



## MY DALEK

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Me and the Dalek are on the ferry, out on the deck at the front. The wind's blowing the hair away from my face, just like one of these adverts on the telly for posh hair dryers.

'Rats' tails,' my mother calls my hair. 'Fuckface,' I call her, but not in front of her or anything. I don't know why everyone at school goes on about how much they love their mother. I would rather have a Dalek, even though it's just a box. I've been wearing it every day, walking around town all silver and two metres tall. Everyone stares and shouts but they can fuck off. Now it's folded in a bin liner beside me and it's rustling in the wind coming off the sea. The town's fading away and the water's sort of sparkly and there's hardly anyone else on the boat. It's like it's my boat, taking me south in the pink and purple morning sky.

I turned thirteen just before Halloween, so I've spent most of my teenage life, all three and a half weeks of it, in the Dalek. I made it myself from the loft ladder box. My dad sent off for the ladder from a DIY catalogue and when it arrived he slid it out onto the carpet and fixed it into place. Fuckface and him practised pulling it down from the ceiling and going up the steps, but I couldn't be arsed. I just wanted to look at the box. The cardboard was so amazing: all thick with these corrugated

edges, like a castle. The loft ladder screeched as they slid it up and down and the screams bursting out from the metal hurt my ears. The box just sat there, looking so strong and solid and reliable that I wanted to crawl inside and close the lid. My Dad looked up from the ladder and said, 'You can have it if you want.'

That's when I decided I was going to make a Dalek.

I painted it silver with big black spots and made holes for my eyes and arms. As soon as I put it on, I was a giant. I could hide inside the Dalek and nobody could see me at all, or touch me. Even my voice was muffled. All I had to say was: 'EX-TERM-IN-ATE'.

At Halloween I walked down the street like some kind of silver god. It was so brilliant that the day after I wanted to wear the box to school, but old Fuckface wouldn't let me. I tried to sneak out in it, but she caught me and started shouting.

'How could you get on the school bus with a thing like that? And the teachers wouldn't like it. I don't know what's got into that head of yours.'

She allowed me to wear it *after* school though, as if she was granting me some royal favour or something. So as soon as I got home, I put it on and went out, away from her. I walked around in the Dalek and went to the shop. The kids in the street couldn't handle it. They just wanted everyone to be the same. If you weren't like them they thought you were a terrorist or something. They'd been watching too much crap on the telly and couldn't take their eyes off me.

'What the fuck?'

'Halloween was yesterday, mate.'

'Jesus, it's an alien.'

'Someone's been taking too many mushrooms.'

I wore the Dalek every day after school and on Saturdays and Sundays too. My mother hated it. I walked into town smiling behind the cardboard as losers in cars blew their horns at me.

There's a seagull flapping its wings beside the ferry—keeping an eye on things. It's like my friend going south with me. It's good that I'm going south because the

word north makes me feel crap. North reminds me of him, the North Pole. Anyway, the less said about him the better.

At school there were lots of people I knew and before everything happened, I thought I had friends, then it all changed and I couldn't talk to anyone. Once I'd found the Dalek, it got worse. Being inside it felt normal to me, but nobody else agreed. In the school corridor without the Dalek I was too close to everyone. There was nowhere to hide.

School was like being surrounded by needles or injections. And yesterday in art class Martin MacManus was at it again. He's such a wanker — always putting his arms around me and I don't know how to tell him to stop. He asks me stuff, like what happened with the North Pole, and leans towards me with his face right up to mine. Yesterday when he asked me, I just kept on painting. I wished the Dalek was there to climb inside, because I wanted to exterminate him. I plunged my paintbrush into the red splat of paint on the pallet and it sprayed out. Some of it hit him in the face.

'What are you doing, bitch?' he shouted, jumping back

'Oops,' I said and carried on painting, but it served him right. The picture I was painting got redder and redder. I painted bloody streaks all over the figure so it looked like it had been in a car crash.

'I don't think much of your painting anyway,' he said and walked off.

