

Monster Dressed as Monster

It was Halloween. You should have bought the mask. You saw it in the shop on Byres Road, one of those latex textured things you pull over your head like something that's been skinned. The mask was wrinkly, witchy, carbunckled but no –the idea of your face inside the rubber-smell of it - couldn't dance in that. The hair was all nylon - buzzy and the colour of manky straw from a byre, you know? That green way when the beasts have trampled it. Eyes like something gouged out with a point.

Anyway.

You should have bought it there and then, on impulse. But twenty seven pounds, you thought - and you'd only wear it once.

Your big mistake was hesitating.

That boy will lose his eye. One comment and your tumbler in his face. No pause for thought. No hesitation there.

You hesitated in the shop on Byres Road - your eye roved - got distracted. There was an inflatable sheep. You thought of Archie. You thought of Archie and you thought of Dad and you thought of *her* and it clicked. Didn't it?

Archie fell and broke his neck.

Archie was a black-faced ram. Your Dad used to show him at the ram-fair down at Newton Stewart, clipped close, bollocks shaved. The ram got used to all the pulling and pummelling and the snip-snip-snip of the shears *She* thought it was daft to show that ram. Just so much wasted mutton. Dad said that ram was worth a lot of money.

It was just as well that Alex dragged you off. You would have killed him.

"Come on!" Alex said.

You've never done anything like that before. Just glassed the bloke for what?

The smell in the Oxfam shop but. You always imagine that smell don't you and there it was, that dead granny smell you remember from your granny's house before she was even dead. The smell of disuse. Hollowed out. Bodies full of gas and sort of washed clean in an unclean sort

of way like that black brine on muddy estuaries where they never flush. The volunteers at the counter gave you funny looks. You pretended to check out the second-hand books but actually the stuff on that rail was fascinating.

You realised that what you really wanted was a Playtex roll-on just like *she* wore - cross-your-heart with fingertip panels and the lift and separate. You've got that image of her from your dreams, sitting on the edge of your bed like that, her blurred eyes rubbed, begging.

The best you could find was an old bra in a rummage bin. You went back into town and bought the panty-girdle new in Markies.

God knows what Alex thought when he caught you struggling with the wee slider-catch fastening the suspender to the stocking top. You were standing in the living room and Alex just barged in with a carry-out and a Tony Blair mask from the Party Shop. Mortified, you were.

"You think I've lost the place," you said.

Alex smirked. "Marilyn Monroe?"

"More like my mother."

Alex looked like he would boak. You could see his point - no tits to speak of, just all this flab and awkward bones and trussed-up like a roll of pork bulging round the sides of bra straps, suspenders rolling out like spilled shit above the panty-girdle. Your Dad chased her around the house like that. You saw it – took a long-long step away. Remembered the Ailsa Craig.

Ailsa Craig always seemed to pull down the light from any break in the clouds. Across the water you could see Kintyre and, on a clear day, Ulster. Dad had lost interest in almost everything by then and Archie's fleece was manky with brambles and dry thistles tangled in its knit. That bright October day the ram plodded down the field toward the ewes, picking up speed on the slope, tripped and broke his neck. Your Dad sat down beside you on the turf. He knew, even from that remove, that it was over.

You stood there looking down on him.

The ram lay there, stone dead, neck twisted, head cocked back to stare up the hill. The ewes turned as a flock and flowed away down towards the cliff-edge in a dense puck of shimmying fleece.

"Ah, fuck it," said your Dad and hauled himself to his feet. He began to limp sideways down the hillside, the collie at his heel. The sea was burred-flat and spray-flecked but the sun had gone in behind the cloud and Ailsa Craig was just a darkness denser than the rest. Infested with rats, they said.

When he reached Archie, Dad aimed a kick at the sheep's arse. The dead beast jerked forward then settled back on itself, just mutton on the bone and old stringy mutton at that.

“Fuckin’ shame,” Dad said. “Fuckin’ shame.”

He dug his fingers into the old ram’s fleece.

“This is your mother’s doing,” he said.

“How?” you said.

He shook his head and sighed. He straightened up and continued down the hill towards the ewes who stood clustered against the sea. He didn’t stop. You watched, expecting him to chase the ewes back up the brae. He disappeared over the lip and out of sight. The dog paced the cliff-edge, back and forth.

