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Shot Silk

by Sue Hitchcock

There was a crack in the parapet of the bridge. It was of no importance but it was hers. She had chosen that spot and now she owned it. The crack had other owners, a line of ants coming and going and a tiny seedling, leaves like buddleia, maybe. “Don’t worry, I won’t disturb you. Just ignore me. Everyone else does.” This particular afternoon, that was her greatest wish, to be ignored.

Life as she saw it was like shot silk, the warp blue and the weft rose-pink. Her childhood had been a dream of fairytale princesses, bedtime stories, dressing up, visits to Sadlers Wells to see “Swan Lake” and “Sleeping Beauty”. She had attended ballet lessons and ran around at home in satin pumps. Everything had to be pink.

School was a torture of navy blue serge gymslip and brutish boys. Nowhere was there a Prince Charming to bend his knee and kiss her hand. Life was blue, she was blue and she thought she could understand singing the Blues. Of course she had to grow up and behave like other adults. She got a job in the Council Highways department and learned to joke with the men who called in with work dockets. Some even flirted with her but none appealed to her. Always she looked for the handsome prince, or even a little courtesy, but in vain.

At home she experimented looking in the mirror. She angrily swiped off the pink lipstick and rubbed black mascara on her lips. Yes, but it wasn’t enough. Superdrug stocked what she needed, black hair dye, nail varnish called jet jewel and stick-on tattoos. She revelled in hate, but like-minded Goth boys seemed feeble to her. Hate was replaced with loneliness.

This railway bridge now seemed like her happy, blue place, the ideal spot to make a tragic ending. The stopping train had passed slowly beneath where she leaned examining the crack. The fast train would be due in forty minutes, honking at the level crossing before rounding the bend- plenty of time to climb up ready. A queue of cars , mothers retrieving their kids from the local primary, passed her, hardly noticing the train spotter watching the line.

Now it was quiet. Still watching the ants in the crack, she slid one knee up and rolled onto the top. It was quite comfortable, she felt invisible, though a blackbird fringed at her. Resting her head on her arm she stared at the curve in the line to be sure she was ready, but the sun warmed her and monotony made her eyelids droop.

“Whoo-whah,” opened her eyelids which had filtered red the bright sunlight. A green world greeted the drowsy girl, who blinked as the train rattled below her. For a minute she forgot why she was there. She had missed her chance.

“Are you alright?” a gentle voice asked. A green man stood holding his bicycle.

“What time is it? I must have been asleep.” She paused staring at him, “Is your beard really green?”