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. . . Loves a Clown

Margaret Dawson
Denison University

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"...Loves a Clown"

Every five minutes the crazy man who looks like my next door neighbor screams. It has taken four of his calls for me to translate him into sight through the one-way mirror that surrounds me. The commuters' eyes are all rolled back in their heads and they can see nothing outside, only themselves. When finally I see the small dirty mouth which emits the only distinguishable noise, I feel that he can see me too, that now I have a link. But for him nothing is recognizable.

*

John said six o'clock. Another scream makes it twenty-five past.

"Meet me under the Kodak picture. It's huge, you can't miss it."

I forgot about rush hour. The circus of commuters scramble to the trains, the same show over and over again. Grand Central's merry-go-round. The light from Grandma's Christmas dinner distorts the mask of business and everyone looks like a hologram.

I wonder where John is.

"Just wait by the picture..."

But I think fluorescent is dangerous.

*

"It's a shame what you did to those nice legs. You sure did have some nice legs. You really gotta get it together, honey. "

I could not see her truly for her blinding and fuzzy pink lipstick. She was as unclear and obscure to me as the crowd in Grand Central. The same dizziness there came back. She went to the window, and though I thought the whiteness of her costume would never allow it, I felt she would do something I somehow knew would hurt, and before I could stop her, before I could scream and stop her, she ripped open the softly glowing white curtains.

"C'mon dear, look at the world. It's beautiful!"

*

Everyone is going so fast around. I look down but the ground holds no relief. My eyes are fixed on the half-eaten jelly doughnut that I know will be somebody's dinner.

I see a woman in a navy blue, belted, down jacket and I think it's my mother, not really, but it could be. She smiles like she sees someone familiar, my father. She gets closer and her eyes scream with wild laughter. She smiles because nothing is recognizable. She reminds me of the clown in the funhouse. Now I can only see her pinwheel eyes and dirty smile.

*

"Mommy, I'm kinda scared of all these mirrors. I don't really like them, I can't really see anyone."

"Don't worry dear, it's just for fun. We'll be out soon anyway."

"Can I get a balloon from the clown then?"

"Of course, honey, of course."

*

The announcer's voice starts to boom out the schedule changes, but the loud speaker translates only a loud mumble.

Just like the sound of the crowd going around.

Just like the sound of the merry - go - round.

Just like the sound of the side bar going down.

*

"You are such a nice little girl. You are going to get a special treat, such a nice, sweet, little girl. I am going to let you come see all my different make-ups and pretty clownsuits. I have a special balloon waiting for you in my dressing room. It's just over behind the merry-go-round. We'll come right back, we don't want your mommy to worry."

After I was let go, nothing, not even myself, was recognizable.

*

The nurse called the doctor and came over to the bed to try to calm me down. She let down the side railing and the slow squeaking brought back the pain of small legs and the coldness of the sound began seeping into a warm, once innocent self. I scratched violently at my bandages until my blood soaked the sheets.

*

The bright red smile he painted on me was smeared all over my face. It was the only wound that could be seen. The lump under the snarled, matted hair on the back of my head throbbed to the scream of the merry-go-round. It was the shrieking laughter that squeaked from the thick pink grin, through the huge white teeth of the red carousel horse and pierced the air into shivers. His glassy bulging eye watched everything, but he saw nothing...

They must have seen. Why didn't they see? Around and around, the lady with the pink hat, the boy eating the hot dog, couldn't they help? Does it spin too fast to see a bony body being driven again and again into the cold metal wardrobe. Does it spin too fast to translate the meaning of the heavy, nauseating moans that vibrated in my stomach.

The make-up on his face left a huge white hole in my chest where he rested his head when he ripped open my insides.

*

Lying on the starched sheets I feel somehow satisfied as I remember the woman who could be my mother's face in the mirror when she saw me shatter my self into splinters.

The hinged door swung open and a too bright uniform stood there behind the cold metal tray of poison that I knew I would not eat. Even her grin could not keep her disapproving breath from seeping through her too large dentures.

*

So many people everywhere, just like those pictures you have to tilt in the light to see. I hope they don't know anything's happened. Where's my mother?

*

"We all have to pay a price if we want a good man. You're taking things too seriously, honey. Just try to be, well, normal."

I did not know what she was talking about but I hated her for it. She placed the tray on the bedside table.

"No man wants a crazy wife, dear. You're a very pretty girl you know, really, you are."

*

Running towards the funhouse through blurred mustaches and fuzzy pink lipstick, I think I am, but it keeps moving farther away. I'm inside.

I bang hard against the mirrors, hard like I was against the wardrobe, until I am shattered into splinters of glass. Finally the blood comes.

*

"Seven-ten to New Haven on track 24." The voice from the loud speaker seems so clear as I run through smeared white faces. One last time I look back but I cannot see for the explosion of red splinters screaming fluorescent light.

*

The darkness of the drawn curtains on the midday sun is soothing and cool. The sanitary smell is faintly familiar. Swollen hands look better on a nine year old. I can feel the soreness without moving. I want to touch the wet oozing slashes that I know cover my thighs. The wet red and white. The red burrowing into the white, the white that is forever trenched by the red. The red and the white so long buried under the still forming scab of a years-old wound, now brought out into the world of my sight, into the world of merry-go-rounds, of ladies with pink hats and boys eating hot dogs and women with pinwheeled eyes that could be my mother.

Margaret Dawson