

Dr CATHY KEZELMAN

innocence revisited

*a tale in parts*

*a memoir*

*'This book is a sensitive and detailed account of one woman's struggle to overcome the effects of severe childhood trauma. As a professor of child development I am all too aware of the importance of nurture and care in the early years and the long-term disastrous effects of abuse. Cathy's book highlights some of the creative ways in which child victims cope with horrendous experiences. It shows the typical refusal of the mother to believe and protect her child and stop the abuse. It shows how hard it can be for adult survivors to live comfortably in loving sexual relationships and the strain this imposes on partners and family members. When children are not supported, they may push their traumatic experiences to a corner of the memory where they remain until a trigger leads to their return.*

*Cathy's capacity to dissociate as a child helped to save her and her ability to repress all memory of her abuse allowed her to function to some extent. But still, she knew that something was wrong. Her survival as a child and again as an adult coming to terms with her trauma is a testament to human resilience. Child sex abuse is known to be one of the greatest contributors to later mental illness, substance abuse, self harm and suicide. I hope her story will encourage others to create a safer and more caring world for children.'*

**Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO** - Emeritus Professor of Child Development - University of South Australia, child protection expert, recipient of the inaugural Australian Humanitarian Award, Senior Australian of the Year in 2001.

Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs is perhaps Australia's best-known expert on child protection. Through her roles as child protection professional, educator, author, scholar and ambassador she has worked ceaselessly and passionately towards her vision to provide a safer and more caring world for children. Freda spent 9 years as a consultant to Save the Children's international programs, 6 years as consultant to DVA on veterans' children's issues and has been an adviser to the New Zealand Police and Ministry of Education, and the Government of Fiji, Hong Kong and South Africa on child protection issues.

She is Foundation Dean of the De Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies, Professor of Childhood Development at the University of South Australia, recipient of the inaugural Australian Humanitarian Award, ANZAC Fellowship Award, the Jean Denton Memorial Fellowship, the Creswick Fellowship Award, two university Chancellors' community service awards, an Hon PhD from the University of Sheffield (UK 2008) and was Senior Australian of the Year in 2001. In the 2005 Queens Birthday Honours, Professor Freda Briggs received an Officer (AO) in the General Division Award for service to raising community and professional awareness of child abuse and neglect, and as advocate for effective child safety education programs. Freda is the author of 16 books and since the age of 60, has published a book a year and continues to publish extensively in international journals.

*'This book, about the search for rebuilding from the ashes of abuse, is written with integrity and honesty. I found many sections confronting and wanted to reach out to that little trapped girl. Cathy's strength in recreating a life, family and finding herself is remarkable and courageous.'*

*This is an important testament to survivors of child abuse. Irrespective of background, a child's world is only safe, when the adult carer cares, loves and protects. It shows that we need to protect our children, so they don't carry the burdens into adult years and life.'*

**Susanne Gervay** - M.Ed (UNSW), Dip Ed, M.A. (UTS), BA (UniSyd)

A specialist in child growth & development and an award winning children's and young adult author. Awarded Lady Cutter Award for Services to Children's Literature and Professional Achievement Award (UTS) for Writing. Her books are widely endorsed by organisations that protect children such as the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, Room to Read, Life Education Australia, The Children's Hospital Westmead.

innocence revisited

*To a family of hope, special friends,  
and the therapist who helped me reclaim my life.*

A note from the author

All names in this book have been changed, with the exception of my husband's (Dan), my niece's (Angela), and my own (Cathy).

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Innocence Revisited: A Tale in Parts.

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departing

# chapter 1

The Gap and the cliffs around it are picturesque. Copses of regenerated bush and a vast ocean cut a breathtaking vista to the east while, across the road, a park falls gently down to the harbour foreshores. Some days I'd claim my patch of grass in the park on the Western side, a patch removed from the main drag of strolling crowds.

I would position myself alone with my thoughts, roll onto my back and stare into the majestic canopy of the century old Moreton Bay Figs above. Rosellas and parakeets would flutter overhead, flashing rainbows of hope against evolving skies. Sometimes I would venture to the water's edge and sit on a bench watching children frolicking in the sand - pictures of innocence - with molten chocolate ice cream dripping onto their bellies.

On bad days, I would mount the steps on the ocean side, clamber onto the platform overlooking the cliff and linger there, pondering my demise. Although there is one spot known as The Gap, the surrounding area boasts several contenders, all of which I considered with great interest. I eventually chose one. Mine was on top of the hill, off the path and hidden away from twittering tourists sporting cameras and expressions of delight. I would disappear into the tangle of shrubs and salt-encrusted bushes that cowed from the prevailing winds, and stop dead next to the flimsy wooden fence with its wire lifting off; my spot.

I would spend hours pressed against the fence, studying the moods of the sea and the rocks below, the trajectory of my fall, visualising my end. When the ocean glistened on a still sunny day, the waves would tumble over one another, like young children at play. But as clouds of steel collected in the sky above 'my spot' they would transform my sea into a cesspool of despair. The wind would force the breakers to crash against the rocks below, pounding and exploding them, shooting spray and foam high into the air, soaking the path and the people lining it hundreds of metres above.

I imagined climbing through the fence, teetering on the edge and pushing off. A little soil would come loose, perhaps a few stones. Then I would plummet three, maybe four hundred metres and land with a thud onto

the rocks below. Shattered senseless, the sea would gather me up and embrace my pain - an aquatic mother tending my wounds at long last.

One desolate Wednesday evening at dusk I strode to my spot, resolute. Trembling, with my knees pressed hard against the rusty wire of the white painted fence, images of my family paraded before my eyes. I reached inside my handbag and rummaged through tissues, biros and the clink of keys for my wallet. Sequestered behind a flimsy plastic flap inside my wallet was a set of pint-sized photos; one of each of the children I had cared for, including one of my niece Angie, taken a year before she died. I slid Angie's photo out first and remembered.

I had seen Angie lying in the bottom of her rosewood coffin on the night before she was cremated. I'd bent forward to kiss her; I always kissed Angie when I saw her, but this time as soon as my lips touched her cheek I shuddered and recoiled. The icy chill of death had crept in and snatched my Angie away when I wasn't watching.

Standing on my spot I envisaged my body laid out in a dank wooden box as my children bent forward for their farewell kiss. 'Stop, don't touch me!' I screamed as a seagull screeched in the buffeting sky above, swooped down, then back up and away.

After Angie died I flew to the country town where my brother, Simon, and his partner lived. It was a horrid week; my brother had lost his only child. There was no consolation in her having enjoyed a long and successful life, nor had she even had a short joyful one. Just eighteen months before she'd died, Angie had lost her mother to cancer and soon after that had been ostracised by her mother's family. Ironically, the trip which killed Angie was the first occasion on which she was to see her mother's family for over a year.

Angie had indeed experienced more than her fair share of pain. An only child, she'd suffered alone; her parent's devotion to 'The Orange People' and after that her parents' separation, divorce and their bitter custody battles that ensued. The tragedy of Angie's life made losing her even more painful. My brother had adored and cared for her as best he knew how and was distraught. There was no consoling him. During the week a few of his friends dropped in. Some of those visits brought temporary relief but the moment they left, we were confronted by a loss too cruel to comprehend.

It took several days for the coroner to release Angie's body; she had died in an accident, but he had to be sure nothing suspicious had taken place. Unlike most eighteen year olds Angie had thought about her death. In fact she had visited a clairvoyant in the weeks before she died and the clairvoyant had predicted that Angie would die young and that she'd die in a car accident. Angie had left instructions; she wanted to be cremated.

We'd gone to see her body the night before the funeral. She'd looked weird nestled in a tangle of white silk, dressed up in her 'formal' dress; a brown velvet gown, with a white crocheted vest over the bodice. A lively, vibrant Angie had shown off the dress in her year ten formal photos only a year earlier. Angie was not glowing in her coffin. Her face was drained of colour and her cheeks were collapsed, like deflated balloons. It was the lifelessness of her eyes that had shocked me the most. The bright eyes of youth had glazed over and retreated into their sockets; their work on earth was finished. I remember the bruise on Angie's forehead, a little raised and slightly discoloured. It hadn't seemed nasty enough to have made her die.

How do you say goodbye to one so young and make it 'okay'? Or make sense of a funeral full of youngsters who best belong at the beach? Or of a wake at which a series of surrogate mothers mourned a child whose biological mother had passed away?

And so we trudged through the sand dunes of a windswept beach in Northern NSW, a curious procession of silent mourners, each carrying a few flowers with which to make our personal farewells. I ventured up to the water's edge and stood watching the waves lapping at my feet, pondered and cried, kissed each flower and sent it on its way to find Angie. Then I looked up to see my brother had swum way too far out, so far out that I feared that he might never return. I watched anxiously until he had launched his flowers and waited until he emerged, sodden and spent, from a sea awash with colour.

It was a week during which each night was black, sleepless and silent. And each day black, aimless and silent. Save the ticking clock, the wretched grandfather clock that marked every second of the week of Angie's passing.

After a week of bitter sweet rituals, I returned to my daily existence in Sydney. Put my head down and tried to move on with my life. But the emptiness I felt when Angie died continued to grow; that emptiness had awakened a feeling within me. Seeing her body had left me with a sense that there was something which I needed to remember. I had no idea what it

was; I simply knew that there was something more, something which I needed to explore.

## chapter 2

Before Angie died I lived a hectic but successful life. My husband and I had four kids of our own. We'd also cared for a cousin of my husband's for a number of years, but at that time our kids were aged between eight and sixteen and our extra child was already living independently. Our kids kept us busy with their hobbies and a range of extra-curricular and school activities. I'd rip around all week squeezing their needs in between the other demands on my time and on weekends my husband would pitch in with the ferrying as well.

I also worked in a group general practice in Sydney's eastern suburbs. I worked part-time, or so it was called, but most weeks I put in at least forty hours. I loved the challenges of medical practice though, collecting and analysing the facts so I could apply my knowledge and skills to diagnosing and treating my patients. At work I felt confident and capable much of the time and it didn't matter that there was little time left for my needs. Manic activity suited me. The more I did, the more I felt I could do and besides, I didn't have any needs of my own - none that I knew about. But then I knew precious little about myself at all.

I returned to work the week after Angie died. I suspected it was a bit early to go back, but never doubted that I could handle it. I wasn't one to let my emotions get the better of me. Besides I was a doctor, a professional and professionals can keep their feelings under wraps; so I used to believe.

At 8:10 Monday morning I strode into my office, swept the heaped pile of doctor correspondence to one side, and placed a freshly framed photo of Angie on the desk in front of me. When I smiled at Angie on my desk, she smiled back at me and that felt strangely reassuring.

'Sorry to disturb you, Cathy, but you have three patients waiting.' I looked at my watch. It was 9:15. My secretary's voice had shaken me out of my reverie.

I took the top file from the pile and called Mrs Harris in. I didn't really want to see Mrs Harris, but I had no choice. I don't remember who else I saw that day, but I know that I didn't want to see any of them. It was a crazy day as it always was following a week away. Many of my regulars had

waited for me to come back. I wish they hadn't; I just wanted to be left alone. At least the time passed quickly. In fact ten hours evaporated in what seemed like no time.

It was 7.15 pm when I showed my last patient out.

'Cathy, are you all right?' my secretary Pamela barked. I lifted my head off the desk, wiped my eyes dry and checked the time on my watch: 7:35 pm No wonder Pamela was annoyed. She usually left the office at 7 pm on the dot, if not a little before.

'Just finishing off!' I shouted in my best doctor's voice. I straightened my collar, grabbed my things and marched outside.

'Good night Pamela!'

'Good night Cathy!'

I hadn't even taken the keys out of the ignition before all four kids burst into the garage. It was late and they were keen to see me. They too had lost Angie. When I saw their faces peering expectantly through the car window, I panicked. I knew I couldn't give them the attention they needed. I was spent.

Thank goodness my husband popped his head around the corner a minute later.

'Hi honey, I'm stuffed.' I called. 'Could you do the honours tonight?'

'Sure, darling. Is there anything-?'

Before he'd finished the sentence I'd thrown everyone a goodnight kiss and headed off.

'GOOD NIGHT, ALL!' I shouted as I disappeared into my bedroom, shutting the world out behind me.

I started crying the moment I found myself alone and didn't stop even when I forced myself into my pyjamas. I snuggled into bed and pulled the covers up over my head, the tears still pouring. I was completely exhausted and yet my exhaustion didn't help me fall asleep. How could I fall asleep when Angie had died? I couldn't. I wasn't nearly ready to let her go. When I was awake I could keep her alive in my mind's eye. And so I did, all night long.

The next morning, I toppled out of bed and wandered bleary-eyed into the kitchen. A giant-sized photo of a relaxed and tanned Angie smiled at me from the mini-shrine I'd created on the kitchen bench. Angie looked a picture, surrounded by her favourite flowers; red roses and baby's breath



and a circle of beeswax candles. I couldn't smile back. Her photo didn't reassure me anymore.

Thoughts of Angie filled my head in the weeks that followed and I spoke to her whenever I could. We chatted about all sorts of things; about her dreams for the future and her plans for the here and now. Each time the light shone off her golden hair in my mind's eye, the tragedy of her loss felt a little less real. And when she vanished, as she inevitably did, I would turn to her photo and will her to arise from within the image. She never did. And then I would hear another knock at my door.

'Why can't they leave me alone? Is that too much to ask? That shitty damn secretary, I've never liked her. Doesn't she understand how lousy I feel? I don't want to see any more patients today! Enough! They stream in here, one after another wanting things, demanding things. Angie's dead, damn it! Who cares about some piddley little snuffle? Buy some tissues snuffle and snort if you must, but leave me alone! Doesn't anyone understand? Angie is dead, damn it!'

