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The face she was trying to conjure wouldn't quite come. She had no idea if anyone else was doing any better. Most likely everyone was imagining a different face. Maybe that was the problem. There was, though, no other way. The chance of even two of them, let alone more, producing the same face was unlikely. Unless it was one of the old ones, a face that had been worn before, you know, by someone in the world, in which case it didn't count. You had to start again when that happened.

She took a biscuit from the small bowl on the arm of the sofa and bit into it carefully, breaking a piece off with her teeth before taking it onto her tongue and pressing it against her upper palate, liquefying the dry mass into a sugary paste. Some crumbs fell from her lips onto her jumper and trousers, but she didn't notice these.

After all, faces weren't like milk bottles that you could leave outside on the doorstep when you'd done with them, for collecting and taking back to the milk factory or the 'dairy' or whatever they called it; to be cleaned out with a 'whoosh' of water and then filled again with a 'whoosh' of fresh milk and re-delivered the next morning to someone else's doorstep. Someone she didn't know. My bottle becomes someone else's receptacle. Except, when you thought about it for a second, when did you last see a milk *bottle*? Maybe in other places, like abroad, they still had them. Here it was all paper cartons these days. One careful user. Or not careful. It didn't matter. And wasn't there a time they printed faces on the cartons? Faces of 'missing persons'. Do you know this person? Have you seen this face? Well of course I have *now*, I'm looking straight at it. And if they wanted to do that sort of thing with milk bottles it wouldn't work, would it, even if they printed little portrait photos onto the glass. Because you wouldn't be able to change this missing person for the next one, once they were found, or when they'd given up looking. Not without breaking the bottle or scraping the face off, and who's going to go to that sort of expense? If it was bottles it wouldn't be faces anyway probably, it would be something like...like names, like the embossed logo on a Coca-cola bottle. Recognised everywhere. Names are all hardness and edge and substance. Breakable, but fixable. They stay in the world even after a person has gone, they can be used over and over. Whereas faces are more biodegradable. They go back into the mash of human kindness. None of which was helping with the present task.

'Draw me a line,' the voice had said. 'Imagine a surface, a white page, and draw me a line from the top of the page down to the bottom.' A sort of first exercise, she

supposed. Mental training. She could already guess what was coming next.

'Now,' said the voice, 'draw another line *across* the page, one side to the other, however you like.' Simple enough. 'Okay,' the voice was saying, 'let's say that the line across the page is a horizon or ground, a line that describes the 'world'. I am under the ground maybe or I am out here walking in the world, but if you imagine the line continuing, beyond the edge of the page, it is the same ground that you are standing on, the same world that supports us both.'

Except I'm not standing, am I, *clever*, she thought to herself, I'm sitting down. Shows what you know. She got up and went into the kitchen.

'As for the vertical line,' the voice continued, 'let that stand for a city, or a wall somewhere, a broken pillar, a doorway, a copse of trees, anywhere in the world I could be speaking to you from. Have you got that? Are you with me still?'

As she went over again, in her mind, what the voice had said, she filled the kettle, switched it on and dropped a tea-bag in the cup.

'Okay now, what I need you to do,'—this was going to be the difficult bit, she was sure of that—'right there on the same page, if that helps at all, is to draw me a face that has never been worn before. A new face that I can be seen in. A face that hasn't been used up already by being looked at and passed around and pored over and sniffed at, a face that hasn't been part of someone else's story, a face that hasn't been 'put on' or taken off and discarded, a face with no burns on it, a face with no bruises on it, a face for scraping the sand off and recognising at once, although no-one has had this face before.'

She didn't usually take milk in her tea but this time she splashed in a drop. The cloud filled the liquid, turning it a thin, indistinguishable grey.

A new face? Not so simple at all. She stood there in the kitchen, staring ahead, staring into nothing much. What were the others doing right now? She assumed there must be others. Millions, most likely. 'Friends,' the voice had said. Friends, not friend. 'You know who you are.' She had assumed this address included her. 'Listen to me please. I need your help. We don't have a great deal of time.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joe Kelleher.