

The lounge was gilded rococo, all twiddly and ornate, burnished and buffed, with coiled decorous triumphants.

Came a loud knock, knocking.

1972

Daddy asked:

‘Who’s there?’

Penny Goring

Like solid gold easy action, Mummy shot up through the floorboards

in

people pleaser perfect

otherworldly boast shapes

welcome sheer futuristic

peep-toes raced metaphoric

bold unbuttoned hosanna

deified lace veiled vision

classic reality touching

drama frivolity smothered

ultimate majestic desire

flutter voluptuous vivid

translated girl outperforms

rallying extraordinary sweetness

oppositional celebration exquisite

curve ball frisson booster

dynamism universal embellish

defiance charm combination

Mummy had a pair of castanets and she clacked them over her head

and she said:

‘This is my game and you haven’t mastered the rules.’

Daddy had a pair of red plastic gloves and he slunk them over his fingers

and he said:

‘I wouldn’t love you if you were the last lover in the world.’

The room swam upwards, the sun.

vapourised lamb shank

revitalised sheath

spiritualised sickle

the sun

flame circle spurs

great frazzled balls

cadmium rouge cunny

the sun

burnt nuzzle drifter

dry nettle blinker

aspect spectacular

the sun

sing meltdown cecily

chain-react domino

arabesque shafting

the sun

charity mother lode

mudscape marauder

orbiting cheesecake

the sun

How to Peel a Sack of Potatoes

Give them names. Get to know them. Poke their eyes out. Drop them in a bucket of water. Save their skins for Daddy.

Hidden in the back of Daddy’s wardrobe the girls found a box of broken things going THUMP THUMP in the dark:

a balaclava

a sticky red PVC thong

a film reel

a pair of tweezers

a multi-zippered all-in-one with all its zips hanging wide open like hungry golden-toothed mouths

two tattered lace body stockings

a pale blue nightdress dappled with stiff brown stains

an oily bicycle chain

a red plastic devil’s tail with a pointed golden tip

a rusted pipe

a splintered branch from the lilac tree

a rotten molar and two brown incisors

Daddy’s secret recipe for Delirious Delight

a jar of toenails

a jar of white powder

a book of raffle tickets

a yellow plunger

a blow torch

a bottle of Mummy’s pills still in the chemist’s paper bag

a fork with curly tines

a dessert spoon with a scorched and sooty bowl

a tiny pair of ballet pumps in sumptuous pale salmon leather with the hand-sewn elastics hanging

