Keeping Up Appearances

Arnold had become a hollow shell with a faded surface.

Now that he hit eighty Arnold believed it was vital to keep up appearances—how he wanted to be seen rather than how he was, to appear as he once was and wanted to be. It had zero to do with being handsome or well clothed. Appearance was everything when being with other people. He wanted respect, not worry.

In mornings, after he woke and took his eight pills, he put in his teeth. It was hardly normal to smile with teeth missing. He combed his hair over the large bald spot. Looking at himself in the mirror, he straightened, adjusting his shoulders. Put in his hearing aides. Tightened his belt to lessen his pot belly. Put on his distance glasses, reading glasses in his shirt pocket.

He pretended to be energetic and engaged. Avoided long outings at a theatre because he might fall asleep–he hated falling asleep in front of other people, unaware of their stares, grins, sighs. People expected perky and positive–and awake. Arnold had to still be Arnold.

It was a lot of work, depressing and he kept getting older. Eventually Arnold invested in a synthetic skin. Covering every part of his body, including his face, it invisibly zipped up in the back. He looked like he was forty-five. When he met people wearing the suit, they complimented him on how great he looked. “The plastic looks real,” they told him.

Arnold knew he lived an allegory. Outside he was fit, inside a wreck. Still, the shell was easier than putting in his teeth and it was machine washable.

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