Unplastic Girl

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Christina Busby

We swarm the mall like honey bees - buzzing from flower to flower, store to store, gathering pollen for the honey. Why do we move in circles like this, mindlessly bustling from store to store, sign to sign, clothing rack to shoe shelf?

We walk through the crowd. I feel bodies moving, floating, maybe. This moment - the sounds, the people - feels surreal. Everything trickles like sticky sap running down the side of a tree.

I was a mango and he scooped out the fat pulp and pit. It was a hard tumor inside me. Then there was nothing left. I was split open with juice dribbling and bleeding down fingers and lips. I was fulfilling, and I was fulfilled. I was opened wide, devoured, and then replenished again. It was brutal and painful, and then it was beautiful. Bliss.

Alex tugs on the sleeve of my shirt. I can't hear her over the music, but she jerks her head to the left, motioning me to follow her.

As we enter the store, we are bombarded with a series of high-pitched voices: "HI WELCOME HOW ARE YOU?" All of them, tall and lanky with huge smiles plastered on their faces. I hear their heels clicking as they scurry through the store, smiling and asking customers if they need any help. ANY HELP TRYING ON THAT SUPER CUTE TOP?

The mannequins wear skinny jeans. Each mannequin is adorned with a wig - Dirty Blonde, Dark Auburn, Jet Black. Their faces are blank, completely expressionless. Each stands in an awkward position - one has her hands on her hips and thrusts her pelvis forward, trying to emphasize the hip bones. One crouches, her face resting in her hand as she attempts to lean her elbow against her thigh. The third is off-putting, standing there blank as if dumbstruck with a huge, polyester purse dangling from her arm like a dead baby. They are merely replications. They are illusions of women, but still, something about them sends a chill down my spine.

Should I be afraid? Maybe these phantasms will spring to life. They know nothing about what it means to live, feel, love, or die. They know nothing about what it means to be women.

We weave in and out of the aisles. Whenever something catches my eye, I run my fingers over it. There are many things that I want: the jeans and the flannel and the ear rings and the head band. I want the whole matching outfit. I'm so typical. Am I?

Alex approaches with several dresses draping over her arm. She holds up a dress in front of me. It is deep blue and it reaches the middle of my thighs.

"It's a little plain, which is why you need this belt." She holds out a thick white belt and then wraps it around my torso, just beneath my breasts. It's tight against my ribs. "It'll be so sexy."

She places the dresses in my hands and I walk to the dressing room. The mannequin gives me a little piece of metal with '4' on it - the number of garments I'm going to try on. The dresses hang limply on the door. I don't want them. From the way they hang, I don't think they want me either. I look at myself in the mirror. I run my fingers through my hair, straightening my frazzled bangs. I put my hands on my hips and push my pelvis out, standing like the mannequin in the store's glass window. I have a face, but am I a mannequin too? I have feelings and emotions and thoughts and desires. Am I alive or am I fake?

The dressing room is an eerie place. At this very moment, there are women - and who knows how many there are - there are women just like me, and they peel layers of clothing from their flesh, exposing their skin to themselves in the mirror. There is the soft thudding sound as jeans hit the floor. Women stand practically nude beneath florescent lights, as if they are being born for the first time. The outlines of our bodies glow in the mirror. We are ready to be tied down to the operating table - carved open with knives, prodded with rods and syringes. I can't bear to hear the sound of limbs shuffling or the sound of the wind rustling through flowers and obliterating their delicate petals. We are delicate petals.
When in dressing rooms, we isolate ourselves in tiny boxes. Claustrophobia. Suffocation. We put ourselves on display simply for ourselves, but could it be that someone else is watching? Somewhere, eyes watch us. We morph from human beings into infants - flesh brand new and exposed.

I found the lime green caterpillar in the yard. It clung to a twig, rapidly devouring a fresh, green leaf. Its body scrunched in the middle as it moved and wiggled. I squatted low to the ground. My limbs were flabby from the dirt.

I scooped this tiny creature into my hands and placed it in a plastic jar. I put a twig in its new home. I gave it something to crawl on. Anything at all to pass the time.

Dress Number One. It looks like a tank top tucked into a high-waisted skirt. I see girls wearing these all the time. Tall lanky women with legs that walk for miles. Miles and miles until finally, I wind up at your door. It's pretty, and it's casual, but it's not enough.

My father said it was going to disappear. I didn't understand what he meant. He had a thick mustache and it twisted when he said, "Shhhhhhhhh." When he did this, when he hugged me, I wanted him to take me into his arms and rock me like a doll. A beautiful baby doll.

