything at all when their skirts are so damn tight. Women who smile and nod at the many, or the few, before them and say, “thank you for the feedback,” and swear next time to finally be better.

In the dressing room today, a woman’s body being measured by another woman, her friend, her personal trainer. A woman closing her eyes and holding her breath as her friend records the numbers in a computer spreadsheet, as her value and self-confidence get translated into numbers on a chart. A woman who looks at the numbers and sighs, sadly, apologizing for gaining one-quarter of an inch around her thighs. I’ll do better next week, she says, I’ve just been busy. I’ll do better tomorrow. I’ll be better.

In the dressing room today, a woman watching herself shrink, a woman working to make herself smaller, working to take up less space. In the dressing room today, women wishing they could shrink themselves, lose inches upon inches until finally they disappear, taking up no space at all. Until they are beautiful, and invisible. Until they are good. Until they are better. Tomorrow. Please God, tomorrow.