**A Secret Thing**

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As a tiny child she knew at all costs she had to keep this Thing secret. No one must know. She covered it well, which took its toll on her.  Suppressing sapped her energy. Always tired, she didn't want to play with the other children, and they were happy to forget about her, she was odd. Her nit-ridden hair was matted into a big lump at the back, a solid crawling mullet.  The secret’s strength grew, fed by increasing deception. It began as a small grey mass of maggots inside her.  Gradually over the years it developed a shell, like a dark walnut, rotten inside. She could feel the hard lump, which seemed to move around her torso.  When she was ten, it burst open inside her; the maggots had developed into black slimy worms that feasted on the blood from the shell cuts to her guts. Bent double she was sent home from school. She heard the class sniggering as she left.  She must keep the secret at all costs. No one could know.The black worms grew into a tangled ball of red-eyed snakes that seeped acid as they writhed and thrashed in her belly.   The acid took away her appetite and made her breath repugnant.  A lone teenager who spent every lunchtime locked in a toilet cubicle waiting out the hour.  Even if she had been hungry, no one would have sat next to her and to sit alone in public, was unbearable.  Behind the flimsy, graffitied door, she silently lifted her legs up whenever anyone came into the girls toilets, they never saw she was there.  She was good at Silent, she was used to Alone and above all she kept the Thing secret.  Her body reacted to the shameful squirming deep inside her, first with acne that resisted all medication.  When she covered the pockmarked skin with expensive concealers, the whiteheads solidified into hideous warts with black hair wiring out of them earning her the nickname "The Witch-Bitch".  And she was. She spat out her poison to any who came near, spiking them with her sharp acrid tongue, ensuring that no one wanted to get close. She must keep this Thing secret at all costs. The nest of rancid snakes inside continued to grow. In her twenties to gain more space the sinister passenger began to twist and squeeze her organs causing excruciating pain.  Scans revealed nothing and doctor's hearts sank when she came through their doors. A "rude, demanding hypochondriac" was top of their differential diagnosis.  A relief when inevitably, accompanied by vitriolic complaint, she would change to another Practice. One day the churning lump inside boiled hot, she spat on the windscreen of the car that had come too close as they waited side by side at the red light. The driver ignoring her, needed to be taught a lesson, she swung the back wheel of her bike into the sleek smug side panel of the range rover.  The lights changed and the 4x4 sped off, the damage to be examined later, away from this ugly road raged cyclist, whose carbuncled face looked too dangerous to be reasoned with.  As she stood on the bike pedal to get a fast angry start, the back wheel was unable to turn due to the bent mudguard now crunched into the spokes.  Her bike pitched over into the path of the car behind. The nurses at the hospital were glad to see her go. Never had they encountered such an ungrateful and cantankerous patient.  Quietly relieved that she discharged herself early, they turned a blind eye to her frantic attempts to damage and remove her plaster cast. She would not accept their treatment any more than she would accept their sympathy. How dare these strangers try to get close under the guise of helping her!  She had to discard the cast to feel safe, and prove her resilience.  It took strength to keep this Thing a secret all these years.   The agony of the next few months, walking on a broken leg with no support, distracted her from the mordant hurt inside.  She bitterly relished the different pain.  Here was real honest pain. Pain with a reason, justified pain. New torture gave respite from the murky torment inside forged by the Thing that had to be kept secret. She developed an enormous limp, a lopsided gait so pronounced she resembled the villain in an amateur pantomime. As the leg healed, she became aware again of the inner torment born of keeping the Thing secret. A volcano of furious serpents spewed acid from her foul smelling mouth with its few remaining black teeth, on a daily basis. She only went out at dead of night to avoid the horrified stares as she leaned over garden walls to vomit out her misery. But no one guessed her secret. No one knew. The poison inside oozed and soaked into her bones. Already strained from the imbalance of the limp, her sickly backbone gave way. Coming home late at night, you might encounter her. An ugly bent over witch, leaning on her filthy Zimmer frame, swearing and disgorging the contents of her stomach. You will cross the road to avoid any contact with this stinking and disturbing vagrant. She kept the Thing secret all her life. To her cost.  |