

# ENGLISH MOTHERS



Alison  
Bouhmid

**For my boys**

# **English Mothers**

## **The Murderer's Mother**

Inside a semi-detached Persimmon home located on a developing estate. A solitary sitting creature, sunning itself in a lounge with wall-to-wall carpeting. A creature grossly at odds with the tasteful interior. A monstrous pale mass of flesh with a chiffon piled up high on its head. So female rather than male. How did she put in the pins? Bending her arms over the rolls of fat and lifting them on high, must have been awkward. The floral motif of the fabric that she was draped in confirmed femininity. She was ensconced in a tan leather electric chair which, with the touch of a switch, could be activated to laboriously grind and tip, pushing her buttocks and her weight forwards and up, until she could steady herself into a standing position. She sat almost still. Her eyelids occasionally blinked shut over batrachian eyes, across which flowed a stream of spoiled memories. Her hand went backwards and forwards with morsels to eat, setting into motion the mouth. Continually masticating.

As she sat in the hot seat feeding herself, Angela watched a blowfly fussing and thought about dresses. The dresses that she currently wore had no form or waist and were all the same shape, falling voluminous from shoulder to mid-shin. They took up a lot of fabric. She had four: two short-sleeved, two long-sleeved, with only the thickness of the material differentiating her summer from her winter clothes. Expunging whimsy from her wardrobe had been a conscious decision. It had been her attempt to try and prevent the unforeseen. For it seemed to her that particular dresses in her life belonged to particular moments which, if dressed otherwise, might have been different. Better perhaps. She was obsessed with the question of how to remember right. How to remember at all? Think of clothes. But careful, her clothes rather than her son's clothes. Blank out his blazer and his regulation grey trousers with a mush of tissue and chocolate in their pocket. She had tried really hard to get the stains out of his trousers. Rubbed and rubbed. She had left them to soak overnight but in vain.

Dresses might fade or get attacked by woolly bears or shrink, get thrown out even, but their essential nature didn't change. They didn't metamorphose into something completely else, such as skin or fur, when you weren't there, or were momentarily distracted. Not like in that dream where she had pubic hair growing coarse and thick out of her tongue. Dresses, she thought, were choice given bodily form. First of all which one to buy, then how much to spend, whether or not it suited you, was comfortable, would be hard-wearing, was value for money. Then once bought, when and how the dress should be worn. And who you would be in that dress. Her right arm was starting to ache, so she moved the pink, plastic, salad bowl that didn't contain salad, to her left side.

Her earliest memories were not necessarily of dresses, but they were grubby and always clothed. Being teased at primary school for wearing the same dress every day. A drab, woollen, grey dress, which pulled in at the waist with a drawstring. There had been pompoms at each end of the drawstring until she'd accidentally cut them off, in art. Without its pompoms the drawstring kept coming out and, at night, her mum would thread it back by attaching it to a safety pin and inching it back inside the bunched up tube of fabric, like a gristly caterpillar humping and arching itself forward within its loose skin. Apart from the problem of the drawstring, which was eventually solved by being stitched into place, the dress was practical and didn't show the dirt. All the other little girls, it seemed to her, were in pretty, soft shades of sherbet pink, lemon or turquoise. And none of them wanted to be friends with her, even then, when she hadn't been guilty of anything. Except of not being like them.

When she'd been a small kid, she had had one week-day dress and one Sunday dress for best. The Sunday dress was navy-blue, flared and worsted with long, red, cotton sleeves. The sleeves had small, white polka dots on them and were generously cut so that they billowed out gracefully before coming in tightly to a long elegant cuff. Angela had felt lovely in her best dress and would sit, stiff and still, scared of getting messed up, creasing or staining. Until she forgot all about being careful. It used to be so easy to forget. Like the time her mum had lent her her gold locket to wear to the Christmas pantomime school trip. She had felt puffed with pride and incredibly grown-up. She squeezed it lovingly between her fingers before putting it into the moistness of her mouth. Enjoying herself immensely, she sucked away at the metallic taste in the dark theatre, held spell-bound by the performance. When Angela got home her mum took one look at her and let out a scream and a slap as she saw the carcass of her golden locket around her daughter's neck. Angela had chewed it quite to bits and mangled the smiling portrait within. In her rage her mother chucked the locket into the bin and Angela had not dared retrieve it.

