



## THE MAKE-UP GIRL Heidi James

Somewhere down the twisted Saxon lane there will be a lay-by or dirt track that leads quietly to a farmer's starting point in his field. The corner where he sits in his machinery, his hand resting in his lap, constricted by the minute space in his cab, reflecting the acres of land constipated by debt.

She is driving, looking for the track that will lead to this private apex. She is driving steadily. The car is much bigger than she is used to, so she takes extra care around corners and at stenosed parts of the road. Spring breezes tangle her hair through the open window. She keeps both hands on the wheel and doesn't drop her eyes from the road when she lights her fag. She isn't being chased or anything, so she drives smoothly, her skirt high on her pitted legs. She is an attractive girl, the thin-lipped type common to this area, whose face will carry only the smog of disappointments as she gets older. All joy and love will slip through the cracks around her lips. But for now

while she is young and her skin crammed with collagen, she is lovely. She is tight in the story she thinks is being witnessed. Her vision of the future is Roman and blunders through obstacles.

The road rolls around the moderate hills. Trees temporarily block the light in regal tunnels and the villages she passes are too slow to stick to the wheels. Yesterday morning she went to the doctor's and told him she thought she had an addiction. She waited patiently in the mucus coloured waiting room, re-reading her plan. Of course she isn't an addict, she wouldn't even consider something so disgusting, but the alternatives the doctor prescribes are clean and a treat, especially for today. She knew the doctor was suspicious; of course she knew. She knew the touch of his hands and the rasping odour of his breath. This man has scraped the frosting of cells from her cervix with his fingers wedged inside her. They were as intimate as lovers. She wouldn't touch goods from the street and she would never consume anything other than genuine untainted pharmaceutical grade. She just wasn't that sort of girl.

'I'll give you one more prescription then you must register as an addict and join the programme, ok?'

'Yes, ok Doctor, I'll do that.'

There would be no need of that though. These were for her and Jim.

This would be their first day alone away from her work. He came in last Monday, his face soft; yielding, his bones fine and high. Relationships between employees and clients are strictly forbidden but while she rubbed the healthy coloured pan stick into his face she knew this was love she was feeling. He was the one. His composure and quiet manner; his open hands and skinny chest; the fragility he

had wrapped around himself. She swelled, became a giantess for him.

‘Climb inside me, absorb me because this is love I am feeling,’ she whispered to his closed eyes.

His silence warmed the flesh on her cheeks. She decided then to leave together. To run and find a place for them both, where she could take care of him, be his woman and where no one could come between them.

She took out all the cash she could from her credit cards, packed her clothes and arranged the loan of the vehicle. Beyond that what plans could she make? There wasn't anywhere that would accept them. She knew that. She knew that society would not accept their relationship. She knew it was illegal. There were no hotels she could book for them to spend their first night together. Her flat wasn't safe; she had no family they could stay with. They would just have to run and live in the van. But they would be together. She could fix the van up with a mattress and nice bedclothes, maybe paint the inside a nice soft green colour. She would buy a camping stove and a cool box. From her flat she brought the tin opener and some cutlery, cushions from the sofa and a hot water bottle. They would be gypsies, raising their children and loving each other. They would see the country together and Jim could look after their home while she did little jobs to provide for them. She would be a mother to them all and keep everything tidy, perhaps keep a dog that they would find starving, wandering the streets, its flesh beaded by ticks. She could nurse it back to health and it would guard them while they slept; impossible to imagine life now without them all. Jim would give her all this.

She didn't say good-bye to anyone. She left the flat at six o'clock in the morning and drove to work. She parked her little car next to the

van and loaded it quickly, leaving a space for Jim to lie down in the back on all the cushions. She let herself in through the back door, her fingers rigid through the alarm combination. He was waiting, as she knew he would be. He was freezing cold and naked where they had neglected him through the night. His fingers were almost stiff with the cold. She warmed them with her hot thin mouth; sucking his fingers till he softened. She wrapped him in a blanket her Aunt Julie had bought her as a house-warming present, tucking the satin edge around his chin so the rough wool wouldn't irritate his face. Pushing the blanket into the grooves and slots of his body, she folded the ends in so they wouldn't trail in the dirt. She didn't know if he had allergies or a criminal record. She didn't know which school he had left or what he liked to watch on television. She knew his parents' names and of course about the accident that had killed him, but nothing more. His eyes closed were hers, he was hers and there was some time.

