

# Jane

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Is this a paternalistic kind of feeling

wonders Doll-ma months before her decapitation

I wonder if, when Oskar Kokoschka hired the avant-garde doll-maker Hermine Moss to make a life size replica of Alma Mahler, a composer with whom he had a turbulent love affair, he had hopes or expectations? His letters to Hermine were so painstakingly detailed that I would place my bet on the latter.

*Please permit my sense of touch to take pleasure in those places where layers of fat or muscle suddenly give way to a sinewy covering of skin. For the first layer (inside) please use fine, curly horsehair; you must buy an old sofa or something similar; have the horsehair disinfected. Then, over that, a layer of pouches stuffed with down, cotton wool for the seat and breasts.*

He enquired whether Doll-ma's mouth can be opened. Will she have teeth and a tongue inside?

*If you are able to carry out this task as I would wish, to deceive me with such magic that when I see it and touch it imagine that I have the woman of my dreams in front of me, then dear Fräulein Moos, I will be eternally indebted to your skills of invention and your womanly sensitivity as you may already have deduced from the discussion we had.*

But upon her arrival, he's disappointed. *It is not what he had paid for, and certainly – he is not deceived.* Instead of Alma there is Doll-ma, a bird like creature with feathers instead of skin, and letters of complaint are sent from Dresden to Munich.

*I was honestly shocked by your doll which, although I was long prepared for a certain distance from reality, contradicts what I demanded of it and hoped of you in too many ways! The outer shell is a polar-bear pelt, suitable for a shaggy imitation bedside rug rather than the soft and pliable skin of a woman. The result is that I cannot even dress the doll, which you knew was my intention, let alone array her in delicate and precious robes. Even attempting to pull on one stocking would be like asking a French dancing-master to waltz with a polar bear.*

Was this gesture a provocation from its skilled maker? Was she consciously refusing complicity with his invitation of violence and objectification by offering up her abject doll? One of the rare remaining photos of Doll-ma depicts Hermine kneeling by her feet. Doll-ma is half reclining in the armchair, her legs crossed, her open palm and head tenderly directed towards Hermine. In fact, all the surviving photos seem to be taken in Hermine's studio, sharing the exact blanket hung in the background of the double portrait mentioned above. In all of them Doll-ma is naked, a *shaggy imitation bedside rug* in place of the *soft and pliable skin of a woman* Kokoschka had demanded.

Still, he chooses to dress her in custom made undergarments and clothes. Rumour had it he would take her to the opera, driving her around Dresden in his carriage. He calls her a Silent Woman. *Being unable to tell your story is a living death.* Doll-ma's faith was deemed the moment she was conceived. *Violence is one way to silence people, to deny their voice and their credibility, to assert your right to control over their right to exist.* Finally, after drawing her and painting her over and over again, he decided *to do away with it* and threw her a big champagne party with chamber music.

*Doll-ma in her finest made redundant even though no consent is needed to stick a finger in her open mouth made to measure Parisian lingerie underneath a custom-made gown dressed by Kokoschka's maid who he fucked no doubt he liked his ladies with a mist of servitude and silence Doll-ma on the view for the crowds to please to admire his exquisite taste and knowledge of the latest trends*

*Doll-ma on the lawn outside of the house decapitated and covered in blood her body is now an autonomous land the police was called by the neighbourhood watch they thought she was a corpse it's just a bottle of red I broke over its head he says it would have been hard since she was soft and stuffed curly horsehair inside but this don't matter he got bored as she grew old and collected dust.*

Before I made a trip to the National Gallery to have a look at the original, I had looked at the online reproduction many times. The famous painting by Paul Delaroche depicts Lady Jane Grey in the moments before her execution having seen her reign for only 9 days. Historically, these were usually conducted in an open air, and not in the space of theatre Delaroche proposes.

