

Faces

by Andrew Bowen

Three months had passed since the grease fire melted Jasmine's face.

I sat beside her on the hospital bed and held her clammy hand as she trembled. "No more stir-fry," I joked. The doctor and nurse faked a chuckle. Jasmine might have, but the bandages muffled her voice.

The last strip of puss and blood-stained bandage came off her gummy skin. I gagged but swallowed the bitter sting of bile and patted her hand. "Y-you look good honey."

She turned her head toward the sound of my voice. The surface of her face was crumpled like a mountain range on a raised map. Her eyes rolled in their sockets, balls of creamy smoke where sapphires used to be. She squeezed my hand. A tear dripped over the ridges of her cheeks.

We sat in the back pew of her church, beneath the shadow of the balcony, and listened to a sermon about one's inner light. It was our first time back since the accident. A wig of strawberry-streaked chestnut curls dangled over her cheeks. Adults stole glances. Kids whispered and pointed. She held her chin high and gently cleared her throat as I crossed my arms and bowed my head under the weight of so many functional eyes. We didn't go back.

One night, as I read in bed, she rubbed my crotch. I lifted my book and looked down. It had been four months. I smiled and turned my head. The corners of my lips sagged, as did everything else, when

I saw her face. All I could think about was Freddy Krueger.

"I'm sorry," I said as she whimpered and took her hand away.

"You're going to leave me!" She covered her face with our green comforter.

I set my book on the nightstand. "That's ridiculous. Please don't cry. Your skin will chap again."

She pulled the comforter down and looked toward me. "I'm a monster, John! You can't even make love to me anymore."

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. There had to be a way I could have sex without getting nauseous. Then, with my eyes veiled, I saw the solution.

That night, we fucked doggie style. She grunted in front of me as I concentrated on the twin bulbs of her heart-shaped ass. She said my name. Pride inflated my head as I broke my focus and glanced up. The back of her head made it look like I was screwing a wrinkly bald man.

For weeks afterward we only made love in the dark. But after a while, it seemed like I was fucking my own shadow with my wife's moans as a voice-over.

It wasn't long before I started jerking off to photos of Jasmine and faces on magazines just to get a sense of human coupling. But the staid gaze of Britney Spears, Sasha Gray and even my wife became debilitatingly one-sided. I came while in a stall at work and hammered my fist against the wall. The hunger for conventional intercourse grumbled in my loins. I was one hard-on away from

exploiting the next intern I saw and just getting it over with.

I sat at my desk and neglected a full day's workload scheming ways to get as close to normal as possible. I looked up from my hands at the framed photos on my desk. One was of our son, now in college, on Halloween when he was seven. He wore a home-made mask of a skull made out of a paper bag. I slowly leaned back in my chair as a grin crept on my face.

"You want me to what?" She said that night in bed.

I held a brown paper bag in my hand, the paper a shade darker than the tan left over on Jasmine's skin. "It's a way to have sex with the light on."

She crossed her arms. "I can't see anyway."

I gritted my teeth. "But I can."

"So you want me to wear this bag over my head...with a blown-up picture of me on it?"

"Yes! I mean, guys are more visual and girls emotion-driven during sex. So we both sorta get what we want."

Jasmine lowered her face and hummed as she considered.

"Come on. I'm desperate." I reached over and touched her hand. "I just wanna feel like we're normal again."

She slowly turned her hand over and allowed mine to sink into her palm. She sighed, "I can't beleive I'm agreeing to this."

I handed her the bag and took off my clothes. She stood and untied

her green robe. The fabric flowed over the indentation of her obliques and curve of her hips. She took up the bag over her head, hesitated and sheathed her face.

My mouth hung open as she stood with her hands on her hips.

"It better be me on this thing," her muffled voice vibrated against the bag. "Well, this do it for ya?"

I looked down as my dick inflated. I smiled and nodded. "Yeah."

She mounted my lap and guided me inside. The warmth of her flesh and the site of her body moving in concert with all sensation felt like a pressure release as I sank into the sheets. I looked up at the stile frame grin she wore on the paper bag.

I sighed, clasped my hands behind my head and closed my eyes, thinking of all the ways I could Photo Shop her face.

