

Strange Reflections

by Richard Lewis

The longer and more carefully we look at a funny story, the sadder it becomes.

Billy was staring into the mirror, suddenly he yelped in amazement. The mirror was playing tricks on him. He recognised the image but it wasn't him. It was that clown and master of mime, 'Jingles' who he'd seen at the Dreamscape Circus.

The sad eyes and downturned mouth seemed to be pleading with him. The vision lasted mere seconds but made a lasting impact on Billy. He told himself, "one day I'm going to be like Jingles."

His mother would often say, "Billy stop clowning around."

Billy wasn't deliberately trying to be funny, it was just that when he became excited, funny things happened. His face contorted into strange shapes, his body moved in extraordinary ways.

His mother would laugh, which was an achievement, as she'd suffered severe depression since Billy's father died soon after he was born and spent most of her days in bed.

His teacher once joked, "Billy, will you leave the class, I have something serious to say."

In school he often felt stupid but when playing the fool, got the attention he craved. In those precious moments he felt he was someone and that he mattered.

When he was fifteen, he returned home from school one day and found the house unusually quiet.

"Mum, you there?" he called out.

He knew his mother would be in bed but she usually replied.

Billy called again, "Muum," but still no answer. He climbed the stairs to his mother's bedroom.

'It's unusual for the door to be shut,' he thought.

He felt a chill in his bones as the door seemed to say, "don't come in."

His reluctant hand slowly turned the doorknob but the door resisted, its hinges whining in protest. The first thing he saw was the two guilty bottles on the bedside table. He hadn't noticed his mother at first but then he saw her bleached features, nesting in the shroud-like pillow. The long dark hair cascading down and an arm dangling awkwardly.

Billy went to live with an uncle who was once a street theatre entertainer. He helped him find a job working as a stagehand at Circus Arcadia. After a few years and many hours of hard work he established himself as Billy the Clown.

While suffering bouts of depression, his work with the circus and the supportive travelling community, held him. He loved the crazy, intoxicating world. When he stepped into the ring, he felt transformed, soaking up the applause and taking delight in the excitement on children's faces.

Billy had found a new home.