Male dramatic

Safe from Duncan Sarkies’ *Stray Thoughts and Nosebleeds*

Safe is an obsessive-compulsive boy who directly addresses the audience.

SAFE: If you step on a crack your mother will die, so don’t step, don’t step, don’t step – you stepped on a crack with the toe of your right foot so now you must step on the next one with the heel of your left – which you do, that’s good, now it’s all better.

If you step in a shadow you’ll catch fire, walk around a lamppost carefully, here comes a car so you’ll have to jump – you jump and land safely out of shadow, but here’s another so you jump and land safely again, but here’s a bus, a double-decker bus, so you jump as high as you can, you catch a tree and hang there, you let yourself down when the bus has gone past. Well done, no catching fire today.

Before you can flush the loo you must say, ‘Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are.’ If you don’t say this you will go to hell. You must not think the next verse or – you must not think the next verse or else – don’t think the next ‘Up above the world so high’ verse you idiot, you thought the next verse and now you’re going to hell unless you sing that line out loud three times backwards – here goes: ‘high so world the above Up’, ‘high so world the above Up’, ‘high so world the above Up’ – there, all better; don’t think ‘Like a diamond in the
sky’ – too late, finish the last verse and reverse the whole song: ‘Twinkle twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are, are you what wonder I How, star little twinkle Twinkle, sky the in diamond a Like, high so world the above Up, are you what wonder I How, star little twinkle Twinkle.’ There, that’s better, flush the loo, the loo is flushed so you can count to seventeen – ‘1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17’ – and leave the room, phew, deep breaths, double phew, oops, you blinked so you have to blink again to make it even – that’s better, itchy eye, itchy eye, have to scratch your left eye, so even it up by scratching with your right hand – good, but your nose is itchy, don’t touch your nose, don’t touch – can’t think until I’ve touched my nose – don’t touch – can’t think until I’ve done it – then touch your nose three times with each hand: left right left right left right, all the lefts were first and all the rights were second – need to even it up, so touch again: right left right left right left – brain won’t stop, need fresh air, need to stop thinking, open the door, go outside and close the door but you stood on the mat with half of your foot, so stand with half your other foot – oops you overbalanced and stepped with your left foot, so one hop with the right evens it up – good, and breathe easy, breathe easy, there’s Mum, tell her you’re not feeling well, say ‘help’ to Mum, go to the bathroom with Mum, Mum wets the face-cloth squeeze the face-cloth tight because the water makes it all better, water makes it all better, water makes the thoughts go away and breathe easy, breathe easy, breathe easy because no one’s gonna hurt you now …

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Have to draw a square and have to make it perfect, out with the ruler out with the protractor – line there, dot there, ninety degrees, perfect. Line there, dot there, ninety degrees, perfect. Line there, dot there, ninety degrees, perfect. Line, dot, ninety degrees, line, dot, ninety degrees. Check square, oh no, square fails to check because of eighty-nine degree line, rub it all out, need to reverse the last two minutes so rub harder, it’s no good, no good, screw up paper, take paper to rubbish bin, place it at the bottom of the rubbish bin, remember to take out every single bit of rubbish carefully so that it can be put back in exactly the same order. From left to right in a straight line on the floor we have:

Banana peel
Piece of toast
Drawing pin
Rolled-up piece of paper
Tin can lid (sticky side up)
Onion peel
Empty box of mixed herbs
Coca-cola bottle top
Screwed up Lotto ticket
Used cotton bud #1
Drawing pin
Broken glass in newspaper
Stale potato chips
Blonde hair, and
Used cotton bud #2
Put in Rolled-up piece of paper #2 with bad square – naughty square, naughty square, eighty-nine degrees how could I be such an idiot – put it at bottom of newspaper, then:
Used cotton bud #2
Blonde hair
Stale potato chips
Broken glass in newspaper –
Oh no! Newspaper slips! Glass falls out! Have to rearrange the glass properly – which bit goes where, must get it right or you will go to prison, must get it right, which bit goes where – here’s Mum, Mum asks what you are doing. ‘I’m putting the rubbish away.’ She goes to put it away, you scream, ‘No!’ She goes to put it away, you scream, ‘I need to put it in order.’ She says, ‘Nonsense’, and she goes to pick it up. ‘No!’ you say. She tries to pick it up but you push her away, she picks it up anyway, she’s got the order all wrong, the order’s all wrong, you scream, ‘I’m going to prison!’ You scream, ‘I’m going to prison! I’m going to prison!’ You grab the rubbish bin and empty it out again, sort the rubbish, have to get the order right, Mum grabs rubbish, any rubbish, scrambled order, you scream, ‘Stop it!’ Mum is putting rubbish back in the rubbish bin. ‘Stop it!’ You hit her, Mum’s going red, Mum says, Go to your room!, you yell ‘I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I HATE YOU!’ you pull rubbish out, Mum cleans up glass, the order’s all wrong. You will go to prison, ‘STOP IT!!’ She’s cleaning it up any order, the glass isn’t right, you grab a piece of glass and stick it in her leg, Mum screams, you say, ‘Sorry Mum sorry Mum.’ Mum grabs face-cloth, Mum wets face-cloth – put your hands in the
face-cloth, breathe easy, hands in face-clothe, water makes thoughts go away, water makes it all go away, water makes the world go round, the world go round, the world go round, water makes the world go round it makes the world go round …

In hospital with Mum because she’s got glass in her leg but the doctor says she’s okay, she says, ‘It’s not your fault. You can’t help the way you are’, and Mum is patting you head, saying, ‘You’re a good boy’, ‘My little prince, good little boy’, and you feel okay because both your hands are in a glass of water, and God promises as long as your hands stay in water you’ll be okay. God will look after you as long as your hands are in water, but you can’t sleep with your hands in a glass of water so Mum lets you sleep with the wet face-cloth, she says, ‘Sweet dreams’, you close your eyes and think of nice things like fish and candy floss and seashells and smurfs and belly buttons and chocolate and The Monster At The End Of This Book and the girl who lives down the road and double-decker buses and rainbows and cotton wool and knucklebones and bouncing balls and spinning tops and helicopters and Mum and Dad and Jesus and God and Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Give us this day our daily bread, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, Forever and ever, Amen.

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Sleep tight. Don’t let the bed bugs bite.
God will keep you safe tonight.

Commentary

Duncan Sarkies’ *Stray Thoughts and Nosebleeds* is the title of his first book of short stories, which won the Hubert Church New Zealand Society of Authors Best First Book award at the 2000 Montana New Zealand Book Awards.

Later, Sarkies and collaborator Matt Grace created *Wild Man Eyes*, which fused 400 slide images with stories from the book. It performed and toured as a solo show with Sarkies playing all the characters. *Wild Man Eyes* went on to win the Spoken Word and Flying Solo awards at the 2002 Wellington Fringe Festival.

Reviewing the original short stories, Chris Knox wrote that, “Sarkies likes to show the ways in which all of us are, if not quite mad, then at least partly unhinged …”

www.wildmaneyes.co.nz
www.playmarket.org.nz