

Fancy That

by Marion Umney

Why had I left it so late? There was nothing left in the costume hire shop and wracking my brains to remember “modern” productions which might be easier to source was not proving fruitful. The only ones which stuck in my mind were Jane Horrocks as Lady Macbeth wetting herself in the sleep walking scene while the witches raced around in leathers on motorbikes (not well received by the critics as you can imagine) and a Barbican production of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* where the characters kept falling over in the mud so that their flimsy shifts (under which they wore very little) started to cling ever closer to their bodies. Perhaps not the best look for a 60th birthday celebration.

Why was I going anyway, I hmped. I hated fancy dress parties at the best of times and Shakespeare themed was the worst. I could just see them all now, the women trying to be Judy Dench (in her younger days of course) or the lazy ones in black with loads of make-up cackling “Pass the prosecco – Hubble bubble toil and trouble.” The men either with kingly pretentions (just how many Henry Vs, Richard IIIs, Macbeth’s and Hamlets can you seriously have in one place without them metaphorically killing each other?) or sporting yellow gaiters to show off their bulging calf muscles (still sexy at sixty). Well, who was going to pass up an opportunity to strut their stuff? Me apparently.

“Hmmm. Not easy.” My daughter scratches her head, “But you can’t chicken out Mum. You and Pam have been friends forever.”

“Can’t think why when she keeps having these crackbrained ideas.” I retort.

“OK let’s have a rummage through what you’ve got and see if we can rustle something up.”

She runs up the stairs two at a time while I stomp reluctantly behind her.

In the bedroom she throws open the wardrobe door and pulls out dresses, trousers, shirts, and articles defying description, tossing them onto the bed until the place looks like a jumble sale.

“What about your academic gown? You could be Portia.” She empties the dusty garment out of the equally dusty carrier bag where it’s been sitting for the last twenty years since I resigned from the University and stopped having to dig it out once a year for graduation days.

“Did that at her 40th,” I mutter through gritted teeth.

“She needs to get a bit more imaginative.” My daughter is beginning to get the picture.

She holds up various items. “Ophelia?”

“Not likely, that’s my best nightdress.”

“You worried someone dad doesn’t know about might recognise it?” she grins, and I stick my tongue out.

“I should be so lucky.”

“Hey, these are very principal boyish; Viola/Cesario?”

“More like Puss in Boots I think, so thanks, but no thanks.”

She picks out a blue dress, long and fitted. I remember it well and so does she, or she should. I wore it for her wedding. No mother of the bride dress and jacket for me, the dress is long and slightly hippie, but when your daughter gets married in a field you need something which will hide the wellies.

Her face shines.

“I’ve got it Mum. Be yourself. Everyone else is taken anyway, so you might as well.” And with that she disappears downstairs to find her phone, leaving me lovingly fingering the dress, but still no clearer about who I’m going to be.

She arrives back in a minute or two and sticks her phone under my nose.

“There you are – Miranda, that’s you isn’t it?”

I stare at the picture. It's a pre-Raphaelite picture of a woman with flowing red hair in a long blue dress. The text reads,

Miranda, The Tempest 1916
John William Waterhouse

The picture is beautiful and never have I been so pleased to be a *Ginger* called Miranda.

