

Extract from Escape

(Part of Magdalen's fairy story. She is the princess.)

The princess assumed that all fathers changed themselves into monsters. It was part of their being fathers. She was certain of that because it was through your father that you learnt what all other people did. You washed your hands before eating; you were polite; you did not interrupt; you were thoughtful and considerate; you finished your homework so that you, too, would be clever and admired some day out there in the big world. You did not question any of these ways of behaving or thinking because they were the right things to do, so you did not refuse when the monster-father asked you to do things you did not like. What he did was customary. All fathers did it, and you carried out what they commanded, no matter what it was.

However, in Gail's house the princess suspected that this did not happen. And finally, one night after the father had knocked on the door and whispered, 'You two there: happy dreams!' she took a deep breath and asked, 'Is that all?' 'All what?' was Gail's answer. The princess hesitated. She did not know how to go on. So she repeated, 'Is that all? Doesn't your father do anything else?' 'Like what?' 'I don't know. Like anything. Like coming in,' she was stammering, 'for a chat.' Gail was astounded. 'What? Now? You're joking! He's had enough of us by this time of night. Why? Does yours?' Already the princess was beginning to feel a new kind of misery creep through her. Bleakly she answered, 'Sometimes.' 'The only time Dad's set foot in this room was to tell me off for pulling that clothes rail down. Oh, I didn't think! It must be different when there's only you and your dad. Are you homesick? Do you miss him? I wasn't thinking, honestly I wasn't. But don't you fret. He'll be back soon.'

As she said this, Gail put a motherly arm round her shoulders and for a few moments the princess rested against her friend's chest. The comfort was given for the wrong reason but that was not why she finally drew away. Her assumption had been mistaken. She knew now why her king-monster called her Special. It meant that what was done happened only to her. Neither Delia nor Gail nor anyone was visited by a monster. And although the princess continued to play with them she did not permit any more hugging. Because she was different; she did not fit in.

Author's comments

I had been so angered and saddened by what abuse does to people that I had to put my feelings into a book. My first idea was a big picture book for children. For lots of reasons I rejected that but some of it remains in the fairy tale that Magdalen writes. It proved a satisfactory way of presenting a young woman's attempt to acknowledge the damage that has been done to her. If you read the book you will see that Magdalen

does not put her story down in a continuous narrative but in bits as she recalls how, as a child, she explained the monster's nocturnal visits, the eventual realisation of who this is, then her growing isolation; she describes the methods of her father's control and her self accusing disgust.

I am not particularly fond of literature that has an overt message but **Escape** has one and I make no apology for it.

Escape was translated and published in the Netherlands under the title, **Ontsnap**.

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