

Parallax Error

"Who's ugliest of 'em all, now, *cow*?"

Joyfully vicious, she'd been muttering that and worse, mantra-like, for hours while making her preparations, in the bath and now sitting at her dresser; Frank, bless him, was already downstairs, getting things ready for the *soiree*. But talking and applying lipstick don't go together easily. And being drunk didn't help, either. Still, she persisted, happily slashing and pushing with the vermillion until her mouth looked like an open wound.

Her mood changed. Remembering past insults, she scowled at the creature in the glass, heedless of the mouthy mess and the vacant look in her eyes, those sunken eyes that had dreamed so many useless dreams.

"*She's* dead. *DEAD!* Now I'm preddiest." She found it difficult to focus, but forced herself to concentrate on her mouth and snarled, "The cow. The fuckin' hate-filled *BITCH...*" Filming over, her eyes glittered in their pits, glowing, gloating, hating. "Frank knows, oh, he *knows* how much I love him..." She stopped, pressed the heel of her palm against her forehead; tears finally welled up, rolled down, bulldozing mascara and rouge into mud. "At least, *he* understands me.... Oh, sweet Jesus!" It was enough to elicit another sob of joy.

Blinking, she tried to wipe her eyes, dropped the tube, fumbled for it, gave up, reached for another, missed, tried to focus and found her toothbrush that, somehow, had gotten onto her dresser. Laboriously, she began brushing, rubbing her lips and teeth, mixing her spittle with the lipstick, and flecking her teeth bright red – but then stopped, savoring the fact that she now had no competition.

"It's my turn – *my* turn, ev'body's gonna know that I'm the preddiest, and she's in her *GRAVE*, as ugly a sin. *Hah!*" She burped, unexpectedly, bringing up a small amount of

liquored bile; turning her head, she spat on the floor, the beautiful floor that Frank had spent a small fortune on. For a moment she sagged, dropped the toothbrush, then shook her body straight, hands now splayed on the dresser, fingertips white. She blinked some more, but now lost all focus on what she was supposed to be doing.

Her gaze wandered to the whisky bottle. "Tha's what I need – 'nother drink." Trouble was, there seemed to be more than one, sometimes as many as four, all spinning in a circle before her eyes. She closed her eyes and shook her head, but that made her feel worse, as though her brain wanted to burst. Steadying herself with one hand on the dresser, with only her left eye open for guidance, she finally got the other hand around the bottle's neck. "Gotcha!" Triumphantly, she leaned back in her chair and took a long slug that she had to stop only when she started to choke. Coughing, she let the bottle drop to the dresser where it teetered for a second then spun, as though by an invisible hand, to finally remain upright and with barely a finger left at the bottom. "Nees' more whisky...." Vacantly, she looked around for another, but the room was spinning and her eyes still wouldn't focus properly. Gripping the dresser with both hands, she cried into the mirror: "Frank, *FRANK* ... nees' more whishhy, Frank, where're you? Why, Frank? Why didja let that BITCH fugg around? I love you, Frank, you know that, don'chew? Why didn't y'tell her to FUCK OFF?" She stopped, wailing to the empty room, and then slumped back in the chair, head bowed. "Fuck ... so tired...."

At that moment, the door opened and Frank looked in. "Are you ready yet, doll? The guests are arriving, y'know." His tone was undemanding, remote. He arched one eyebrow. "You'd better fix your face properly, doll." Without waiting for any reply, he closed the door quietly.

She pushed herself forward and leant into the mirror, her hands like claws digging into her dresser. "You're mine, Frank. *Mine!*" she hissed. "And don' you ever f'get it!"

A hand slipped. *Slip!* The thought triggered a response: she reached for her white satin slip but it dropped

from her grasp, landing in the waste bin. "Goddammit!" Puffed and bleary-eyed, she looked down at her naked body. "Fuck it! Need. Get. Dressed. Party ... where's my *FARKIN'* party piece?" She swiveled in the chair, spun too fast, her arm flailed against the near-empty whisky bottle, her cosmetics, perfumes; all scattered. Some drops of liquor spilled onto the white carpet, forming a distorted happy face. Cackling softly, "Oooh, Fra ... mi'be angreeee....", she shook her head at the mess, tried to get up, failed and looked again in the mirror.

And went cold.

Her image now seemed faint, like in a fog. It was as though she was fading, and so was the room. She was here, and yet she wasn't. Her eyes went wild – even wilder. She reached out to the mirror, touching it, herself, her hair, her face.

She sobbed and slobbered, "I'm here, *here*," one hand beating on the glass. But, the light – was it the light? – *was* fading. She looked at the other hand. So old and yet still young. Aren't I? She put her face closer to the skin, looking carefully, searching for signs of ... of ... what? The room seemed to spin; she closed her tiring eyes and rested her forehead there. "Jus' f'ra minute, then I'll fix me fuckin' face...." As the words spilled, so also red drool oozed, gradually making a small pool beside her nose. At first, her breathing labored, then slowed as she softly slurred "Fraaa....", the final aspiration hissing, as though endlessly, through partially clenched teeth.

When she hadn't appeared after another hour, Frank found her, one hand pressed against the mirror, her forehead still resting on the other hand. Finding no pulse in her withered wrist, he then leaned forward, smoothed his white hair – glancing down only once at the corpse, as he did so – and left the room as quietly as he had earlier.

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