

The emperor's new clothes

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There lived a man; he should still be alive now, yet one would like to think that he had grown up a little. He fancied himself the 'It Boy' of Western Super- Mare, he was the guy in the latest fashion, up to date hairdo's and always had this months Vanity Fair tucked under one arm. The fact that he was almost 38 and still lived in his parents three bedroomed semi-detached did not seem to deter him. Being a man of simple pleasures, and having never had the intuition to actually move into a place of his own and get a career, his daily routine had not changed much over the past twenty years. No later than 8. 30am every morning, his doting and somewhat downtrodden mother would creep into his bedroom, careful not to wake the mountain of a son who lay snoring like a pig in his bed. She would place his plate of sausage sandwiches next to his bedside and then quietly leave closing the door gently behind her. At precisely 8. 40am, he would take one last grotesque snore and then emerge from his top bunk, and haul his not so svelte figure down the two foot ladder that leant against the side, which screamed in distress every step he made in his descent. With one foul swoop his great hairy hand would shovel sausage sandwiches into his gawping mouth, two at a time. He would then make his way to the bathroom, where he spent about two thirds of his life. Who would have thought that a bathroom barely capable of fitting in a bathtub, wash basin and toilet, could hold the many different cheap brands of beauty products that he had acquired over the years?

Two and half-hours later and he is all ready.

" The better a man looks, the better a man is"

He would bellow after flushing the toilet and bursting out of the bathroom with a quiff that no Elvis impersonator could compare to. He had a lengthy beauty regime that was absolutely vital that he stuck to. How else was he going to pass off being the most vain person in the whole of Western Super-Mare's history? One gets the impression that some of the hair that once belonged on the crown of his head had quietly crept to join the vast amount of hair that covered the rest of his body. As most middle-aged men do, he himself had acquired a rather prominent bald patch. This baldness did bother his small mind. But not enough so that he did not take ultimate pride in every other inch of himself. After bathroom time, it was dressing up time. To say that he took an interest in fashion would be a laughable understatement. His desperately small bedroom was not somewhere one could kick back and relax, purely due to the lack of space. He did have a lot of clothes, even the odd sarong and kilt. If someone famous had once worn it, or been seen in it, he would have it, or so he liked to make out. Expense simply does not matter when you are not paying for anybody but your conceited self. Rumour about the town was that he surely must have had 'Superior Being' tattooed behind his ear, like the '666' in the Omen, but this guy was real. Once kitted out in an outfit that was about as un-flattering as he could possibly piece together, 'Its next season darling, anybody can see that' he would sneer to anybody who dared to scoff at him. After blowing air kisses to his mother and father, he would head off to the seafront.

When on the bus, he would lay out a designer tissue on which to perch his bottom on, and cross his legs curtly. One may imagine that seeing a middle aged bald man with the ghastliest fake tan and atrocious dress sense and

perspiration problem, would be a humorous thing, but the locals were completely used to him, and paid him no attention whatsoever. In the city he would flounce around seemingly aimless, peering in at the most expensive shops and throwing lesser beings nasty looks. Then, he would go to his favourite, a low key seaside affair, that his Great Aunt happened to own. Here, he could get free coffee and cream cakes. This was a privilege he had been abusing ungratefully for as long as his great aunt could remember.

He was definitely not one to say no to something free (as his unlucky relative had realised). This was his critical downfall. It was a day like any other in the cafe, when he was approached by a young woman complete with fake breasts, a fake smile, and an incredible amount of orange makeup on, a saleswoman. He glanced her up and down, his eyes did not stumble upon an expensive label, therefore he returned to his article without bothering to utter a word. 'Sir, sorry to disturb you, as you look like a very busy man...' At which point, his Aunt spluttered in the background. She continued, 'My company are the newest in follicle technology, we deal in complicated science procedures, to bring men like yourself back smiling, with a full head of hair' Which was then her queue to throw him a dazzling smile with gleaming eyes. Luckily, she had his attention. " Men... like myself?' He growled ferociously, spraying her with saliva. The woman's smile did not crack.

" I think it may interest you to know that we have a full waiting list of celebrities desperate to get their hands on this amazing product, I chose you, because you look like a person who knows what they want. And we are

prepared to give you the full course, absolutely one hundred percent free!

There was a pause.

Inside his head, cogs were turning slowly. Celebrities. Desperate. Free! He took a deep breath in, stood up proudly, his nose in the air and slammed his great hairy fist down on the table smashing four empty mugs and declared, 'I'll do it' Quick as a flash, his details were down on paper and he carry on with his coffee, smug, with the prospect of a full head of hair. A month or so later, at 8. 30am a parcel arrived next to his sausage sandwiches. At first sighting, the grown man inside of him let out a high pitched squeak of excitement. He dropped to his knees like an eager child, tearing away the packaging in glee. Minutes later, sat amidst a sea of bubble wrap, he cradling his new elixir. 'Follicle SOS hair rejuvenator with added vitamins' He gasped in awe at this magical product and once again felt smugly aware that he had been hand picked to use it. After studying the instructions, here began the treatment. This is not the kind of treatment he had in mind though. One must bear in mind, that his peers were not very fond of him.

Every day he applied the 'magical' cream, and every night, he checked his bald spot for improvement. No such luck. In fact, he wasn't entirely sure, but it looked like his hair was getting sparser.

After three weeks of applying the cream, he was not a happy customer. He had even stopped going out to the seafront for his regular coffee and cream cakes. For not only had his bald spot stayed bald, but to his horror it had increased in size.

He rang the helpline. Sitting there in his mother's favourite chair, on hold, for most of an hour. Until the same lady who he had spoken to before answered.

A whole string of violent abuse later, the woman replied,

'The treatment has to get rid of the original hair, in order to work on the head as a whole, and produce shiny healthy looking locks. Because you sir, are worth it' She purred.

Nothing like a cheap compliment to dampen his rage.

So, religiously, he carried on applying it.

Until the final day came, when he awoke one morning completely, outrageously bald, not to mention shiny. Alongside his sausage sandwich was a small letter.

He opened it happily,

'Popular as ever' he thought.

Inside the letter, was a note written by hand. It read;

'Have you never read the story about the Emperor and his new clothes?

Oh, he and his bald head of Western Super-Mare...

Vanity is a highly un-attractive quality.

Consider the lesson taught'

On the back of the note, were the signatures of every person in his neighbourhood.

Hands shaking, he laid down the note gently. Promptly strolled downstairs, leaving his sausage sandwiches behind, picked up the yellow pages and looked up, designer toupees.