

Missy

by Tania Hershman

If I had a daughter, this is how it would be. It would be all, *Stand up straight, missy, shoulders back, no slouching*, and she'd be sulky, sullen, pouting, wilful, and I'd see in her eyes, which would be my eyes, that she was starting to hate me, and I'd pour it on thicker. *Smile for the camera, you stupid girl*, I'd be, and, *the lens won't crack, it's seen faces like yours before*. And she'd harbour murderous thoughts inside her little head, shaped like my head, and she'd let her hair, my hair, grow long and unbrushed, and I'd take her and shake her and tell her she'd never amount to anything and she'd hold back from crying, I'd see it in her eyes, my eyes, and I'd see the hate and I'd keep on and on until she left me. On the day she left, I'd be *Fine, then, go out into the world, let's see what you make of yourself, missy, let's see how well you do*, and she'd be sulky, sullen, pouting, wilful, but taller, taller than me, with my eyes, and my hair, and my head-shape, and she'd go, she'd take her things, stuffed into my old suitcase, and I'd watch her back as she walked away without turning round. Then I'd be, *That's right, missy, you go off and you don't think of me*, only I'd whisper this to myself, and *You live your life the way you want to, not the way I want you to. You be free*, and I'd go back into the house, sit on my sofa, sit quietly, and know I'd done what I needed to do.

