Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

It's a Sin

by Rosalyn St Pierre

It was the end of September, and I had become conscious of the evenings drawing in—the cusp of the seasons changing, outside this house and within my body. I was content, for the most part. I'd have preferred to move, but circumstances wouldn't allow it. 'Mustn't grumble,' as they say.

Then the peace was shattered by the Pet Shop Boys on the radio:

When I look back upon my life
It's always with a sense of shame
I've always been the one to blame
For everything I long to do
It's a sin.

By any standard, my last one was a mighty sin—one which, if there should be an afterlife, would leave the possibility of Nirvana severely challenged. I knew this was a safe place... but even so...

A bargain, perhaps? Repentance followed by forgiveness? Was this the bacterium of guilt re-emerging after so many years? I might not have turned away from sin, but perhaps I could arrange a detour to amend my actions.

Plan A: Turn to God

Go to church and donate to a good cause.

An opportunity to express remorse silently, with a philanthropic touch. Catholic churches are full of charity boxes—medieval promises of an opportunity to buy back, through donations, a solution to one's problems.

I considered:

St Jude, patron saint of hopeless causes—rejected. I noted that his box was already full. My prospects were not yet so dire that I needed to drop in a fifty-quid note at this stage.

St Anthony, always my favourite. Put five pounds into his charity box and lost things are suddenly found. Not appropriate for this mission. I hadn't lost anything. In fact, that was the problem: I wanted to get rid of something.

African orphans? I was tempted, but I didn't like the look of the priest in the photograph with the little children.

I left. My personal finances remained untouched.

Plan B: Alter My Lifestyle

Brighten everyone's day with a smile.

I roamed Tunbridge Wells with a smile, then a grin and, as my facial muscles tired, a rictus grin. I sauntered around the shopping mall, beaming at everyone. I cried, 'Have a lovely day!' to anyone brave enough to meet my eye.

I tried to embrace the youths who had made some deeply uncharitable remarks concerning my age and sanity. It was only when I was escorted from the café at Fenwick's that I considered an alternative strategy.

Plan C: Benefit the Community

Opportunities beckon in this town.

There are, to my continual surprise, many people older than me and many more with varying degrees of disability. I tried to help someone step onto a bus and was accused of sexual harassment. I offered to carry an old man's shopping and was struck across the legs with his walking stick.

I desisted from this activity after helping a partially sighted girl across the road, only to discover that she had not wanted to cross it. While turning back, I was hit by a youth on an electric bike.

Conclusion

The Greeks' advice on repentance is that it is time to turn around—to change one's mind. There is no necessity to announce sorrow or guilt.

I have always liked the Greeks.

I considered:

Am I really sorry for the misdeed? Perhaps.

Will I be found out? Possibly.

Location?

I knew this was not a house where secrets could be kept, although the freezer in the basement had always been a great help.

I looked out of my kitchen window at the people strolling through the park below.

Inspiration!

What could be better than my deed—my sin—hiding in plain sight? None of that out-of-sight, out-of-mind nonsense. I wanted to pass by my one triumph on my daily stroll.

In October last year, I registered as a volunteer gardener and joined the jolly group of retirees who tend the parks and gardens of Tunbridge Wells. We dig and laugh, trim back bushes and plant bulbs for the coming spring.

How well my little plots will flourish in the months ahead, with compost enriched by added blood and bone: a finger here, a foot there, carefully buried beneath the larger shrubs. The other bits and pieces—the liver, heart and kidneys—are all gone now: cooked, distributed late at night and enjoyed by passing dogs and foxes.

Doing good. Joining those who help our community. Bringing joy to all who wander through the parks and gardens.

True repentance.