

ALLOW ME TO ARISE YOU

Most people are in bed on Sunday morning, even old people, who never need much sleep unless they are never going to wake up. Sometimes I wake up needing to leave a dream behind, needing to put a pillow over it. This morning I shake myself away from the mattress and up on my feet in one go. I tell my head to come out of the dream. I tell it that I am awake, that it is alright, that I am awake now. If you were not an adult, you would have your mother to do that. I stroke the quilt, iron it all tidy with my hand. I pick up the book that's fallen just before my sleep about a race of people in London in the last century called the Moderns. The spine is broken. I will confess to the library tomorrow.

Sunday is a day for praying and for the launderette. You take off your week, you put it in the basket, you wash and dry it. I take my washing early. You go left out of my flat – with its silent door and shared garden – right and left again and the parade is back from the main road. It can't actually parade itself because it is a row of shops and doesn't have the brains to show off. Sometimes I think about buying my own washing machine. I would have to go to a superstore and I would need help and I don't know how to ask.

I dress and leave the flat and have the dream following me. There isn't anyone to tell me it was just a dream. There isn't anyone to say

'Stay in bed with a Disprin, I'll bring you tea and jammy bread.'

So I say it to myself with my lips moving and no sound, which is how I speak.

The shops are in Seaview Parade. This is misleading and you should ignore it if you are a tourist or a person who gets cross about lies. There is the Co-Op, an off-licence, a café with wet inside windows, a newsagent and the launderette. There is a vet surgery, closed down because the vet treated a cat that had been burned on purpose so the vet attacked the owner with flea vaccine. The vet was

de-vetted and the owner bought a motorbike with the compensation and probably never got fleas. The vet said he cried at burned cats. He didn't say it to me. It was in the paper. That's how I know about the local world although I prefer books, which pull me inside and flip me over their pages.

The launderette opens by itself at eight o'clock. It is on a timer, it isn't a magic door. There are bashed cider cans, cigarettes in the powder tray, socks in the dryer. It isn't like my flat. You wouldn't know anyone lives in my flat. I put fifty pences and powder and my pants in the machine. Someone called Support does the big things another day. The government pays her. The first time she took my bin liner of things she said

'I am your Support and I will be coming every other Monday and don't thank me I'm not here for your benefit, it isn't as though I haven't got my own dirty washing, I'm only doing it for the mortgage.'

Support never asks where my pants are. It can't be nice washing someone else's pants, especially if you're behind with the mortgage, so I do them myself. While my washing is washing, I buy milk then stand outside by the newspaper seller, right by him. He nods. I don't nod back because you might be saying yes to something, like a gentleman's agreement or that you know the identity of the murderer and daren't say the name with your voice-box in case you are killed.

The newspaper seller is called News. He looks as though he used to go up chimneys. News sells his newspapers outside the newsagent shop. A part of my head wonders why you would buy a newspaper outside a newsagent shop and not inside, and how you would choose. I admire you if you can make those decisions without your head getting hot. When it rains, News drags the stand into the doorway on the launderette side and puts a plastic sheet over his papers. Today News gives me yesterday's Hampshire Echo which he keeps for

me. He puts his hand, black with words, on his anorak near his chest, dips his arm away from him and follows it with a bow. He points to a garden chair and says

'Your throne your majesty.'

A noise comes in my throat. I stop it. Something comes out of my nose. Every Sunday I sit on his garden chair, look down and read about what is happening around me. News has one leg and four brown teeth and today he has a radio in one ear, right in it. He can't hear me or any customer who makes the decision to buy an outside paper. He pours black tea from a flask into a mug with rings of other Sundays inside. He always asks if he can tempt me. I shake my head, every week, half because it feels dangerous to say yes when you might then have to say another word and another, and half because today I want to shake off the feeling. I want to know the dangerous half. News forgets the milk every week. I pour it for him, from the milk I have bought by a happy coincidence every week. News opens the carton.

'Allow me your majesty, you're all fingers and thumbs today.'

He sounds snaky which is to do with his four brown teeth. When he opens the carton, milk dribbles over, making the cardboard soggy as though a baby has sucked it off a nipple. When I've read up to page twenty, I go next door. News pulls me up.

'Allow me to arise you your majesty.'

I allow him to arise me and I go to the launderette and put my things in a dryer. First, I check it isn't full of pennies or hair-grips or contraceptive sheaths. Mrs. Powell comes in. She doesn't have any washing or drying. She comes to get warm and to talk to the posters. News knows Mrs. Powell. He says she's a stinker and could do with getting in the washer herself. I take his word for it, even

though he doesn't have a nice word to say about Mrs. Powell. I take his word that she's a stinker because my sense of smell has been bashed from me.

