

## The Face

by H. W. Moss

The lights in the conference room went up and there stood Robert holding a life size plastic doll.

“Everyone, you already know this young lady, Resusci Anne we call her. Undoubtedly you’ve practiced mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on her at one time or another. Now, as part of your continuing CPR training, you’re going to work on her again. Is that clear?”

Nearly a dozen people wearing informal business attire, only two neckties among them, nodded or murmured assent. They were participants in an annual re-certification program Rob taught employees of large corporations in Silicon Valley.

“As you can tell, Anne here is a shapely brunette with the sweetest face.” She stood next to him at about shoulder height. He raised her arm in greeting and a giggle went up from the back row. “She’s very lifelike, but in actuality, nothing more than a collection of skin-colored plastic, some wires and metal joints.”

He placed the large doll backside down on the floor, then leaned back on his haunches to review his efforts. “Ladies and gentlemen, the final segment of your instruction has now begun. Your re-recognition in Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation will be complete in,” he glanced at his watch, “little more than half an hour.”

A grim silence greeted this statement.

“Don’t all applaud at once,” he added, which elicited some chuckles. “We’ve been studying hard for two hours. Now comes the fun part.”

Rob had been giving these courses for five years and thought he had developed considerable control over his audience. It was not that he took his job as a lark, but at the same time he did his best to liven up things and enjoyed making jokes. He lifted the dummy's arm at the wrist, again looked at his watch, and said: "The victim has a pulse but is not breathing. Quick, who can tell me the proper technique in this situation?"

"Rescue breathing," sprang from the lips of at least three people at the same time.

Rob smiled broadly. "That's the spirit. You've re-learned something you already knew. Quick: no pulse and not breathing!"

"Chest compression and rescue breathing together," came a fast response from a lone female voice.

Rob propped the doll up, raised the head and turned it toward the crowd. "Hi, my name's Anne," he said in a contralto falsetto. "Me and my brother, Andy, are your helpers." The audience did not react to this bit of silliness. Reverting to his normal voice, Rob continued with the demonstration.

"So far, we've only dealt with theory on how to revive an adult, child or infant. You've seen the video, now it's time to actually perform CPR. I know, the lecture was boring, the interactive discussion and videos were a tad more interesting but now the fun begins: You will actively participate with live mannequins." The joke was completely lost on his students.

The pseudo-human was an elaborate mechanism with inflatable lungs and cables to simulate a pulse. "I squeeze this bulb and it feels like the victim's heart is beating," Rob explained. "As you saw in the video, you must be able to recognize if the victim has a pulse or not in order to make the proper life saving decision."

Anne's head could be turned from side to side and the mouth and nose manipulated to open an airway and ventilate the mannequin. Rob pinched the nose and blew into the rubber mouth. The chest expanded.

“See. Easy as pie. Any questions before we form a line and give it a go?”

A hand shot up and a man said: “I have one. Is there any truth to the story the mannequin's face came from a dead prostitute?”

Rob was not surprised by the query and decided to stand before answering. It was undignified to sit on the floor when setting the record straight, he thought as he rose.

“Short answer: No. Actually, we don't know who the woman was. But, yes, it was taken from the death mask of a young woman who was fished out of the Seine at the turn of the century, around 1900. We have no idea who she was. Which is why they made a death mask of her in the first place. Before refrigeration, with photography still in its infancy, the morgue had to have a way of keeping evidence of what some unknown body looked like if it was ever to be identified. So they made these masks. And this woman was so beautiful her face was reproduced as a popular piece of decoration, a wall hanging or coffee table sculpture, which was sold throughout Europe. Fifty years after she died, the doll's inventor, Asmund Laerdal, found one of those copies of the death mask lying around his father-in-law's house and decided to use it.”

Rob bent and picked up Anne. He held her toward the class. “Isn't she beautiful?”

At that moment a piece of soft plastic which ordinarily stayed snapped securely to nubs on the back plate fell away from the dummy's chest and exposed the mannequin's lungs. The audience pointed this out to Rob by giving the largest collective laugh of the morning.

“Ooops. Sorry. This rarely happens, but Annie appears to be falling apart.” Rob put one of the dummy’s arms over his shoulder, an arm around her waist and did a mock dance step. “No worries, back in a jiff.” He turned and walked out a nearby door.

Rob was parked in the visitor lot so it took a few moments to get down the elevator to his car. He opened the trunk. The relatively spacious storage compartment had little extra room in it because it was jammed full of similar devices. On the floor next to the spare tire were six or seven plastic dolls, most, but not all, damaged in one way or another.

Rob turned one over; it was an Andy. He decided to stick with the female model which meant he had to rummage around until he found an Anne that was intact. He located one, gave it a quick inspection, satisfied himself it would do and hurriedly pressed the one he had brought with him down into the trunk along with the others and slammed the lid shut. It was a tight fit.

The lesson was short, but it still put him behind schedule. He told everyone they had earned a satisfactory passing grade and, with his valise packed and the doll under his arm, he was just about to leave when he was accosted by an older woman who said she had one more question.

“Is there any truth to the story that Laerdal’s daughter drowned and that’s why he invented the doll?” she asked. “Or that they offered him a chance to put his daughter’s face on it and he declined?”

Rob knew the answer to this piece of apocrypha as well.

“Sorry. No truth whatsoever. Laerdal was in the business of making simulated plastic wounds for medical students during World War Two. Then, in 1958 in Norway,

he was approached by an anesthesiologist who asked him to make something they could practice giving revival breathing classes on. Presto, there's Anne. Whoops." He held up his wrist as if the woman could read his watch. "Fallen behind on my next appointment. Gotta go. You were all wonderful."

Rob really was late. He was on a fairly tight schedule with little time for transit and it would not do for the teacher to be tardy to his next class. There was barely room in the trunk for the doll. As it was, he had to press down hard on the lid before the lock clicked. He threw the valise unceremoniously in the back seat and jumped behind the wheel.

A block away, the light was turning from green to yellow. At first he thought he could beat it but, at very nearly the last second, he decided to play safe than sorry and hit the brakes.

The vehicle behind him was not prepared for his abrupt stop. He did not get completely out of his car although he opened the door and started to step on to the pavement. When he saw the little old lady behind the wheel and how it was such a minor collision her car was not hurt, he suddenly could care less what it had done to his car. Robert knew it would tie him up longer than he desired if he traded insurance information, so he did the unthinkable: as soon as the light turned green, off he sped.

Almost immediately, he heard a siren and looked in the rear view mirror. This was not what he had expected and cursed his bad luck. The police car must have been right there at the same intersection to have started up after him so soon.

There was no point in trying to outrun the cops, so he pulled to the side of the road and removed his driving license from his wallet.

After reading the name aloud, the officer asked if Rob's address was current and squinted through the open window to better view the interior of the passenger compartment. Rob's license was in his hand as the officer walked toward his own vehicle. Before he got to the patrol car, however, Rob saw in his side mirror as the man stopped at the rear bumper of Rob's car and took a closer, somewhat astonished look.

The police officer walked back toward Rob: "Mister Hornbuck, please step out of your vehicle."

He followed the policeman apprehensively. To his utter shock, Rob realized the accident had popped the trunk lid open. Its maw was half raised and the entire inventory of plastic dolls was quite visible.

"Honestly officer, I can explain."

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