

Nicola Bealing - Death & Circuses

9 July – 4 September 2016

Two Dresses

Annamaria Murphy

Inspired by an Absconded poster in Helston Folk Museum of Ann Medlyn, who stole two spotted gowns from her place of work, and the WILD young mothers of Helston, who make the best of it.

2015. Molly Tregear.

Outside the Helston branch of Peacocks, Molly Tregear stares into the window. Party season. She longs for one dress in particular. She's been in and tried it on a few times. Fits like a glove. Taylor, her boy cries from his pram. "Hush now sweetheart," she says. She blows on her hands to keep them warm.

1816. Ann Medlyn.

It says here on the poster, "Ann Medlyn" (that's me) "Seventeen years old" (I don't know how old I am) "With a ruddy complexion" (That's because I walk five miles to work every day, then five miles home) "Employee of Master William Jeffrey", (Slave more like) "Has absconded with two spotted gowns" (That is true, I have).

Molly.

Molly rocks the pram and Taylor falls asleep sucking his thumb. Someone is looking at the dress. "It won't suit you," thinks Molly. "Don't buy it." The woman doesn't.

There's not many places in this town to hang about in. She can't go back into the B&B till five. Costa's isn't bad. You can make a latte last for an hour if you try. Subways is ok for cheap deals, but they don't like you to linger. Factory shop's good. Wide enough for several prams at once. If she is with the other young mothers, they feel like their prams are chariots, and they are warriors.

Ann.

Master Jeffrey is making two gowns for one of the Godolphin daughters. Blue, with white spots. I'm good with numbers, so I did the measurements. I'm the same size as her, so he's fitting them on me. Only I'm not the same size as her no more, as she got bigger on account of eating fancies in the tea shop up Meneage Street. She's always in there. But Master Jeffrey 'as blamed me. Says I got the numbers wrong. But I didn't.

Molly.

The charity shop in Coinagehall Street is good too. It's a got a toy section with books, so Taylor can play in it. And a book is only ten p. Sometimes the older mothers look at you with that look. "But there's no age range for love, is there?" thinks Molly.

Ann.

The dress dudn' suit the Godolphin girl anyway. We've had to make two, because of the cake eating. I've only got two dresses altogether. One for 'ere, and one for church. Both brown.

Molly.

Molly hasn't got enough for the dress in Peacocks. She could wait for the sale, but it might be gone by then. It's blue, like her eyes, like Taylor's eyes.

Ann.

I met a boy from Truro. He said he loves me. Loves my blue eyes. Godolphin girl doesn't want the dresses now. Master Jeffreys says it's my fault. It's not though.

Molly.

Mollys met a boy from Truro. He was good with Taylor. He's asked her out. She's got nothing to wear. She wonders whether she could put a deposit on the blue dress? She looks in her purse.

Ann.

I'm running. I got the dresses. Give 'em the slip down Wheelbarrow Lane, along Cross Street, up Drippy Droppy, through Five Wells. They're after me now.

Officers are blowing whistles.

They're upon me.

I'm off you buggers. Can't catch me. I'm off to Truro. I got the dresses. It's me they fit!

Molly.

Molly thinks she could just try the dress on one more time. The assistant tells her it's the same colour as her eyes. "I could put it by for you?" she says to Molly.

Ann.

It's me they fit! Me!

Annamaria Murphy wrote this story as part of the Kneehigh Theatre's Helston Rambles project inspired by both the Absconded notice in Helston Museum's archive and stories from the WILD. Quite separately, Nicola Bealing found the same notice in the Museum and made the series, Imagined Portraits of Ann Medlyn. Thank you to all for allowing us to bring them together.

Nicola Bealing

Imagined Portraits of Ann Medlyn (12 of 20)

Oil on paper

76 x 56cm