She got him into the lift and wheeled him out to the van. She propped his head up so he could see her as she drove and uncovered his body to the cool air, as he liked.

'Wait here darling, I'll lock up.'

She grabbed the bags with his chemicals and reset the alarm, the door locked behind them — going.

Then all she had to do was drive.

Her excitement is softened by the DF's she got from the doctor. She looks at him in the rear view mirror; naked; lying on the blanket like a long baby.

'We will be a modern day Bonnie and Clyde on the run. Everyone will come after us and we will fight to the death to stay together. It's funny, we know each other so well in some ways but in others we

know nothing. We can spend this time getting to know each other's deepest secrets, and then play with each other and kiss and make babies. Oh God Jim, this is all I ever wanted. A man who I can trust with all my secrets; keep me safe. Jim, I knew the moment I held your face, the weight of your head in my bosom, I knew then, I knew you would be and I would be and then of course it doesn't matter if we live long. I always believed in this love Jim, didn't you? All those other boyfriends I had I was looking for this; for you. You too! Oh Jim, that girl who came in with your parents she was wrong as much as I am right, yes? I never had many men really, none of them like this. Shall we go to Wales? We could camp in the hills. My friend said it's really pretty. She stayed there once with her true love. Jim, shall we start trying for a baby straight away? I don't care about marriage. I don't want them to take any part of this away. I want you with me always, some filament of you still embedded inside me. I read about a woman once, whose baby died inside her, and because she couldn't bear to lose it she said nothing to no-one, so it fossilised inside her. She walked around pregnant all her life with her baby all hard and white like chalk, a little statue she never had to put down. Isn't that beautiful? Perhaps I will be that lucky. Anyway, darling man, I have you now don't I? We could be like moles and live underground, our eyes sealed shut and grime in our ears, Oh God, sorry, oh God I am so sorry. I didn't mean to be so insensitive. Oh baby please, I am sorry. Please forgive me, can you? Thank you baby. God I'm sorry, sweetheart. I don't want to upset you ever. God I am such a fucking idiot, a fucking idiot. I am sorry Jim. Really.'

She carried on driving. They had left the small town and were cutting through the industrial estates. The factories were just opening

up. Workers snubbed their half smoked fags before entering the building, the shutters over the windows lolled halfway, stolen cars smoked like pyres by the side of the road and in their own enclave were the carpet and furniture warehouses — flat buildings that would be the first bombed at the start of the next school term.

‘This is love I am feeling, Jim, truly. My mum called me Rochelle because she loved the French, honestly anything French is all right by her! I think she knew a Frenchman before she met my dad. She used to buy croissants for breakfast on a Sunday and my dad used be well pissed off. ‘Where’s my bacon butty?’ She said he had no culture. My mum was a bit above herself, you know, had ideas above her station. Why did your family choose Jim? I suppose you are named after your granddad that was a hero in the war. Isn’t it funny, I just have this sixth sense about you. It’s like I dreamt of you and now here you are. I suppose you were a sickly child. Did you watch Blue Peter and Newsround? Did you ever send a drawing in to Tony Hart? I did and I got in the Gallery. I was so chuffed! I wonder what you were doing on my twelfth birthday? I am thinking about the time when I was twelve, I was very happy.

Remember what you promised me? I know you won’t let me down. Look at the lovely countryside. When I see the place Jim, we can stop and have a cuddle, shall we? I can’t wait either but we have to be careful Jim. We can’t stop just yet.’

Accessible but not totally exposed to the road, bordered by thick hedgerows and the odd tree, she found the field. All bored kids round here knew the type of place. She hadn’t forgotten how to spot one even though she had had her own flat for a while and no need of a secluded patch of dirt. She had driven fifty or so miles, crossing and re-crossing

through roads snagged by the motorway and dual carriageways.

She parked the van in the corner furthest from the road, stashed behind a thick hedge of hawthorn. Fists of clay gripped the tyres and wheel arches. The way from the road to their corner was slowed by the sludge of wet, overworked soil. Last season's roots thrust dead antennae out into the damp air. The sky was shrouded by grey cloud - a good sign they wouldn't be interrupted by walkers or metal detecting fanatics.

'Well then, Jim, will this do? Just for tonight? Shall I come in the back?'

She swallowed two more pills with the water she bought at the garage earlier.

