

BOY IN THE MIRROR

By

Ken Smith

© 2007

Haunting grey eyes, supported by layers of skin, stare back at you. Above them sit Dennis Healey eyebrows, not totally out of control but requiring attention. To complete the picture, silver sideburns and balding head, cropped for comfort, cropped to hide the fact maybe, cropped to look younger - yes.

It is a wise face, a weary face, a wanting face, lined and flushed around the cheeks,

brought about by a double scotch and a lifetime of hopes and fears, each line etched with the precision of an artist.

Ugly hair protrudes from ears and nostrils. You wonder how you can grow so much in such unattractive places but produce so little on your head. So many times, you have clipped away - clipped away the days, months, hopefully years. Clipping away all that makes you what you do not want to be but what you are. Reminding you that you are not "Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be".

Again, you wonder who you are. You only know who you are not!

You sink another scotch and wonder if that's wise. Your liver would say not, maybe your bladder also. If nothing else, you feel and look better as it bursts in your belly, bursts in your brain, increasing your flush to crimson, spreading a smile across your ageing face.

Blessed with dimpled cheeks your face lights up and you are eighteen once more. Then again, you've never been anything but. And you remind yourself that it is only the decaying shell you live in which is older than you, and you ask yourself if those of a similar, youthful age - who

delight and torment you - will ever understand this.

“You are as young as you feel,” they say.

You reply; you are as young as they make you feel, as you are permitted to feel. It took you a lifetime to discover this; to discover that youth and beauty is everything in a world that dares call itself gay, that dares believe the Berlin Wall has fallen but has built an even bigger one around you.

You know this to be true; digging the foundations, mixing mortar and laying many bricks yourself during a misguided youth.

“Is Denim suitable?” you wonder, scarlet face and blue shirt. But nothing clashes these days - personalities perhaps, ages yes.

You ask yourself, “Is it a crime to desire beauty for oneself, or of another, for oneself? And who of your age would not be Dorian Grey for a day for this purpose?” And you reply, “Who would not?”

Snug-fitting 501's gather in the excess flesh, distributing it neatly around your ageing frame, making it presentable, undetectable, desirable maybe. And DM boots, for a young man's feet, firm around your frail, old bones.

You look at yourself in the mirror again and know that you are mutton dressed as lamb seeking lamb dressed as lamb, but with the help of another scotch you no longer care.

You catch his reflection in the mirror, peach smooth face, searching blue eyes, body-hugging vest, painted-on pants. He's eighteen going on fifteen and frightens you by his youthful confidence, by his beauty, by his thoughts.

He offers you a smile and you feel ashamed, guilty, gullible. But you greet him with a smile of your own. Greet him with the contents of your soul, opening wounds of thoughts of lovers past.

You think he thinks you're old, sad, spent - even silly dressed as you are - but you hold his gaze for as long as possible, making a mental photocopy of his fine features and figure, something to torment and tease you whilst you toss and turn, and try to sleep in an empty bed.

You want to speak, but don't. You want to tell him about life, death, joy and love - life's hidden treasures.

He greets you across the room and you are dissolved and delighted by his soft speech, yet feel as though he's just stabbed you.

You look down at your roughened palms and check if they are bleeding, wondering if you could suffer being nailed to yet another cross, reminded that you've had relationships lasting longer than the years that he's been breathing. Your last you scattered along the path of your favourite walk after watching him waste away. How you wished it were you, neither expecting such a cruel and devastating disease in your lifetime.

You catch his searching eyes in the mirror once more, bluer than your Denim shirt. You question him telepathically and ask, "What do you want me to be this time - mother, father, uncle, brother or - if God were good – lover."

You've played them all, acting the roles many times, directing the undirectable play of life, a lifetime of made-up-faces. One of them was yours - you think.

He touches your shoulder, momentarily healing your wounds. You say hello but know that even Moses could never bridge the gulf of years that lie between you.

He offers up his name and removes the distance by a single kiss upon your cheek.

Nervously, you reply with your own, trying to hide the tremors of excitement and of fear. You take another gulp of scotch, knowing too well you've run the gauntlet of rough and rude rent-boys many times before.

Unexpectedly, he reaches out his gentle hand for yours. His feminine fingers fit snugly into your wrinkled skin and you squeeze them tightly.

Together you move back to the table. You draw in his youthful vibrations, absorbing his sensual, boyish scent.

You sink the remainder of the scotch and he his lager. As you walk away from the bar, hand in hand, you feel your body lacerated by the surgical stares of scalpel eyes. You no longer care.

At the exit, he kisses you - a long, lingering, life-threatening kiss. His arms go about your waist and you smile, drawing him into your bosom, offering your succulent breast to another hungry soul.