You’ve got your father’s face. It’s not that obvious but when you look – maybe more so in the bones or the way just certain gestures, grimaces, turns of phrase, you know, even that, you know – but you’ve definitely got his jaw and his eyebrows. And his mouth. You always thought – you had her eyes.

By then you had put on the not-so-wee black dress, struggled with the zip. Alex had gone off to get ready. Standing in front of the full-length mirror, you were really getting into this. The wig was gorgeous. But eyeshadow and mascara was a whole fucking voyage of discovery. How do they do that so close to their eyes? You just rubbed the stuff in and it looked like you’d died. You blinked. And there she was. It wasn’t the makeup. You thought it was. You used to think there was something painted on about her face that, reproduced, would draw her likeness towards the surface. Seen in certain lights. You were wrong. Staring, you saw *she* is a state of mind. You know that don’t you? You recognise that state like the sea when the sun falls upon it and you can see right to the bottom - sand and rocks and crabs. That state is shame.

It was almost Halloween. You walked to the cliff edge - gazed into the sea. The tide was in and the slabs below were all awash with foam and torn kelp. No sign of him. *She* was making the dinner with a wee sherry by her hand.

“What’s wrong with you?” she said.

“Dad’s dead,” you said.

“What d’you mean dead?”

“He jumped off the cliff. I couldn’t see him. He’s gone.”

“You’re kidding me,” she said.

“I’m not. He just walked off the cliff,” you said.

“It was an accident.”

“He said it was your doing.”

She said, “O my god.” She started to rock, her arse leaned against the table’s edge. She was in her stocking soles on the flagstone floor.

So anyway

You were standing beside that wee wall just outside the close. The party had spilled into the backyard, noise and lager, the smell of dope.

And the boy said...

And you said... “I’m supposed to be my mother.”

And he said, “Hoor was she?”

It was just as well that Alex dragged you off. You would have killed him.

“Fuckin come on!” Alex said. “Fuck sake!”

Your hands were slippery-slimy with blood from the guy’s face and your blood too where splinters of the glass had cut your fingers. Alex was cool.

“What the fuck did you do that for?” he said.

And you just said, “Cunt should not have commented.” Just that.

“Here. Up here,” Alex said.

You climbed a set of stairs and hirpled along a balcony and down into another street.

“You need to wrap that up,” Alex said. “It’s dripping everywhere.”

“What wi’?”

“I don’t know what wi’. Yer knickers.”

“Can’t handle these suspenders,” you said. You must have been fleein’.

“Here,” he said, and wrapped a handkerchief around your fingers. “You need to get out of that dress.”

“Into what?”

A police car flashed by at the end of the street.

“Here. Up this close,” he said. “Maybe there’s washing out.”

And you thought, nobody hangs out washing overnight these days, at least not in October. They all have tumble driers. But you were wrong. There, hanging on a line in the next backdoor along, was a full row of washing.

“It’s damp,” you said.

“Gi’e’s peace.”

“Unzip me.”

Your dress zipped down the back. His fingers fumbled with the fastener, the sensation raising the hairs on the nape of your neck. You tilted your head into the sensation. Chill spilled

across naked flesh as the dress split open, neck to waist. You shimmied out of the dress, wiping your bloody hand on the fabric. And stood there in her underwear, trussed up, back turned, exposed to the breath of wind and him behind you.

“What’s it to be?” Alex said. “Overalls?”

A dog barked.

“I’ll take those jeans,” you said, returning to yourself.

“Put this shirt on,” Alex said.” No. This blouse. It’ll go better with the shoes.”

“Shit! The shoes,”

“Jist need to go for it. Show’s off yer tummy nice. Have you considered getting yer belly button pierced?”

“Fuck off!” you said. Then, “Thanks.”

“Daft bastard. What were you thinking?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Let’s get out of here,” he said, and dialled a taxi on his mobile phone.

It’s almost morning and the police have not arrived. The straps and catches cut into your shoulders and your thighs. Your Dad chased her round the house

Remember.

He was a big man then, strong and hirsute, skin like leather and *she* some wood nymph, rubenesque. That was the night you gave up on the pair of them - that moment glimpsed through the cracked-wide door. He chased her across the farmyard under the autumn moon. She was squealing. He was shouting. Imagine. You can’t. That’s the thing with parents isn’t it? You never really know.