I had a fantastic understanding of grief before Angie died. At least I thought I did. In twenty years of medicine I'd seen lots of loss; a widowed spouse; a family in mourning; accidents; operations and illnesses; the countless tragedies of living. But my grief seemed much worse than any I'd ever witnessed. It tore me apart, pounding me from morning to night, to morning again.

My internal monologue was a tirade. 'Hey world, stop what you're doing! Why world, why did you take Angie away? Why? Tell me why, I'm begging you! What is wrong with you WORLD? Bring her back right now, you hear? Right NOW!'

Eyes prised apart, sitting bolt upright in bed, pillows crumpled behind my back, I tried to shield my eyes from another night of horror. The tape replayed night after night, a ghoulish panoply of images; the mangled wreck of twisted metal; Angie's lifeless body pinioned to a tree; the rot of death. I clutched the tangle of sweat-soaked sheets to my chest, shaking.

I dreaded the nights. I could not rest.

Angie had now been dead for two months.

Only the light of morning brought any possibility of relief from the cruel limbo of my nights.

‘Come on now. Think of the kids. You need to get out of bed for the kids! Come on now, you can do it. Yes you can. Come on, Cathy, you can’t spend the whole day in bed!’

I was really scared. I didn’t know what was happening to me. I’d never felt so out of control before. Formerly a person who didn’t acknowledge her feelings; now I was being ruled by them. I couldn’t deny the facts any longer. I was a bundle of nerves and I wasn’t coping. It was obvious that I needed help. But how should I get it and who from?

I didn’t want to see a shrink. The thought of that was way too confronting. Somehow seeing a psychologist wasn’t as threatening. One benefit of being a doctor is that you get to hear who’s worth seeing across a range of fields. I’d heard good reports about a clinical psychologist, a woman called Kate, so I decided to start with her.

Seeking help was a big step for someone as independent as me. I abhorred weakness; weakness in others and especially weakness in me. Yet my deteriorating mental state left me little choice. I dialled Kate’s number and found myself fronting up for my first session one week later.

‘Hello Cathy, I’m Kate. Come on in and take a seat.’ Kate’s words, although expected, caught me off guard. I momentarily considered making a break for it, thought better of it and obediently followed Kate into her office. On stepping across the threshold I spotted a chunky armchair in the opposite corner and made a beeline for it, sat down and tried to mark out my territory. It didn’t work. I felt like an alien. I didn’t belong in a psychologist’s office.

Kate shut the door behind me and went to the matching armchair opposite me. I squirmed in my chair and sized her up. She was middle-aged and had no blatantly aversive features. It didn’t mean I could get comfortable though. I tried snuggling up against the armrest on one side and then right back into the corner of the chair. Damn armchair was too big. When I sat back, my feet didn’t reach the floor. I felt small and insignificant, like a child. I tried tucking my legs under me, but they shot back out leaving me perched like shag on a rock. By then the perspiration was flowing; my armpits were sodden. Kate watched all of my machinations. She’d effortlessly settled back into her chair with one simple manoeuvre.

She looked across at me and smiled. I averted my eyes and studiously looked past her to the muted apricot wall behind. From there I followed the

wall around the room. The room was pleasing to the eye, painted soothing pastel hues throughout and peppered with a few vibrant paintings. On the table next to me was a vase with flowers. A nice touch, I thought.

Kate smiled again and nodded. I looked away and over to the desk covered with papers towards the far wall. Then checked out the couch on the other side of me and gazed up at the ceiling. Although Kate's ceiling was more captivating than most, I soon had to look back down. An old hand at such games, she caught my eye and nodded again. This nod, a little more pointed than the first, was harder to ignore. I wiped the sweat off my brow and gulped hard.

'I don't know whether you can help me. I don't know. I just don't know what's wrong.'

I can't remember precisely what I said, but none of the words came easily. I can recall the long awkward silences and the forced reluctant snippets offered to fill them. I didn't ever feel comfortable. In fact I spent the entire session wanting to bolt. Somehow I survived but not without being bathed in a lather of sweat by the end of the fifty minutes.

'Yes Angie and I were very close. Yes we were.'

Kate looked straight at me; I looked away. I'd said enough. I didn't want to give too much away, not yet. Not ever.

I hadn't come to terms with the news delivered that fateful 'Good Friday' just over a year earlier. I was at home with three of my children.

'Hey behave yourselves, will you? We need to pack.'

My three youngest children were horsing around like kids do best.

I tried to look stern. 'Okay now off you go and get your stuff ready, you hear? Lay it out on your beds. That way I can check it all to see that you haven't forgotten anything.'

'But Muuum!'

'Yes darling, I know that you can pack your own things, I do, but just let Mummy make sure that you haven't forgotten anything, okay? We don't want to get all the way up to Coffs Harbour and find something missing, now do we?'

They scurried off to their rooms, chuckling. The house bubbled.

That's when the door bell rang. I couldn't imagine who it might be. I wasn't expecting anyone.

‘Here!’ I shouted tossing the clothes I had in my hands to my son. ‘Thanks darling. Just put them on my bed, will you?’

I didn’t know what to make of the young police officer standing in front of me. He looked serious, but then they always do.

‘Good morning, ma’am. I-I’m looking for Dr Kezelman,’

‘That’s me,’ I nodded. ‘What can I do for you officer?’ I asked, ushering him inside.

‘I think you should ah... sit down, ma’am,’ His lips were quivering and he looked awfully pale with his forehead full of pimples.

‘No thanks. I’d rather stand.’ I felt a hand slip into mine. My thirteen year old son had taken a break from terrorising his younger sisters with his Hannibal Lecter mask and returned to my side.

‘Your brother contacted us. He asked us to come and see you. I-I’m afraid that I have some bad news. It’s your niece, Angela.’

‘Angela?’

‘Yes, Angela. I’m afraid, ma’am that Angela died this morning... in a car accident up north. Your brother, Simon isn’t it? Well he asked us to...’

My son gripped my hand with all his might. His eyes were welling up.

‘Angie? Angie’s dead?’

‘Yes, ma’am. I’m afraid she is.’

‘But how? It’s not possible?’

‘I’m so sorry...’

My legs gave way as I slammed the young constable back outside. I steadied myself against the doorframe and pulled my son against me. As we slumped to the floor we clung to one another, sobbing hard. The girls came barrelling over, tears streaming, anticipating something bad, but not yet knowing the news. How could I tell them what I knew would break their hearts? All of my kids adored their big country cousin. Angie had always been special to them, like a sister.

People don’t die at eighteen! Surely it was a mistake? Angie couldn’t be dead. No way! Not Angie! I’d only just spoken to her the night before, she was alive then. And she’d sounded great, the best she’d sounded in ages. The last year had been ghastly; she’d lost her Mum and then had all that awful family drama. No way, Angie wasn’t dead. She couldn’t be!

*‘I’m going up to see the whole clan, Auntie Cathy. Up to the farm and you know what? It’s all going to be okay. I’m sure of it. Linda’s picking me up around nine and we’ll be off...’*

It wasn't all okay at all.

Our dear sweet Angie died on 9th April 1998, a road statistic. A meaningless number that flashed up onto television screens at the end of the news, after the feel-good animal story, and just before the weather report.

Somehow I bumbled through that first session of therapy and went back for more. After a few more sessions I reluctantly signed up for more ongoing sessions; every Monday and Thursday for the foreseeable future. There were a few rules:

All consultations would last fifty minutes.

If I arrived late, the time wouldn't be made up; my session would be shorter.

If I wanted to cancel an appointment, 24 hours notice was expected, otherwise I would be charged.

Twice a week thereafter I fronted up to therapy, feeling like a lamb to the slaughter. It wasn't Kate's fault. I would have felt that way with any therapist. It was circumstantial, not personal. For the first time in my life I had been granted the opportunity to talk about myself, but I struggled with the attention and with having to explore and reveal aspects of myself which I had kept hidden, even from me.

Kate's therapeutic style not only discourages small talk but puts the onus on the client to get the ball rolling. At first I'd do whatever I could to derail the beginnings of my sessions.

'I'm just going to sit here and say nothing. Whatever she does she's not going to make me talk.' My attempts at winning silences didn't work because Kate could sit in silence longer than I could.

'I know her game; I can stare longer than she can. Okay, okay. You win!' I tried staring Kate down frequently, but she'd invariably stare back longer and harder than I could. Asides, distractions and any attempt to steer the conversation away from me failed dismally in the hands of an expert. So eventually I'd start to talk and I'd keep on talking. I'd talk about myself again and again and then I'd come back for another appointment and do it all over again.

## chapter 3

‘So Cathy, tell me. Did you have many friends in primary school?’

I’d been in therapy for a few weeks and Kate was trying to find out more about my childhood. Being a doctor I was used to taking a history. Asking the questions, that is. Answering them was a whole new ball game.

I cast my mind back to my schoolgirl days.

‘Hmm, let’s see. I would have been 5, maybe 6, when I started school. And say 11 or 12 when I left. That was Humpybong. Humpybong first, and then Indooroopilly, but only a couple of years at Indooroopilly. That’s all.’

I tried to conjure an image of Humpybong primary; the playground, classrooms, teachers, any friends, but I couldn’t. Not one.

‘And how about Indooroopilly? I asked myself. I could feel Kate’s eyes on me, watching me and waiting for an answer.

‘I don’t know. I can’t remember.’ I mumbled looking at my feet.

I felt the heat rush to my face and I wanted to disappear; the shame of it. If only the floor would rise up and swallow me whole. I’d never felt comfortable talking about myself but this was excruciating.

‘And, Cathy what did you like to eat when you were younger?’

My own children’s likes and dislikes came to me in a flash, but that wasn’t the question. I needed to produce some of my own, but they weren’t mine at all. None were.

‘I don’t know. I can’t remember.’

‘What did you do on weekends, Cathy?’

More questions. Enough already! Why won’t she stop?

‘I don’t know. I can’t remember.’ But this time I added, ‘But I did have a happy childhood. I know I did. My mother told me so.’

I heard how this sounded as I articulated the words out loud. As the sweat cascaded down my face I slumped down in my chair. I wanted to hide but there was nowhere to go. I felt utterly exposed with my failure laid out for the whole world to see.

So my memory wasn’t the best. So what? That’s what I’d told myself over the years. Boy how I’d hated it whenever my friends reminisced; remembering where they sat in a classroom, a teacher’s name, things which

had been said. I'd sit frozen in silence feeling more inadequate by the second and ever more alienated. I was forever wanting to contribute, but invariably unable to make a start.

And now for the first time, saying it aloud to a stranger, I was admitting that it wasn't okay. In fact it never had been. Something was wrong. Seriously wrong.

'Cathy... Cathy!' Kate's insistent tone penetrated my psyche from the back of beyond and I stirred. We were reaching the end of the session. I couldn't give any answers to any of the questions about my childhood she had posed. At first my inability to answer had rattled me, but my subconscious soon steered my escape as I spaced out. As I lifted my head back out of my lap, the apricot walls came back into focus. I looked to the side and saw the detail of a vase with lilac tulips of the most dulcet tones beside me. Nothing had changed in the room and yet everything had changed for me. I was missing large chunks of my childhood memory and for the first time in my life I was acknowledging just how abnormal that was.

But I did have a happy childhood, didn't I? Yes, of course I did. I tried replaying the message that I'd heard repeatedly over the years, on the stuck turntable of my mother's affirmation, 'Baba, you had a happy childhood. Everything was done for you.'

But its persuasion had faded. If I'd had a happy childhood, why couldn't I remember it? What was wrong with me?

## chapter 4

I peeked out from the cocoon I'd fashioned between the sheets, dreading the day. I'd tossed and turned all night and even though the sun was shining and the sky was an iridescent blue, the world felt bleak.

Despite four months having passed since Angie's death, my grief felt as raw as it had on day one. Grieving is a gradual process and these were early days. Yet while other members of my family were starting to get on with their lives, I was coping less well all the time. I fought every morning just to get out of bed. Luckily, the thought that my family and patients needed me helped me sustain some of the motions of daily life. There were many activities; however, that I couldn't tackle. My husband struggled, not just to handle those practicalities that I couldn't, but to also follow the change in me. Being able to articulate what was happening to me would have helped, but I was too confused to be able to do that. I was not only overcome with grief, but was also shattered by my memory loss. Further exploration had defined a ten year stretch during which few childhood memories remained, and that realisation scared the hell out of me.

There was one day in particular which heralded a further downhill slide. It started with the usual daily push to get myself out of bed, the extra effort for taking a shower and the cursory brushing of my hair. I didn't even bother to look in the mirror. I rarely sought the mirror's approval anymore; I didn't like what I saw. I donned a sombre grey ensemble, packed my kids in the car, drove them to school and cajoled myself into my surgery.

I consulted the first few patients on autopilot, but as the morning marched on, the icy chill of Angie's death made me lose track of what I was doing. One minute I was writing a prescription for Mr Thomson's blood pressure pills and the next, Mrs McKay, an octogenarian with diabetes, was retrieving a frothy sample from her coat pocket. Problem was that I couldn't remember Mr Thomson leaving or Mrs McKay arriving.

Responding to a quizzical looking Mrs McKay, I covered as best I could. 'Very well, Mrs McKay, now let's see how we're going, shall we?' and transported her offering to the sink. 'No problem there, Mrs... er...' and returned to my seat.



Mrs... er... said something. I nodded and she said something else and Mrs... er... kept talking, but her words ran together into one long word which I couldn't recognise. My head was pounding, my pulse pelting along at twenty to the dozen. I felt like a pressure cooker about to blow.