Back in the garden chair, I carry on with the Hampshire Post. Under the title it says 'Bringing The Community Together' and gives people away with a voucher. You hand it in at Alton Towers and you get a Free Child. Section One of the Classifieds is Jobs. There aren't many on Saturday because by the weekend the unemployed have lost their impetus. They go into town and buy Umbro shirts to give themselves a wage-earning feeling until Monday. Some of the vacancies are for advertising sales: 'Can You Smile On The Telephone?' I have tried it. I have picked up the telephone and smiled. You can misread a smile. My father used to smile at the neighbours, at the doctor, but not at home, in sound-dead rooms. He had an unhappy time with the smile. He didn't smile just before he died. He may have smiled upstairs, where he died by his own hand. I don't know.

Section Three is Wedding Dresses Worn Once. My mother's wedding dress is in the airing cupboard, at the back, in white paper. The dress is warm, like she has just stepped out of it from the altar. She wore it when she was twenty and I was nearly born. It is knee-length silk, wide across the stomach, with small whitish lines if you look close up, which my sister and me often did. We would take the dress when my father was at work, and hold up the arm-holes where the perfume was. I could smell then, I could smell with my sister the warm perfume. The bottom had gold thread. My mother said a fairy godmother from the Disney version of Snow White and therefore a mouse, tiptoed into the wardrobe and sewed gold thread along the hem. I have a photograph of my mother at the registry office. You can just see the butterflies around the collar.

She was beautiful because she was still and elegant. My father said she was working-class and looked it. My father used to spit on me, and he was wealthy.

Section Four is Articles For Sale because there aren't enough of you to use them properly. Ludo and ice-cream machines and bunk beds and badminton racquets. If you dictated racquet to someone, they might spell it with a wrong meaning, even if you smiled, because you would be smiling in a homonym. Sometimes, in a dreamless bit of my head, I have a feeling about words. I was good at school, only at words. I enjoyed turning over the paper when the teacher said

'You may begin'.

I liked the cool desk and the open window with the playing-field and its spring-summer smells. I liked the sound of the pen tapping my glasses and head bones, tapping coded half-things into the tips of my fingers, on to the paper, into the whole thing. That was before my father killed my mother and I was told to come out of my self, when I wanted to turn into my self and write things down and be believed, in paragraphs. That was before I went into 'care'. Some words have a wrong meaning.

Section Five is Births Marriages and Deaths. There are outlines of birds holding babies. There are two rings, pretend-sparkly like teeth, and crosses without Jesus nailed down and champagne corks shooting out of foamy bottles like a bucket of sea smashing a sandcastle. Three corks today:

'Happy Diamond Anniversary To Bill 'Scotty' Scott From Wife Edie (Scott)'.

'To Liam! One L Of A Driver From Bo, Scat, Kaz, Joo-Joo (Media Studies).'

'To Mother and Father Thank You For Everything I Am Looking Forward To My Twenty-First Birthday Wait Until You See My Electric Blue Party Dress I Love You'...and my name underneath and a photograph of a girl, beautiful, blurry,

aged thirteen. I hope no one will look too closely because it is Lady Diana Spencer. You can send classifieds by post. I tell the hot part of my head to slow down, and I'm just managing it when News punches the other side of the paper and shouts

'Boo!'

His four brown teeth come into my face, smiling and wet, and I burst out crying inside and try to get out of the chair with News laughing

'Arise your majesty!'

and I'm next door and I concentrate on the newspaper announcement and know that I have sent it because today is my twenty-first birthday and Mother's Day and because I have no photographs of the real me, and something's coming out of my mouth onto the launderette floor onto my bag with my clean pants making my head hurt and my mouth sticky dark.

I walk home, thinking of families in bed, especially mothers. My Mother never had her Day, except when she tried to stop my father killing me. At my front door I suddenly stop shaking because my mother is alive here, in pictures and words, but I have to be quick because soon they will disappear into scaredness. My mother, alive in my words and head pictures, is in bed and allowed to smile. She is waiting for me to create her again, to be astonished by my every clever word.

Now I am carrying breakfast that my sister – also alive in my heart spaces – has helped spread across a silver tray. I'm wearing my electric blue party dress. I put the tray outside the room where my mother is reading the Moderns, holding the words inside the room, perfect as an unbroken spine, keeping the world outside, unwritten. I am showing you a picture of me feeling a picture of the bedroom in its ideal world while I am going to the airing cupboard.

I really am going to the airing cupboard. I unwrap the white paper. I lift the perfect, sleeveless arms and feel a stroke of perfume from my mother. With my white-glove fingers, I chase the throat of butterflies and the hem of gold threads sewn by Disney animals, and I shake the dress to release my mother and hold against my self the silk wedding dress, still warm.

The End