a wishbone

a knitting needle
 two halves of a black and white photo of a young couple standing on the steps outside Lewisham Registry Office, the edges of the rip skimming their noses, both looking stunned
 a shrunken lump of matter wrapped in a skein of red hair
 the laddered silk stockings, flaked with dried skin, Mummy had worn on the last day
 If it was hidden it could never be gone.
 Julie disentangled the stockings from the jumble in the box and hung them out the window – to air them, she said. Two empty legs, lost without their body, shivered – loose and forlorn.
 Debbie claimed the stockings for her own.
 Stroking their snags she filled them with her two legs, clipped them to Mummy's suspender belt, slipped her feet into Mummy's stone cold high-heels, strutted her way down the narrow hallway, pink straps bisecting her thighs.
 Julie could clearly recall the last time she had seen Mummy in the flesh. It was the night of Daddy's avant-garde orgy all-nighter.
 Unlikely combos squelched and moaned in cutting-edge positions, lost in panting lust-motion. Shaky but very much determined, Mummy shoved her way through the tangled bodies and started singing raucously at the top of her lungs, clapping her hands above her head and throwing manic smiles.
 She sang all seven verses of 'Kumbaya, My Lord' before Mrs. Wilson got up and joined her, and so did Charlie the Porsche, and they sang it all over again. Soon all Daddy's friends were at it, laughing and stomping their bare feet. Mummy had disrupted the heavy head-fuck of his fantasia free-for-all with her infectious God song.
 Daddy stood apart – he was fuming – he wanted his mass fellatio fix.
 'Choose a single detached part of the human body – hands or legs or tits or cock. Roll up! Roll up! Roughly chipped or highly polished.'
 Nobody was listening.
 He was the first to notice two cops climbing in through the window. He dodged nimble-quick past the blissed-out throng but the police made faltering progress, distracted by the genitalia.
 By the time they made it to the kitchen he was already out the back door and dashing across the back garden.
 A police siren wailed in the street.
 Daddy heaved his bulk up the lone lilac tree and over the close-boarded 6ft high fence. Once he was out in the alleyways he was up, up and away. Julie thought she heard him laughing hysterically.
 Mummy came upstairs, pulled her away from the window and shushed the girls back to their beds.
 Next morning, Mummy was gone.
 And they saw Batman saving the world by leaping tall buildings, but only once a week, on the telly.
 The lounge was bleached with peroxide light, feedback fed the wasted air. Daddy sat nonchalant on the sofa. The girls were arranged before him.
 Julie: 'Because we couldn't find her, we set our sights on him.'
 Daddy: 'Somewhere.'
 Debbie: 'It took us a whole year begging to get him to say he loved us.'
 Daddy: 'Somehow.'
 Lizzy: 'It was only then we felt safe.'
 Daddy: 'Someone.'
 All three girls: 'He liked taking us out and showing us off – look what my daughters can do.'
 Daddy: 'Something uncouth and bare in me wants to roar.'
 The sisters formed a conga and skidded round the room.
 Curtains trembled but never closed.
 And they heard Daddy gibbering in his cups:
 'If only
 dry bone wrinkle skin concertina
 If only
 age sweet corrugated meat reek
 If only
 fingerprint residue on shrink fit
 If only
 taut inflamed joints barely moving
 If only
 ears nose hair nails stop growing
 If only
 bare banal root
 Only, only.'
 Daddy lay alone in his bed.
 A huge defrosting turkey sat on Mummy's pillow, leaking its cold juice on his face.
 Mummy's stockings were scrunched in a ball in his mouth.
 He pushed his fingers past his teeth and tugged at the sodden fabric, endless yards of black nylon unravelled from his gagging throat, the more he yanked the more there was, it went on and on, the longest ever legs unwound from deep inside him and tied themselves in knots round his flab.
 He rolled over, reaching for Mummy.
 The turkey rolled into his arms.
 Mummy froze the oozing grey walls:
 'I am an itch ripped raw. I slotted sharpened switchblades in my loose cold flesh, dig deeper please my hubby, stroke my weeping ruts, pick the ruby red scabs, peel this dead gush fountain, slice these ripened sores, lick your fingers, taste my flavours, soothe me with your saliva, man-handle my plucked wobble, never wash again, bury your chin, mouth, nose beneath my lonely pause.'
 He was choking on stocking yet he managed to splutter:
 'My darling, it doesn't come easy. One has to coarsen and dishevel. There are too many things to want in this world, and although I know they ain't worth the having, I wants them just the same...'
 Mummy melted the icicles:
 'Played like the idiot you are. I am your only salvation. I am everything.'
 The room swam backwards, the rain.
 mist nimble snow sifted
 drop purple clever
 still room raged backwards

