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The Clown at Number Thirteen

It came as a shock to be named as next of kin and executor of his will. I'm not sure if I can cope with this. I'm fragile enough at the moment after my breakdown or whatever it was you'd like to call it. I can't work out whether it was physical or mental. I live with my mother now and no longer work. I'll probably work again someday but have no desire to at the moment. My work was a burden I couldn't bear any longer. I've been slowly weaned off my medication now and the doctors are pleased with my progress.

So it was a surprise to be summoned to the hospital and named next of kin after my brother's car accident. He had deteriorated rapidly and it was my decision alone to turn off his life support. The doctors explained to me his condition was very serious; if he survived he'd be a vegetable and it would be better to turn off the life support and let nature take its course. I agreed. I had no desire for the bastard to live; he'd made my life hell as a child and gave our parents no end of heartache. Mother never even visited him in hospital when we were notified of the accident. Dad's heart problems can probably be blamed squarely on my brother's nefarious shoulders. I was also glad Dad was not alive to witness my troubles. Partly in shock with my new found responsibility I gathered up my brother's belongings from the hospital, extracted his house keys and threw everything else in a hospital bin on the way home. What money there was left in his wallet I donated to a charity tin on a hospital reception desk.

So it was with great trepidation some time after the funeral that I entered his terrace house in the inner city at number thirteen. This evil

cruel oddity that was my brother had in later years become a recluse and a devotee of some stupid secret occult sect. His funeral was bad enough—his fellow cult members looked like a gathering of the gothic damned. It was not a religious funeral thank goodness, that would have been gross hypocrisy and very few family members attended.

On entering the house it was dark and dank with patchy walls—so unwelcoming. I suddenly felt a wave of fear wash over me. I shivered as soon as I entered, but I had to make a start some time. My one true and tried friend was overseas. I know she'd disapprove of me being alone in this house, she knew my brother and hated him, and I knew my mother would not cope in this environment. Come to think of it what am I doing here? Mother pleaded with me to wait for my friend to return.

“You're just recovering yourself from an illness,” she said. “Company always makes one braver.”

Enough of this vacillation, I thought to myself, so I started to get busy, sweeping and cleaning as the place was really filthy. It was as though the house had been neglected for years. I threw back curtains and opened blinds and windows to let some new life into the place. The house seemed to breathe anew and I started to relax. I went out to the backyard to investigate. I could see the bins had not been emptied for a while as they stank but had no choice but to squash in more rubbish. The tiny backyard was an overgrown mess with weeds and plants, and in amongst all this growth were some of the most grotesque looking statues I'd ever seen. I closely walked past a statue of a faun with a licentious sneer on its face and let out a yell. Someone or something jabbed me on the backside. I quickly turned around and thought it's either my imagination or something physical had happened to me. I looked down at the faun's hand. A piece of wire was sticking out of his hand; I must have brushed against it. As I scanned the other statues I realised they all had this odd sneer portrayed on their faces.

I went inside and made myself a black coffee. It had to be black because the milk in the fridge was so putrid I had to pour it down the sink and began throwing out other food past its use by date. After that I became more relaxed, confident, I even felt more powerful for some reason. When I think of my brilliant older brother, the cunning dominating force of my miserable childhood and teenage years and look around me now, I think what for, what did he achieve? The

answer, a dysfunctional myopia of dystopia; a sect he created for his own gratification and amusement.

Regarding myself, I felt I'd achieved something with what I'd physically done so far. I put some clothes in bags for charity and started to investigate the contents of the house. The place was strewn with odd paraphernalia, his books delved into other worlds and witchcraft. I didn't even want to see what's on his laptop as I was afraid of what I would find. I opened a hall cupboard and came across some gruesome looking artefacts—capas, whips, chains, handcuffs and masks. Oh what a Pandora's Box of indulgent dissolution. And there staring at me on the top shelf was a most unusual doll. It was a porcelain doll in a clown suit and makeup. The hair was orange and the smile on the face leered at me. The smug look with the large painted red mouth was unnerving, eerie. It seems my older brother got stranger in his tastes and crueller as the years advanced. He even called himself a grand wizard no less, how delusional! I placed the clown in a special bag so I could get rid of it on the way home somehow, or better still I'd throw it in a public bin. I had an overriding desire to get rid of that ugly doll so placed it next to the hall cupboard. I also found something of a practical nature in the cupboard—a toolbox with a hammer sticking out at the top.

I'll have that. It might come in handy, I thought.

I then went into the lounge room and looked outside the window and noticed the overcast sky; no doubt rain was coming. I gathered everything up I needed to take to the car and placed it next to the front door and closed all the windows. The rain was pelting down now and had turned into a violent storm with thunder and lightning. The lights I had previously turned on were now flickering. I noticed the bag beside the hall cupboard that contained the clown, and picked it up, but to my surprise it was light, the bag was empty. I knew I had put it in that bag. I looked around the different rooms of the house, the bedroom, the study and the kitchen and eventually found it in the lounge room. There it was with its cold doll-like eyes sitting in a chair staring at me, the smile even more sinister than before my first encounter.

I was paralysed for a second as a voice came into my head.

Now I really must be crazy, I thought.

“Looking for me”, said a voice that seemed oddly familiar. I refused to believe it, I must be hallucinating. I am not going to give in to that

voice. I know who it is and it's coming from that clown. I definitely must be hallucinating. Yes, that's it, I'm imagining all this. Maybe my medication was at fault, I don't know. But I absolutely refuse to listen to that voice.

I had to get rid of that clown, my sanity depended upon it. I don't know where I found the courage, but I grabbed the clown and put it back in the bag, grabbed the hammer from the toolbox and pounded that doll with all my might until there was nothing left. The air in the house was ice cold but I had perspiration dripping from my forehead.

For some strange reason he storm cleared and the warm rays of the sun at first timidly crept through windows where curtains and blinds had been opened. Then the sun got stronger and the light became warm and brilliant. I opened the front door. A sudden calm came over the house and me, the air was not icy anymore; in fact there was a fragrance, like the roses from my grandmother's garden that I had known as a child. The warm rays of the sun gently invigorated me so I left the front door ajar to fill the house with sunlight and fragrance. I went to the back door to lock it. I looked out at the statues in the back yard, they were just inoffensive statues, still weird looking but innocuous. They didn't threaten me anymore; the smugness had been wiped off their faces. I had a relaxing whiskey and cigarette before I left the house and gave a toast to my brother.

"Here's to you big brother wherever you may be. You're gone for good now. You'll never dominate me again." I loaded up the car and put the bag containing the shattered doll on the passenger seat next to me. I stopped off at a public park and disposed of it in a bin. I was well again; in fact I felt reborn.