

Threes

Threes. Everything was in threes and she had become really quite bored by the lack of symmetry that two or four would have given her. Lack of symmetry also made her quite anxious, a symptom of her position on the spectrum as they liked to call it. Her position, she thought, ought to be perfectly in the centre and that made her anxious too. Neurodiversity could be a real challenge sometimes.

This whole outing was unsettling and the need to navigate these unfamiliar surroundings had set it off, the sense of confusion, frustration and anxiety. She had not been in the town before and had gotten lost around the narrow road which was labelled Lower Castle St. for some reason, even though the nice man who directed her to Baker Street had called it Angel Pitch. So she had found her way through the streets to the Trinity Centre. The first three of the day but by no means the last, as there was Trinity Street and Trinity Terrace as well as the Trinity Almshouses. At least there were more than three of those.

She had chosen one of the three doors in the Trinity Centre and tiptoed into the triangular room. It smelt odd, a bit fusty like warm wet dog. It had three rooms, of course. One was a kitchen where bowls of porridge were on the table, the next a snug with three chairs of different sizes and then a bedroom with three beds, also of different sizes. Shuddering, she wanted to run but this is where the note from her stepmother had said to come and she always did as she was told. Well, mostly. But threes, not at all comfortable with that.

Still, she had tried all the bowls of porridge and found only one to her liking, the others salty and hot. She had rearranged the chairs into a graduated set and then tried them out but broken one, so that was a two now. And she had

dragged all the beds into a more pleasing pattern but found only one to be sufficiently comfortable and somewhat soporific. Perhaps it was all a dream.

But if it was a dream, why was she now confronted by yet another three, bears this time and not at all happy ones.

And bears that spoke. That was shock enough but their first utterances were in unison so that was another anxious moment of threes.

“Who are you?” they chorused and before she could reply there was a gabble of three voices speaking over one another with porridge, chair and bed all being mentioned in a mixture of querulous fury and amazement.

Dumbly and quaking, she held out her stepmother’s note, the one that instructed her to present herself at the Trinity Centre at 12:30 pm, but with no further explanation. The largest bear took the note from her and, donning spectacles, read it aloud to the others. On completion, the three turned and looked at her again and, as one, asked ‘So?’.

‘Well, that’s why I’m here’ she murmured whilst knowing from their faces, well muzzles, that it made no sense to them, or to her for that matter.

‘But you’ve eaten my porridge and broken my chair and slept in my bed’ cried the smallest of the three.

‘Yes, and I’m very sorry but I was hungry and weary and anyway, it’s not my fault your chair is so fragile’ she said, more and more defiantly. ‘Do you know why I am here like my stepmother commanded?’

The three bears turned to one another in ursine confabulation before turning back to her, with the middle-sized one responding. ‘Does your stepmother love you, child?’

‘Well, no I don’t think so. In fact, I think I am just a burden to her as I behave strangely at times and have tantrums when I’m frustrated and can’t always find the right words to explain why I am upset and ...’.

‘Ah’, said the middle-sized bear, ‘Because sometimes people are sent here to be killed and eaten, you see’ and the girl could see her teeth gleaming as she spoke. The bears were standing in front of all the doors now, blocking her exits and she began to sob quietly.

‘But we don’t kill children’ said the largest bear, ‘Even if they do eat our porridge and break out chairs’.

‘And sleep in our beds’ piped up the smallest bear.

‘But we are hungry’ said the middle-sized bear and the girl began to shake. But the bear went on ‘So how about you become the fourth bear for today and we’ll all have lunch in the Grofield pub next door?’

And so three became four and she loved the symmetry of it all. Which is when she did awake from her dream.