



**Excerpt: God in a Butcher's Shop**

by **Nazish Khan-Lane**

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Mrs Carmen was my art teacher from Year Three through to Year Five. She was a giant, golden lion of a woman with blonde hair that covered her arms and legs and glowed orange when it caught the sun. She wore bold statement jewellery that I learned later was called Aztec. Mrs Carmen gave me the gift of freedom without realising it, giving my coping mechanism an understanding and a context. I hung on to her every word, a beggar fixated on a silver stream of coins gushing from the mouth of a gambling machine.

'Personification' she explained in her soothing, deep sing-song voice, 'is when human feelings or characteristics are given to non-human things. Like objects, or the weather. So, don't think it is silly to put hands on buildings or draw mouths on fruit.'

I drew tears on an onion which made her laugh but made Lisa Cutler call me the Teacher's Pet. I hated Lisa Cutler.

Mrs Carmen gave me permission to set myself free of people. I was in good company. I was not alone. John Keats' autumn and sun discussed the handover of seasons like effective co-parents dealing with shifts. William Wordsworth's clouds were lonely, forever wandering, forever confusing school children. Lightning bolts became hip thrusting disco dancers across the sky. Food called out your name, stairs complained, chairs groaned,

flowers blushed as they shed petals. Clothes were on their best behaviour when wardrobes were opened, eager to be chosen first for your team, keen to be on your side. They did not judge you, think you smelt funny or foreign. Nor did they hold their nose as you walked past in P.E. or make fun of your colour, your hair, your shape....

My new shoes always went in between two pairs of my old ones. That way they could talk and get to know each other and learn early on that tiptoeing was my favourite kind of walking in the house. I liked to move silently and noiselessly.

I was the conductor of my everyday instruments. My shoes, my bed, my clothes all spoke to each other about my welfare, discussed me when I was at school. I commanded my bed, like a sentinel soldier, to guard the soiled wet sheets that I had scrunched up under it: 'Pretend to be a mummy kangaroo and hide them in your pouch!' and I warned the sheets that, whatever happened, they must not let Gita find them until I could put them into the washing machine on her next blue day.

A couple of times they had been removed, washed and put back on the bed without a word. I did tell bed off for not being a better hider and admonished sheets for getting caught.

Sometimes I thought I could hear Gita standing outside my room listening to me orchestrating my instructions, unifying the performers, my band. I would stand motionless, my arms in mid-command, waiting for an ambush, wishing for an ambush. Nothing ever happened.