Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Back Soon

by Jane Hill

A car engine coughing woke me much too early, but I bleary-eyed my way to the window to see my father driving off. I decided he must be popping out for milk or a newspaper. I took myself back to bed to read, assuming he'd be back soon. Eventually, I dragged myself out of bed, glanced out of the window and padded downstairs to the kitchen. Kettle on, I sang while warming the pot, then added the leaves and water. A good hour had passed with no Dad so I woke my sister, Matilda.

'Charming,' she snapped. 'Do you think he's just gone?'

I made a noncommittal noise, considering it prudent to keep my mouth shut, though inwardly I was seething about our father's uncharacteristic behaviour. Dad was usually a friendly, honest chap, but since Mum went, he'd been at sixes and sevens, unable to settle into any job for long. We'd stopped believing him whenever he waxed lyrical about this or that opportunity. However wonderful they sounded, few ever came to fruition.

When the subject of Scotland was first broached, Tilly and I smiled through gritted teeth, waiting for the inevitable failure. For the last few months, all we'd heard was that he didn't know when he'd be leaving, or the job wasn't happening—then it was. As for how long it might last, he'd originally told us six weeks, but now he wasn't sure. His constant dickering kept us both in a state of nervous anticipation.

'Tea won't be long, Tills!' I called, then stopped dead in my tracks. Bruno's food and water bowls were there, beside the cupboard. I felt a sudden rush of emotion and gasped. Tilly rushed in.

'Abby, have you burned yourself?'

Her concerned face was too much. All I could do was nod and splutter.

She pushed me aside to fuss over cups, saucers and clinking spoons. As she poured, the smell of stewed tea reassured me, and gradually my blarting sniffles slowed. I blew my nose.

Tilly was the practical twin. Always first with a solution, whereas I couldn't even sew on a button. I'm not usually given to tears. Funerals and Lassie films get me snuffling, or the sight of an injured bird. I'd find a box and a cosy lining; Tilly would fashion a splint for the creature.

Together for thirty-three years, we were known locally as the Misses Edwards. 'Matilda does while Abigail dreams,' our school reports had noted.

Tilly banged the shortbread tin on the table, noticing not only Bruno's dishes but the gaping hole left by the absence of dog.

'Where's Bruno? HAS HE TAKEN HIM TO BLOODY SCOTLAND FOR SIX FUCKIN' WEEKS?!'

Bruno was Tilly's. A lady from our church had given him to her after deciding the puppy was too rowdy.

'Tills, it's not for long...' I mumbled.

'BUT HE DIDN'T EVEN ASK ME. HE'S MINE! He had no right...' Her voice tailed off.

'I thought I saw Bruno when Dad drove off,' I whispered, 'but I thought he'd have brought him home by now...'

I withered under her glare.

Sipping tea and munching shortbread, I wondered why he would take him. Bruno wasn't particularly well trained; he was even rubbish at 'fetch'! A friendly dog who chased birds in the garden. Only useful for a heavy paw in the groin while we sat on the sofa.

I rallied. 'Tilly, I'm sure Bruno is safe.'

She scowled and stood up. 'No, Abby. No goodbye, and he's just buggered off with Bruno. You know, we might have forgiven Dad for leaving if only he hadn't TAKEN THE DOG!'

Suddenly, a bibbing outside, a key scraping in the lock, a fusillade of barking. Dad followed Bruno in as the hound rushed through the house towards my sister.

'Hi, girls.'

Matilda, much relieved, sank back into her chair.

'Well, bugger me, Father. How far did you get up the M6 before you noticed your stowaway...?'