'If she doesn't shut up, I-I'll do something, I will. I'll scream!'

I grabbed the front of my desk and gritted my teeth.

Next time I looked up the room was empty. No Mr Thomson and no Mrs McKay either.

'Dr Kezelman, are you ready in there? Can I come in?'

The door swung open and Mr McIntyre, an old repat patient, normally a favourite, shuffled in. Mr McIntyre talked at me and he was asking me things, wanting... Next thing I knew, my secretary was bending over me, asking me if I was alright. From my position, splayed across the desk and bewildered as to how I'd got there, I didn't know how to answer her.

After several such incidents I was forced to take stock. In twenty years of practice I'd dragged myself out of a sick bed on more than one occasion because of a misguided sense of duty. In this case I couldn't maintain the facade. I knew it was only a matter of time before I'd commit a serious blunder. Fortunately the doctor in me was still functioning enough to force an admission; that I was no longer fit to practice.

I considered my options. I had to take some time off work, but how much time was the question. I settled on a four month sabbatical, a period which seemed long enough to regain my health, and brief enough that I might preserve my skills. Having never taken a day's sick leave, four months seemed like an eternity. I was convinced that by the end of the period I would be completely back on deck.

I couldn't have been more wrong. At the end of the allotted time I was feeling worse than ever. I was forced to make one of the hardest decisions of my life. Rather than extending my leave further, I decided to quit altogether.

In leaving work I relinquished not only a role but a self-definition. Being a doctor gave me respectability and a confidence I hadn't found in my everyday life. As a doctor behind the consulting desk, I was the person in authority. People came to me to seek advice and counsel. It was a vital role for me. Once discarded, it rendered me more vulnerable than ever.

My children's demands continued unabated and as much as I resented having to try meeting them at the time, the duty of it forced me to keep functioning. On okay days I could do the minimum needed to keep the household operating, but on bad days I couldn't even manage that.

I devised a rigid schedule in an attempt to stay afloat.

Step one. Get out of bed and into a piping hot shower.

The heat of the shower would help jolt me awake.

Step two. Dress in a daze.

I would throw on the same pair of jeans and black T-shirt day in, day out. Join my family at breakfast only a couple of minutes before we had to leave. I couldn't stomach any more chitchat than that.

Step three. Crawl into the driver's seat.

I would listen to my kids chattering away. 'Have a good day. See you this afternoon!' I would offer with contrived enthusiasm as they jumped out of the car.

Step four. Drive straight home to bed.

I would drive home via the quickest route and hop back into bed, pull up the covers and languish alone until three o'clock came.

Step five. Get up.

I would force myself back up and out. Pick the kids up, drive home and spend the afternoon trying to meet their demands. I couldn't; I didn't have the capacity to look after myself let alone anyone else.

Step six. Spend an interminable evening.

I would count the minutes until my children went to bed. Sometimes I'd retire before my youngest had brushed her teeth.

Step seven. Get into bed

I was invariably desperate to get into bed and yet when I did, I could rarely fall asleep. I would toss and turn until morning. My husband would lie snoring beside me as I lay awake with my thoughts. I didn't share the restlessness of my nights with him, not then.

I was a bundle of nerves and life had become one big chore. The one positive in my days was seeing Kate. Yet the benefit of my visits would only last for the duration of the session; once I left her office, any connection I'd felt would vanish. I became obsessed with seeing Kate and began a countdown the moment I awoke. I would imagine walking down

Kate's drive, pressing her buzzer, hearing her say 'hello' and walking into her waiting room. I longed to feel safe, if only for fifty minutes in the day.

On the days on which I didn't have a session, I would call Kate's number frequently. I didn't necessarily want to talk to her. I just wanted to hear her voice, to know that she cared, that someone did. Sometimes when Kate answered, I would hang up, not knowing what to say. Sometimes just listening to her message would be sufficient to contain my panic. Occasionally I would pluck up the courage to leave a message. And when I did I would wait anxiously for her return call, as though she had no patient to tend to but me. And when she didn't call straight back I would wonder why she was ignoring me and soon panic - perhaps she might think that I was a bother, or worse still, maybe she might *know* that I was.

When Kate finally did ring back I often still didn't know what to say. I had just needed to know that she was there. Kate was the only person I called during that time in my life. I shunned most conversations otherwise, and rarely initiated any contact. Unless someone rang me, I didn't speak with anyone outside of my family and my therapist for months.

I had changed and people didn't know what to make of me. All my life I'd been independent and now, I was needy but still shunning help. My medical colleagues in particular grappled with my decision to leave medicine. They didn't know what to make of my affliction.

I felt hurt by some friends. By those who I had expected would be there for me, but weren't. By others who made no attempt to understand what was going on, or who vanished as soon as things got tough. The fact is that not everyone is capable of giving to others in that way. Besides, people are busy with their own lives. Personal dramas crop up and when they do, most people quickly forget the dramas of others, me included. At the time though, I felt abandoned and those feelings made me withdraw further from my friends and worse still; my family. Being so disconnected was dangerous. Thankfully Kate realised this and worked hard to keep me linked to them, even when they weren't by my side.

'Cathy, I want you to walk into your children's bedrooms. Look around, inspect their things, feel the mood, experience the distinctive odours and think about what makes each of your children unique.'

'Cathy, get out the photo albums and go through them. Look at your family and what you've created. Remember them and keep in touch.'

I did follow Kate's instructions, some of the time. But when I was at my neediest I couldn't comply. I was drawn to my isolation like an alcoholic to the bottle. Being alone was a familiar space, but not a constructive one and I needed to be drawn out of it regularly. Kate urged me to make arrangements to get out of the house; to join a gym and get some exercise, or to take the dog for a walk. I tried. Some days I could, but on others I simply couldn't and often those were the days on which I was at my lowest ebb and needed to most.

Weeks passed with little to differentiate one day from the next. I would venture out only when it was absolutely necessary, but such trips came at a cost. With my first panic attack I was convinced that I was dying, despite medical training that knew better. Subsequent attacks felt no less debilitating. Each time I felt like I was going to die.

Where a trip to the corner shop was nerve-wracking, supermarkets held a deadly threat. Just walking through the doors of the local Coles would make my heart race.

'Help me! Please help me! Let me out!' As the air closed in I would gasp my last.

'Quick the exit! Leave the stupid trolley. Okay, come on. You're okay. Steady now, slow deep breaths. Focus, breathe. You're okay. You're okay.'

I was painfully aware of the risks of shopping but soon other tasks triggered panic attacks as well - a family picnic, a drive down a certain road. Eventually I became completely immobilised and the consequences were dire: our once well piled cupboards emptied out; the 'to do' pile of washing climbed to the ceiling; ironing became a relic of the past; and one meal after another went uncooked.

Despite seeing Kate regularly my mood remained chaotic. She suggested I consult a psychiatrist colleague. I didn't want to go; I didn't like doctors, especially shrinks, but Kate insisted. Seeing him wasn't near as bad as expected and I saw him a few times. He prescribed some antidepressants and monitored their effects. I took them begrudgingly; I still didn't want to admit that I was sick or needy.

The medication worked at first; however, once my mood went into free fall, nothing helped. By then my days had me trapped within a personal cave devoid of light, hope or connection, within a space full of nothingness. That nothingness inhabited me, making the walls of my cave close in a little more every day. At times I would search for a life beyond the darkness

before surrendering to my panic, which in turn brought despair. I felt as though I deserved to be alone. As my isolation became a compulsion, I rotted within the deafening silence of my entrapment. For months, nothing but a fraying thread via Kate kept me connected to my family, and via my family, to the world at large.

The only real relief I felt was when, for 50 minutes most days, I sat in an armchair in suburban Sydney, in the office of a therapist who gave me her all. But the moment I walked outside, the succour I had felt, minutes earlier, would dissolve. And on the five minute drive back home, I would sever my connection with Kate and quit my friends and family altogether. And when it all got too much to bear I would fantasise about ways to put an end to my misery.

I toyed with the idea of suicide and soon crystallised my plan. The Gap is a convenient ten minutes' drive from my home. Although it's a notorious suicide destination for locals, American and Japanese tourists come there to sight-see. Tourist buses regularly disgorge camera-happy herds, while those contemplating suicide visit alone. I made regular pilgrimages to The Gap, in secret and alone.

I'd frequented The Gap for some weeks before mentioning it to Kate. She knew how depressed I was and may well have suspected that I was suicidal; however, I didn't trust her enough to share my suicidal thoughts with her right away. Regardless, Kate gave me her unbridled support, urging me to call her at any time, even on weekends and nights. She saw me three, four and sometimes five times a week and her generous availability enabled me to trust her more.

Gradually, ever so gradually, I began to drop hints about my suicidal thoughts. I didn't reveal much at first and certainly didn't talk about my visits to The Gap. When I gingerly flagged a couple of my darker thoughts, she responded calmly and without judgment, always working to strengthen my connections with constant reminders about the wonderful family I'd created, of the husband who loved me and of children who needed their mother.

'Cathy, get some photos and put them in your wallet, photos of your family so that they're always with you even when they're not there in person.'

Gradually over time I told Kate about some of my visits to The Gap.

‘Cathy, I want you to keep photos with you in the car, so that you can get them out to remind you of what you have in the present.’

When I first disclosed my plans I felt some relief. Finally another human being knew how desperate I was feeling. However the moment I left Kate’s consulting room or we hung up the phone, I felt alone again. Kate was my lifeline, but only when I allowed her to enter my world.

I severed all other emotional ties including those with my husband. My thinking had become so muddled I’d convinced myself that I shouldn’t worry him with my suicidal thoughts. As if anything would be more of a worry than losing one’s wife to suicide! Another part of me didn’t want to tell him anything, knowing that he would try to stop me. At that point I still needed to know that I had a way out of my pain should I need it.

For weeks I was subsumed by suicidal thoughts. The initial relief I had felt on revealing my thoughts hadn’t lasted. Then came the day on which the pain had become so intolerable that I was driven past the point of desperation. Thank goodness that I’d followed Kate’s instructions and had my photos with me. Kate had achieved her goal and kept my family close by me under all circumstances.

After replacing Angie’s photo I took another one out. It was of one of my daughters. I trailed my fingers around her mouth, circling them down and across her chin. I stroked her hair and drank in the softness of her lips and the fullness of her cheeks. In my head I wandered into her bedroom and picked up her hairbrush off her dresser. I rearranged the knick-knacks on her shelf. Connecting with her in that way helped breathe back in a little will to live. Feeling calmer I slipped her photo back to join the others.

I traced the vibrancy of each of my children in similar vein: feeling, remembering, pausing and reminiscing. As each of my children rose out of their photos and their radiance embraced me, their zest for life replenished me. I thought of my family, of the four children we had created and our surrogate child, living overseas. I could not imagine any of my children feeling the ice.

And so it was that on that occasion I stepped back from the white painted fence, with the wire coming away, retraced my steps down the path from my ‘spot’ and drove back home to my family.

## chapter 5

*A tangle of white silk is growing up the walls of the coffin. A body lies nestled inside. I can't see the body properly, so I take a step forward. It's not Angie. It looks like my father; except he's grey.*

My first flashback scared the living daylights out of me. I didn't know it was a flashback; I didn't know what flashbacks were. Having always felt in control of my mind, I now felt as though my mind had taken control of me. I panicked as I was catapulted into a space which was familiar, and yet not, and into a time and place in which I appeared to be present, and yet wasn't. I was subjected to sights and sounds, sensations and feelings which I couldn't explain.

The flashback wasn't a once-off. They kept coming. One minute I'd be minding my own business and in the next, my equilibrium would be shattered. Fragments of memories from past eras would bombard me with a variety of scenes rumbling in and out of my consciousness, relegating what I knew as the present to the background. One minute I'd be fourteen and the next, forty-five before reverting to fourteen again... and then, eight. What was happening to me? Perhaps the pressure had finally got to me. Perhaps I really was going mad.

As the scenes gained momentum, I described them to Kate. I was worried about what she'd say, but I shouldn't have been concerned. Kate had heard of such phenomena and she labelled them for me; 'flashbacks'. Perhaps I wasn't going crazy after all.

I searched the internet and found numerous articles documenting the experiences of soldiers who had suffered war trauma and subsequently 'forgotten' or 'repressed' any memory of those horrors. My reading described the process by which traumatic memories could return, even decades later, as flashbacks. The flashbacks described in the articles sounded just like the ones I'd been having. Further articles explained that serious trauma during one's childhood could also cause 'repressed memories'. I started to wonder about my childhood and what had actually happened to me.

Soon a steady stream of flashbacks was sweeping me away in sights, sounds, emotions and sensations from long ago. Sometimes the flashbacks formed a core around which further memories returned. In particular I was transported back to the year my father died and found myself reliving key events. The sum total of those memories helped me construct a narrative of those times which included memories of my schoolgirl days but the events of one pivotal day and the days subsequent to it were featured time and again in a kaleidoscope of detail.

Brisbane Grammar offered an academically elite education. In the Queensland of the sixties, it was the best non-denominational education that money could buy. My intellectually ambitious parents were thrilled to be able to send Simon and me there. Not that they could afford the fees, our family wasn't well off; our fees were reduced because my father had been a master at the boys' school and my mother was language mistress at the girls' school across the way.

In 1968, my second year at Grammar and Simon's last, I was in year nine. I was fourteen years' old and a faceless member of the black stockinged-gloved-boater-hatted tunic brigade. Conformity and discipline were the guiding principles of Brisbane Grammar and I, forever the 'good' girl, towed the line.

