'Lamb & Bear'


750 WORDS

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For Lamb
She became more and more withdrawn. She refused to get out of the chair and onto the bed. The nurses tried everything but she was too stubborn. She just sat in the chair, and wouldn't entertain even the slightest possibility of moving. Her leg ulcers had flared up again and were open wounds festering under the fluorescent light. She had been trying to write her autobiography. Her old desktop computer, which had little more than WordPad on it, was where she was busy typing away her life's story. In this way I guess she was willing herself to death. With each keystroke, she was a little bit closer to the end. Now she held a pen in her hand.

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We called her Lamb. Not because she was helpless or because somewhere along the line she became lost, but because that's just what our family does. Everyone in the family is given an animal equivalent, a sort of nickname. My grandfather’s is Bear. Lamb and Bear: it seems an unlikely combination, but they meant the world to each other and in a weird way it makes perfect sense to me. They came to Australia with nothing and created a life together.

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I didn't want to see her like that. I didn't want to remember her surrounded by noisy machines and paled by saline solution. I wanted to remember her wide-eyed and rosy-cheeked and surrounded by the entire family at the dinner table unwrapping presents in Lipari Street. At any family get-together where there were presents involved she'd end up wearing curling ribbon in her hair, sticky ribbon-bows as brooches. Wrapping paper was folded neatly into crowns that would be sent around the table for everyone.
When we were done she would fold up all the wrapping and put it in boxes and store it in the garage. I don’t remember ever asking why she kept the rubbish. We had just written her off as a hoarder.

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My uncle Mark had demanded that she listen to reason, but she insisted that she knew what she was doing. Even though her body had given up on her years earlier, in her own mind she was still of sound judgment. He yelled at her to get in the bed, and against the nurses continual requests she just sat there, in the chair, writing in her journals. But now the words on the pages had degraded into scribbles of graffiti blocking fragments of memories and other important things she'd written down, or had forgotten to.

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The nurses had told her that if she wasn't going to get into the bed, then she'd have to pack up her things and go home because they needed it for someone else. They basically had to force her into the bed so they could drain the excess fluids from her legs or else they’d have to be amputated. Her blood was being poisoned by the septicemia from her un-treated legs. They were thick and black. She was starting to drift in and out of consciousness. She'd wake up briefly, to jot a few more things down and to show us the semblance of a smile. It was weak, and she was fighting the temptation to close her eyes. She didn’t talk to anyone after they put her into bed. It only took a few hours for her to succumb. She closed her eyes again and that was it.

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When they cleared out her stuff, most of it went to the tip, and some of it was sold off cheaply at Blacktown markets by my scavenging aunties. They threw the computer out, gave away all her unfinished piano manuscripts, and as they got to the last of the boxes, they found the one with all the wrapping in it. Everything else was gone. All of the jewelry, all of the keepsakes, all of the heirlooms: gone. We don’t have much to remember her by, save our memories. That and every year at Christmas time, when my family gets together, we re-use the wrapping paper she collected for our presents. We add a few extra pieces to the collection and my mum parades through the house with curling ribbon in her hair, brooches on her shirt and she folds paper crowns for us to wear at the dinner table. It’s not the same, but it’s a nice tribute.