

Ten Books That Have Stuck with Me Off the Top of My Head as I Make Them Up, #1

by Dan Kelly

Teddy's Skin by Margaret Wise Brown—The peculiar recurrence of furry animals and fur-lined rooms in Brown's work becomes apparent in this little-known and strangely horrifying entry in the author's whimsical oeuvre. Uncommonly, Brown is a character in her own children's book, having been made by the Color Kittens when they mixed together “all the colors of the world rejected by God.” The Brown character is locked in a room with only two chairs. She sits in one, her childhood bear in the other, mute but obviously too, too alive. It is unclear how long she's been in the room, or if the room exists. An example of a passage from the book:

“Miss Brown had spent the morning (was it just this morning? Or another?) purchasing parsnips and leafy green vegetables from the local grocers, when she was overcome by a wave of nausea. The world went black and she awoke in a windowless, doorless room. The farthest wall wavered in her sight until she approached it, at which time its infinitude coalesced into a blank, bleak solidity. She imagined she heard a duck kicking at the wall outside, cursing her with quacks and heaving small pebbles at the house for spite.

‘Goodnight, room,’ said Miss Brown.

‘Goodbye, Margaret,’ it replied in her father's voice. She fell to the floor, chattering, and counted the seven shiny brass buttons on her jacket.”

Throughout the book, Brown is taunted by her beloved Little Fur

Family, who appear through orifice-like openings in the very air, demanding that she explain what the fuck they're supposed to be, and why the fur son found an even smaller fur-being living in the ground, before snapping shut with disgusting liquid sounds. "I don't know! I don't know!" sobs Brown. At that moment, Scuppers the Sailor Dog appears in his yellow rain slicker and hat with a large baling hook. He swings at her, but vanishes before connecting, representing her deceased mother's distant personality.

Eventually running out of parsnips and leafy green vegetable, hunger and cold gnaw at Brown. She looks to her bear who would surely provide SOME sustenance and warmth, but at the cost of removing her fondest memories, and perhaps her sanity. The illustrations by Garth Williams are soft and edgeless yet filled with Much-like anxiety. Here is a man tired of drawing cute fluffy animals and filled with a desire to see the world melt and burn, as hinted at by the cover of Wise's other collaboration with Williams' *Fox Eyes*.

The book ends with Brown eying Teddy over her shoulder, fondling a Opinel knife left behind by Mister Dog/Crispin's Crispian after he appeared in the form of a fur tornado and dared her to finally "belong to herself...or belong nowhere." Brown weighs the possibilities in her mind and the knife in her hand, but the final page shows only a wordless illustration of a crib filled with flaming autumn leaves. What it means is left to the reader's imagination, but it probably has something to do with fucking.

