

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

We are bound by the secrets we share

by Janie Reynolds

We both know, my love, that there in a ring of fire through which we could jump. And that, on the other side, lies freedom. I sense you fear that I will leave you here. That one day you will find I am gone. That I jumped, deep at night, as you lay in our bed, sleeping. And that I have found adventure, and paradise, without you.

And I know you dare not jump. Because, like me, you are an animal. One, who wishes not to remember, but is plagued by a memory as vast as the ocean. One huger than that of all the poor creatures snivelling on the three-dimensional earth.

I watch you, as you stoke our waxing fire, and the flames start to burn, just that tiny bit taller and wilder than you would have hoped. I see how quickly a single human memory is to leap, uninvited, into the battlefield of your moment, like a reincarnated, fallen knight, from some lost war in your dismembered past. How the long, strong muscles in your arms and legs, then change up a gear, primed, and your heart beat faster, and faster still, gripping you under the collarbone at your throat, on the left. Because the knight is, no doubt, sliding his primeval sword, once again, from its sheath, and swinging a forehand or a backhand swipe at a completely imaginary enemy. 'Danger,' he whispers, slyly, under your breath. And before we can delight in our fire's own fury, and the extra warmth its freedom could deliver, your knight has slain those flames, and you are back, to bask in contentment that we are safe once more.

And, not, as one might think, because you were ever burned. I know you and I know that you have never even felt a fire as I have. So, not for a recollection of that searing prick, then the seething heat, first crackling with rage across the hairs of the skin like a forest fire, then boring down, in, like acid, dissolving the soft white flesh below. No. Not that. Rather, because, one fine day in your early childhood, your mother, or your father, tugged you away, under your shoulders, lifted you angrily up, then scolded you, with wagging finger, not to go near the fire because, 'Fire Can Kill You'. On a day, when you had crawled away, enticed and hypnotised by the glorious orange goddess, your nostrils, filled with sweet, musky scent, drawing you irresistibly in.

That tantalising centre-piece, worshipped by them, as they all crouched around, and, on a cold day, would fight for, with their territorial glances and jutting elbows, before outstretching their arms and moaning with relief as their tight neon fists, like bulbs frozen in the winter soil, slowly, uncurled to reveal purple, then red, then spotted pink finger petals.

So you had a secret. That 'Fire Can Kill You'. Because those were the words you heard first, from which all future flames have risen. And you hold those words tightly and true. You keep them safe. They keep you safe.

But don't fear I will not love you for your pantomime. Nor for the mistakes you repeat and the U-turns you take. For, I have a secret, too. I am also a simmering mass of memories, that goad me backwards and sideways and in circles, like you. I, too, hide a fearful interferer, who fights me for the wheel as I drive in the present, and tells me not to go this way but that. I, too, blindly follow the path set out for me, made of the words that I heard as I first grew. Here on the safe side. Our side of the ring of fire.