*Bare Interior – Front centre, a stack of hay to soak up the blood. On top, a wooden block fixed to the floor and a pillow for comfort. Stage floor covered by a black cloth. Back of stage wallpapered with Norman architectural features. Stage back right, a pillar.*

*JANE (enters, clearing throat by spitting loudly. Pause. She realizes someone might step in her saliva, so smears it with the tip of her shoe. Considering what is about to happen she should seem surprised by the clarity of her own thoughts. Pause. She walks slowly towards the wooden block, cautious not to trip on her dress. She kneels on the pillow. She picks up some hay, smells it, and discards it – not in the throes of some Proustian phenomenon, she's smart enough to know it was placed there for purely practical reasons. She examines a crease in the black cloth covering the stage. She should grimace with distaste that the set designer*

*clearly doesn't have an eye for detail. She takes a few quick breaths, and winks a couple of times for unclear reasons, before wrapping a blindfold over her eyes)*

*Lighting technician should ensure that Jane's face is beautifully illuminated; one day she will feature in the Book of Martyrs and he has to ensure she looks good for the occasion. And she does.*

FIRST LADY IN WAITING, SECOND LADY IN WAITING, EXECUTIONER and LIEUTENANT (*enter and take positions*)

FIRST LADY IN WAITING (*throws herself on a pillar, banging it repeatedly with her fists, before resting her palms on the surface. She is ready*)

SECOND LADY IN WAITING (*throws herself on the ground, drowning in the folds of her velvet dress, eyes closed, face spasmic in grief. She is ready*)

*(NB to director – one should acknowledge that being hysterical is not an easy task – both ladies should be fluent in Stanislavski's method. At the end of the day it's a one-off performance and no dress rehearsals prior – there's no room for improvement here.)*

LIEUTENANT (*oldest actor, wearing an expensive looking fur Anna Wintour would surely approve of. He walks towards Jane, cautious not to trip on the fur. He suspends his body over Jane, waiting*)

EXECUTIONER (*frowns. It's hard to tell what goes through his mind. His body is strong and muscular, good calves in particular, palms of his hands are the size of Jane's head*)

JANE (*not bothered, for she cannot see*)

AUDIENCE (*enters and takes up their seats*)

JANE (*after reflection*):

You can blindfold me for all I care  
cause you're so scared of my gaze  
My name is Jane  
and your executioner friend  
won't intimidate me  
You used me for your wicked crimes  
and then swiped left  
I'm only a girl 17 years of age but your  
tender gestures and your gentle touch  
won't fool me

LIEUTENANT:

Let's pray together little dove gentle child  
you'll pay for the crimes you did not commit  
but our council of elders agreed that someone must  
and you'll do just fine

JANE:

My dress is made of silk  
my dress is white  
I'm pure inside  
like a child-bride I'm so young  
I do not wish to die please let me read Plato for the last time  
I do not wish to die so let me pet my dog the very last time

LIEUTENANT:

And we have dirt on you  
because I'm rich  
and you you're just a sweet little nothing with a flair for a footballer  
and now you will die  
I assure you child  
it's better than leaving this town  
because wherever you go my followers will hunt you down  
my knights my mohair brides will find you  
and you'll be dead inside

and what's worst I'll be telling your friends what a slut you are  
because I've been signed I have people behind me  
I'll fuck you up little girl  
cause you wore that silky dress  
and tempted me with your slender ankles

JANE:

Since you want my head just fucking take it already  
and stick it on the pike for masses to indulge  
so get it over with

*(Jane's head is severed in a clean cut)*

JANE'S HEAD:

My body is still warm  
but there's a queue already  
and with buckets in their hands they form a straight line

LIEUTENANT *(shouting)*:

Virgin's blood  
freshly curved breasts  
and a pound of cheek  
spoil yourselves with one of a kind luxurious pie

EXECUTIONER *(slightly bored)*:

Thanks fuck she didn't have a beach body

JANE'S HEAD:

My crimson stained dress will soon be displayed  
in a lovely perspex case  
so you can charge twenty pounds a ticket  
and sell a tote bag with an image of my head

Since there's nothing more poetic than beautiful woman's corpse  
said Edward Allan Poe  
but he wouldn't say how I shat myself

and how I pissed all over that lovely soft emerald pillow you gave me to kneel on

LIEUTENANT:

Be dignified my child!

