

Helen Says (from FATHER MUST)

by Rick Rofihe

Laura's masking.

That's what Helen says—Helen in the other of the bedrooms of their two-bedroom—“Laura's masking.”

And those looks of Laura's, so many in that face—is each of them a mask?

“I don't think of it that way,” says Helen. “And even if one is, and whether it's a mask that comes from masking, or a mask that hides the masking—I don't think of it that way,” says Helen. “I just think now that that's just Laura. And no matter what look is on her face, she's masking.”

Masking. Helen says not to think of it as covering or disguising or concealing. Helen says to understand it is not to take it as something put up front and over like a mask. Helen says it's not like that.

“Think of a glove,” says Helen. “One that dulls your sense of touch, but as if it were worn *underneath* the surface of your hand. Or a sound inside you that you carry to dampen outside sound. Or a filter that tones down what you see, not like sunglasses—*behind* your eyes. That's masking,” Helen says. “That's the way it is with Laura. And Laura's always masking.”

Always?

Helen says Laura's good at it, has had lots of practice, that it comes without thinking now.

But always?

Helen says that maybe if you get Laura laughing really hard, or if you find Laura crying, or if you catch Laura just waking up or just about to fall asleep, then maybe she's not masking. “Of course, there's dreaming—not that I know what Laura dreams,” says

Helen. "But while she's dreaming, I don't think she could still keep masking."

"You've known Laura a long time."

"A long time."

"Before you and Laura took this apartment together, when she was married, was she also masking then?"

"When she was married and before—before she even thought of getting married."

"So you must know Laura well. Do you think she *knows* she's masking?"

"Maybe she didn't know exactly at first, but by now she must know. Of course she wouldn't admit it, not to herself or anyone else—that's part of masking."

"You ever try to talk to her about it?"

"She doesn't want to. That's another part of masking."

"You two talk to each other a lot about other things?"

"We don't really have that much to say to each other anymore."

"So Laura doesn't tell you everything..."

"Someone who's masking and who doesn't want to talk about it might not have that much else to tell."

"Wasn't she seeing someone a while back?"

"Jim. A nice guy, Jim," says Helen. "But, to Laura, Jim could have been almost anybody. And she must have known that. And that's part of the reason why she was masking then. Why she *is* masking now. Why she's always masking."

Why? Why is Laura masking?

"Because she thinks she shouldn't have to mask," says Helen.

Says Helen. And how does Helen know?

"Oh," says Helen. "I know masking."

Helen doesn't catch herself and say that she has masked. Or even that she masks but of course is not now masking. No. All Helen says in the other bedroom of their two-bedroom is, "I know masking."

