

The Beautiful Man Is Not A Feekin' Jessie

“Yer a feekin' jessie, lad, that yer are.” Not for the first time I know that Grandad hates me. Mum says I've to be kind, he's old. Dad says nothing. Martin says I'm to punch the old bastard in the face. I'm with Martin.

“Pink isn't just a girl's colour now, Dad.” Mum roots around in the tin for another green triangle.

“Feck that, by guiney.” Grandad is rolling his loose teeth around his mouth, chomping and chewing on his hate for me.

“Pink shirt, girls' hair, no job – feck me.”

I admire my lovely hands whilst Grandad rasps away, concentrating on my perfectly pale fingernail moons. Lunula, that's their real name – we learnt it at college in the manicure module. They get significantly smaller in smokers or bigger in people with arterial hypertension. Both apply to Grandad - what does that mean for his moons?

Interested, I look up to see him clutching at his throat. Mum is humming from the kitchen over the boiling kettle - she's taken the chocolates with her - and Dad is breathing regularly behind the newspaper. Grandad's eyes are wide, he's trying to speak. I think this is another heart attack, and I wonder how long it will take him to die.

“Jesus Mary Mother of Christ!” My mother drops the tea tray in the doorway causing my Dad to leap up like he wasn't asleep.

“Ambulance, lad!” says my Dad, and I go into the hallway to the little table and pick up the receiver with the twirly cable. It takes ages for the dial to stutter all the way back from nine,

three times, like Grandad tottering back from the off-licence. The voice says, “Which service please?” and I must’ve said “Ambulance,” because they’re here.

The paramedic who comes into the room is the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen. He kneels next to Grandad’s chair and holds his hand and says, “Hello, Thomas.”

Grandad’s eyes snap open just as the beautiful man is leaning over and I wait to hear him call this man a woofter, to feck off and keep his soft girls’ hands to himself, but Grandad does not speak. The beautiful man reaches out to Grandad’s mouth, parts his wrinkled lips and puts his beautiful fingers inside. I am transfixed. He pulls out Grandad’s loose lower dentures and sets them on the table.

“Take it easy, Thomas,” he says.

I show the paramedic to the door, and he stops in the hall and looks at the aged photograph of Grandad aged 18, on a foreign dock in Navy uniform, an arm slung carelessly around his best friend Jim.

“You always can tell, laddy,” says the beautiful man, and I blush as though he has caught me examining his lunulars. “Be kind to your Grandad. It’s hard for him too.”

On the way back to the lounge I eat three green triangles at once, and my cheeks bulge.