

STORIES

Story writing can be a useful part of the work that people do to further their personal growth. We print two examples. The first, by Fran Mosley, is about going on courses. The second is anonymous and is about virginity, power, personal invasion and 'crime'.

GOING ON A COURSE

by Fran Mosley

Starting therapy training a few weeks ago brought up terrifying feelings which I had last felt when I started University aged 17; I was reliving the helplessness and despair I had felt then, and couldn't shake them off. So I wrote down the story of those days, in order to get the feelings out of me and on to paper, where I could look at them. Having done this, I needed to exorcise them in some way, so I called on a creature within me who I first met at the AHP conference this year, in the various guises of Manta Ray, Tiger and Eagle. This time she was a Harpy. I rewrote the story, including her this time - and at the end of it I felt enormously relieved, and back on an even keel!

THE LITTLE GIRL AND THE HARPY

There is a little girl of 17, who has no mother. Instead she has a brother who torments her and a father whom she tries to protect, because that is what you have to do with fathers who can't quite cope with the world. (Also, so long as the father is kept whole, she can at least pretend that he is looking after her, and that everything is normal).

The little girl is going off to University. She is delivered to her digs by her father and brother in the family car, and then left, like a parcel at the left luggage office. They go off back to the house where they live - it isn't quite a home, but it is familiar and fairly safe. But she is left alone, friendless, to unpack in a room she is to share with a blonde girl called Caroline. They have been put in the same room, because they are both studying Chemistry. The blonde girl seems confident. She is pretty. She likes Chemistry, and in the next few weeks she gets up early, goes off to lectures, and becomes a part of the student throng. But the little girl doesn't. She doesn't like Chemistry, and doesn't understand it. She doesn't understand any of the lectures, even maths, though she used to like maths at school. The lecture halls are vast, and full of people all studying science - and not speaking to her. The labs are much bigger than the school ones, and there is nobody to keep an eye on her, and help her when she doesn't understand what she should be doing.

Slowly the little girl falls apart. She gets up in the mornings and goes to lectures, but she finds she can't stop crying. She walks about everywhere with tears in her

eyes, or streaming down her face. She slowly makes friends with some of the other girls in the lodging house, but they are all doing Arts subjects. They get up later, because their lectures are later. And when they talk about what they are learning the little girl listens enviously. They have to read novels, which she loves. They learn history, in a radical new way. They are given exciting new ideas to tussle with. She has only her incomprehensible science to tussle with - alone. So she continues to fall apart. And because she is used to being alone she doesn't ask for help.

But then she hears that other people sometimes have a bad time too, and they go to the University Health Centre and talk to the doctors there. So she makes an appointment and goes to see a doctor. But he isn't the good one who she has heard of, he is another one. He listens to her, and she cries, and she tells him about when her mother died, and about her life, and how hard she is finding it at University. He says she has serious problems, and needs to have psychotherapy, and she ought to take a year off university and have therapy instead, and then come back in a year's time to start again. (She is, after all, a year younger than most of the first-year students). At that, despair enters her heart. She can't possibly leave university; there's nowhere to go. She can't return to her father, who is glad to have got rid of her. And what would she live off without a grant? So she goes away, and decides to fight alone.

The little girl decides that she MUST stop studying science. At this point I think I should explain that she had never understood science even at school because she missed out on the first basic year, having been put into a class of children that were older than her. As a result of this she was frightened of failing O levels, worked harder at sciences than at the Arts she loved, and did better in them. She was then blackmailed by a vicious headmistress who wanted to boost the sciences in her school, into doing Science A levels. "Your Arts results are poor, and your sciences are alright. If you won't do Science A levels you must leave", and of course, because the little girl had to protect her father, not to be a nuisance, she capitulated. Later, when applying for university, going to read a Science subject seemed her only hope.

So the little girl decides to try and change to an Arts subject. She has three science A levels, and in 1968 it is unheard of to study Arts with science A levels. But as she sees it she has only two choices - to change to an Arts subject -ANY Arts subject - or give up, collapse, give in, be submerged and die. So she starts fighting. She goes to see everybody, lecturers, administrators, admissions tutors, day after day. Nobody will help her. It hasn't been done before. It can't be done. She is not suitable. Then a lifeline is thrown to her. She hears about somebody, a boy in her year, who hated his science studies and has persuaded the authorities to let him continue until the end of the year, then come back as a First year again to study an Arts subject. He has done what she wants to do! He has succeeded! So she starts the fight up again. Goes to see all the same people, but this time she can say "It IS possible. Look he has done it. You must let me, too". Eventually she wins. She has been subtle, and found out which sub-

ject nobody wants to do - it is Geography, in a particular department where nobody wants to study Geography. "That's what I want to study" she says. "I didn't even do Geography O level, but that IS what I want to study. Let me do it". And they do.

