

False Reflection

By Lucy Edmiston

Greta lay completely still. Peeking over the lip of the quilt, her milk blue eyes scanned from one side of the bedroom to the other, slowly taking stock.

There were two doors, both shut. On the bedside table was a watch with a well-worn leather strap, and although it faced towards her, Greta could not read the time.

“Mum?” The word creaked from her mouth, as unrecognisable as the room.

Greta listened for a reply, or the comforting sounds that indicated the presence of her mother; the clatter of cups, the call of the kettle. There were none. Only the tick of minutes and a familiar echo from her stomach. She couldn't remember what she had eaten for dinner.

Hunger outweighed her uncertainty. Her mother would make her some tea and slice of toast, there might even be a smear of butter. Greta shifted to the edge of the bed, her body a song of complaints, and eventually made her way upright.

Unsure of what lay behind either door, Greta chose the one with the dressing gown to open. She listened first, then peeped out. There was a narrow corridor with a handrail running down either side.

“Mum?” Greta rasped again into the enduring stillness. She slowly shuffled down the hallway making use of the support, until the corridor opened out into a large and comfortable looking living room. There were a settee and two armchairs, luxurious with cushions, and photos of smiling children on the walls- in colour! And in the corner was a television- it looked quite different to the one she had seen in the newspaper though. The people who own this house must be very fancy, she thought. She didn't know anyone who owned a television!

Delighted and distracted, Greta stretched her fingers towards the sleek, black screen, but as she did, a sudden twitch of white fluttered to her right. The ghostly movement caused her to freeze, statue still, eyes down. She wasn't going to touch anything! Her heart raced with panic and she wished she had waited in bed for her mother.

Finding the courage to face the still spirit, Greta looked up. Looking back was a woman, her head haloed by an untidy bush of brittle grey hair. She stood delicate in her nightie, looking as lost as Greta was. She must have been the oldest person Greta had ever seen; her cheekbones jutted like ancient pyramids, her eyelids sagged revealing red-rimmed and watery beds, the milk blue irises half registering Greta as someone she knew.

Gently, Greta raised her hand and pressed it to the deeply lined palm of the woman opposite, both met on the cool, burnished surface between them.

“Have you seen my mum?” They asked with one hollow voice.