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FACING THE FACTS

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I took off the restraints last night. They slid off remarkably easily, with a whisper, like startled lizards. I looked at myself in the mirror. Too big, moon-faced, forehead like a marble slab, scored with red pressure lines where the straps had worked too tight.

The bathroom light flickered, pale neon, and I watched the sockets of my eyes dance in the ghost light. Deep, man. Send Orpheus into those depths. Kiss him goodbye.

I smiled at the thought, watched my lips curve, saw the movement shiver up my face, pallid skin stretching like parchment, crow's feet sidling out from the corner of my eyes to catch it.

Older now. Older than the last time. I could see it, written in small print on my face. A blemish here. A wrinkle there. Getting old, Alice.

Leant a hand against the bathroom cabinet, felt the mirror pressing up against me, cold.

Looked down at the mask, lying there in the sink. Translucent, wraithlike.

They weigh nothing, the masks. You're supposed to forget about them. That's the trick, you see? Just relax. Don't think too hard about it. Makes it easier.

Looked at myself again, blue eyes bouncing back at me. Peering out of the cave. Stay in there guys. Outside is no fun.

Ran the taps, watched them cough water into the basin. Splashed a little on my face. Feeling it hit my skin. Flinching from it a little. Like a scared kid.

Looked again, saw my face all rivulets, all reflection.

Got a hand towel, dried off. The cotton's scratchy these days. Feels like an old record.

Picked up the mask. Smiled my face goodbye. Felt the seals lock, heard the leather rasp against the little buckles.

Clunk-click, every trip.

Turned to the door.

Stepped on out.

Took my new face for a walk.

THE END