the rain
 shoosh from the valley wax
 suffer pig mountain
 lower gleams ramble
 the rain
 street rinse on rubber stun
 spin crumple nylon
 itch flipper harness
 the rain
 sideways slung ooze prickle
 carnation gash float
 window knock wetter
 the rain
 Julie never told anybody what she remembered about Mummy. She kept it all to herself. There was not enough to go round.
 Mummy had worn a red wig with a heavy fringe low on her nose. She was not tall and her face was set hard like cement, from loving Daddy for so long. She never dressed in fashionable clothes like the party people did. She wore a tweed pencil skirt and cashmere twin-sets fitted close to her sombre form, with her breasts pushed inside pointy bras. And she didn't wear tights like the other women did, to cover their legs all the way up past the bum-skimming hems of their mini-skirts – she wore stockings and black patent court shoes, and she smelt like big knickers and Norman Hartnell's 'In Love.'
 After they were born Mummy turned to the church. She never chose any particular religion, she worshipped with them all, going anywhere she got the chance to sing. She had loved to sing, her voice was strident and true. And she taught the girls the words to every song on her Godspell LP and she made them join the school choir.
 Mummy never prayed but she sang her heart out.
 And they saw Daddy holding Mummy cradled in his arms. He laid her gently on his bed and he unfolded her, searched her empty belly, puzzled her missing pieces, gathered her to him, filtered her solutions, arrived at his conclusion. She stained the creeping grey walls with her rays of light refracted through his fingers, and she fell like the rain, soft engorged droplets burst on his parched skin, left him drenched and dismantled, alone in his lair and he bellowed:
 'SOMEWHERE! SOMEHOW! SOMEONE!'

The lounge was moody mud red.
 Bang smack in the centre of the room Daddy stood tall while his huge hands, like two agile damp crustaceans, explored his bloated face.
 Daddy spoke softly:
 'Memories piled on memories. The memory of memories replacing the memory. I remember remembering that this is the memory of the memory of you.'
 Mummy turned in whispering smoke rings between his girded legs:
 'I could fill you in seconds, spill you in minutes, thrill you in one infinite hour, absolve you in no time at all. Hold me. I want your 1.5 litre capacity. Boil me. I need your heat-resistant element.'
 He stooped, pulled back the carpet, and effortlessly ripped up a floorboard, propped it against a wall, and chalked it with accurate diagrams:
 the ace of spades, the queen of hearts, the lilac tree.
How to get inside a pair of tights
 Sit. Roll one leg down ensuring toe piece is straight and facing forward, insert toes, pull to ankle, repeat. Stand. Ease both legs to knee-level and gradually inch higher until they're settled around your waist. Ensure crotch is snug.
 And they saw Mummy in the kitchen, the flimsy gauze of her draped around Daddy's whisky bottle. He was trying to make her substantial by plastering her with his slobber.
 They knew lots of songs about gone. They sang them after lights out, thin warble tone-deaf trilling.
 Daddy's index finger moved with the upturned shot glass round and round the alphabet. He urged it through the emotions. It kept spelling out the same word:
 'D-A-V-I-D.'
 Daddy was disgruntled.
 'Is that all you've got to say to me?! My own name?! Wow! Fucking useless!'

It was about that time the girls noticed movement on the ceiling. A wave of grey foam was riding the swirling Artex.
 Daddy kept his hold on the shot glass, shouting:
 'Is that all you've got, after all this time?!'
 The foam fell from the ceiling in big foul dollops, sucked the air out the lounge, settled mostly on Daddy, slid down his pyjama bottoms, slithered inside his Y-fronts, coated his shrivelled ball-bags, cradled his stiff old dick.
 Mummy slipped her blubber down to his toes, all the way up his legs, and when she was waist-high, crotch snug, she kissed his nape. She held him and he knew all things made her and she made the rain and all things.
 Daddy:
 'She's gone. Gone to be a moonbeam in the sky.'
 sky
 world-sized ceiling
 alive
 lights blinking
 full-throttle
 throb grey
 advance
 Mummy:
 'You are my punishment. I chose you.'
 Daddy:
 'I can't be bothered with love.'

The girls knew Mummy was not a moonbeam or a monolith or anything profound or mysterious. Mummy was fragile, precious – not an egg or an eye-ball, though.
 And they saw the Starman on Upper Street. He was ravishing in his spangled jacket on shiny hose-pipe legs, towering in very red shoes. He dallied for one unreachable moment – lifted his skirts, flashed them his unearthly bum – and then, with a twitch of his padded silk shoulder – wham bam – he was gone.