

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Munchausen by Proxy

by Mari Syrad Grieves

Bah-buhm, bah-buhm, bah-buhm.

“It was an accident.” (‘An accident I had planned.’)

“She didn’t deserve it.” (‘She deserved every agonising cut.’)

“I’m sorry.” (‘I’m not.’)

Bah-buhm, bah-buhm.

My mother and I were very close; inseparable. We looked so alike, people would say. She’d cut our hair the same. So similar we were that when I went to speak, her voice came out; and when she fell, my bones would break. Mother fell a lot. She had me convinced I was sick. Me and a dozen doctors. She was lonely and I didn’t know any different. I was just a little boy.

I escaped the house when I was eighteen. By then, an x-ray would have shown skull fractures and scarred bones; but what it couldn’t show was the torture she had inflicted with every neurotic inspection, every imagined sickness, every unnecessary medication, every wasted doctors’ visit, every sunny day kept inside...a childhood stolen.

I didn’t go back for years. Neurosis; hypochondria; sexual dysfunction; nightmares; a limp. That was her legacy. My life an endless blur of prescriptions and dissatisfaction; a diet of bland food and ignoring her calls.

But as she got older, she needed me and I saw an opportunity. She taught me how to look after others and so I cared for her the way she cared for me. Osteoporosis: how brittle it makes one's bones. She looked so frightened as I pushed her.

Later, when she was dead and I was next, I reflected on what I might do differently, given the chance. 'I would've used more bleach when I bathed her,' I thought.

When it's your time; when they come for you, they don't differentiate. They don't see the look in your eyes, the shape of your mouth, the lines on your skin. To them you are translucent, the colour of your heart illuminating the rest of your insides with either green or red. We are either remorseful or we are not. They don't weigh up the reasons behind our actions: the crime, the sin, the same. No matter why.

They ask, just once. "Do you feel remorse?" "Yes," I cry. They can tell when you are lying. The colour inside you glows. If only I could tear out that tell-tale heart. I had no way out.

The shadowy figures loomed above me, their thirst palpable, the only light, the red pulsating beat.

Bah-buhm. Bah-buhm.

The darkness is here.