

Other People's Ghosts

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Everyone has a ghost in their wardrobe, if you care to look.

I wasn't searching for Robert's ghost. I was looking for the bright-blue, suede heels I knew were in the wardrobe somewhere. I had a desire to wear them to a corporate dinner we were attending this evening. They would dress up my nice - but-conservative outfit – make my legs look good without causing Robert's boss to raise his eyebrows too much.

Young girls are hard to age, but I would have said she was about six, with thick glasses and tangled hair; I couldn't tell what colour because she was in black and white.

I don't know if all ghosts are black and white – I think not, but this one was.

I wanted to shut the door on her.

'Oh, hello,' I said.

'Hi.'

'I wasn't looking for you,' I said.

She held up her arms and in them was a teddy bear. He was quite new, in a little suit, but with a bit of fluff missing near his eye. The memory of him crawled out of me slowly, like extracting the poison from a snake bite. I remembered that her hair was light brown.

The ghost girl looked sorry for me.

'You knew you'd find me eventually,' she said.

'I only wanted the shoes,' I said.

'Did you?' she asked.

She moved obediently and I saw them, squashed under Robert's golfing bag.

I imagined the blood.

Taking the shoes from underneath the little girl, I placed them on the bedroom floor, shutting the wardrobe door defiantly. But I already knew I couldn't wear them again.

I wore a cream trouser suit with brand new gold sandals that I had purchased at a boutique shop in town.

That evening, Robert's boss said I looked lovely. Robert put his hand on the nape of my neck. I concentrated hard on not being sick.

When we got home, I put the gold sandals at the bottom of the wardrobe. The golfing bag was gone. I wondered if it had ever been there.

'Where did you find these?' Robert held a blue shoe in each hand, both still slightly crushed.

'Under the bed,' I lied. We both looked at the bed as if we had never seen it before.

I took the shoes from him and bent down, pushing them into a gap where they could have been hidden away, unseen all this time. While I was on my hands and knees I heard a strange noise, like laughter. Afraid there were ghosts under here too, I shoved the cases and boxes in front of me aside.

But it was just Robert, at the other end, smiling.

There are no ghosts under your bed, of course.

Only monsters.