

What qualifies as 'good'? Does the unquestioning acceptance of a father's abuse towards one's sister, which vanishes from one's memory, count? While our 'moral science tutored' morality would let out a vehement 'no', Sian Hughes' novel walks down the grey path to reflect on how 'moral' truth imposed by moral science is only a form of coercion culture.

The novel with a sense of humour that borders on discomfort charts the journey of Steffie as she tries to uncover many 'truths'. At the beginning is the death of Stan, the father, which cracks open memories that Steffie never realised even existed — memories of her childhood spent with her sister, Caroline. Spiralling through confusions as to whether Caroline was real, Steffie realises that her memory has been bleached clean of most of their shared childhood, akin to the clothes she scrubs in the laundry at work. In a working-class colony in

Crooked lines

NO SUCH THING AS MONDAY

By Sian Hughes,
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Birmingham, the two sisters grew up in a house full of hidden places for stash and secrets. The mother ironed all day, saving every penny she could from the father who squandered life and money on clubs and dog fights and returned home to stifle them with violence. Steffie, however, only remembers a loving father who gave her every privilege, while she recalls, in snippets, how Caroline lived on the darker side of the room, went hungry often, or was kicked by Stan as Steffie closed the door on her because there were things that one should not know — "I never saw her, and that didn't mean anything." This 'unnoticing' was a normal way of ignoring uncomfortable truths



because "there was no such thing as Monday". Hence she remained her father's child, taking care of him until his death even though he abandoned her, coerced money out of her, and showed no remorse.

Ignoring these crooked edges landed her in a topsy-turvy adulthood wherein she reached the upper limits of chaos — her newborn daughter was up for adoption. She could no longer ignore what she

did to her daughter and sister. She scrubbed harder, as if perfecting things outside would straighten the creases within. Unsure of whether she would find Caroline, she takes the train to Durham, only to realise that she could not wait until Thursday to meet her. But Caroline finds Steffie, and gives her hope, like she used to when she would pass small cloth mice through the slit of the board that divided their room. Steffie returned home realising that despite the darkness, Caroline has chosen to be good and resilient. Her mother and sister had done it; now it was her turn. She chooses to return to Baby, the dog, Katherine, the elderly neighbour, and her rented home, intending to be nurturing despite troubles.

In a prose that at times keeps you on the edge and, at other times, bores you, much like life itself, Hughes shows that there is no method to being good because after all, no one is sorted.

Priyanka Chatterjee