I was a well filled-out adolescent with a no-nonsense sugar basin haircut and a face I would rather hide. Puberty was not kind to me; nor was I kind to myself. I had a sweet tooth and an indulgent appetite. Most afternoons after school, I would hoe into half a loaf of bread with lashings of cheese. Had I not been obsessed with tennis, my girth would have far been more expansive than it was. Mercifully, I played tennis daily - at home and at school. My position on the tennis team was a gift which guaranteed regular exercise while securing for me a crucial away-from-home pass for a large part of most weekends.

I was a tomboy. I hated dressing up and shunned make-up, jewellery or any form of adornment. I didn't display any of the usual adolescent enthusiasm for clothes; in fact I did what I could to not be noticed. Shorts and a T-shirt constituted my standard garb and I only succumbed to wearing a skirt when it was for tennis, and compulsory.

October 1, 1968



*A few minutes after recess the headmistress's secretary intrudes into our science class. I jump as she addresses me, 'Cathy, go get your bag and come with me, will you?'*

*'It must be something serious!' I think to myself devastated at the thought of being in trouble. 'Even the naughty kids don't have to take their bags with them when they get a detention.' I muse. I can't imagine what I've done wrong. I never risk doing anything wrong at school.*

*The secretary leads me to the benches out the front of the school.*

*'Why don't you sit here, Cathy dear? Your mother won't be long.'*

*'My mother? What could possibly make my mother leave class in the middle of a school day?' I wonder.*

*I try to sit patiently but the butterflies in my stomach are making me nervous; I startle every time the bell sounds a change of period. With each lesson change, different girls scurry past. The occasional friend calls out to me, 'Hey Cathy, what's up? What are you doing out here? Maybe you're in trouble!' Maybe I am. Another half hour and I am still waiting for my mother. Perhaps the secretary has it wrong.*

*The bell tolls announcing lunchtime.*

*I reach into my schoolbag and take out my vegemite sandwich, finishing all bar the crust, and grab my granny smith. We always had granny smiths at our house. My mother preferred them. I chomp through it, toss the core in the bin and wait some more. It is well into lunchtime before my mother emerges from the car park. Mrs Carpenter, the headmistress has her arm around her.*

*This is a surprise; there has been no love lost between my mother and Mrs Carpenter.*

*My mother is clutching a scrunched up handkerchief. She hadn't shown any sign of a cold that morning.*

*My mother and Mrs Carpenter exchange a few words. Mrs Carpenter turns around and walks back towards her office. My mother stops an inch from my face and announces; 'Your father is dead.' Her breath scorches my cheeks.*

*The fifteen-minute bell tolls. It is time to go and play.*

*'Your father's dead. I've just been to see him,' my mother's words toll.*

*My mother isn't making any sense. My father wasn't dead. He couldn't have been. I look up into her eyes, searching for a sign. She looks away.*

*'What happened?' I ask the back of her head.*

*'Oh, some sort of attack.'*

*My mother points to my bag. 'Come on, Baba. Enough questions! Get your things. We're going home.'*

*'Hey Cathy, aren't you playing with us today?'* A couple of my friends ask as I saunter past their game of elastics.

*'NO, I'm not!' I confirm with myself.*

*My father is dead!*

*My father is dead!*

*My father is dead! I practise saying the words over and over in my head but they don't make any sense because it can't be true.*

*My mother and I shuffle to the car like a pair of deaf mutes. I toss my bag into the boot like any other afternoon. My mother climbs behind the wheel. I clamber into the back, taking the seat behind her.*

*My mother doesn't like me sitting in the front next to her.*

*I buckle my seatbelt. My mother turns the key in the ignition, releases the handbrake, and drives out of the Grammar school car park.*

*For the forty-five minute journey home I stare at the back of my mother's head, replaying the events of the earlier morning in my mind's eye. I could see my father hunched over his Uncle Toby's. He was in his PJ's, the striped short pair he wears when it gets hot. Simon and I were sitting opposite him crunching on our Weetbix. No-one was speaking.*

*'Cyril, what on earth are you doing? Don't you know what time it is?'*

*Our mother, buffed and polished for work, had pierced the deafening breakfast silence.*

*My father had gotten up, walked into his bedroom and emerged soon after in charcoal Bermuda shorts, beige knee-highs at half mast and his signature short-sleeved shirt with shirt tails flapping. His wavy, greying hair was unruly and his shave, rough. I notice a small patch of stubble he'd missed on his chin. He pushed the front door open, the fly screen door next, walked down the steps leading from the veranda, across the front garden, over to his small green Fiat. He got into the driver's seat and squeezed in behind the wheel, backed out, pausing at the end of the driveway for a break in the traffic and disappeared into the Moggill Rd peak hour stream.*

*'What happened?'*

*'Oh some sort of attack.'*

*Every now and again I lean forward to make contact with my mother but she's concentrating too hard to notice. The suburbs flick by like the*

*discarded pages of a picture book - car, trucks, people, children, trees and houses. By the time the car tackles the incline to our carport, we still haven't shared a word. My mother turns the engine off and removes the key, winds her window up, opens the driver's door and gets out. I get out too. My mother locks the car and strides around to the front of the house. I trail behind.*

*I creep up the steps and onto the veranda, in through the fly screen door and inside the front door. I look around; everything seems the same as when we left in the morning. I think of Simon and wonder whether he's been told. I open his door but he isn't there and go into my bedroom and shut the door behind me.*

*I throw myself across my bed and sob so hard that my bed rattles. As the first flood of tears subsides, I look around to see my teddy perched on the bookshelf opposite. He looks sad; he's been watching me cry. I take Teddy off the shelf, carry him back to bed and say gently, 'Teddy, I'm afraid I have some bad news.' I feel his little body tighten.*

*'Our daddy is dead, Teddy.' Teddy starts crying; I hug him and he hugs me back. Teddy is shivering. So am I. We climb under the covers and pull them up over us, snuggling closer than ever before because our Daddy is dead. I sing to Teddy until he falls asleep, but once he does I feel more alone. I tuck Teddy in so he's warm and snug, half hoping he'll wake up; but he doesn't, and I can't bring myself to wake him.*

*I draw my knees in and wrap my arms around myself, because then at least someone is holding me. I cuddle myself tight, so tight that it hurts and I rock back and forth, back and forth, rhythmically like a metronome - click, click, click. Nothing makes any difference; I am cold and alone no matter what I do. I cry louder and Teddy wakes up. He hugs me and sings to me until I doze off.*

*Teddy and I sleep fitfully under the covers all afternoon. Every now and again I get up to check whether Simon is home. He takes such a long time to get back that I start to worry that he is dead too, but Teddy tells me not to be silly. Teddy says that Simon isn't dead and he's right because Simon does come home eventually. And when he does I go to talk to him, but he doesn't want to talk. In fact he closes himself in his room and won't come out. Simon doesn't want to talk at all. Lucky that Teddy does, otherwise I wouldn't have anyone to talk to on the day my father died.*

*The next day after lunch, a shiny black car pulls up out the front of our house.*

*'Hey Catherine, see that car out there?' Simon is pointing to the shiniest black car I'd ever seen.*

*'That car's going to take us to the crematorium.'*

*I don't know what a crematorium is so I ask Teddy. He doesn't know either. I don't ask Simon because he doesn't like being asked things. In that way he's a bit like my mother. The shiny black car drives my mother, Simon and me through lots of suburbs that I've never seen. And when the road runs out of suburbs it snakes through the bush where there aren't any houses or street lights. The trip takes ages and my tummy is doing cartwheels by the time the car finally slows down in front of a set of metal gates. The gates open and the shiny black car crawls over a grid, up a long circular driveway, past a row of rose bushes and pulls up outside a dark brick building.*

*A man in a black suit with pasty skin and pokey eyes opens my door. I jump out quickly. I don't want to stay in that car any longer than I have to. The man leads us through a door down the side of the brick building and into the back room. My mother walks right behind him. Simon is next and I drag along behind. The room is empty except for a large wooden box, balancing on a stand.*

*'Your father's in there', my mother announces pointing to the box. 'We can see him if we want'.*

*I don't want to at all but when my mother and Simon start walking towards the box, I follow them. The lid of the box is open. They peer inside. I follow suit. Some silky white stuff is growing up the inside of the box. It looks creepy; I don't venture too close. Someone is lying inside the box; someone is grey. It can't be my father because my father is not grey. My Daddy isn't dead.*

*The pasty-skinned man leads us into a hall around the front of the building. The hall reminds me of my Grandmother's church. It has two straight rows of pews separated by a corridor. There is a stand out the front with a microphone on it. Two bunches of gladioli, and some other flowers that I can't name, fill two large vases on either side. I think they are meant to make the hall look pretty, but they don't, because nothing is pretty when my Daddy is dead. Somehow the box has followed us and is perched on a table behind the stand. The hall has lots of people in it. I don't recognise*

most of them, but some boys are wearing Simon's school uniform and some girls are wearing mine. Different boys and girls are wearing a different uniform. I imagine that they are from my father's new school. I wish some of my friends had come, but none have.

My family sits in the front row, the one closest to the box. My mother sits between Simon and me, with my grandmother taking the seat next to Simon. I'm glad that my grandmother doesn't sit beside me because I don't like her. I wish my mother had let Teddy come, because then I would have someone to hug. It's chilly in the hall with no-one to hug.

I can't sit still during the service even when my mother shakes her head. At least when she glares at me I can see her face. I haven't seen much of her face since my father died. Her hands are clenched making her knuckles turn white, but she isn't crying. My mother doesn't ever cry, not even when my father is dead. Simon isn't crying either and my grandmother never smiles, laughs or cries, so I don't bother to check her face. I can't stop crying. I wonder what is wrong with me.

Different people get up to say nice things about my father which is nice. I wonder who asked them to speak and why they didn't ask me. After all I knew Daddy better than anyone. Not that I would have been brave enough to stand out the front of a big hall and utter a sound, especially with lots of strangers watching.

I get a shock when the black curtains from the side shoot across in front of the box with the grey person in it. And another shock when there's a heavy thud, followed by a dull, whirring sound. That's when I realise that they are taking my Daddy away. I shoot out towards the box, but my mother grabs me and holds me back. She tells me that I'm not allowed to go there and holds onto me until my father is all gone. Some music starts playing and my mother, Simon and my grandmother get up off their pews and walk towards the side door.

Everyone else stays in their seats waiting. I stay too but not because I'm waiting. I can't leave my Daddy behind. My mother dashes back inside to get me. 'Come on, Baba. Get up! Don't you think I have enough to deal with?' I shudder, springing to attention. I don't want my mother to be angry.

I never wanted my mother to be angry.

I try to walk outside like a good girl but my legs are too wobbly to carry me. I topple sideways and start to fall. As I do, a pair of hands grabs and

*holds me. 'Don't worry, sweetheart.' My mother's friend, Lily, smiles encouragingly.*

*'I've got you now.'*

*Lily gathers me up and draws me towards her. She feels warm and snugly, like teddy, and I nuzzle my head against her chest. Lily whispers into my ear, that she understands, that it is okay to cry and feel sad and that she is there with me. And when I can take the weight back on my feet, Lily walks me ever so slowly outside and leads me away from my mother and the people milling around her. She takes me to the rose garden we'd passed on the way in and the rose garden is full of perfume and colours and the warmth of the sun.*

*When it is time to leave, Lily strolls back with me to the car. She kisses my cheeks and gives me one last very big hug before I get back into the black car to drive home to teddy.*

The next morning Simon and I get up at the usual time and put our school uniforms on. Our mother is dressed and ready as we sit down to eat our Weetbix. When we're finished she drives us to school.

*At the end of the day the three of us drive home together in silence.*

*Teddy is waiting for me when I come home from school. We cuddle straight away and we sing to one another. And when he falls asleep I change out of my uniform and put on my shorts and T-shirt, lace up my Dunlop volleys and take my tennis racquet and a ball, hop over the side fence and into the Fig Tree Pocket Telephone Exchange. I hit the ball and I hit that ball against the brick wall of the Fig Tree Pocket Telephone Exchange. And I hit the ball until the light of the day begins to fade, the mozzies start to bite and my mother hollers 'Dinnertime!'*

*On the day after my father dies dinner is on the table at the usual time of 6 pm. As the sun begins to go down, my mother, Simon and I sit down to eat our chops and potatoes at the table in the nook in the kitchen.*

Other than that I don't remember much about what happened on the day after they took my Daddy away. I do know that I didn't get called out of class again. I also know that I didn't say much because I couldn't think of anything to say.

Nothing had changed and yet everything had changed.

My father was dead and his place at the dinner table was empty.

My father was dead.

