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Mother's Little Legacy

by Janie Reynolds

They say all women turn into their mothers. This fact does not bode me well.

If true, I will become a bed ridden, valium-fuelled dragon, wrapped in a thermal blanket and hidden in an attic. I will do nothing but knit jumpers and scarves. I will neglect my children and die, forgotten and unloved, in a mental hospital.

I grew up not knowing my mother. It was odd having a mother going insane in your attic but I tried to forget she was there. Occasionally I would see her take something from the fridge or walk up to my father and wail at him. Sometimes, I would go up there, to the attic, and find her in bed, knitting, or lying like a mummy. If I tried to say something she would wail at me and push out her hand to gesture me out.

Once a month on a Sunday we would hear her take a bath. She would come down the stairs, dressed nicely and smelling of perfume. She would wear a tight red pencil skirt, tight black jumper, black stockings and heels. She would take a cardboard box out onto the street. It was filled with jumpers and scarves she had knitted for the local communist party fundraiser.

I would watch her out of our front window, standing on the pavement, acting as though the whole world was interested in her. She would pose, like a celebrity being snapped by the paparazzi. Eventually, a man drove up in a car. He would take the knitwear and they would talk, before he drove away. She always stood there waving until his car was out of sight.

It never bothered me that women always turn into their mothers because how could I when I had barely known her? There'd be no chance for it to have spread.

But then, one day, when I was 40, my father rang me to tell me she had died. I had to go through her things because he couldn't bear to.

The attic smelled of my perfume. I found a bottle of it on her dressing table. A black satin negligee was slung over the back of her chair. It was my size.

I sat at her mirror and her outline caught me like a ghost. I heard my own voice coming back at me, wailing. My hair, was the colour of hers. The photos of her when she was young could have been me.

I told my father, I can't stay. I need to go back to my place, its too eerie here. My flat was so cold I slipped my negligee on super quick before wrapping myself in a blanket and getting into bed. I could feel her there with me, for the first time in my life. I was no longer alone.

When I woke in the morning I realised I was late for work. I slipped off my negligee and with horror realised it was black. As I opened my wardrobe I felt the same dread you would feel lifting the lid of the coffin of someone you loved. Horrified at what I was doing, I took out my red pencil skirt and tight black jumper. Then all I needed were my black stockings and heels, before I was ready to go out the door.