It's simultaneously sweet, creepy and educational
- Dylan Horrocks

Shadow Costume

An Undercover Romance

Suzanne Claessen
an under cover Romance

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A COLD NIGHT. ALL SHE WANTED WAS TO GET THERE QUICKLY.

IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA TO START WITH.

BUT SOON THE CLOUDS TOOK OVER.

Quickly

EVEN THE STREETLIGHTS STRUGGLED FOR THEIR ORANGE GLOW.

But there was just enough light to carry on.
Perhaps a new solution would come to her as she walked?

Her brain sent messages to her legs to walk faster.

And faster.

"Clack" "Clack" "Clack"
Maybe, she thought, when I stand still to help this beggar, it will go away.

Just for a moment, she showed her true face.

Come with me to the pub? Let's have some bread and beer.

Hey! Hey! Ooh, I'm stiff! Lend me your shoulder, will ya, Rosey?

He's not blind at all. He's only pretending.
He pretends to know me. I can play this game.

Loaf Inn

Did you see what was behind me, Rosy? An old crooked bloke!

It was loud inside. Very loud. But there was an ecstatic atmosphere. Wine, beer, and bread were flowing freely.

All they could do was talk even louder. The only way to fit in.

Rosy, it's so good to see ya! Man, where have you been all this time? Haunted by shadows? Hawr, hawr!

Look here. I've been wanting to show you this for a long time.
MY TEACHERS HAVE SHOWN ME THE ROADS, THEY OPENED UP MY EYES TO A WORLD WHERE

THE BIZARRE IS THE NORM

You can’t always pull the same trick, you see, or people won’t buy it anymore.

DIVERSITY AND IMMUNITY, COOKIE, ARE THE KEYS TO SURVIVING ON THE STREETS.

LOOK AT THIS ANT!

HA! IT’S A BEETLE IN A BODY SHAPED LIKE AN ANT!

THIS GUY WITH THE SIDEBURNS? A STRANGE ANT-LIKE HYBRID?

ANOTHER BEETLE! ITS FACIAL HAIR IS KEY TO ITS “PARTNERSHIP” WITH ANTS. IT DELIVERS A TASTY SUBSTANCE. THE ANTS LOVE IT!
This spider doesn't look like an ant to our eyes, but it sure smells like one! SNIFF SNIFF...

These guys crawl on top of ants and rub their legs on them. Perhaps this is how they obtain their shell. Also, in this sneaky position they can snatch the food the ants carry!

These are the Myrmecophiles. They love living with ants so much, they'll do anything to make believe they're part of the colony.

These masked souls take the fruits from organized societies without being proper members.

Shelter
From the elements

Defense
Against predators

Food
Everywhere

The rules are set: it's just a matter of knowing how to follow them. It's true for any kind of society!

This beetle with the swollen gut pretends to be a young termite. It is fed and looked after by adult termites in the termite society! It is a Termitophile.

*Thyreoxenus brevibialis
I've observed and made these stories my own.

In the same way you're drinking your beer?

Aaah, this blank eye? Just a lens, but it works wonders.

Rule #1: Rich people drop coins to make them feel better about themselves. Perhaps they are reminded of the poor man residing inside them? Poverty of character? Poverty of the soul?
Rule #2. It’s a bonus when it’s not a one-way donation, but an exchange. Mutualism. They give me the coins; I give them the treat they just needed. Visually, emotionally, physically or intellectually.

Oh, you should see how they marvel at my talent for reading Braille books!

Swif. Sometimes I get quite emotional myself.

Each day I travel a different road, in search of a heart where things flourish.
Each day I adapt my mask, according to the neighbourhood I’m in.

This is the third rule.

Is there a circus in town?
I’ll be the enchanting and melancholic pantomime.

Mommy! Look!

Did I end up in the dark backyard of town? I know very well what they want there.
WHAT DOES THAT MAKE ME?
A SNOBBOPHILE?
ELITOPHILE?
MASSIAPHILE?

DEPENDING ON THE DAY AND SCENE,
I CHOOSE TO BE A PARASITE OR FRIENDLY
HOBHABITANT OF SOCIETY.
A LUXURY COMPARED TO THOSE GUYS
WHO ARE STUCK IN THEIR ROLE.

MY UNQUESTIONING
COMPANY

ROYALC

WHAT IF THEY DON'T FALL FOR IT?

AH! WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH,
I LISTEN TO THIS SONG.

AINT SHE PRETTY?

* PILAETUS OCHRACEUS*
Its legs are like feathers, but don't be fooled by this way in sheepl's clothing.

SuCKING OUT THE ANTS' BODY JUICES.

IT POSESSS ITSELF IN THE PATH OF ANTS, AND ATTRACTS THEM WITH A MISLEADING AND INJURING ATTRACTION. THE ANTS WANT TO LICK AND MILK IT!

WHEN THE ANT BECOMES PARALIZED, THE FEAST BEGINS FOR THIS FEATHER-LEGGED TUEE --

His deceit oozes out of him.

I must admit his resourcefulness is admirable.

Then why do I feel so uncomfortable?

Everybody has their own creatures they can learn from. For you Rosy, this stick insect is your mirror.

The invisible soul blending me seamlessly with its surroundings.
You're hard to see in the dark, Rosy. I already noticed it on the street.

But she wasn't listening anymore. She stood up tall, and pushed her chair away.

She left him some coins to pay for the bread and beer....

Why are ya leavin', Rosy?

And started running, again.
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

ALBERTINE
Hey, I didn’t recognize you there. You’re all wet. Come in.

DON’T WORRY ABOUT THE COAT.

What's up?

I guess I finally know what to say now.

Sorry
I feel our relationship has not been what I wanted it to be.

I know. It's good we took a break from each other.

It gave me lots of time to think and...

It's been all my fault. I wanted us to work so badly, but now I realize what went wrong. All this time I've been wearing a mask.

You see. And you know what the mask looks like?

It looks like you.
I wanted us to be on the same level, always. The perfect match, soulmates.

Every time you disagreed with me, I absorbed your opinion, discarding my own.

The mask grew thicker and thicker.

At first I thought it was not ok. I thought I was weak, and that I didn't have the strength to stay true to myself.
But I'm just like an insect, mimicking my environment, merging in and becoming part of it.

Precisely our relationships to others and the environment makes us who we are.

And isn't human interaction at its best when parties imitate each other's words, use gestures, even facial expressions? The ultimate way to show you're on the same page!

I just need you to let me become a part of you, too.

And oh, did they make love that night.

It was quite like... it was not unlike beasts.
Meanwhile

Hiccup

How are ya gonna pay for all those beers, scumbag? With peppermints?

You’re lucky I’m in a good mood today

Loaf Inn

Out!

And don’t let me see that trickster face again!
As he lay utterly drunk on the wet stones, half drowned in delirium, he could still make out something soft and warm. He felt caressed by a gentle tenderness. Despite everything, he knew he’d done a selfless thing. Something... good — she understood.
Suzanne Claessen is a writer, illustrator, and beekeeper. Her work aims to reconcile earthly concerns – such as environmental degradation and consumerism – with imagination and the bizarre. She is always on the lookout for opportunities to turn the ghastly and sombre into the wonder contained in nature and mankind. Surrealism and existentialism are her guides.
Shadow
Causue
Shadow costume is the introspective journey of a girl whose hopes and fears are much like any other human: from the fear of being chased on the street, to being tangled up in relationships, to the opportunities that unfold through unexpected encounters with others. A meeting with a stranger inspires her to zoom out of her own life and zoom in on quite something else.

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June 2014