She lay down next to him, her head tucked into the space above his shoulder, her nose to his ear, her body pressed against his. This wasn't their first embrace. Her hands skimmed the surface of his flesh, avoiding the rough black stitching across his sunken chest.

'This is all I have ever wanted Jim, someone to love me, hold me and only me.'

Stroking the belly with the flat of her hand, the tips of her fingers grazed the head of his penis. Sensing no resistance she started to knead it. She pulled back the foreskin, rubbing back and forth, insistently. She kissed his mouth, pushing her tongue into the black, oxygen-impooverished socket.

'Come on Jim, do it to me please. Why aren't you getting hard? Please Jim, let me just put it in. This is our chance Jim, come on now Jim. What, don't you want me? Am I not what you thought I'd be? Are you disappointed now? Am I not like her? I thought you wanted me Jim - me. Why did you come with me? Oh yeah I know why, playing

games uh, playing games with my heart. Please Jim, just touch my pussy. Just lick me. I will sit on you so you don't hurt yourself. Jim, you have to try. Relationships are about give and take, not take, take and take. JIM, ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME? Look at me, I am half naked, loving you, letting myself go for you. I am totally open to you and you hurt me. You have broken your promise, Jim, you cunt, you have broken your promise. I sucked your cock, you bastard, now it's your turn to please me, so come on, I know your game, fuckwit. You think you're better than me, think I am beneath you I suppose. I heard your family talking, I know that sort of up-themselves snobs. Bit of rough am I? Well mate, at least I can still breathe! At least I can talk, can't I, even if I don't sound like your ex? Well, you picked me remember! So now what?'

She gripped the thawed ears and lifting the head as far as she could, she brought it down hard against the metal bottom of the van. There was an immaculate freedom in their relationship. She couldn't hurt him. He could take it all like a man. She continued to beat him; his face slashed with wet stripes of her saliva. Her breath ruptured her closed mouth and trachea as she crashed his ribs against the buffer of his remaining soft tissues. The fibres of his stitches gave way, loosening the seam running along his sternum. The sticky substance left in his bowel was seeping through the cotton wool plugging his rectum. The thaw of this early spring started the body's final breakdown. The free radical damage done while he was still breathing accelerated the rot of his tissues. All this is not registered by her. She is lying on her back now, smoking a Benson and Hedges with her right hand and stroking his thigh with her left.

'I am so sorry Jim. I know I am so deeply selfish. I shouldn't

expect so much of you so soon. You will be back to your old self soon and we shouldn't rush. You are right, it will be all the better for the wait. But Jim, if they come to take you, we will have lost our chance, so you see don't you, why I got so upset? I know I have a temper Jim. It's common to have a temper. It's common to raise your voice really though isn't it? I think it's common for women to smoke or eat in the streets and I can't stand those sorts of girls who drink pints of lager. Who do they think they are? I never understood girls acting like men. I would hate for you to think that I am common. You don't do you? I think my mother's common. She embarrasses me so much I can't bear it. What embarrasses you? Did you really not know about your heart? Was it a painful surprise? Do you mind my asking? I saw the coffin they had picked out for you. It was awful, one of our cheapest. That would be embarrassing. But you do know, darling, don't you that I would never do that to you, never. I think I might eat now Jim, would you mind? I bought some sandwiches and things. You see I am well prepared. Sometimes when I am working on a body, I wish so much that I could just take a peek at what it is that killed them. What made it all stop that day or this. Why not then or later? I think that's because I like to be well prepared. I want to know exactly what and where everything is; when and how it might happen. I hate surprises, they are always such a disappointment, you know? People always get everything wrong. My Mum had a surprise party for my birthday once, but she got it wrong. It wasn't what I had always wanted: the food, the people, all of it was wrong. Did you know insects have no lungs? I don't know about a heart or brain, just no lungs.'

She pulled the blanket close about herself, the metallic cold outside exacerbated by the half frozen cadaver in her lap. His flesh

was soft now. Only his internal arrangement was still frozen solid. The thick pan stick she had applied for him at their first meeting had rubbed off from around his lips. They were a dusky purple again. She lit another cigarette, sucking deeply, filling her lung sacks. She held the hot smoke for a second before leaning over Jim's face, sealing her lips over his and blowing the smoke into his mouth.

'There you are baby. See, there ain't nothing I won't share with you.'

