

THE FACE AFF

by Samuel Best

At first Ah thought it wis a hoolet that wakened me. The soft, slow hoot cairried intae ma bedroom on the shairp hairst air. But as Ah stirred under ma duvet Ah realised that the noise hadnae come fae ootside ma windae - it had come fae inside ma room.

Ah lay still and listened. Sometimes when Ah listen gey carefully Ah feel like Ah can hear ma ain pulse - the bluid skooshin through ma veins wi a steady pull like the tide - and the nicht it wis nae different. The mair Ah focused the mair Ah could hear the white noise ae ma ain hairtbeat. Somewhere in the background Ah thought Ah could hear laughter and it took me a meenit tae realise it wis the sound ae ma Da's TV doon the hall. He aye watches thae comedy specials; ken the wans wi three or fower comedians aw daein a wee bit. Every noo and again Ah can hear him laughin along. The sound jarred wi how Ah felt. Ma stomach wis twisted ticht and Ah could feel adrenaline scuddin through me, even though Ah couldnae yet figure oot why. Dae ye ever get that, when your body feels like it's gettin ready tae fight or run but you're no quite sure whit's wrang? Like if you're walkin through a tunnel at nicht and even though there's naebody aroon you suddenly start tae tense up? Get aw feart? It's like a sixth sense for danger and richt noo mines wis goin aff like a fire alarm.

The room lay quiet for a meenit or twa mair afore Ah heard it again. A canny wee sound like somewan steppin on an auld floorboard, or openin a creaky door slowly. Or liftin the hatch tae the loft. See, ma bedroom is part ae the new hoose conversion, and the bit on the far side ae the room used tae be the landing corridor, wi the loft hatch. They switched the waws aroon so ma room got bigger but they kept the loft hatch where it wis. And where it wis is noo in the middle ae the ceiling, about a metre away fae level wi the foot ae ma bed.

The widd creaked again and Ah slowly moved ma heid oot fae under the duvet. Ma room wis daurk and for a meenit the shadows made it hard for me tae recognise onyhin. The chair by the door looked like a beastie crouchin, ready tae pounce.

The heap ae school claes flung in the corner looked like a dissectit deid body. As ma een adjusted Ah lifted them tae the ceiling, towards the loft hatch.

Sure enough, as ma een got used tae the deep blackness ae ma room, Ah could see that the hatch wisnae fastened shut onymair. It lay squinty, leavin a wee tait ae even daurker shadow that Ah kent wis the loft. Ma hairt wis in ma mooth. Ah wis aboot ready tae cry oot tae ma Da when ma voice caught in ma thrapple. The creakin sound came again and Ah saw the hatch slowly move tae open wider. Ah scrambled back in ma bed, pressin ma body against the heidboard tae get as far away fae the loft as Ah could. Then, fae deep in the blackness, Ah saw fower lang, spindly fingers curl aroon the widden hatch and lift it clean away!

There wis nuhin separatin ma room fae the loft noo, and suddenly ma voice came back tae me and Ah shouted ‘Da! Da! Da!’ but he couldnae hear me. Ah heard his TV laughter fae doon the hall but that wis aw - nae heavy footsteps, nae ‘dinnae worry, son, I’m comin!’ Above me, a face appeared.

Well, when Ah say a face appeared, what Ah mean tae say is, what *should have been a face* appeared. Ah saw this grey, fleshy oval appear. It had wispy grey hair on tap ae its heid. Although the bottom hauf ae its body wis lost tae the shadows, Ah could see some sort ae grey rags coverin its top half, under which thae lang fingers were attached tae equally bony, sinewy airms. But nae face. Nae face at aw. Nae een, nae lugs, nae neb, nae mooth. Jist grey skin, aw ower its pus.

I screamed for help again as the monster began tae crawl oot ae the loft hatch heid-first. It wis aboot halfway oot when Ah finally heard ma Da’s TV switch aff.

“Da! Help! There’s somehin in ma-”

Ma voice died in ma throat and suddenly ma haill body felt smothered. Ah looked aroon and caught sicht ae myself in ma bedroom mirror. There Ah wis in ma bed, pyjamas on, tousie hair, but where Ah used tae have a mooth, Ah noo jist had a bare patch ae skin. Ah reached a haun up tae touch it and couldnae find ony trace ae ma lips or teeth or tongue. Ah tried tae scream again but it came oot muffled, like Ah wis shoutin intae a pilla. Ah ran ma fingers up and felt ma nostrils close

ower tae wee pin holes. Each breath wis a nightmare and Ah felt myself about tae pass oot.

Along the corridor Ah heard ma Da open his bedroom door and start tae walk doon the hallway tae ma room. Ah banged ma fists on the waw behind me tae get him tae walk faster but then ma sicht started tae fail. Ah looked back up at the monster, growin fainter noo, and instead ae the blank, grey mass where its coupon shouldae been, Ah saw a shevelled mooth and neb and the beginnins ae whit looked like een. Whit looked like me, Ah realised! This hing wis chorin ma face, piece by piece!

It raised wan ae its skeletal hauns and waggled its fingers at me mockingly, a hackit toothy grin stretchin across its - ma - mooth. It retreated back intae the loft, and drapped the hatch closed richt as ma Da opened ma bedroom door. The last hing I saw afore ma een disappeared wis ma Da's horrified coupon as he looked at whit wis left ae mine. Then the hail room faded tae blackness as his scream filled the air and fae loft cam a cruel, victorious laugh.