## chapter 6

*It's the first Saturday since my father died and I miss him. The house is still; Simon is asleep and my mother has gone out shopping. I'm feeling sad and alone and don't know how to occupy myself. I try to sit down in the kitchen, but can't settle because it feels too creepy in the nook without Daddy. I've stuffed myself silly going back and forth to the fridge. I've switched on the TV, but only the cartoons are showing and none of the cartoons are funny. I don't want to play with Cherry even though she keeps licking me; I don't even want to pat her. I'm even feeling too sad to play tennis. That's how dreadful I'm feeling.*

*I even try doing the crossword but I don't finish it because I can't solve all the words and besides, it's boring. I'm mindlessly flicking through the rest of the paper when I notice that someone has taken to it with a pair of scissors. That's when I remember a story my mother had told about her grandmother. About how her grandmother would cut bits out of the newspaper when she wanted to hide something. I wonder if my mother is hiding something from us kids.*

*With my curiosity tweaked, I start eavesdropping on my mother's late night phone conversations. My mother doesn't have many friends but those she has, she speaks to, on the phone at night after Simon and I go to bed. Instead of sleeping, Teddy and I kneel together on the bed with our ears pressed hard against the wall. Luckily the walls in our house are thin so the sound carries.*

*Two conversations in particular intrigue us. In the first, my mother rants about journalists. I'm not sure what 'irresponsible journalism' means, but I feel certain that it relates to the missing articles. In the other conversation my mother complains about insurance companies and how outrageous it is that her insurer has refused to pay up 'under the circumstances' especially when she's 'paid her premiums all these years'. I look 'premiums' up in our Pear's Encyclopaedia, but still can't work out what circumstances she's referring to.*

*The next day when my mother goes out I start poking in all those places I'm not meant to look. I'm nervous at the thought of being caught, but the*

*urge to solve the mystery galvanises me. Teddy's my 'lookout' because spies always need someone keeping watch. I knew that much.*

*Our search has extended into its second week when I open the bottom drawer of a dresser to find an official-looking envelope.*

*'Coroner's Office', it says. I don't know what a coroner is, but don't wait to check. I slip the contents of the envelope out.*

**Cyril I.**

**Institute of Forensic Pathology 2/10/68 at 10:30 am**

**Gunshot wound to abdomen**

**Jindal at 1/10/68 approximately 10:00 am**

*I don't know what Forensic Pathology means either but I do know what a gunshot wound is and who Cyril I. is too. I also know full well that a gunshot wound is not the same as 'some sort of attack'.*

\*

*I don't tell my mother what I had uncovered. Ours is not a 'normal' family in which children ask questions and parents do their best to answer them. Besides, my mother didn't want me to know the truth. Why else would she have lied? I also can't tell my brother; he is caught up in the same dynamics of secrecy.*

*My brother would not learn that my father had been shot until he was in his twenties. It was never discussed; nor did he ever ask.*

*Armed with this new and crucial fact, I set about piecing together a picture of what had happened that spring day.*

*At around 8:30am on October 1, my father backed his little green Fiat onto Moggie Rd, and died an hour and a half later. He died from a gunshot wound. I found it hard to believe that a father could be shot dead in real life. I thought that only happened in the movies or on TV. I couldn't I bear to think about him dying. Getting shot hurts; I knew that because I'd seen cowboys get shot on TV and Indians and other baddies too. And people who get shot bleed a lot and they cry for help. When Daddy cried for help, I wasn't there to help him. I don't think anyone was.*

*I don't see Daddy's car again until two weeks later.*

*When the mechanic from the Golden Fleece garage in Toowong brings it back, he parks it under the date palm populated by flying foxes out the*



*front of the house. The car looks spiffy. It's been given a good wash and polish and even a scrub on the inside. I've never seen Daddy's car looking so smart. There's just one thing wrong; my father isn't inside. Why didn't the mechanic put Daddy back? I keep going outside to check, just in case, even braving the squawking flying foxes. My father never did appear back inside. He really had gone forever.*

\*

After my father died, my mother cleared the house of all his things. That included any photos, not just photos of him but those of us together. I think she wanted us to forget that we'd ever had him. Why else would she have taken his picture away? Why else did she never talk about him? Why didn't she reminisce about the things we did together as a family?

When Angie died we did whatever we could to keep her memory alive. Simon enlarged several of his favourite photos of her and hung them in rooms all over his house.

For over thirty years I didn't have any photos of my father and for a lot of that time it didn't bother me. It was only when I started remembering him that I realised how much I yearned for some. Even before I set about finding some photos of him, I went out and bought a photo album - just for Daddy. As I carried my album home I felt like a kid who'd been given a fabulous new toy. I was chuffed.

All of the photos of my father were at my mother's place and there weren't many. In those times photographs were taken more sparingly than they are these days. My mother's albums formed an eclectic mix of varying shapes, sizes and styles. Some were square, others rectangular, some, skinny and others, bulged. There were the relics and the new, as well as the emblazoned and studiously plain. Her taste in albums bore no relevance to my journey, but the manner in which the photos were arranged did. Many of the photos she owned had not made it into albums, but those that had seemed to follow no logical sequence. Their presentation portrayed life events with such randomness and disregard for continuity and chronology that it denied all establishment of any sort of context. Different generations were thrown in together to form one gigantic image soup. Take the gaudy blue album for example. It housed photos of my children, followed by some from my mother's childhood, some of me as a baby came next with several

of my mother's parents and her grandparents after that. Any photos of my father or of us as a family were placed haphazardly throughout. I would have to pore through each of all the albums to collect what few photos of my father there were going to be.

As for the itinerant photos, their life of freedom had done them no justice. I rescued several crumpled and discoloured photos from behind the out-of-date medicine collection in Simon's room, from inside the linen cupboard under stacked towels, out of boxes in the sunroom and from the back of my mother's wardrobe.

I gathered all of the photos I had together and spread them out on the lounge room floor, selected the few singletons I wanted to keep and returned to the albums to pore through for final choices. Sitting alone in my mother's lounge room I flipped open the chocolate brown one and stopped and stared at a portrait of a man I was assured was my father. I recognised his face but there was not a lot else that I could remember; his hugs and kisses; how I sat perched on his knee; the tenderness of his touch; none of these, nor the timbre of his voice. Such details didn't come readily. Feelings arose within me, but vanished before I could hold onto the sensations or cherish them.

I flipped the page and a family of four stared back; two parents, a boy and a girl. It resembled the family I once had. That family camped in a tent that reminded me of our lean-to. That family went to the beach. The little boy and girl from that family wore swimsuits and played with buckets and spades and built sandcastles. There were birthday parties with games and laughter, and rumbles with a dog which looked just like Cherry. Ballet lessons, tennis competitions. It looked like a happy family. Maybe I did have a happy childhood after all, but if my childhood was happy, why couldn't I remember it?

I stopped on another page with a single photo of my parents on their wedding day. The newlyweds were posing by a shiny black Humber, which they had hired for the occasion. My father looked dashing in a dark suit; his hair and shoes gleamed. My mother looked resplendent in a fox fur coat with collar, paws and matching hat. My father was beaming. I don't recall him looking so happy. Ever.

I flipped through a sequence of baby shots of my brother and after those, a photo of me with a family friend, a doctor friend of my mother's from Sydney. My mother had met the doctor and his wife soon after she'd

arrived in Australia for the first time. I hadn't thought about the doctor in years. In the photo I looked about thirteen and was standing awkwardly beside the doctor. He had his arm around me and I didn't seem to like it. Looking at the photo made me uneasy, so I didn't focus on it for long.

I spent several hours on my mother's lounge room floor, gathering the photos I wanted to keep. I took my selection home, had the photos copied and replaced the originals the next time I was able to visit my mother's place undetected. Meanwhile back at home I proceeded to arrange the early years of my life as best I could. When the deed was done I lay back, basking in the sense of what I had achieved. I was forty-five years old and finally owned a photo album which was filled with my photos!

I looked through my photos a lot in the months that followed. It was as if staring at them might spin some magic and bring the images to life, and if the images came to life they might divulge some of their secrets. Sadly there was no magic, but the photos did provide me with a context within which to reconstruct more of my past.

Within months I was able to picture Redcliffe, the suburb in which I grew up - a forgettable settlement of red sands and windswept beaches, the house my parents built, and the corner block on which it stood. The houses on either side, the backyard in which we played and the dirt roads around our home. At some point in my childhood the dirt roads disappeared and were replaced by bitumen, and the vacant lots morphed into homes with gardens and fences and washing lines. It was the bush area across the road that was special though, as a child it had been home to my many adventures.

Redcliffe lies on the shores of Moreton Bay, 40 kms north of Brisbane in Queensland. My parents settled on the Moreton Bay Peninsula when Simon was a few months old. In those days the Peninsula was a haven for old-timers, many of whom were related; if not by blood, by indiscretion. Redcliffe was the quintessential country town in which everyone knew everyone else's business. Rumours spread like wildfire and no-one could really be trusted.

When they first arrived, my parents rented the upper level of a ramshackle duplex in a place called Margate. I came home there from hospital, three years after the rest of the family had taken up residence. I

was said to be a bonnie baby who was hard to soothe. In fact, I screamed so much that my mother would stick my pram, with me inside it, down the end of the yard. That way she wouldn't have to hear me. By all reports, being ignored didn't shut me up; it made me scream louder. Sometimes, my mother told me, I screamed so hard that I lost my voice and became an exponent of baby mime. I can picture myself: legs kicking furiously, arms thrashing like windmills, face flushed scarlet vermilion with my mouth opened wide like the megaphone I aspired to be. No-one, it seems, came if I hollered.

Nor did they when I didn't.

My mother recounted how Mr Timms, an old timer living down below would alert her to my distress.

'Hey luv, your baby's cryin' real bad down there in the yard.'

'Yes I know, Mr Timms. That's why I put her there and I'd thank you to mind your own business.'

My mother changed, fed and put me down to sleep according to a strict four hourly feeding schedule as was prescribed in those days. It would seem that my mother followed either that schedule, or her own, but rarely mine.

She had other demands on her time and many of those demands came from my brother, Simon. Simon had captured my mother's heart long before I arrived on the scene. Three and a half years older, he had not only arrived first, but arrived a boy; obliged to replace the boy brother my mother had lost during the war. Given the considerable expectations placed upon him, it was to his benefit and fortune that Simon was smart. In Kindergarten he was labelled a genius. He then skipped Grade 1 topped Grade 2 and maintained his academic superiority to the end of high school.

Yet all was not lost. I was a cute little girl who could twist her Daddy around her little finger. My Daddy called me his princess and told me that I was special and I sure felt special when I was with him. So the balance of our little family was established. I was my father's princess and Simon, my mother's genius son.

My parents worked hard to make ends meet and times weren't easy especially when my mother didn't work. Consequently our physical needs were adequately addressed, but never indulged. We always had plenty of food, though much of it was of questionable quality. Mutton, mince and lumps of ox tongue were standard fare and then there was my mother's cabbage soup. She'd boil the cabbage in a huge pot and make enough to last

all week. And the smell... oh how I hated that smell! We'd be forced to eat it until the last leaf had been devoured and that could mean facing it several times a day. Nothing edible was ever thrown out, even when it was on the turn.

Bread in particular was treated with a quasi-sacred respect and never considered too stale. When bread grew so hard that we couldn't bite it, my mother would douse it with milk, stick it into our wood-fired oven for five minutes and serve it back up. Lashings of butter and homemade jam helped it slide down!

Our clothes were mostly hand-me-downs. This arrangement favoured Simon because they came from a cousin, Lee who was older than Simon, male and corpulent. Simon got to wear the cast-offs first, and was therefore dressed reasonably well. I on the other hand wasn't so lucky. I got Simon's hand-me-downs and so for most of my childhood I looked like a threadbare walking tent; a pup tent when I was little and a lean-to as I grew older. Just as well that I seemed not to mind how I looked. For most of my childhood, the less attractive I felt, the better it suited me.

Looking rough and ready assured me membership in our local gang who were all boys apart from me. I was one of the youngest of the crew, traipsing barefoot behind Simon and the others from the moment I could toddle. Cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, tree houses, waterholes and caves, sticks and water - our bush provided all the best building blocks for child's play and all manner of adventure. Best of all, we kids had one another.

Some of my childhood was happy. I was sure of it.

## chapter 7

My mother lived close to my marital home in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. My mother, brother and I moved into her two storey semi, the year after my father died and she has lived there ever since. In the early years of my therapy and in those prior, I would pop in to see my mother weekly, and speak with her every second day. I felt close to my mother and very protective of her. When she felt miserable I'd spring into action and seek ways to lift her mood. Her wellbeing and happiness had always been my responsibility and one of my foremost concerns since childhood.

Whenever I saw my mother we'd chat amicably, but rarely discuss anything personal. Over the years I'd identified the topics I could safely broach with her and earmarked those better avoided. My mother had a short fuse and as children we developed ways to avoid bearing the brunt of her anger. It wasn't always possible. Sometimes she would explode regardless, but we did what we could to maintain the peace, even as adults.

Simon became secretive. In fact he had become so adept at keeping secrets that he regularly hid any and all information that had the potential to elicit our mother's disapproval. Whenever he came to visit her, he displayed only those aspects of his personality of which she approved. That meant hiding some of the most significant parts of his life, a denial of self which would come at a cost. Simon had learnt that it was preferable to leave some things unsaid the hard way; screaming rows, disapproving silences and threats of being disowned had taught my brother the practical wisdom of revealing himself to his mother only sparingly.

For years I'd been the family peacemaker. It was a role I'd adopted in early childhood and carried into adulthood. I too had learnt not to discuss certain issues with my mother and only ever articulated an alternate stance when making a point was crucial to my peace of mind. I had learnt that my mother's point of view prevailed, regardless. It was definitely better to keep the peace.

Therapy brought enhanced insight and with it an awareness of how much I'd silenced myself over the years. Of how rarely I'd expressed my views to my mother or even been able to identify what they were. At forty-

five I started to challenge my mother's views, like an adolescent seeking independence, and she was far from impressed!

'Baba, I don't know why you are asking me these questions. There are secrets which are just for the three of us, you, me and Simey and they need to stay between us and no-one else.'

Most people would ask a person making a statement like the one my mother made to elaborate. I didn't because I was still learning how to challenge her. As I gained more insight I not only challenged her, but realised that her conversations no longer needed to represent absolute truth. They were her opinions and not mine. My job was to formulate opinions of my own and stick to them. As I sought to change the patterns of a lifetime, I questioned my mother further.

'Mum, I'm having some trouble remembering things, from when I was little.'