The quiet field lay flat outside the van. The fermenting hoards of camouflaged insects and worms masticated the sod under the tyres, reshaping the landscape beyond the human beings perched above. The land is shifted by these invisible architects and there is no controlling its new form, though dams are built and fields ploughed, it's all decaying, falling down rotten every moment.

'Do you know what I think is funny? All the people who come to me want their loved one to have colour in their cheeks; as if they have just come back from a bracing walk on the beach. Or they want them to look glamorous, all dolled up like a dog's dinner. Ain't that mad? It's like they are a dot-to-dot picture or a colouring book. I want to say to them, 'They are DEAD, you idiot, face it,' but they can't can they? They always think in the back of their putrid little heads that they might be the one to defy the law of Nature and actually live forever, along with their astonishingly ugly and commonplace brood. It's like all the university education and careers they go for, "to make something of themselves" well who cares? Who will even remember them? All we are here for is to make babies and once the babies are having their own babies we should die, don't you think? It's all right, don't answer, I know you're dead.'

The quiet solidified and fell heavily in her lap and over her shoulders, pressing her body further into gravity's clasp. She hadn't accounted for time and its back-peddalling when you have nothing to do. She hadn't planned for boredom. Eventually, when faced with doing nothing you fall asleep. The DFs she'd had deafened her nerves so she slept for hours. The body lying untidily, like a combatant fallen in battle, strewn across her legs - her saviour. He looked like he had taken a bullet for her. She breathed under him, her body processing the oxygen mix and funnelling out the waste products. The corpse submitted to shifting with her. Like a whore, it did what she did, and what she wanted it to do. The slurry of its internal organs sloshed about. The thaw was complete. He sounded like a full hot water bottle that had gone cold overnight.

It was dark but not night, when she woke up. She woke relieved to find they were still together, that they hadn't yet been found. She put a new cigarette in her mouth, and lit it with the lighter she had found in his pocket. He looked ugly in the lack of light. Shadows weren't becoming for his type of bone structure. They flattened his nose and deepened the sockets of his eyes. His face flinched from the gloom and sought the light to pick out his best features. He looked bored. She knew he was bored. Experience pricked at her nerves. He wanted to leave her. She had seen that look before and he didn't want sex. Everyone knows that when they go off sex it's all over. All men ever want is a warm place to stick it in and if she won't do and he would rather go without, then obviously it has to be over. The only thing left is leave with your pride and dignity intact. Remain a lady. She had had doubts though. He wasn't so hot, in fact she could find someone better just like that, anywhere, right now.

‘Jim, Jim, you know what? I think this is all wrong. I don't love you anymore, Jim. I think we have reached the end. I know it's hard and I am so sorry but I am just not happy now, so let's part before all our good memories are ruined by arguments and fights, yeah? I know Jim, I know you can't be without me. I know I am the most amazing woman you have ever met but darling, please, you aren't right for me. I am bored by you. I wanted you to dance with me like in the films. I wanted you to pick me flowers and leave me little letters on my pillow just like you promised. You broke your promise, Jim. Anyway I suppose we just stopped laughing together didn't we? Now it's too late, I think you should leave and let me be, ok? I've packed your stuff.’

She opened the double doors of the van into the hoary night.

‘I'm sorry babe, remember me fondly yeah, good luck. Now come on don't make this difficult. I know you want to try again but face it, it won't work not now, not ever. Don't make me kick you out Jim, please.’

She sat staring at him, stinking and flaccid on the bedding she had carried down from her flat to keep him comfy, not moving, lazy and selfish. He had given her nothing, brought nothing to their relationship, just took, took and took.

‘Right you fucking bastard, I've been patient enough, now fuck off!’

She dragged the body she had so carefully laid in the van out onto the mud.

‘Now don't fucking come back!’

She slammed the doors shut and got in the driver's seat. It was done; she had done it. It hadn't been easy. Sometimes it's hard to

break up and she had loved him. But this was right and she needed her independence again. She started the engine and drove away, heading for the seaside and the fresh air.

Jim's body stayed furred where she had dumped him like a belligerent drunk, where later tomorrow or the day after, a dog walker or the farmer will find him. Re-frozen and tattered by the sharp teeth of a starved fox, the police will be called and he will be reunited with his family, who will quickly have him incinerated.

First published by Pulp Net (<http://www.pulp.net>)

<http://www.pulp.net/fiction/stories/20/the-make-up-girl.html>

This file is for personal reading only. No element of this story may be reproduced, resold or retransmitted in any way without the permission of the author.