I put the brush in the water to rinse it then put it back in the red paint. I stroked it onto my painting, over and over again. I wet the brush and chose some purple then, strong bruise-coloured purple. I thought about what Martin MacManus had asked me and what he said about the North Pole and I painted the purple next to the red and over the red and around the red and my brush swirled over the paper. The smell of the paint was in my nose. I kept adding more red and then more purple and I splashed the brush in the water. My heart was beating and I knew I was sweating and I hoped I didn't smell. I painted and painted around the same part of the picture, until suddenly I saw that I'd made a hole. I'd added so much paint and water and brushed so hard that the paper had become soggy and torn right through.

I had been doing OK, until he'd come along. The wanker.

And I don't understand how Martin MacManus knew about the North Pole. Somebody must have been talking. The North Pole's real name is Colin North and he's in fourth year. He's got dark hair and eyes that dart around a bit like a snake's tongue. I don't know what he saw in me.

Just before Halloween he asked me to come to the park with him after school. We sat on the swings trailing our feet on the gravel and the noise they made seemed loud in the silence. The only other sound was the seagulls howling above us. I was too shy to speak and he didn't try, so we just sat. The swings creaked and he lit up a fag. Its red tip glowed and he looked at me as he sucked on it. And I didn't know what to do. So I twisted the chains of my swing together and untwisted them and I spun round and round. I leaned back and my hair flew out and I felt dizzy and laughed. The North Pole's eyes flickered towards me and he told me out of the side of his mouth, in his croaky forty-a-day voice,

'I suppose you got a nice face, shame about yer legs.'

And my face turned beetroot. I don't know if it was the 'suppose' or the 'face' or the 'leg' part that did it. Then he said,

'Let's go for a walk.'

And I didn't really know if that meant a real walk or something else, but I said OK anyway coz anything was better than sitting there with a red face feeling awkward.

The boat's moving so smoothly that it's making me nervous. When things are this quiet I wonder what'll happen next. Moving across the sea's making me think of being a baby, being pushed along in a big pram, up above the ground, watching the sky through the flickering leaves as the trees moved past.

When I was a baby, Fuckface used to leave me in my pram beside the outside toilet while she cooked or cleaned in the flat upstairs. Sometimes people's faces appeared, looking in at me, big planets coming through the white lace. I could hear footsteps going by, the clicking of heels or the stomp of working boots. The pram

would rock when her hands returned or when some stranger couldn't resist a baby.

I told her about this the other day and she said I was a liar. She said you can't remember anything from when you're that young. That's why it didn't matter. Well that's a typical Fuckface response.

And all that time that Martin MacManus was asking me about the North Pole, I'd been needing to pee. I'd wanted to go to the toilet at lunchtime but couldn't face going in there. There are always girls hanging about in the end cubicle, smoking and cackling like witches around a cauldron. Whenever I go to the loo I feel scared of making too much noise, or nervous about the rustle if I'm unwrapping a tampon. If I make a sound I hear snorts and grunts. Sometimes I can't pee because I know they are listening and when I wash my hands I'm scared to look in the mirror in case I see their mocking faces looking back. When I rush out the smell of smoke always clings to me.

I'm always needing to go to the toilet these days, ever since that day with the North Pole. Sometimes in the middle of class I've had to rush out and if I don't go I get a pain down there. It's sore to pee too and even though it feels like I need really badly, sometimes nothing comes out.

The girls in the toilets noticed that I was always going. I peed as often as they smoked. So I spent the day stinking of their tobacco. And the other day I heard them talking. I thought I heard my name and the North Pole's, but it was as I was pulling the plug. When I came out they were looking at me. I felt their eyes and I wondered why it had gone silent. Then one of them whispered something and they all laughed. The bitches. I twisted the tap to wash my hands and watched the water circle down the plughole.

Anyway, last night on the way home from school I suddenly saw the North Pole, leaning against a gate with two of his friends. My ears started buzzing and it was like a tunnel of flames between us. His image screamed towards me like a tornado. I got the shakes and I could hardly walk, but I kept placing one foot in front of the other, taking deep breaths so that I would be calm enough to say hello. As soon as I

did he turned his head away. I saw the side of his nose and his hair flying back and I looked at where he was looking to see what it was he had turned to look at, but there was nothing there. He was just turning away so that he didn't have to look at me. Some leaves fell from the sky on either side of him and his two friends stared at me, big wolves on their hind legs leering.

