

Gerard Knows Best

a timed exercise

by Mia Sundby

These are the things I decided I would do this year. It was a simple plan; exercise more, drink less, stop impulse-buying rubber ducks.

It had started off as a joke. I saw a tiny little rubber duck in a charity shop about 3 years ago, and what can I say --it amused me. There was nothing particularly special about it. Just a bright yellow rubber duck about the size of my thumb, with half of its painted-on face worn off. Still, something about it was charming. The little guy was tucked away between two hideous real-fur coats clearly donated from the wardrobe of a long-dead and long-disliked great aunt --I wasn't even sure if it was legal to sell real fur anymore, even if the proceeds did go to charity. It definitely shouldn't have been legal to sell them if they were as poorly put together as the ones guarding the rubber duck.

He only had most of one painted eye remaining, but there was a sort of incongruous charm to him. His eye seemed to stare up at me, as I parted the waxy fur, as though he had called my name and was expectantly waiting for a response.

I bought him, named him Gerard, and didn't think any more on it.

At least not for the first few weeks.

That was when the dreams started. I hesitate to call them nightmares --though my therapist wouldn't. She thinks it's something to do with me going through a healing cycle about the time my mum forgot I was home and locked me in for a full day. But I'm not so sure. Mostly because the dreams weren't of memories, and no matter how convoluted or metaphorical the images might have been, they didn't really seem relevant.

It started with a dream of Gerard. He came to me in my sleep, only he wasn't the size of my thumb anymore. He was huge, at least double my height, and he spoke to me. It was unsettling, which is why my therapist thinks it's linked to the 'Home-Along' incident, but I didn't feel in danger. I felt... comforted.

Gerard was there, and Gerard would do me no harm. Gerard cared about me, in a way no other being had ever cared about me before. Gerard knew best. He always does. He told me things, in that strange quacking, hissing voice of his. He spoke for what felt like hours, though I was enraptured. I was also asleep, so I couldn't have interrupted him even if I'd wanted to.

And every dream would end the same.

"Find them..." He would hiss. "Find them all..." And then he would quack, and I would wake up.

And... And things started to happen after that. It began with the cat.