

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Short Shared Story

by Penny Jones

They had shared the womb, struggling for space in the amniotic fluid until released into the unknown where they turned to each other. They developed a secret language, which no one else understood. They shared imaginary friends, gave them life and then killed them off, apparently in agreement about the fate of these creations. When they could articulate a sense of individual identity she became steadfast in her separateness. Despite the fact they were forced to live together and shared all their physical traits, she pursued the exit from this bond until she was able to leave home.

At last in her own room, in the shared student flat over a chippy in a Northern University town she was able to live unburdened by comparison. She walked alone down streets where no heads turned to stare. Her entrances caused no sensation. Or if they did it was because of her own beauty or personality. She had to write essays, make friends, meet boys without the discussion and reciprocity that had been embedded in her life.

This new freedom, while exhilarating, became a kind of prison, in which she found that to most people everything had to be explained. They did not have the same sensibility, frames of reference, sense of humour or wardrobe. She realised that even between ordinary siblings there was not the shared physicality or history that contributed to the mental and emotional shorthand that she had taken for granted.

It was when she had turned to her own reflection for solace rather than as an object for criticism or admiration that she read about a family rental service while scrolling through essay references online. Finding a physical match was easy. The agency actors were masters of disguise. Once she had made the selection the task of training her twin started in earnest. She sent photographs, home movies, family stories, books and memories. The service sent progress reports and only a couple of months after their introduction the pair arranged a meeting.

As recommended by the agency they met in a coffee shop, in public, and as she had foreseen all heads turned towards her when she joined her waiting twin.

The identical sound of their voices, their shared laughter and gestures compelled the other customers to turn to stare before hurriedly averting their eyes.

They arranged a second meeting at the flat. As she opened the door her perfect reflection was revealed, arm raised holding a knife.