Forgetfulness. Angela sitting in a classroom with her reading book, suddenly aware of a warm and smooth feeling between her thighs. What was there? She had sat for a very long time, scared to move and reveal her shame, convinced that she had soiled herself. Eventually, she plucked up her courage and gingerly put her hand up her skirt to find out the extent of the damage. She touched a roundness. Ugh...no it was okay. It was hard and dry. She'd been bunny hopping around the playground with a large pebble stuck between her thighs. When the bell had rung she'd run to line up and thought no more about her game. The pebble must have got stuck there somehow in her sweat. Angela wet herself in relief that she hadn't pooped her pants. How easily kids forget themselves. Or seem to. Her boy had kept saying that he had forgotten.

Forgotten all he'd been taught, forgotten himself, forgotten what had happened. But they kept telling him over and over again that he had to remember. That she would still love him whatever. They had said that but what did they know? Angela wondered whether he wouldn't be better off dead. She didn't doubt that she would. She should know better than to think about her son. It was forbidden. The fly buzzed off.

Then back again. Back to her best dress, its folds redolent with the boredom of Sunday afternoons. There had been a game of hide and seek with her elder half-sister who was visiting for the day, which she did every other Sunday. Angela had been hiding under the bed and as she came out she caught one of the sleeves on the springs underneath the mattress, tearing a long rip down the left sleeve. She had tried to hide the tear from her mother's sharp eyes, keeping her on her unripped side when she went down for tea. But it was no good. Another slap. Her mother replaced the sleeves, exchanging bright red gaiety for dull, off white tedium accentuated by nosegays of tiny flowers. Angela hated the new version of her Sunday dress and it took her an eternity to grow out of it. Her half-sister had laughed at her predicament. Angel hated her half-sister because she had long hair. Her own hair was kept short until she was old enough to take care of it herself. She swore never to cut it when she was grown up. She never had. When loose she could sit on her long, straight hair but she kept it wrapped up tight in a bun. Her half-sister also had pierced ears. And *she* didn't have any big brothers.

Angela thought back on what she had been wearing for her first kiss. Are you surprised? That the monstrosity has become a person who kisses or has kissed in such a relatively short space of time. Wearing a red, white and blue striped top with an elasticated waist and a smocked neck, in summer light cheesecloth, with matching blue shorts. Down the playing fields. Rolling and laughing and pushing. Puffed sleeves. The material was slightly scratchy to her skin. Her mum wanted to know what she'd been doing to get all mussed up like that. She'd shrugged. Her mum had been suspicious of her nine-year old daughter, no proof, just intuition. Arousal and fear made Angela smirk. Being cheeky, her mum said. She got the belt that time, her smirk whipped out of her. Her older brother picked a piece of grass from off his shoulder.

Later on, when she had gone to secondary school she had, like all the other kids, worn school uniform. It had been a blessed relief to her. For once she didn't stand out and she almost made friends. How smart she had felt herself in her belted, lime-green, summer dress with its prim, white collar and full skirt. But she had only had one throughout her entire school career and she wore it until the fabric was pulled tight across her increasingly heavy breasts and the hem line only barely covered her behind. Angela stopped eating a moment, her hand in mid-air, as she strained to capture the faintest of recollections. That of physical pleasure. The

sensation of her young, warm flesh rubbing itself against the thin cloth, like a cat wanting petting. Firm flesh flushed with desire. The skin of her vast torso itched under the teasing caress of the fugitive almost memory. She scratched herself hard before popping another handful of food in her mouth. More food. Other pleasures.