

## Darkness is Cheap

by Victoria Watson

Darkness is cheap. But tripping over the dog, breaking your ankle and losing a silver ear ring under the couch just because you are too mean to pay the meter is just plain stupid; and typical of Mrs Fawcett-Spode.

Mrs Fawcett-Spode was an ugly woman; and I don't mean that unkindly. She just was terribly, terribly ugly. She could scare children off swings and made babies howl. She could walk into a room and the milk would go off and the wallpaper would start peeling. She had bright pink hair, which she had coloured herself from a bottle calling itself Medium Champagne. This had reacted with the flea powder she had accidentally covered her hair in, and now the colour was more vimto than Champagne, and flat vimto at that. She wore a lot of make-up, heavy foundation mostly, to cover up her 5 'o clock shadow. It was not successful as it got clogged up in her stubble.

She was big too. Impossibly, unbelievably big. She was so big she could stop buses, just with a wave of a meaty arm. Her arms were legendary, they were dinner lady arms and we all know about them. She could tackle an entire rugby team with one of her forearms, especially if it was wielding a massive scoop of mashed potato at the same time. Children and her dog recoiled to all corners when she approached, mostly because she was so terrifying in size and looks, but sometimes because they knew she was so clumsy they were very likely to be pulverised in her wake.

She'd had her dog, Buster for over 15 years and he had started to smell, like all old dogs do. Mrs Fawcett-Spode rarely noticed this odour, but on occasions when she did, like when she had just stepped out of the bath and had puffed her rotund pink body with violet-scented talcum powder from head to toe.

She would wrinkle her large nose, tighten her vast velour bathrobe belt and shout at the top of her lungs, “Buster, have you been rolling in fox shit again?”

Buster would make a little whimpering noise and hide under the table, a straggly paw placed strategically over an ear. The night she broke her ankle Buster had adopted a similar posture, knowing full well that as soon as his owner stopped hopping up and down the hallway, looking for matches and candles while swearing at him, he would be in even bigger trouble than he was before.