'Yes Baba. Your poor memory upsets me terribly. Your mother has a wonderful memory. I can't imagine what's wrong with yours! Sometimes I think you're making it up!' My mother was shouting at me. I hated it when my mother shouted.

'No Mum. I really can't remember.'

'Well it makes me angry. I just don't know what's wrong with you! I can remember everything about my childhood like it was yesterday.'

'Well it's very har...'

'Baba, you had a happy childhood and everything was done for the children! Isn't that enough? Daddy and I never went out together, you know. So you'd never be alone.'

'Yes, Mum. I've heard that before but I want to know more. I want to be able to remember for myself.'

'And Baba, your father loved you very much. You know that don't you? He adored you!'

It was strange hearing my mother talk about my father. The topic of my father had been taboo for such a long time.

Prior to my memories returning I'd rarely thought about my father, let alone chosen to speak about him. Previously, on the occasions a friend had inquired about him, I would feel distinctly uncomfortable and snap back a brutally blunt, 'He's dead.' And if the friend had dared ask anything else I would respond so abrasively that the questioning would abruptly stop.

I only dared question my mother directly about my childhood a couple of times, and neither time reaped any reward. As anticipated, she would be defensive at first, quickly become irritated and soon after, enraged. My mother resented my questioning and scoffed at the therapy which had spawned it. She was a firm believer that the past is the past and didn't believe in delving into issues. She subscribed to the theory that doing so only stirred things up unnecessarily. My mother reiterated this conviction frequently, and routinely reminded me that only those too weak to deal with their issues would ever consider going to a therapist.

I was seeing my psychologist and was fully engaged in my therapy. As the process challenged my belief system, I began to change. My mother, in the meantime, held onto her rigid views. The resulting tension between us shook the foundations of our relationship and drove a wedge between us. New insights meant that I could not remain the silent, compliant daughter I had been. The shift was difficult for my mother to handle. She preferred the 'old me' and told me so in no uncertain terms. But try as she might to hold onto the old me, I was not prepared to be the daughter she wanted ever again. My journey had become a journey to find my 'self'; a self that I was no longer prepared to deny for anyone. Especially her.

My mother loved going overseas and headed off whenever she could afford it. As luck would have it she was leaving on a six-week overseas trip soon after I'd decided that it wasn't worth asking her any more questions. Her time away provided me with the perfect opportunity to explore aspects of my past which she was loath to share. Still playing the dutiful daughter I drove her to the airport, but this time, after a farewell drink in the lounge, I headed straight back to her place.

My mother held onto all sorts of paraphernalia just in case it would become useful. As a result, her house was packed with memorabilia which others would have ditched eons earlier. As I searched for clues, my mother's idiosyncrasies were actually working in my favour for once.

I embarked on a thorough search of the three storeys of my mother's house, including the basement. I spent a good couple of days on the ground floor, checking inside cupboards and drawers and suitcases. I didn't find much of interest because the ground floor of her house was largely concerned with the details of everyday life.



In an upstairs bedroom, inside a wardrobe, under a pile of naphthalene-impregnated woollies, I uncovered an ancient leather handbag. Inside it I found a curious stash of parental memorabilia. Some items dated from the thirties and forties and included my mother's ID and a ticket for her passage to Australia. There was an old wallet of my father's; still holding pay slips, receipts and his passport photo. How handsome he'd once been! There was a stack of sympathy cards from 1968, the year my father died. I didn't recognise many of names signed at the bottom of the cards but I found solace in the sentiments they expressed.

I discovered one card from the doctor whose photo I'd found and it had a hand-written note inside it. In the note the doctor invited us to go and stay with him over Christmas; the Christmas after my father died. Reading the note upset me rather like his photo had. I didn't understand why, but swiftly packed it away and put the doctor to the back of my mind. I finished reading the cards and popped them back inside the handbag, covered the handbag with the naphthalene woollies and headed under the house.

My mother's basement was divided into four sections. The first was a cluttered laundry. The second harboured the largest stash of obsolete household gadgets, out-of-date products, jars and bottles in the Southern Hemisphere. I found Simon's chemistry set there, complete with corroded jars, and test tubes discoloured by the sludge of spent reactions. Simon had fancied himself as a 'mad scientist' and used to conduct his experiments in the basement. His speciality was baking gunpowder in my mother's oven, which in turn fuelled a series of rocket launches from the backyard. I'd help him test his rockets out, whenever he'd let me, fetching the matches, keeping a lookout for our mother, grabbing the hose in an emergency and refilling the holes the rockets made in the grass when they burrowed underground by mistake.

Section three was pitch-black, with pipes and cables snaking across the dirt floor. Despite hooking up a bulb I still risked life and limb, negotiating my way around. Stacks of assorted suitcases, metal trunks, cardboard boxes and containers lay blanketed under layers of hessian, carpet and plastic to protect the antiquated from ageing further. Ferreting through these items took several visits and unremitting determination.

Despite several generations of silverfish having supped on the items, a smorgasbord of bits and pieces remained intact; letters, poems and short

stories, sketchpads full of my father's drawings and innumerable musical scores that he'd composed.

I picked up an innocuous-looking exercise book and dusted it off. Inside it were pages of verse which used a perplexing array of constructs and stilted Shakespearian language. Another exercise book contained essays in which sentences lay angled across the pages and extra words were jotted throughout the margins. In addition, scrawled comments punctuated the text while key words were repeatedly underlined. I didn't know what to make of what I read. While much of his writing confused me, the music syllabus I found was delightful - his passion for music filled every page. I adored the way my father introduced composers as if they were old friends, how he had personified each instrument and brought musical eras and styles long passed, to life.

Through these remnants of my father's passions, I got in touch with the sensitivity he had displayed in his life. I stroked his work and held it close, embracing it and embracing him. Thirty years after my father died I was finally mourning him, and that process continued for months. It was weird; I felt as though he'd only just died, but then I was still mourning Angie. The problem now, was that I was grieving two deaths simultaneously.

Towards the end of the second week of my search, I tackled the last section of my mother's basement. Inside the numerous cartons stuffed with plastic bags were piles of yellowing papers. There was no order to them; items were stored on a first stashed/ longest forgotten principle. The most critical items were most often buried the deepest.

Squatting in the midst of generations of plastic bags, I explored an innocuous looking carton and removed a bag, compacted over time. I brushed it off and extracted an envelope stamped: 'Coroner's Office.' The corners of the envelope looked grubby and the paper was stained. I tried to pull the document inside, out but it was stuck. I pulled harder and doing so threw me backwards into the dirt, smashing my light in the process. I lay dazed for several minutes before I could pick myself up and go upstairs to get another bulb.

**Cyril I.**

**Institute of Forensic Pathology 2/10/68 at 10:30 am**

**Gunshot wound to abdomen**

**Jindal at 1/10/68 approximately 10:00 am**

It was the very report I'd stumbled across as a child, decades earlier, yet reading it now gutted me all over again. I was in no state to look at anything else after that or for the several weeks that followed. I gathered a few things together - a few musical scores, the music syllabus and some short stories and took them home with me. Over the ensuing weeks I studied them obsessively. I even played some of his pieces on the piano, and read the stories he'd written so often that I learnt them off by heart.

On my mother's return from overseas I surprised myself by owning up to the search up front. I was surprised that she didn't blow her stack. Maybe she was too relaxed after her holiday to lose her temper right away. Though she wasn't too relaxed to censor her customary comments.

'But Baba, you've never shown any interest in your father's things and quite frankly I could never understand why.'

I told my mother that I'd been playing my father's music.

'Oh there was a lot more music than that, Baba. When your father died I wanted to get rid of everything as quickly as possible. I threw a lot of his music out because I didn't want you and your brother to be upset. Did you know that some of your father's music was published? I sold a lot of it to the university. You know the one at St Lucia.'

I couldn't believe my ears. To think that the pick of my father's work had gone! That I would never get to see it or enjoy it! He was gone and my connections to him were gone. Such realisations upset me greatly and at times, the pain was too much to bear. I felt bereft and alone and suicidal thoughts once again came to the fore.

I had to remember that I wasn't alone. The family I had created was there for me, as were a few close friends. I also had a special person, a person with whom I could share my pain, who listened and empathised. Kate was amazing and her support was readily available. Yet sometimes I felt ambivalent about the support she offered and on occasions I'd push her away. I didn't trust her completely just yet. At other times I felt clingy and expected Kate to be instantly accessible, to materialise with a click of a finger, ready to meet my demands. During those times, no matter how much support Kate gave me, she still couldn't satisfy my insatiable need for time and attention. I was extremely needy, a child who was desperate to be cared

for but who pushed that care away as soon as her immediate needs had been met, without knowing why.

Kate worked hard to contain my angst but it wasn't an easy task. She was fighting a bevy of ghosts that were surfacing from my past and those ghosts were wreaking havoc with my peace of mind. My search and its findings seemed to have intensified the severity and frequency of my flashbacks. Each one delivered new fragments of reality and freshly confounded emotions and left me agitated and irrational.

Even though I had remembered quite a lot, I still had more gaps that I was anxious to fill. I didn't want to go back to my mother's place - I was too shaken up by what I'd found there already - but I did want to learn more, and looked for other ways to do just that.

## chapter 8

Since my brother and I had grown up in the same house, logic supposed that he might be able to fill in some of the gaps in my recall. I decided to meet with him and see what he knew. The difficulty would be that Simon and I weren't used to reminiscing or sharing anything personal. To further complicate what I was hoping to extract from him, he'd had his fair share of personal struggles and they had seriously clouded his perception of the past.

After our father died, Simon rejected his studious persona and hit the party scene running. In sharp contrast to his school career, his years at university were erratic. He skipped classes regularly, preferring to spend time at the races or the pokies to doing his work. Through most of those years he drank heavily and was often sozzled, high, or both. He wrote his car off more times than I'd like to remember and brushed with the law, telegraph poles and his own mortality far too frequently for comfort.

Instead of trying to understand the reasons behind Simon's rebellion, my mother simply punished him. He acted out mercilessly. Feeling personally affronted by his behaviour she would scream, even more than usual, and he screamed back twice as loud. At one point she even threatened to disown him. Simon moved out, back in and back out again, until the last time when he all but disappeared for several years. During those years Simon not only kept his distance from my mother, but ostracised me by association.

During that time my mother remarried and her new husband copped a lot of the anger that she had previously directed at my brother. Left with little option other than being good, I kept a low profile. I was a teenager who had never displayed any adolescent behavior or rebellion. Compelled to remain compliant, I allied myself to my mother whenever she was in conflict with either my stepfather or my brother.

When Simon announced that he was getting married I was shocked. I'd barely heard mention of his fiance, let alone had any chance to get to know her. We both lived in Sydney, so there was no geographical distance to validate or excuse the communication gap between us. Our alienation was very plainly a natural consequence of our family's dysfunction. After Simon

married he and his wife moved away and we rarely saw them. I married soon after Simon, with my marriage providing an acceptable reason to leave home.

Simon was introduced to the philosophy of 'Rajneesh' when his daughter was about three. It was a doctrine which he and his wife enthusiastically embraced. I couldn't relate to its dictates and Simon's blind devotion to its values drove us further apart. Years later, after Simon separated from his wife and was fighting for custody of Angie, he sought me out. His divorce was as acrimonious as they come and the accusations and counter-accusations were putrid. The protracted disputes played out detrimentally with Angie as she grappled to glean the truth about why her family had fallen apart. She struggled to decide which version of events to believe and which parent to trust, so conflicting were their stories and accusations.

During those difficult years, aspects of Simon's treatment of Angie disturbed me greatly. He failed to recognise the trauma she was experiencing in much the same way as our mother did with him, and often punished her rebellion at times when I felt that compassion and understanding were warranted instead.

Simon's ex-wife also struggled with an addiction to alcohol and the rages it caused. She loved Angie in her own way, but often couldn't care for her properly. Simon eventually won custody of Angie and she stayed on with him in the country while her mother moved to Sydney.

Angie chose not to see her mother much for several years after that. On the rare occasions on which Angie did visit her mother, we'd often receive a distressed call from her. We'd rush over to find Angie, squatting alone with her bags, on the footpath outside the house. We'd always hear the same story; there'd been some disagreement and her mother had lost her temper and lashed out. Eventually she stopped visiting. It was only after her mother was diagnosed with cancer that Angie started seeing her again. Their visits became more regular after a second diagnosis of cancer was made. During her mother's last months, Angie sat vigil. Bridges were mended as a daughter cared for a mother more lovingly and devotedly than her mother had ever cared for her.

Throughout my childhood it had been my role to bolster my brother's ego. Speaking out against his ways had been outside my brief and for a long time even as an adult, I wouldn't challenge him. Despite doing what I could

for Angie, I didn't step in as much as I could have when things spiralled out of control.

For years I feared that my brother was 'unstable' and I was at pains not to destabilise him further. I was terrified that some disaster would befall him and I had good reason. After years of addiction, Simon developed a hunger for adrenaline. He traded in Porches and copped endless speeding fines on local country roads; he bought a light plane and learned to fly; he scuba dived to the depths, tempting fate by pulling on the tails of sharks and other creatures of the deep; he embarked on treks to Everest and in the Hindu Kush in minus 30 degrees, technical climbs on which members of his party plunged to their deaths. As Simon played Russian roulette, my mother and I sat and watched nervously from the sidelines.

And then came Rajneesh.

Sporting the curious uniform of 'sunset coloured' clothes and a pendant featuring the leader, the Bhagwan, around his neck, Simon became a devotee. The espoused philosophy enticed my brother with a pain-free 'out' from his ruminating thoughts. It also brought countless extended trips away from Angie. Some were weekend workshops in Sydney, but many meant weeks and even months in Oregon in the Bhagwan's American retreat.

