

GROWING UP BABY

by Lauren Foley

This bed is too soft. Boring, boring, boring, boring, bored. I used to have a bigger navy bed that lay almost on the floor. It had some wooden thing underneath like what the lorry driver uses to load up his truck. That bed was hard. I loved it. This bed is stupid. McStupid. It moves up and down like a seesaw. It has handles on the side so I don't fall out. Hah. I hate this bed. I want my old one back. That one came from Japanese World. I've no idea how it got to my old bedroom. Did it fly on the wooden thingymajig like how a magic carpet flies? Did it grow sticks and swim across the seas? Or did it get there in The Tardis? My Mammy says this new bed is brilliant. I think she's wrong. Only babies have bars on their beds. And I am not a baby. I'm always in this bed. I eat in here. Sleep in here. I even get washed in here. I don't go to the toilet. I have a stupid bag. It's the stupid McStupidest. One time it bursted and the smell was awful yucky. But sometimes when it's really full I'd like to burst it meself. Make a holy stink: Phhffttttt! Brrrrpppp! Hee hee! But I can't reach it. My arms don't always work. Phhhhhffftttttt! Brrrrrrppppp! Haha!

My eyes hurt because this bed isn't comfy. I don't sleep. Only little bits at a time. Television hurts my eyes even more, so I switch it off. I think TV's more pretend than most other things. I'd rather lie on my bumpy bed and watch the ceiling. My Mammy doesn't see how the plaster can be so interesting. But I'm not looking at the plaster. I try to find pictures in it. I see a half of a face, near the light shade, that looks like *The Little Prince*.

I want to, want to, want to go to the desert. I want. I want. I want. I bet it's mega hot there. Here it's hot, but my room's got air-con. I've heard about The Outback World—it's not very far away—but I can't leave this stupid bed. Not even to go to the *ospidéal*. Seriously. They come in and take me out in this bed and bring me in the nee naw to the *ospidéal*. I get to the ward and I don't even get out of me bed at all. At all. McStupid it is. Mega Mc-

Stupid. Hmmufft. I hate this bed. It pains me. Pains me arms and back and legs and bum-baleiro. Then Mammy puts like Sudocrem on me. And then that pains me. I didn't get hurted like this from the Japanese World bed. Japan's cool. They've even got samurais and ninjas. It's too too cool for school – twice as cool. Maybe I could go there, but I'd rather go to the desert. You can walk on top of the sand and maybe if you're really lucky you'll meet a snake. And you can be mates with the snake. Snake mates. I reckon that'd be ace. I think it'd be the best to have a bezzie snaky mate. I've no friends. *Nada. Niente. Zippo. Ceann ar bith.* Daddy says I'm his number one pal. His *numero uno*. But, he's my Da like. He's *stupid*. Your friends are in your class. But I can't go to school because of the bed. I wish they'd make a school I could go and play in. Or send someone here play with to me. I can't play sports. I can play cards on the iPad, or we could read books. Well, they could read to me. Maybe they'd like *The Little Prince* too. Ah, he's cool. He travelled around all the planets and had a fox friend and knew a snaky snake and a man who loved him. He's up in the stars laughing and he really knows that grown ups are McStupid. But he's cool; a bit of a whiner. But cool. Even he had more mates than me – McWhiner that he was. I can't be bothered whining. It makes Mammy cry and Daddy cranky.

So, I'm always looking at the worlds on the ceiling plaster. I can see three swans. One, in the corner, is cleaning its feathers and the other is stretching up big and tall, far away across from it. Another is only lazing about above the wardrobe. There's a Chinese dragon too and towards the door: a waterfall. I think it's sad that they don't talk to each other, it's because they're so far apart, but I talk to them. They've been on so many holidays before they came here to my ceiling plaster universe. Lucky them. The best thing is when I see something new. It's like a magic trick. In my worlds anything goes. If I can see it, I can believe it. Even with my eyes closed, anything anything goes. Then it's time for a party. Janet, my aunty, comes to my room when it's time for *phys-i-o-ther-a-py*.

I used to live in another world before we moved to this one. The other side of the Earth World. But Aunty Janet lives here and she can help me, and the *ospidéals* here are better than the *ospidéals* at home my Mammy says. She says so because here we've got *Med-i-care*. But at home, because Daddy had a good job, we had to pay through our noses. But she says through our *sróns*. She loves Irish words. She says them all the time. Sings them too, when I'm half asleep. But she's mega McStupid, because she just sings any word she thinks of like: *urlár, bainne, fuinneog, oráiste*. That's *floor, milk, window, orange*. I have a *cúpla focal* meself. Mammy tests me. We have our *scrúdús* on Fridays. Me Ma only sings Irish words. She must really like them. She sings them so special like. She says she may have to speak English words, but she'll never sing them. She can be McStupid like

Grandad about that. I think her singing's so good she should sing all the words in all the worlds. And her pal Simon Cowell off the X-Factor is English, and she likes him. She tells Da if he was to let himself go—whatever that means—she'd be off to marry Simon in a jiffy. But sure Simon wouldn't vote for her if she sang in Irish. Nobody foreign knows Irish! It's only for us like. Anyway, how'd she get to bootcamp singing about *fuinneogs*? Grown ups can be mega McStupid all day long.

