

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Emily's Little People

by Vera Gajic

“Did you hear that?” said Emily.

“What?”

“That.”

“I don't know what I am listening for, the house is full of sounds,” said Julia not paying attention.

“Not the normal sounds, not the creaking and groaning of the house or your tummy, the little people moving around, rustling, the tiny quiet voices,” squeaked Emily.

Julia had been worried about her daughter ever since her husband, Emily's Dad had left them two years ago. He hadn't done it well, it wasn't a good divorce if there was such a thing, they were still fighting over finances by letter and email. Never actually speaking, for which she was grateful, she wouldn't be able to cope if she heard his voice. It was the first thing that drew her to him, his beautiful deep baritone which made her tissues vibrate when he spoke to her in his best seductive deep whispers.

Even though she later realised she wasn't the only one he used his voice on, like a fisherman uses his hook, it still had the desired effect on her right up to the day he walked out after ten years together. He left the two of them and moved to California, just like that, except it wasn't just like that for him, Julia was sure. He'd found someone else who was susceptible to those dulcet tones.

“There aren't any noises darling. I can't hear anything.”

“Please try and listen Mummy you aren't really trying to hear them,” pleaded Emily.

“Who are they?” asked Julia, beginning to worry this was going to be another episode like the last one which ended up forcing them to move out of their home as Emily couldn’t stand the smell, it made her retch but no one else could detect it. Julia had brought Emily to see this house three times before she agreed to move to make sure she couldn’t smell anything. Dear God, she hoped it wasn’t going to be noises this time.

“Mummy are you really listening? Please shut your eyes and listen.”

Julia closed her eyes and tried to block out her thoughts so that she could listen. Standing in the middle of the living room with its deep carpet, red velvet curtains and two squidgy sofas it had a soft cosy feel which muffled sounds despite its high Victorian ceilings. Once she let her ears adjust to the silence she soon became aware of the ringing in her ears or was it her head.

Too many loud concerts in her youth maybe or did everyone have a ringing when there was no other noise. Once she heard the ringing, not really ringing that wasn’t the right word more of a hum, a high pitched hum she couldn’t unhear it and it seemed to get louder and louder. She rarely allowed herself the quiet to hear it and she knew why. It was so irritating.

“There it is again, sounds like little feet in high shoes and a long dress swishing around, click, swish, click, click, swish. Can’t you hear it? It sounds like it is coming out of the fireplace”

Emily crouched down by the fireplace and tried to pull open the metal stopper covering up the entrance to the chimney breast.

“I told you Emily the fireplace doesn’t work, it’s just for decoration, it’s been blocked up, don’t try and pull it, stop it, please Emily stop it, now, stop it.”

Every morning since her husband had left Julia promised herself that today she was going to be patient, she was not going to raise her voice but every night she scolded herself for not keeping her promise.

“But there it is again, click, click, now someone else is walking too, clack, clack, click, click. Mummy you must be able to hear it.”

“No, no I can’t hear a thing Emily,” biting her tongue so that she couldn’t say more.

The door opened and in walked Grandma Betty. She had moved in with her daughter and grand daughter a few weeks ago after Julia begged her to help, professing not to be able to cope with Emily on her own anymore. Betty found that hard to believe. Emily was an unusual child it was true but she wasn’t madness inducing as Julia implied. Whatever the reason she was grateful to be in charge of a family again, she’d missed it.

“You can hear it can’t you Grandma?” asked Emily.

“What?”

“The little people in the fireplace,” replied Emily.

“Oh yes I can, swishing and clattering away,” said Betty, she knew what Emily was up to.

“Oh for God sake,” said Julia, “I’m going for a lie down,” and walked out of the room.

“Thanks Grandma,” smiled Emily.

“Now Emily, you’re not to get used to this. You know I can’t really hear it anymore than you can.”

“That’s what you think,” said Emily. She was practising the art of being stubborn and she was doing very well at it.