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Writer’s Craft

24 January 2024

Word Count: 491

In Vain

 The package arrived in late October while birds chirped on dying branches. I signed for it quickly and shut the door. It had only taken three days to arrive. Why had the woman on the phone said a week?

 I assured myself the quality wouldn’t suffer despite what I feared was a hasty production. *Advanced Technology*, the website had said, in bold. *Advanced*. I went to bed dizzy, my stomach burning and my heart racing; I couldn’t open the box.

 The next day, as I moved the knife toward the tightly taped edges, the telephone rang (or had the dog barked?) and I took it as a sign from God to wait a little longer. But, as I slipped into the shower that evening, the horrible sight of my face in the mirror assured me of my decision.

 Wrapped in an old robe, I moved to the kitchen and slid a knife through the box. Inside was a hand-held mirror, a container of clear gel, an instructional pamphlet – and my new face.

 I held her, the backside cool and soft on my hands. Her cheeks were tight and her plump lips a beautiful crimson red. They looked nothing like mine, thin and dull like my mother’s.

 Her cheekbones were raised, just as I’d selected. For a moment, I thought I should’ve shifted them a few centimetres higher ­­– perhaps a full inch – but the thought quickly passed.

 I moved to the bathroom, discarding the instructional pamphlet I’d read online, and peeled back the thin plastic film to reveal the translucent jelly. How could a powerful acid look so soothing? As I coated my face, the stench of burning flesh could not quash the excitement I felt watching my mother’s boyish features melt off my face in chunks.

 I gently placed on my new face, patting down the skin along my nose and carefully stretching the edges toward my scalp. I winced as I stuck my upper and lower lips to melted flesh. With closed eyes, I prepared to be free of the weight of my own ugliness. Silently, I counted down.

 It took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the light. As I leaned toward the mirror, I was quickly dizzied by my newfound beauty. Tight skin. A slight curve on the tip of my nose. Luscious eyebrows.

 I shifted my gaze. Right below my left cheekbone, about an inch from my ear, there was an indent – a scar I’d failed to notice earlier, about the size of a coin. My skin turned cold. The stain of ugliness had reappeared as fast as I’d burned it away. My sobs roared in waves as I clawed my face like a rabid dog, ripping away flesh into bits of bloody pulp on my soft, blue bathmat.

 As a tear rolled down where my cheek used to be, I caught my reflection in the mirror.

 My eyes were floating.

 Floating in nothing.