JANE'S HEAD:

You've been telling me to cover up your crimes  
but there's no dignity in dying for your sins  
there's no pride nor honour in dying for your land  
you so frivolously call motherland  
if she was a mother she wouldn't let me die

But know this—

I will come for you one day  
when you feel safe  
even if you're old  
and I will hunt you down  
you hateful stupid fuck  
because I'm not Ofelia, but Medusa.

There's a cavity on your back where my head fits perfectly.

I've been meaning to write about other things, but it's just not happening.

I decided to submit myself to this feeling, and as Maya Angelou said (and only a fool would dare to argue), to allow *those conflicting emotions to inform the expression*. Which might just leave me writing love letters or fuck knows what.

It's not a choice, really.

Obsession, perhaps.

Sitting in my studio, jar of sauerkraut on my desk, and I feel like a *real kind of Pole*. Wearing my mother's old jeans, brand Dallas, wondering if they came in one of the boxes from the States some family I'd never met used to send to my grandparents' house in the early 90s. Cardboard boxes filled with used clothes occupied the attic of their house; my own private ciucholand long before the rise of their popularity in Poland.

Every summer we drove south; my parents, sister and I. And every summer I climbed up the stairs leading into the attic. A minor trepidation accompanied me every time I opened the door. It was an anxious unpleasant space, hot from the summer sun. Hay filled cushions covered the floor, cracking under foot every time I made a move, the stuffy air full of the tobacco casually drying around the space.

And every summer the hope was there – to find new clothes as my limbs grew longer, body parts expanded, and my aesthetic choices soaked with the new; the East opening into the West, sucking it in with greed and hunger. The hope of transformation, from the micro of the everyday to the macro of a long awaited independence.

*go back to your potatoes to your sauerkraut your dill you scum you vermin you pest you bitch but now I'm petting your dog and I'm telling you he likes me more cause I got him on his back and now he moans with pleasure his sweet little bark hau hau*

*Actually, I don't exactly have expectations. I have hopes, and fears* says Ursula Le Guin. Expectations seem so finite, almost authoritarian, and so over the years I have trained myself not to expect.

Climbing up the stairs, the element of surprise was a given; as was the understanding that there were different worlds available to me, the worlds where these clothes came from – destinations waiting to be uncovered in some unforeseeable future await. But *Barbarians don't travel. They simply go to destinations or conduct raids.*



Years later I conducted my own raids, pissing on the carpets of the rented flats, and never went back.

*nice GP doctor says you're depressed because you're home sick you're depressed because you're foreign you're depressed because you're all alone and your family is away and your friends are away and your dog is sick you're depressed because you're single and you're all alone and you go on tinder on grindr on her on hinge on happn on bubble on okcupid and on eharmony on match.com on hello kitty you're depressed because you don't know what top of the pops is and we don't do pills for that have some marmite have some chips have a crisps sandwich and neutralize already*

*so I'm having a tea with the queen because she just phoned me and said Agnieszka I do love your flare and I will give you an order for your special achievement for this country the feedback form just came*

Whenever I'm being asked the impossible question *What's your work about?* Marlene Dumas' poem comes to mind, where she talks about her art being *situated between the pornographic tendency to reveal everything and the erotic inclination to hide what it's all about.*

*Pornographic*, as in me wanting for everyone else to know and then *erotic inclination* as in wishing to remain private. Wishing to retrieve from words, wishing we could just stay in the garden, playing games and rolling on the grass, ordering takeaways and drinking wine and fucking against the hedge while hearing voices on the other side. But summer has come to an end, and so did this.

Hence, *I provoke all the effects of a minor mourning* and try to answer the impossible question *What's your work about?*

*kissing is a form of feeding*

and I'm thinking of you feeding me with your saliva feeding me with your fingers feeding me with your nipples feeding me with your cock feeding me with your cum and yet I'm constantly fucking hungry

*kissing is a form of feeding*

and I'm thinking of you feeding me like a bird mouth to mouth