

The Red Coat

'I can't buy that.'

'Why not?'

'Because...because..... it's red.'

'What's wrong with red?'

'It's not.....brown.'

Brown is safe, the colour of my eyes and hair. Brown blends into the background. Brown is comfortable and makes me feel invisible.

'Why?'

'Why what?'

'Why don't you want to be seen?'

Because.....I don't know.'

'Yes you do.'

'Because I'm not worth –oh nonsense stuff.'

'Not –no. Buy it.'

'This coat? It's so

'It's red, yes, so.....buy it.'

'He won't like it.'

'Do you?'

' Yes but, he won't like it.'

' Buy it, you look amazing.'

'Yes..but I don't look like...'

'....You?'

Yes, but another me; perhaps the one I used to be. I touched this beautiful –chain-store- but beautiful, coat. In the mirror I twirl and see someone with shining eyes and hair, standing up straight and looking...attractive?

'Buy it.'

I hadn't seen Polly for such a long time; she had come to stay after years of Christmas cards and promises of 'much catch up properly one day'. She looked wonderful still; we probably both did when we worked together in London. She smiled now and stopped looking so earnest and evangelical. Her mission for the day was to 'perk me up'. She understood teetering relationships; didn't understand lack of confidence; could not understand such indifference to fashion. She had an uphill struggle with me. Since my marriage, a brown duffel coat was my camouflage of choice; beige cardigans in the summer. I had been well-served by these; only once, once had I stepped out of the brown. But then I wasn't myself; I had been persuaded to come out from the wings and play a part in the local panto. Not any part –the princess, who had to wear an amazing red dress for the end of show 'walk-down'. I was observed, by the villain. I fell for those villainous charms of Abanazar. Ripe and ready to fall. There was a weekend of incredible eye-opening madness before I woke up and scuttled back to my brown safe home. I still blushed at the memory; red is for danger and to be avoided.

Polly noticed my red cheeks as I remembered. But I was glowing anyway in the store's mirror and looked ready for..... well, anything.

'Buy it', Polly was not going to let me leave; she would not be deflected by my pleas of tweeds, or even checks; why, they've got colours, haven't they?

'Not on you –this is the one.'

Weary of cajoling she tried tough love. 'Right, I don't care what you look like, I'm desperate for caffeine. Look, you can act, can't you –so pretend it's a costume. Strut like you own the stage; no more pretty princesses, next time - be the queen. Oh, buy it or not, I'm past caring. Come and find me in the coffee shop.' She swung her bag and marched off.

Of course I bought it. Of course he didn't like it. Of course I felt wonderful.

Lost the plot for a while though. Lost the husband too, he'd felt safe with a brown wife. Played the queen at Christmas; played the field; gave the duffel to the charity shop. And so my new, slightly dangerous but colourful life began.

Maggie Pierce