

**Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops**

The Slum, the Mum and the Staycation

by Saffron Swansborough

Act I. Past

When my daughter was 12
We went on holiday, except
I didn't go with them,
My enjoyment of camping in itself
Still being on a long vacation
Instead, I put up my hand
Volunteering to clean and tidy
Our pre-teen's bedroom.

On the first morning of their trip,
While my partner sent
What's Apps of our youngest
Deep set in a camping chair, mouthing
“I love you mummy”

to an invisible me,
I was videoing a Before shot
Of the little corner of our home
We call The Squat
Pushing open the door at the start,
With Lloyd Grossman asking me,
“Who *lives*..... like THIS?”
And me replying, “Well Lloyd,”
But in seconds I was on Life of Grime
As I tried to defend her,
To John Peel,
“BUT SHE REALLY IS A LOVELY PERSON.”

My internal PA looks at the scene
Then sends me a memo:
Block out your diary for the day
And I hope that's long enough
For this job.

Act II. Present

She doesn't know I'm doing this.
Her Dad and I agreed, if she knows
She'll say No.
I want her to be grateful
Yet I fear palm face emojis,
Oh MUM.
She's not a teenager yet so
Of course I won't find

anything embarrassing,
Under the furniture
Or between her books.
The uncluttering
Is like reading
An anthology of a life
On the cusp of change
Lego, Dumbo and primary school recorder
Jostling with vegan cosmetics, period packs
And those expensive Bluetooth headphones she wanted,
Needed, promised to look after,
Now lying on the floor
Like a beached starfish
Wondering what the hell happened.
Through the carpet
Of discarded earring backs
And the things put inside things
(that rainbow tote she lost
Two days ago is inside a new shoebox,
While the missing rings
Are sleeping in the seam
Of a school backpack)
Is my tender girl. The photo of us
With my mum
When my girl was 3 is centre-stage
That's not dusty while
Dolly clothes remain
within her reach.

Act III. Future

I'm rehearsing future discussions
About "stuff that's gone missing
Since you cleaned my room"
I resolve to keep the contents of her bin
For a week or two
To prove what I really threw away.
She won't know for years
That this is like keeping a sample
For the doctor.
I'll spend the afternoon
Grouping her belongings:
Hair things. Pens. To Do lists
Which are all ticked off,
Since she is highly organised.
I wonder whether to add,
"Saturday. 11am. Clean my bedroom."
Later, I will film the After shot.
I will never resent this time spent
With my girl, while she still needs me,
Deep down, even though (and whenever)
we are apart. But there is one thing I cannot do.
I won't go under her bed.