

# Cow

*by* Matt Potter

Every time I kissed her I broke out in welts.

"He looks funny again," the twins would say. "Cow looks funny, Mummy." (I had long stopped trying to teach them to say my name correctly, so Cow I remained.)

"I'm trialling another new make-up again," she told me. "Perhaps you'll react better to this one."

She never said trying, always trialling, to emphasise that her job as a beautician was more about science and less about selling impossible dreams.

"This one has sunscreen, natural collagen, and hormones from the uteri of Greek sheep."

I looked at her reflection in the mirror. She looked like a model, but not a model model: a dummy in a shop window, perfect cheekbones and blank stare.

"I don't think it's your make-up, Bonnie. I think I'm allergic to you."

A single tear rolled down her cheek.

"It's what I suspected," she sighed, smoothing the tear with bronzing moisturiser. "This happens in all my relationships after nine months. I'm just no good with long-term goals."

It was hard saying goodbye to the twins, no more photographs of their shiny grins either side of my blotchy face.

"We love you, Cow," they said. I would always remember the way they spoke in unison. Leaving them smashed my heart wide open.

I thought of wearing a mask, and thus saving our relationship, but was glad I hadn't when, two months later, I met a woman with children who could say my name.

