

# The Man That Wasn't Hers

by Erin Zulkoski

I am lying on my back and am confused. I look around the room, but just with my eyes, as I'm afraid to move my head. Shit, I'm afraid to move at all. I don't recognize my surroundings, or this place I'm in. The pictures on the wall are not mine, neither are the blankets on the bed or the furniture. The man laying next to me is not mine, either. He is smaller, shorter, and thinner than the man I have. He is sleeping with his mouth agape and he's snoring softly. I dared myself to move my head to look at him. I want to reach over and plug his nose, but I talk myself out of it. As I become more coherent and rouse out of my sleep stupor, the situation I have found myself in dawns on me and feelings of sadness and despair overcome me. I feel like a whore, lying next to this man that isn't mine, even though nothing sexual has happened between us. I sit up in bed and find my glasses on the window sill and put them on my face, and I can see the room more clearly now. There are empty beer cans in the corner, rumpled shirts and pants piled on the floor, and books spilling out of the book shelf. I reach for my phone and check the time. I still have some time to try to make myself look somewhat presentable for work. I scoot towards the end of the bed, trying to be careful not to wake the man that isn't mine. I climb awkwardly over laundry baskets that are at the foot of the bed. I accidentally step on more beer cans and cringe as they make the empty aluminum can sound. I look at the man that isn't mine to make sure I haven't woken him up. I make it to the bathroom without further incident and sit down on the cold porcelain of the toilet and pee. I rest my elbows on my knees and put my head in my hands. I have a pounding headache; probably from all the beer the man that isn't mine and I drank into the early morning hours, which explains all the empty cans scattered about the bedroom. I feel like I'm in a daze, my head feels enormous in my hands. Maybe I'm still dreaming; maybe I'm not really sitting on the toilet, wishing I wasn't here. I pinch myself; nope this is my reality. This is really

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happening to me. The pain from my headache increases and I can feel the blood coursing through the veins in my brain, pounding in sync with my heart beat. I stand up and flush the toilet and make my way to the mirror--the same mirror the man that isn't mine stared at me through a few days ago. I look at the same cabinet next to the sink and think about the bottle of perfume--HER perfume. I shudder as I recall him whispering in my ear, "...you'll never be her." I stare at myself in the mirror, or at least I think it is me, but it's hard to tell at this point. I wash my hands and splash warm water on my face and pull my hair into a loose pony tail at the nape of my neck. I give myself a once-over and think, this is as good as it is going to get. I go back into the bedroom to wake the man that isn't mine. I'm relying on him to take me places, but instead, he's just going to take me to work.

