Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Fairytale Friends

by Patrick Hyland

I hope this video camera works. What couldn't be divided was burned—and this is all that's left of the father. I'd been coaxed into the attic, fibreglass on my throat and my T-shirt covered in sweat and cobwebs.
"It'll do you good to do a bit of work around the house," my mother beamed, peeling back the blackout curtains. "Take your mind off things."

I hadn't taken the breakup well. Swallowed a month's worth of diazepam with a vodka chaser. My mother found me face-down on the bathroom tiles, blue lips rattling. Rushed to St. Vincent's to get my stomach pumped, four nights in the kip picking foam out of the walls and not a wink of sleep. Crawled home. Spent the guts of the past three days in the foetal position, and we've not spoken a word to each other. Talk the fuckin' ear off you about the change in weather and the price of a pound of mince, though.

She's like that lake below in Derryounce Bog, still and shimmering on the surface but not for swimming in, my mother.

I found the camera in its original case, and inside was a folded-up piece of card. I turn it over between my fingertips and unfold it. A title in gold lettering reads: A Nursery Rhyme Adventure at St. Paul's National School.

I see my name next to Humpty Dumpty and cringe. Picture his little head sticking out of a lime-and-orange striped jumper, chicken wire piercing the soft skin under his arms, pressing around his hips and legs so that when he walks, he waddles. Poor little fucker, I think to myself, and with my legs splayed across two timber joists, I go down through the cast list.

Snow White got pregnant when she was fourteen and had to drop out of school. The word going around was that her mother shipped her off to Manchester to get it sorted and that Sleepy forked out for the flight and accommodation.

Doc left school to start an apprenticeship with Pinocchio's oul' fella. He owns his own workshop now, making furniture, built a two-storey in the countryside and settled down with one of the Little Pigs. Their eldest is studying law down in UL.

Pinocchio did a stint in Mountjoy for possession and got into the heroin in a bad way. Fucked himself into the Liffey last Christmas.

I bumped into Goldilocks about fifteen years ago at a house party. We tag-teamed a bottle of Captain Morgan's. Pinned me up against the wardrobe in the spare room, took me in the palm of her hand. Shattered me into a million pieces and then put me back together again, but I was never the same. Asked her for her number, and she smirked and handed me her balled-up underwear instead. Two weeks later, I saw on Facebook that her relationship status had gone from 'It's Complicated' to 'In a Relationship' with a Lisa Shaughnessy from Clonakilty.

Little Bo Peep moved to London after school and got signed to a modelling agency. If you've ever shopped on ASOS, you'll have seen her—think she applied for Big Brother one year. She's back in town now, working in SuperValu.

Thumbelina graduated at the top of her class in Trinity and landed a big job with PwC. Got engaged in 2019, a summer wedding in Florence bought and paid for. Pulled an intern into the disabled toilets at a work party and dove nose-first into a bag of Colombia's finest; propped a leg up on the handrail for the lad. The cheese course wasn't long out of the kitchen when the punters heard the screams out of her. We called the wedding off, needless to say. A week in the nuthouse for my troubles, and back under my mother's roof.

I fold up the playbill and open out the viewfinder on the camera. The small LCD screen flickers bright white. The battery icon is blinking red in the top-right corner. The screen fades, and a figure emerges into view. Blonde curls to the shoulders and a familiar bedroom backdrop. Rouge on the lips and light-blue eyeshadow to mask her youth: eight going on eighteen.

A voice from behind the lens comes through the small speaker in a soft, theatrical growl: bear-like. The father.

"Someone's been sleeping in my bed."