

THE MANY ASPECTS OF BED

By Tamaso Lonsdale

Bed! What image does the word conjure up? Comfort? Warmth? Rest? Loneliness? Sex? Punishment? Sickness? Pain? Isolation? Territory? Safety? Possession? Retreat? Emptiness?

Bed! Most of us are born there and will die there, but what of in between? At birth we are dragged from the safe, warm darkness of the womb into unknown dangerous cold and harsh light. All our life we ache to return to the womb but the nearest we find is – bed.

Bed! What comfort after a long hard day of physical toil when every muscle and joint aches with weariness. What bliss to snuggle down in the soft warmth and allow sweet gentle sleep to work its magic.

Bed! The territory of imagination. Children's beds become adventure-lands where the smallest child can be a hero and fairies turn wishes into horses. What wonderful plans we can make in bed! What marvellous stories write, poems compose, get-rich-quick schemes devise, houses build and lovers attract. It all seems so easy in bed!

"Go to your bed!" Those dreaded words of childhood doomed us to isolation for some slight misdemeanor, maybe the fault of one of our siblings or playmates but for which we were unjustly punished. Furious and frustrated we listened to the other kids having a good time, and vowed to get even with the one whose fault it was.

Did you ever wake in the night to the sounds of an adult party? Hearing the laughter, talk, clinking of glasses, music and everyone happy? Dared you creep across the room and peep around the door only to be spotted by some adult who sent you scurrying back to bed, lonely and miserable, hearing their laughter, knowing it was directed at you?

Bed! The lonely emptiness after the loss of a lover. You rouse from fitful sleep and reach out in the darkness for the warmth of a body no longer there; grope blindly for a hand that no longer squeezes yours in silent tribute of love and reassurance. Bereft fear brings tears of self-pity and you long for the time when it was good between you.

Bed! The place of retreat when the world is against you; too many jobs to do; too many people needing you; too many appointments; too much shopping; too many nappies to wash; too much noise around you. Your retreat? Bed! Where else? It might take a headache or a dose of the flu to get you there but to bed you go. You may protest that you can't bear staying in bed but how

wonderful to know that now "they" will leave you alone for a while. "They" might even give you a little attention.

Bed! Your very own territory. No matter what your living situation, what loss of possessions you have suffered, what indignities life has thrown at you, the bed you are in, even just for one night, is your own private sanctuary, inviolable. Nobody comes into it except by specific invitation. Whether staying in a hotel, a motel or sharing a room in a dormitory, hostel or hospital, that bed is yours - the one little spot in the whole world that you can call your own for a few hours. Tomorrow it might belong to somebody else but tonight it is yours, your one piece of privacy.

Bed! What if you can't sleep? You toss and turn; punch the pillow; push off the bedclothes; curl up in a ball; stretch out on your stomach; swat the mosquitoes; startle at a scurrying mouse in the ceiling. Bed becomes your foe, determined to keep you awake when you are desperate to sleep

The holiday bed! You can lie around all day reading your favourite novel and pigging out on your favourite food. You wake in the morning with the delicious feeling that you don't have to get up yet. You can stay there as long as you like - unless, of course, a loved one is demanding that you get out of bed immediately and go for a walk to watch the sunrise.

Bed! The word has many connotations. We plant flowers in a garden bed. Nurseries sell bedding begonias (doesn't 'bedding' mean having sex?). A happy life is a bed of roses (Don't roses come equipped with thorns?). The bottom of the ocean or a river is a bed (but don't try to sleep there). The foundation of a road or a railway is also a bed (or there either).

Bed! Throughout life it has many implications for us, happy and sad. Towards the end, it becomes the bed of the dying and finally the deathbed. Of all aspects of bed, that of the dying must surely be the most pitiful. The bed of a terminally ill patient or a demented ancient soul is rarely a happy one. To sit beside a loved one and watch them slowly slipping away is always difficult. There is little real communication. You talk about the weather, mutual friends, acquaintances, things you have bought, places you have been, anything but the one thing you're too scared to mention and they're too scared to hear. Bed has become for them their only refuge, solace, comfort, their last retreat and their final prison.

Bed! For me it is the everyday luxury. Each night as I slide between the sheets I breathe a sigh of thanks to whatever Providence has decreed that I may rest another night in warmth and comfort. Not for me the park bench with newspaper blanket, the cold comfort of a shop doorway, the flea-ridden filth of a squat in the slums, or even the crisp, clean uniformity of a nursing home - I have my own bed.

And so saying, I think it's time I went there. Goodnight.

Bio

Tamaso has been writing most of her life. She was first published at the age of nine in the Sunbeams children's section of the Sydney Sun and also read her stories on 2GB and 2SM radio stations' children's programs.

She is the author of nine teenage novelettes for 'reluctant readers', four books on Australian birds, several published short stories and poems and has self-published one book Skye's the Limit, a story about a young girl's fight to save a rainforest.

She has recently completed the third novel in trilogy form. The first book, Brothers? Uncles! Sister? Aunt! was published in 2002. The second book The Missus was published in 2010 and the third Beyond Darkness in 2012.

Also in 2012, a book of short stories Out of My Mind was published.

Tamaso has lived in Nimbin northern NSW for twenty years, during which time she has been a volunteer worker at Nimbin News Magazine and presented a Writers' Program on NIM-FM. Community radio. She now edits the literary magazine Beyond the Rainbow.