



The Last Pair of Ears

Mary F McDonough

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I listen, I hear:
I'm the last
pair of ears,
and sometimes
that's enough.

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Many poems in this collection have previously been published elsewhere. *Purple* appeared in *Keith Wright Memorial Pamphlet*, Feb 2011, *Apple Snow* was published as a poster for *Strathclyde Research Day*, Apr 2011, *Spawn* was in *Keith Wright Memorial Pamphlet*, Feb 2012, *Making the Bed* and *Leg Shaving in Octavius*, Jun 2012, *My Old Bag* in *Causeway / Cabshair* Dec 2012, *Parasite* in *Valve 3*, Nov 2013, *Nativity* and *Sated* in *Ecloga: Journal of Literature and the Arts*, 2014, and *Apple Snow* in *Flux*, 2014

Excerpts from *Small Stories*, *Spawn*, *Shaving & Other Lies*, *Hopscotch*, *Clock*, and *We Swim Out* also featured in an improvised album by Martyn Clark, *Hopscotch Requiem*, available to download at www.martynclark.com

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PERSONAL NOTE

The Last Pair of Ears is a collection of poems and short stories about seeing and hearing what we aren't supposed to notice. The two interlocking sets of poetry and short stories represent my exploration of the power of narrative to heal as well as to distort and influence. All of the stories, even those about my own life, have been influenced by my understanding of what it means to be a therapist.

The focus of this collection is on 'lost stories' that have been overlooked, suppressed, or forgotten. In large part, these stories reflect aspects of, and are consistent with 'female' experience. Such stories tend to be marked by flux and loss.

@maryfmcDonough

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Loss



SMALL STORIES

The stories are too big to lose, to ignore,
too small for you to notice.

They sit, here and there, dotted
around the landscape, fading from memory.

BULLET TRAIN TO BEDTIME

I waddle back and forth, dragging bags of clothes behind me into the kitchen. A winter's worth of attic dust is in these clothes. Dirt is the enemy, as far as late-pregnancy nesting is concerned.

I wanna wear dem. I doin' dat, Mama. With his brows scrunched together, two angry caterpillars, and his pink, raisin lips, he looks like me. He usually looks like his Dad; I wonder why it is only in anger that he resembles me.

“I know you do, honey, but you are getting too big. The Shinkansen 'jamas don't fit you any more. I'll put them away for your baby to wear some day.”

Jamas say 2 year boy. I 1. His logic is unassailable. He is threatening me with the Negotiator Finger. *I not yike-a dat baby wear my 'jamas. I take train 'jamas out that bag. Now.*

“You are almost two. You have lots of other 'jamas. These are going to be too tight, honey.”

He waves Totoro at me. Totoro is suddenly an authority figure, as is the man he has never met, who gave us Totoro and sent Shinkansen pajamas when Brendan was born.

The other pajamas don't have smiling Shinkansen on them. I wonder if outgrowing the bullet trains means growing up. Being too big for these 'jamas might mean that Brendan is too big to be my baby. He is 1 and three-quarters; the track from Shinkansen to adulthood to death seems suddenly short to me. My son is on a trajectory over which I have no

control. I can't protect him from mortality.

One 'yast' night is worth doing another load of laundry. I silently wedge him in to the dusty 'jamas, and the Shinkansen smile.

Brendan is heavy in my lap, what is left of it, abruptly asleep. We waddle together to his new big boy bed, in which he, Totoro, and the bullet trains look very small.

GAMES

Hopscotch,
cops and robbers,
ring around the rosies.

Dodge ball,
hide and seek,
among the dusty bluebells.

Games I forgot,
and people too:
now I'm old—
and so are you.



LEG-SHAVING AND OTHER LIES

For a year,
I begged my mother
to let me shave my legs.

“Everyone else is doing it.”

“You promised!”

“I’ll be careful.”

All lies.
More followed:
I didn’t tip over the edge of the tub
and into womanhood.

I was still twelve.

Blood ribboned
down my shin
as my brothers laughed.

At recess the next day,
I waited with the rest
against the bricks.

‘Choose me, me!’ I wanted to shout, but didn’t.
Not how the game was played.
My stomach traded places
with my pulse
as he walked over.

He saw the cut, and
left me, standing,
unpicked,
tart with my disappointment.

PETER'S LOST

When's he coming to take me home?
Can you see Peter?
Is Peter in the area?

There's no real food here. It's all
shite.
Ya cannae make me eat this. Or
that.
Where is he?

I am desperate for a piddle.
I need to wee right now!
I'm not a wee girl, but
I'm crying.
I'm not wee!
Why am I crying here?

Where is Peter?
Peter,
are you in the area?
Speak to me, Peter?

Where is Peter just now?
Is Peter here?
Is Peter in the area?

I'll have to die.
I'll just have to die.
Can anyone hear me?

SPAWN

You flop, breathless, gills gaping,
hatched
in a too-temporary desert puddle.

Frogs should know better.
I scoop you up,
and carry you inside,
sloshing,
unseen by adult eyes,
to the glass box
full of grass clippings and rocks.

I put my mouth against my side of the pane,
pressed open,
waiting.