We ought to be quiet. Human beings ought to lower their voices and listen to the things that really matter: a caterpillar building a cocoon and hiding itself from me and you.

I waited for days. I fed it leaf after leaf.

Daddy said when I am quiet, I will understand silence and that silence is not really silence at all.

Dress Number Two. Another high-waisted dress. Why is the old-fashioned 50s housewife look so popular? I couldn't imagine wearing such a short dress in the 50s. The sight of the flesh of my thighs would only confirm my label as the town slut. Alex, what were you thinking?

One morning, I woke to find the caterpillar was gone. In its place, a tiny, gray bulb dangled from the twig.

"What is this?"

"It's a cocoon." My father's voice echoed from somewhere in the house. His voice reverberated off the ceiling and tumbled into my tiny hands. His voice was faint, distant. Already he was leaving. He was here, but he was already on his way. Where?

Standing on a beach, dipping the toes of one of his feet into the ocean. I see him standing there, silent and still, waiting for the earth to move and knock him off his feet. It did. Didn't you know? Something about the water pulled him down. Maybe it was the fantastic color - the teal, that sparkling blue-green. Or a siren song. It is enough to pull anyone beneath the surface. Drown.

Dress Number Three. I pull the thin, light material over my head. My arms fit smoothly through the thin straps. The dress is bundled tightly at my stomach. Tangled. As I pull it downward so that it may cling to the contours of my body, creating a sex vortex that will pierce the belly buttons of all men and reel them into me, I find I can't pull it beyond my hips. It's stuck. My fat ass can't fit into this dress. Thanks, Alex.

He was at the doorway and I heard his breath rasping. He stopped for only a moment, and then his boots continued on the hard wood floor. I wanted the house to quake with every step that he took.

I crawled out of bed and ran to my jar. My caterpillar. My cocoon. A beautiful creature lay rigid on the floor among the leaves. Where did this creature come from? How did it emerge?

Was it the silence that coaxed it to life? And did the silence scream so loud that it killed it also?

Human beings ought to be quiet.

There was a muffled sob somewhere in the house. I picked up the jar and shook it gently. Stiff. Rigid. Burst of color. Wings. Dead wings.

Dress Number Four. I run my hands over the dress, feeling the silkiness of it, smoothening it against the skin of my torso. I have become a different person. This dress cascaded over me. It was like water. Revitalizing. I am looking into a puddle on the ground, and, in it, I see the reflection of the sky. I become the puddle and the sky. I end and I begin. I turn to the left and then the right. Not bad, Alex. Not bad.

A muffled sob. I followed the sound with the tips of my feet. One moving after the other. My mother sat at the kitchen table with her head in her hands. Her body rumpled and lifeless.

Outside a car door slammed. The ignition coughed. He didn't hesitate. He was gone. We were alone.

I imagined the fluttering sound the creature's wings would have made. A whisper: it confirmed nothing, other than we ought to be quiet.
and that we are alone. Once upon a time, Samson, my father, said, “Shhhhh.” He rocked me like a tired, ragged baby doll.

“Are you done yet? Which room are you in?” Alex’s voice drifts over the door.

“Follow my voice.”
A hand reaches beneath the door and grabs my ankle.

“Let me see you.”
I open the door a crack so that only one of my eyes peers at her. “No.”
She pushes the door with her flat palm, but my body resists against it.

“You’ll have to wait until later.” I close the door again and lock it.

“How much is it?”
“Twenty dollars.”
“That’s pretty cheap.”
“You’re pretty cheap.”
Someone laughs several rooms down.

“What are you laughing at? Bitch.”
“Um, are you like, talking to me?” A door creaks open.

“Yeah, I’m talking to you.”
“Um, are you like, seriously talking to me?”
“Um, like, yes, I’m seriously talking to you.”

I pull the dress off and snatch my jeans from the floor.

My legs plunge into the jeans, filling the empty space with my body.

Another voice floats from the other end of the dressing room. “Hi, can we not have a cat fight in the fucking dressing room?”

Another voice pipes in: “Yeah, can everyone just shut the fuck up for one moment so I can try on this super cute top in peace?”

I open the door and Alex is glaring at a blonde woman. She is wearing only a pair of faded jeans and a black bra. Her hair is tousled to one side and she is staring death into Alex.

Alex waits for me with her arms crossed. “That dirty blonde bitch,” she says. “She’s just plastic anyway.” She walks away and grabs a top. I watch her hold it against herself, coveting this piece of clothing. She turns around to face me.

“What do you think?”

What is plastic?

You. You’re plastic, Alex.