So she whiles away the rest of the year, and returns next September as an Arts student. She still has a bad time, because she has nowhere to live, and no-one to help her. But she eventually finds a flat, and she enjoys studying History and Philosophy (the general course they all do for two terms). In fact she falls in love with Philosophy, and changes once again to study that, eventually getting her degree in it.

This is NOT a happy ending, but it is happier than the beginning.

But now for the harpy, large, black, with huge powerful wings. I will tell the story again, and this time she will have a part to play.

Retell the Story

I'll start with the headmistress. I could actually start a lot earlier in the little girl's life, but in order to get the story written I shall start with the headmistress. It is the start of term after the little girl's O levels. She is 15. The scene is the school gym and the headmistress is just saying "If you won't agree to do Science A levels I'm afraid I can't have you here". But then a huge black Harpy swoops down out of the sky, through the open windows, and picks up the headmistress with its claws, and flies around the gym with her.

"Take back what you said" the Harpy hisses, and the headmistress is so frightened that she pisses on the floor, which makes all the little girls laugh at her. Then, trembling, she agrees to let the little girl study whatever she wants. So the little girl does Maths and History and English A levels, just as she wanted to do. Now it is two years later and we are at the lodging house as the little girl is dropped off by her father and brother on the first day of her university career. The little girl's family are a dead loss; there is little that the Harpy can do to make them behave better. But she can help and protect the little girl in her dealings with the rest of the world. For instance, she can frighten the owner of the lodging house into behaving better to her students - and this is what she does. The Harpy appears to the woman one night as she locks up (this is the week after she locked out some of the girls who were out after 11pm so they had to sleep at the Police station). The Harpy picks up the woman and flies around the Old Steine with her, drops her in the sea, and only picks her out when she promises to behave more kindly to the girls in her care.

At this same lodging house the Harpy has so arranged things that the little girl shares a room with a quiet but friendly and warm girl who becomes a close friend. The Harpy also protects the little girl every night by folding her wings about her as she sleeps, and only allowing sweet dreams to pass through.

The Harpy has a tough time with the university authorities. She is very busy chasing them about, bullying them, making them miserable and insecure, just

like the little girl was in the first story. All day, while the little girl is happily studying Philosophy and History with her new friends, the Harpy is busy tearing them with her strong wings, pecking at them with her beak. Eventually, for the sake of peace, they get together and decide to organise a more humane introductory year for science students, and to be more flexible about allowing students to change from Arts to sciences and vice versa.

Then the Harpy has to get onto the doctors. The most effective way to get them to change is to require them to undergo extensive therapy themselves. She gives this therapy herself, disguised as a woman psychotherapist. The doctors rediscover much of their own vulnerability and helplessness as children, and become much more sensitive to the distress of others.

That is nearly the end of the story. This one does have a happy ending because the Harpy continues to watch over the little girl, who is fast growing into a big girl. The Harpy continues to fight the people who threaten to make the little girl miserable, and to fold her wings about her as she sleeps, but as the years go by the Harpy has less and less to do, because the girl (now big) can look after herself. So she makes an arrangement with the girl's Guardian Angel, who promises to call her if any enemies ever threaten again, and goes off to find another motherless girl to protect.

Fran Mosley is an educational consultant. She is training at the Serpent Institute and Facilitates courses for the L.S.E. Humanistic Psychology Programme.



metanoia which means **change** or **transformation**, is an Institute with associated Organisations, which has been active in the field of individual, group and organisational change for many years. A full range of psychological services is provided from corporate, team and individual **assessment, counselling** and individual, family or group psychotherapy as well as **organisational development and consultation**. We also offer workshops such as **Health & Healing, Bereavement, Assertion Training, Communication Skills, Stress Management** (for individuals and public and private organisations) and **2/3-day Introductory Workshops in Transactional Analysis, Gestalt and Counselling**, as well as qualifying Diploma Courses in **Counselling, Psychotherapy, Supervision, Integrative and Organisational Training/Consultancy**.

For further information, please contact: Dr Petruska Clarkson
metanoia Psychotherapy Training Institute
13 North Common Road, London W5 2QB. Tel: 081 579 2505.