

# DARLING

by Jonathan Langley



He felt shame and I did not,  
The fire alarm, the whole school, the worst timing:  
A play. And both of us in dresses, lipstick, wigs.  
There was laughter, and pity. Nothing worse a boy could be:  
A girl.  
He felt shame but I felt pretty. Thought:  
I would like to do this again. We were ten  
And also innocent.

In college I was Goth and he was not. We didn't speak.  
My fishnets and mascara, black lipstick  
And black petticoat for skirt made me feel  
Like one of the girls  
On the dancefloor  
Who I loved.  
In college he was butch and gay and went hunting.

He lives with his husband now;  
I with my wife.  
I'm too fat and old and beardy to pull off the femme boy shtick  
And he: conventional careerist bore.  
I like my life and who, the man, I have become.

Once or twice a year I remember the red dress  
And their faces. I wonder  
If perhaps I missed a choice.  
I like my life. The man who I've become.

Once every two years I have a thought about the dress.  
The threadbare feeling  
Growing wispy in my mind.  
Moth and rust  
Wear and tear  
Pretty and a shame.

The ten-year-old who could have grown up different  
Needs darning,  
Darling.  
Patching. New cloth cut for grafting.  
Skin and bright eyes and time and choice ahead.  
Slowly disappearing.

It's not like the one I see each day is faring better.  
Much of the faded detail now filled in by memory.  
People look at this and also stare.

This old thing? I just threw it on.