To me, the philosophy of Rajneesh seemed unapologetically hedonistic, urging its followers to look after number one above all else. It fed off the needy by offering the promise of a neatly packaged, stress-free way to live. For Simon, the trite tools Rajneesh provided undoubtedly helped relieve his intellectual intensity and the damages of a troubled childhood. He learnt to practise cathartic meditation, screaming daily in his garage for at least ten years. While it took the edge off his angst, it didn't provide him with any insight into its source.

Using Rajneesh practices Simon could still his agitation and ward off the depression which had plagued him for years. I believe it did so at the cost of his ability to think independently. Rajneesh transformed my brother into a cloned mouth-piece that sprouted a packaged philosophy. I saw it as brainwashing and it hit a raw nerve that would take me years to pinpoint.

In worshipping Rajneesh my brother abandoned his daughter time and again. My mother looked after her a few times but usually Angie was left in the care of a Fijian neighbour. Angie's Fijian mama loved and cared for Angie like one of her own, in a manner Angie had rarely experienced at any

other time. She was one of several ‘mothers’ at Angie’s funeral who had collectively taken the place of one mother who was scarcely there.

I grew close to Angie when she lived with us, and closer still after her mother died. After her mother’s death Angie was distraught. Sadly my brother, whose childhood losses had not been adequately processed, failed to comprehend the degree of his daughter’s distress. He reacted punitively to her angst, casting her out when she needed him most. How sad it was that traumas of prior generations played out in the present causing the next generation to flail just as the one before it! Thankfully the rift between Simon and Angie was in the process of mending when she died. There was a lot of love between them, but it had been repeatedly sabotaged by the extremes of emotional tumult - another pattern which spanned the generations.

My mother was, in my opinion, incapable of real emotional connection and her narcissism kept my brother and me emotionally separated; it caused a lot of damage. The wedge that stood between me and my brother allowed her to control us. She would invariably play favourites and continued to do so with her grandchildren. Simon and I took turns on the pedestal my mother erected - he was the golden boy up until adolescence and I stepped up to take his place after that. Now, once again, the tables were turned.

Despite the competitive undercurrents of our childhood, and our separation, Simon and I shared periods of closeness. I’m sad that there couldn’t have been more.

Although my journey of discovery naturally led me to Simon, I approached him with some trepidation. While I was keen to discover what he recalled, I was wary of the impact of asking him too many questions. I knew Simon had gaps in his memory because he’d intimated as much. My concern was that my questions might reactivate memories which would destabilise him, as mine had done to me.

I proceeded with caution, kicking off with a conversation about cane toads.

Toad escapades had been pivotal in our childhood.

‘Sure Catherine, sure I remember.’ Simon has always called me Catherine. No-one else does.



‘You would have been about six, Catherine and so desperate to have a go.’

Simon was right; I was desperate. I wanted to be chosen but then every member of the gang wanted to be in. That’s because when you were ‘in’ you got to be the one to light the cracker, smack bang under the toad’s belly.

*‘Me! Choose me! Ah come on, that’s not fair! Neil got to do it last time and the time before that and the time...’*

For years Simon would tell me that I was too young and I resented it. As for chucking a rock at a toad, I don’t think I ever got to do that. Only the older boys like Simon ever got a go. That’s why they scored so many direct hits - mid-centre between the toad’s eyes, sending the poor creature into a death spiral.

‘I never did get a turn, did I?’

‘Nah, you were too young and you were really pissed off about it too.’

‘Yes I was. I really was!’

‘Oh come off it, Catherine. It wasn’t all-bad! You had your day of fame, you know.’

‘I did?’

‘Yes, when you started that bushfire.’ I shook my head; it didn’t ring any bells at first, but as Simon continued, ‘Oh come on, you remember, with your little mate... what was his name? Hugh, yeah that was it, the weedy little kid with the Doctor Spock ears’, I swear that I could smell that smoke. There’d been plenty of it.

‘Sure, Hugh and Neil. The brothers from next door. How could I forget?’

‘And what about their mother? She was an old...’ Simon had hit the nail on the head. ‘Witch’, I added.

*I’m about seven and Hugh, my best friend is around eight, nine at the most. We’ve shaken off the rest of the gang and are playing with a box of matches I’ve nicked from the kitchen. Down the back behind the woodpile, I don’t know who strikes the offending match...*

‘Yeah, Neil and I were under our house making some sort of contraption or another. We heard the sirens. Couldn’t not! And came racing out. The gum trees behind Mrs William’s place had gone up. Wish I’d had a camera!’

I smirked, picturing the fire trucks howling up our street. ‘What about those hoses, then?’

‘Yeah, the water was pouring out. I’d never seen anything like it.’

‘And I couldn’t believe how pretty it looked; streams with rainbows in them. Better than anything on the Telly!’

Simon gave me a friendly shove. ‘Sure Catherine. And you missed the best bit. After Mum dragged you and Hugh screaming inside. Neil and I got to watch right down to the last billow of smoke from Mrs William’s shed. Just as well they saved that old biddy’s house otherwise you and your mate, you would have been mince meat! Although as I recall it, you were!’

I could feel my bottom smart as Simon spoke. Mum had beaten me black and blue with the wooden spoon from the top of the fridge.

‘Hey Catherine, what about that boat? The one we made from the scrap metal from the tip? Fixed it with an old soldering iron. What a job! And we painted the name on it: HMAS UNSINKABLE. Great name!’

‘I remember carting it all the way over the road and up to the pond. The bloody thing weighed a ton. It only floated for thirty seconds. You blamed me of course.’

‘Did not.’

‘Sure you did. You blamed me for everything. Even the sinking of the HMAS Unsinkable!’

‘Forget boats, now bikes, they were the go, don’t you remember? We rode them everywhere!’

I pictured my beaten-up old Malvern Star. It carried me all over the Redcliffe Peninsula. I even rode it to school. I loved the wind rushing through my hair, although it didn’t actually rush. My hair was cropped way too short for that.

‘And what about all those weekends at the beach, eh? Weren’t they amazing?’

Simon was right; our times at the beach were some of our best. We’d spend hours at the beach. Dad would balance on his haunches and beaver away, designing high-walled, moated fortresses and castles with turrets and drawbridges. He crafted strange creatures that even God hadn’t got around to designing.

When I visited our beach as an adult I was shocked to see a desolate, windswept expanse of coarse sand littered with seaweed and rubbish. I took my shoes off but the grit got under my toes and the shells cut my feet. My beach didn’t hurt when I was little.

Daddy used to turn simple strolls into magical mystery tours. We'd poke about in salty pools, steaming from the heat, taunting anemones until their tentacles closed around our fingers, or provoking cunjevoi into squirting out their load. We would trace periwinkles to the tiny mounds at the end of their tracks before digging them up, replacing them and tracking them to a new mound. Sometimes I'd hold a conch shell against my ear, like Daddy showed, or collect cuttlefish for our budgies back home.

I was a water baby. When I was small I would hang onto Daddy's hand, squealing with delight. A little older and we would wade out. I'd dive right under the dumpers, fingers pinching my nostrils together. Sometimes the waves would wash my feet out from under me, sucking me back under and spitting me out. Daddy would always be there to scoop me back up in time. And when we swam out past the breakers, I would feel all grown-up, but only for as long as Daddy stayed by my side.

At the end of a beach day Daddy and I would sit on the rocks gazing out to sea, the sea spray whipping against our faces. As the tide came in we'd rush back to protect our sandcastles. More sand, reinforcing higher walls, but the tide would march on and our moats would overflow, leaching the walls until our castles crumbled. Simon would pitch in, but even as a united front, our family was no match for the forces of nature. Minuscule sand crabs, masters of the sea by design, would burrow to safety while we, a thousand times their size battled against the wash and lost.

Simon and I had several conversations about the good old days, reminiscing as siblings should; school holidays, long drives with number plate games, I-spy, camping, tents, stretchers and eskies. But some of my fondest memories were born when Daddy and I spent time together after school.

When Daddy wasn't on playground duty or in rehearsals for the school musical, he'd get back soon after I did. Sometimes we'd take Cherry for a walk, or play catch in the backyard. Daddy wasn't very good at catch but it didn't matter - he was still playing with me. I liked it when everyone else was busy because I'd have Daddy all to myself. He'd lift me onto his lap, 'Well, lassie. What did you do at school today?' And Daddy wasn't like other daddies; he really was interested. I think that he enjoyed listening to me rattle on about school as much as I enjoyed telling him.

'What happened next?'

'Did you and Susie make up?'

‘I’m sure you’ll learn the rest tomorrow.’

And I glowed.

Daddy didn’t spend all of his spare time with me, although I wished he had. First there was music; Daddy adored music. He’d sit in his chair composing, writing, sketching or painting with a symphony thundering in the background. He also loved to read. Daddy’s books and manuscripts filled the house. Along with his tools - 2B,HB, pens and coloured pencils, charcoal and paints and a thick rectangular orange eraser. Most afternoons Daddy would write or sketch right up until dinnertime. After dinner Daddy would wash up. Sometimes I would help dry to give me a chance to talk to him. As soon as Daddy finished washing up, he’d head back to his chair. I didn’t mind too much because the best treat was still to come.

Every night when Daddy put me to bed he’d read me a story. He’d lie down with his head on my pillow.

‘Well, lassie? Which book will we read tonight?’

‘This one Daddy! Or should we read this one? How about two, Daddy? Oh Daddy, two please?’

I’d rest my head on Daddy’s chest and listened intently as the pictures flashed by. I would have happily listened to the same book over and over again. That’s how much I loved story time. Even when I could read perfectly well myself, Daddy would still read to me. Having my Daddy close, his breath warm against my cheek meant the world to me. I wouldn’t let anything ever take it away.

‘Tell me, Simon. What do you remember from later on, after you were about, umm, eleven or?’

I saw the colour drain from Simon’s face as he turned away and stared off into the distance.

‘Hey Simon, what’s up?’ Some time passed before he spoke.

‘Well Catherine, it’s weird. After that everything changes. It changes and I get sad, really sad and all I can see is Dad sitting in that chair of his. You remember his chair, don’t you? He sits in his chair and, I can’t get him to move.’

Although Simon had helped me to recall some of our childhood adventures, he had not been able to cast any light on anything else. He too was at a loss to remember the details of times I was so desperate to recollect and comprehend. I remained in the dark regarding what troubled me.

## chapter 9

For most of my primary years my father taught at my primary school; Humpybong. Humpybong (meaning 'dead huts' to the traditional owners of the land) was the main public school on the Redcliffe Peninsula. Its name; however, belied its ambience. Gaze from any window in the main building and you could see the waves breaking on the sandbanks off shore. Humpybong was a great school for young kids. The laidback education was infused with a sense of freedom, matched by a connection with the prevailing elements - primarily the regular gusts of sea spray and sand that the southerlies brought in.

Having my Daddy at school with me was a godsend for a child who was as painfully shy as I was. Most kids loved him and his popularity helped boost my fragile ego. Besides, he always made me feel special and protected me from the 'rough and ready' side of the playground.

The year I turned eight, Simon left Humpybong to start high school in the city. That year marked a turning point and the beginning of a downhill spiral for the whole family. My mother started teaching at the Girls' Grammar, necessitating two extra hours on the road every day. The additional travel exhausted her and she became even more short-tempered than usual. After a few months my parents decided that it was all too hard and decided to sell up and move closer to Brisbane. And at the end of that year, my father resigned from Humpybong.

I was devastated. An insecure child, I hated change of any sort and these changes were massive. Yet I was grateful that our Christmas holiday break together would not be affected. Holidaying as a family provided some of the best times we ever shared.

Most years at Christmas we would head off up the coast. With six weeks to play with we'd travel far afield. Simon and I would stave off boredom by playing all sorts of games. 'I-spy' and number plate games were old faithfuls, but collecting stamps for our Golden Fleece books was the best. Detouring in search of obscure entries undoubtedly drove our parents spare.

Our holidays were not luxurious. Camping was the order of the day. My father was in charge of pitching the tent and Simey and I were his offsideers.

We'd squabble over whose turn it was to be in charge of the mallet and whacking the pegs in. Or who was doing the final adjustments to the guy ropes. Our old lean-to leaked like a sieve when it rained. Getting the angle on the roof right was crucial, as downpours and strong winds were a certainty at Christmas time up north, courtesy of cyclones from the tropics. Many a night was spent battening down the hatches to resist gales and squalls.

Our mother was in charge of the interior. With army-issue stretchers to erect, an esky to restock as well as cooking gear, lanterns, lilos and other paraphernalia there were always plenty of jobs to go around. Camping meant tinned food; Tom Piper Braised Steak and Vegetables, Tom Piper Sausages and Mash - I hated them all.

Our camping days were relaxed with lots of swimming and strolling in the sun. However the rain brought its pleasures too. At the first drops Simon and I would be out digging trenches to stop the inside of the tent getting wet. We'd get drenched ourselves, but that was all fun. Our mother would scream, but it was worth it. Her holiday screaming didn't seem as angry as her outbursts at home.

The summer holiday after my father resigned from Humpybong should have been great, but it wasn't. Daddy kept to himself and didn't join in the fun. I asked him what was wrong but he wouldn't tell me. Maybe he was sad about leaving Humpybong; I sure was. And I noticed something funny too. It was his right leg; it jiggled a lot. It jiggled when he sat on his stretcher eating his tea and when he sat on the rocks looking out to sea. It even jiggled when he lay curled up in front of the fire at night.

