

'The Maker of Glass Eyes'

Bob Mee

My customers come at night. I hear their tap-tap upon the cobbles, wait to assess the character of their knock upon my heavy door. In order to match precise colour and tone I ask them to lie back in my reclining chair, a present from my mother, from whom I have inherited my sense of discipline and control. Some are startled by vulnerability, others made uneasy by direct light in their one good eye. One or two murmur prayers. All, eventually, offer up their secrets. I am discreet as a priest.

Of course, there are evenings when the terrifying possibility of conversation outweighs the dull necessity of income. Then in the shelter of my wood-panelled room I do not answer the raps of the gloved knuckles, do not move when they are repeated, increase in urgency. The most persistent or desperate lean close and call out my name, softly, as if fearful of discovery. I feel their breath.

In the mornings I begin work early, take comfort in the babble and song of the woman and children next door, in the bustle of the perpetually damp courtyard. I arrange my eyes tray by labelled tray upon the oak table, a present from my father, from whom I have inherited my unusual countenance and attention to detail. My eyes are numbered and named. I like to fancy if they met in the street, they would recognise each other, perhaps exchange a sly wink.

The wearer of each gleaming celebration of my craftsmanship will no longer be the person they were. With my tiny brushes I create personal histories in layers. I build misery and shame in a network of capillaries,

add on joy, cunning and lust in the subtle
blends of the brown and blue iris, and
last of all, in the slightly dilated pupil,
the ability to lie and deceive.