'That's her, isn't it?' said one of them. The North Pole was still looking away.

'Hey Pole, that's your tart isn't it?'

I tried to walk faster but the pavement really seemed to be moving, up and down like the earthquakes I'd seen on the telly. The buzzing in my ears was so loud that I couldn't hear the birds. A car drove past and blew its horn and I jumped out of the way. The driver wound down his window.

'WATCH WHERE YOU'RE BLOODY GOING!'

I looked down at the hard street where a piece of crumpled up paper was being tossed around, becoming more and more torn and ragged. Eventually it was trapped in a corner between a metal lamp post and a wall, next to a lump of yellowing dog shit. As the wind blew through it, it shook.

When I got home I went straight to the Dalek and put it on over my school uniform.

Fuckface didn't like it.

'FOR GOD'S SAKE,' she said. 'you're obsessed with that thing.'

I said nothing.

'Well get out of my way and let me get on with making the tea. Off you go, off out and play.'

To get away from her, I went walking through the streets in the Dalek.

When I got to the park, three guys were there doing wheelies on their bikes, making revving noises as if their rusty Raleighs were Harley Davidsons. The wheels spun in the ground and grunts and swears came out of the boys.

Then I was spotted.

'Jesus, it's the Wicker man.'

'Who is that fucking weirdo?'

‘Let’s get it.’

They put down their bikes and moved towards me.

‘Oi!’ said one of them and picked up a stone. He threw it at me and it hit the box. I didn’t feel anything. I was protected. The others picked up stones and hurled them too.

‘Get it! Get the fucking weirdo!’

‘EX-TERM-IN-ATE!’ I said as the stones bounced off the box.

The boys came closer, but me and the Dalek stood still.

‘EX- TERM-IN-ATE!’ I said and they seemed to get angry. Then a stone came through the hole for my eye and hit me on the eyebrow.

The boys stopped and stared as I staggered backwards, I felt dizzy and the box wobbled. ‘Bull’s Eye!’ said the guy who had thrown the stone.

I was swaying in my Dalek.

‘Hey, let’s get out of here,’ said one of the others. They picked up their bikes and set off away from the park.

I watched them go, and mouthed ‘Ex-term-in-ate’, but no sound came from my lips. Then everything turned 90° as I lost my balance and fell to the ground.

When I opened my eyes I saw the sky above me. Clouds flew across the navy blue in front of the stars. Seagulls swooped and cried. The pain in my eyebrow throbbed.

That’s when I decided. I was going away. It wasn’t enough to hide behind the Dalek. Wherever I went people were closing in on me. I was like a withering balloon with the air seeping from it, shrinking and shrinking.

So I walked home in the Dalek and went straight to my room and packed. I took some knickers and a towel and a packet of biscuits from the kitchen and put them in my schoolbag. I emptied my piggy bank and found that I had just enough money for the ferry to the mainland.

When Fuckface saw me she started shouting.

‘WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOURSELF? What’s that above your eye?’

‘A boy did it.’

‘A boy? What boy?’

‘A boy in the park threw a stone.’

‘And I suppose you had that box on, had you?’

‘Aye, I was in the Dalek.’

‘Well, it serves you right. If you’re going to walk around like that, no wonder people throw stones at you. Can you not just act normal for a change?’

I looked at the floor.

After tea, I set my alarm for half past five and went to bed early. And this morning, when it was still dark, I sneaked out of the house and walked down to the pier to get the first ferry.

And now I’m on the boat, going away from it all and the bird is flying beside me and the wind’s messing with my hair and the sky’s juggling with the morning colours.

At the back of the boat, the water’s being churned up into froth like beer in a trail that stretches behind, and I’m taking the Dalek out of the bin liner, unfolding it and looking around to check that no one can see. I’ve lifted it now and tipped it over the edge, so that it falls down into the sea below and it’s floating away over the early morning waves all purple and red just like Christmas. It’s bobbing up and down beside the seagulls that are flying around it and going off into the distance, and its brown colour with the marks I painted suddenly makes me think of a thing we did at school about Viking funerals, ships carrying dead heroes floating out to sea. And as it disappears over the horizon, I’m opening my mouth and I’m shouting ‘EX-TERM-IN-ATE!’

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