We moved here to Camp-Bella-Town, as me Da calls it, two years ago. Mammy tells him he's racist against Italians when he says that. Daddy says it's her who's racist against Eye-talians because she says it with an 'eye' instead of the right way. He says she does that, because of some dead man called Mussy Leeney. She says she thinks his Ma dropped him on his head once too many times when he was a baby. He says she's anti-Brit and that's why she won't speak properly. She says he wasn't a racist himself till we moved here and he started saying Camp-Bella-Town. And then they do have a great laugh about it all – right when I think someone's going to start shouting. And then they do go on, the two of them, laughing and saying 'i' the Eye-rish way all night long. Grown ups are mad McStupid like that.

Campbelltown World is the nicest I've been to so far. I can see out of the window from my McStupid cot bed; I could in Ireland too. But it isn't always raining here. Janey Mack! In Ireland it rains EVERY day. But Campbelltown World is mega cool and you can see the bestest things out of the window. I've seen lots of birds. They come and sit on the fence. Some of them are every colour in the rainbow. They're called Rainbow Lorikeets, and are my favourite. I thought that all of the colourful birds were Rainbow Lorikeets, but then I found out that there are these other birds called Rosellas. Sometimes I was seeing Rosellas but I thought they were Rainbow Lorikeets. Duh! They are both types of parrot birds. Another time a woman down the road had a koala in her back garden because of a heatwave. She took it to the vet and it got drugged. She had it in a cage. And held it up outside my window so I could see it. That was great. I was happy. She looked sad. But maybe she was just hot. Or her arm got sore holding the cage up. The best time was when me Da brought a sick baby Rainbow Lorikeet into my bedroom. I screamed. It was the best thing ever, ever, ever. Then Mammy went mental-crazy. Then she was screaming at Daddy about The Germs. And Daddy said sure The Germans wouldn't bother his poor son, they're far too guilt-ridden for that. And Mammy laughed. Doubled over laughing. And I thought I knew what racist was from the news. But maybe I don't know what racist is. Sometimes in the grown up world being racist is funny. All other times it's the worst possible thing – ever. McStupido.

Daddy loves the Soccerroos. He says they remind him of the Irish team: always losing. Sometimes, in the middle of the night when Mammy's tired like a dog and I'm shaking, Daddy comes in and sits with me in his PJs. He says that I'm only consulting. Mammy says it's just a little fit, and that she's fit – to be tied. Then Daddy says: Boom! Boom! And he turns on the telly and puts on the football. I don't know how they're always playing a match. And he says this is our time and I'm the best and he tells me about the game and the players and the eejit referee. I think he likes to look more at the football. Because he doesn't look at me too much those times. I must look mad McStupid jumping about like that. Me Da says he's not a kangaroo and I'm not a joey. Then he says – but ya wallaby one. Maybe though I can always see him looking at me, even when he's not, out of the corner of his eye.

Sometimes Daddy has to stay awake all night because of me. All night. He must be mega tired when he goes to work on the 'nstruction site. And I don't know how he gets so mucky giving 'nstructions. Mammy says he's just a mucky puppy. Anyway, Daddy says it's all boys together, all girls together now. And Mammy has to mind the new *leanbh*. *Leanbh* is Irish for baby. I used to think that *bábóg* was Irish for baby. But it means doll. I think my Mammy uses *leanbh* wrong. Aunty Janet thinks so too. Granny and Grandad haven't met the new baby yet. So they might come out here to 'Stralia – maybe even to live. But then Grandad couldn't keep his stool in the pub because someone else would take it. And Granny couldn't go to the Bingo. And they'd have to leave all of their friends. Just because I need *Med-i-care*. And I have no friends of my own to share with them. So I think it's time for me to run on to another world.

If I could run. I'd run to The Outback World. It's closer than Africa World and it has snakes. And I'd be too tired from all the running. So I wouldn't be able to carry all the water I'd need. But I'd still go on. And I wouldn't be able to come back home. But Mammy and Daddy have their new little *leanbh* now and they're always at home taking care of me. And maybe they'd come to The Outback World looking for me. They could have a holiday. They are always looking like they could do with a rest. And I'm tired and sore with pains from this bed. And snakes only bite once. And it wouldn't hurt. And I could make friends with a Martian or an Ewok or a Transformer and that'd be nice. To have a friend who isn't a grown up. And I could find a flower to love. And she'd be beautiful like Aunty Janet. And I'd love to kiss her. Hee hee! And love her. Shhhh. And keep her safe from anything that might bite her—like a sheep—or else she'd be a goner. And yeah. I'd be laughing. Laughing, laughing. And Mammy and Daddy would be sad, a little. But Aunty Janet knows all about

the stars laughing, because Aunty Janet reads me *The Little Prince* after *phys-i-o-ther-apy*, and she could tell them and then they'd be happy.

Once Mammy read it to me—once—and said it was the most stupidest McStupid book she'd ever had the misfortune to read and she was pure mad at Granny for sending it to me, and she'd be telling Granny on Skype next time she was on to her. Seriously. Grown ups know nothing.

Mammy says I'll get out of this smelly auld bed when I'm older. I'll be bigger and stronger. But my feet almost touch the end now. I don't think she's right. I'm always here. In this bed. I never leave. And even though I grow taller and love my family the most I can. I am always like a baby in a cot, looking out at my whole worlds and seeing what they're missing.

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