In February my father started teaching at a high school in Sandgate, halfway between Redcliffe and Brisbane. Later that year we moved to a suburb of Brisbane called Indooroopilly. I hated leaving my friends behind. Indooroopilly primary was much bigger than Humpybong and not nearly as friendly. And for the first time ever, Daddy wasn't at school with me. I couldn't go to him when I felt scared anymore.

The best thing about Indooroopilly was discovering tennis. The sports teacher stuck a racquet in my hand soon after I arrived and to everyone's surprise, I was a natural. The timing couldn't have been better. Given the recent change in my father, I was in the market for an activity to keep me

and my thoughts, busy. Tennis became an obsession and I clung to my racquet for years to come and rarely released my grip.

The local tennis courts soon became my second home. When I wasn't on one court, I was on another, and when I wasn't on any court, I was in the telephone exchange next door to our house. It had a brick wall designed for beating tennis balls senseless with an asphalt run-off which gave a good enough bounce for my purposes. At night, or when it rained, I couldn't play, but I soon found a substitute. Word Games kept my head just as busy. I would toy with word substitutions and rhyming games for hours and sometimes be so engrossed that even when I tried to take a break, my mind would not clear the words away. On occasions I would drop off to sleep with a word chase in mid-flight only to awaken the next day with the same words stuck in my head.

I didn't see as much of my father after we changed schools, even though he still came home early. We should have been able to spend almost as much time together, but we didn't. He was different. He didn't want to play with me anymore. I tried to entice him by putting on shows, something he'd previously enjoyed. I made up plays and dance routines. I even did some poetry readings. Not that I liked poetry, but Daddy did. No matter what I did, I couldn't get his attention, so I tried a new approach. If I could just get him talking...

I chose topics that should have interested him; what he liked about his new school; who his new friends were. I asked if he was okay and whether I'd done something to upset him.

'Daddy, what can I do to make you feel better?'

'Daddy, oh Daddy, can you hear me?'

'Daddy, is there anything I can do to help?'

I might as well have been talking to a wall for all the response I got. I started to wonder whether we'd ever been close because part of me couldn't remember anymore. If my father had packed his bags it would have felt better. Having him there but not being able to get a reaction was devastating. I prayed that the spell the wicked witch must have cast on him would be broken. That he would wake up and be my Daddy again. That he would come and kiss me goodnight and tuck me into bed and lie down beside me and read me stories like he used to.

I didn't know what was happening and I didn't have anyone to ask. No-one explained anything. And so a little girl of eleven watched as her Daddy slipped away. I became convinced that he was dying. I knew he must be. Why else wouldn't he want to play with me? There couldn't be any other explanation. But there was hope! His leg was still jiggling and as long as it jiggled I knew he couldn't be dead. I watched that leg like a hawk.

Every afternoon he'd come back home and collapse into his chair. Before long, sitting in his chair was all he seemed to do. How I hated that chair! He seemed to prefer it to me. It was such an ugly chair too; ugly with its moulded wooden armrests and beige vinyl cushions that parted ways when he sat down. He'd sit there in his uniform. I called it his uniform because he always wore the same clothes. Baggy trousers with stains where his food had gone AWOL, a crumpled shirt with the shirt tails hanging out, and a moth-eaten cardigan buttoned off centre.

I can still see his slippers. His toes poked out the front while the backs were trampled flat from the trudging he did between chair sits. And his hair was tussled, his greying curls flecked with dandruff, and his once smooth face rough with the stubble of indifference. It was his eyes which haunted me most. They had lost their sparkle. And they didn't glisten or gleam; they didn't even seem to focus either. He would stare off into the distance, seemingly searching for something without finding it. And when I tried to make him look straight at me by standing in front of him, his eyes would look straight through me to the back of beyond and further.

He didn't write anymore, or sketch or compose although he still played his music. Sometimes he didn't really seem to listen to it; he wouldn't even notice when the record finished. He would sit in his chair staring, with the record screeching away, until someone passing became alerted to the absence of sound. Occasionally he'd pick up a musical score, but instead of working away, he'd leave it on his lap until gravity got the better of it, and it toppled to the floor.

He didn't flinch when we walked into the room or switched on the television in front of him, nor did he notice us sitting on the couch next to his chair. And when, on Sundays, the family ate dinner together on the couch with beige vinyl cushions, my Daddy would sit blankly in his chair with the three of us sitting beside him.

I kept trying to bring him back to life.



*'Daddy, Helen brought in a tree frog for show and tell today. Daddy, a croaky tree frog. Daddy, can you hear me?'*

*'Daddy, Daddy, Please. Please, Daddy. I've got something really special to show you. It's magic. You'll see... Daddyyyyyy!'*

But there was no magic anywhere. No matter what I did or said or did not do and did not say, there was no response. Maybe he didn't want to be my Daddy anymore. I'd never heard of a Daddy quitting, but he'd resigned from Humpybong. Maybe he'd resigned from me too.

*'Daddy, I'm here. It's me, your princess!'*

*I'm gesticulating furiously trying to get the Daddy statue to acknowledge me but it doesn't. I stop jumping to check whether the statue is still alive. I poke the fleshy parts of the statue's arms and give the statue bruises but it doesn't move. I tug the end of the statue's shirt and hear the material rip but the statue still doesn't react.*

I couldn't explain it. It seemed as if all of the life had been sucked out of my Daddy. He used to be the best Daddy in the world and I loved him and he loved me and that's how it was meant to be forever. My Daddy was never meant to be a statue.

## chapter 10

My father had a sibling, a younger brother named Paul. Paul was married and living in Queensland with his wife and three children. I hadn't seen or heard from Paul since the year after my father died. My mother was in contact with him, once a year at Xmas they exchanged Seasons Greetings; but that was all.

I wrote to Paul to see what secrets he might know and spent a few anxious weeks waiting for a reply.

Paul was in his late seventies and in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Needless to say he was surprised by my letter. His response was somewhat guarded but included a few vignettes from his childhood years. I responded enthusiastically and asked Paul to fill in a few blanks about my father. Paul's second letter was warmer than the first and provided me with some invaluable insights into my father's early life. In my next letter I thanked Paul and inquired about the period after my parents' marriage, but he replied with a rather curt, 'ask your mother' and any further communication stopped soon after.

My father grew up in Hawthorne, on the shores of the muddy Brisbane River. In Hawthorne streets intersected at right angles, nature strips were neatly trimmed with houses being replicas of one another. Hydrangeas and coleuses ruled supreme as did surgically pruned rose bushes, ornamental grapes and citrus trees struck from cuttings after a natter over the back fence. My father's childhood home typified Brisbane suburbia having been hammered from parallel wooden slats and painted anonymous off-white. The house was raised up on stilts, had an enclosed veranda on one side and featured a flat but spacious backyard complete with chicken coop. It had a large area underneath with several different sections, all dark due to an absence of any natural light.

With the help of Paul's letters I was able to picture my father's childhood bedroom. Simon and I shared it on the rare occasions we spent the night at our grandmother's house. And so I imagined my father sitting alone, reading or writing: a bespectacled lad in a no-nonsense bedroom with four drab grey walls lined by heavy wooden skirting boards, darkly stained

picture rails and naked hooks - little colour to be found. Two impeccably made beds; sheets starched crisp and unyielding. His bed was raised high off the ground, with a matching wardrobe and dressing table, equally darkly stained. Paul's bed stood opposite, with his dressing table and wardrobe; carbon copies of the first.

My father's father, Jo, was a policeman who worked long hours of different shifts. He died when Simon was one year old so I never got to meet him. He was said to be a sweet and gentle man while his wife, my grandmother, reportedly ruled the roost. My grandmother, according to Paul, was strict and judgmental. Apparently she was disappointed by my father and his choices. He was neither strong nor macho. Nor did he become a policeman or a bank teller as expected. What's more, he married my mother - a foreigner - and that was an unforgivable sin!

My father was a dreamer who, despite all his talents, didn't excel in any one field. Teaching suited him because he was more comfortable with children than adults. He could relate on a child's level and genuinely share a child's sense of wonder with the world. Yet teaching didn't satisfy his aspirations. It was his search for more that saw him head overseas in his mid-twenties. According to Paul, my father left home against his mother's wishes. No-one in my father's family ventured abroad without good reason, and the only good reason was to defend God and country.

My parents met on the ship my father took to England. My mother was returning to Europe, having spent two lonely years in Australia after the war. My father was fifth generation Australian and my mother, a Polish Jew. My parents' backgrounds were disparate, but they had a lot in common; a love of classical music, a passion for literature, and most of all, a desire to shake off their past and start a new life.

My mother, orphaned during the Holocaust had been sponsored on her trip to the Antipodes by an uncle, who was already resident in Australia. He felt that he was 'rescuing' his niece. As truth would have it, my mother had suffered horrifically during the war, but after liberation she was finding her feet in post war France. When my uncle tracked her down through the Red Cross, she was studying at the Sorbonne. She'd developed a circle of friends and was feeling freer than she had in years. My mother only agreed to go to Australia out of a sense of duty; arriving to her uncle's welcome and his wife's resentment. She felt more isolated than ever in Australia and couldn't wait to leave.

My mother was born into a well-to-do family and she grew up with the best of everything, in an industrial Polish town called Lodz. She lived in an elegant apartment with Persian rugs scattered over parquet floors and priceless antiques in every room. Not only did my mother's family have nannies, maids and tutors at their beck and call, but they were part of a rich, vibrant Jewish community. In childhood she had lots of friends and a large loving extended family. Her early life was one of abundance where my father's was modest.

As a child, I knew little of my mother's background. I knew she came from Poland, and that Poland was in Europe, but she didn't speak about her family or her childhood. It was as if she had no past. As a child I knew that my mother was different to the average Aussie Mum. She spoke with an accent and prepared strange dishes, like pickled herrings and cabbage soup. She didn't bake cakes like my grandmother, nor did she make scones with lemon butter, or mince pies at Christmas.

My mother kept to herself. She had a few friends; most were colleagues from school. Her best friend in Brisbane was Lily, who was Polish like my mother and spoke French as well as several other languages; just like Mum. Together they would criticise Australia, Aussies and most things Australian.

When I was seven, my mother took us to Israel while Daddy stayed home. Before we went she spoke about her family there; I didn't know that she had a family before that. I couldn't work it out. When I looked for Israel on the map, I discovered that it wasn't anywhere near Poland.

My mother didn't explain that she was Jewish and that Israel was the Jewish homeland. Going to Israel held no special significance for me. I could have been going anywhere. I didn't want to go because Daddy wasn't coming with us. I'd never been away from him for a single night let alone a whole six weeks. I missed him from the moment we walked through the gates of the airport and cried as I boarded the plane and even more as the plane took off. When the plane stopped in Darwin and Simey got lost in the toilets, I cried again. I felt a little better when we got off the plane in Bangkok and had a yummy breakfast with sweet juicy pineapple and pawpaw and went to see the floating markets, but I was sad again when we had to get on another plane.

Israel was a long way away and we flew for hours and then more hours. By the time we arrived it was dark. The airport in Israel was busy and people were shouting. I didn't know why they were shouting, because I couldn't understand them but shouting made them sound angry. I didn't want to stay in a place with angry people; I wanted to go home. I was scared.

We caught a taxi to my mother's uncle's place - a different uncle to the one who had brought her to Australia. An old man and woman opened the door and they kissed my mother all over and hugged her. My mother was glowing. I'd never seen her so excited. The old man and woman grabbed me and kissed me and pinched my cheeks. I didn't like them doing that because they were strangers and I didn't want strangers kissing me. I just wanted to go back home to my Daddy in Australia where I could understand what people were saying; and where people didn't shout.

For the first few days I wouldn't let my mother out of my sight in case I got lost, or someone said something which needed translating. After the first couple of weeks I got a bit more used to being there and I even liked being kissed by my mother's uncle and aunt; especially because my Daddy wasn't there to kiss me. I didn't like being pinched on the cheek, or patted on the bottom, but I liked being spoilt. I'd never been spoilt before except by my Daddy; with stories. Simey and I were spoilt in Israel. We got treats every day. Another uncle of my mother's owned a leather shop and next door to the leather shop was a cake shop. That uncle let us go to the cake shop every morning to choose a cake. I'd never had such yummy cakes as I had in Israel. There were lots to choose from but the chocolate one with all the cream was my favourite, so I chose that one lots.

As the weeks went on I liked Israel more and towards the end of the six weeks I would let my mother go out for a couple of hours at a time without me. There were always lots of children to play with; cousins who lived close by. The best game was the one that we played from the roof of the block of flats my mother's first uncle lived in. You could go right up on the roof of the flats in Israel and lie down on your stomach so no-one could see you and throw water bombs on the people walking on the street below. You didn't need to speak the language to drop water bombs.

Cakes and games were the highlights of my trip to Israel and family too. In Israel I had a family that gathered around me and made me feel special. I wished my Israel family would come back to Australia to meet my Daddy. I

wished that they would come and live with us in Australia. I liked having a big family.

I found some of the letters that my mother sent to my father from Israel when I was searching her place. It was weird reading what I'd written at the bottom of my mother's aerogrammes.

'We are having FUN. I hop you are two.'

'Two day we went to a cake shop. Mine was yummy.'

'I miss you Daddy.'

And I also found some letters which my Daddy had written to my mother and was surprised to discover that he'd been keen to move to Israel; permanently. It seems that my mother didn't want to. I still don't understand why.

After the six weeks we came back home and the instant family from Israel disappeared. My mother didn't talk about them much, but whenever she did, she glowed. She always glowed when she talked about her family in Israel.

My father's family was less confusing because it fitted into the Aussie scene. It was only my father who didn't. Many of my father's rellies lived in and around Brisbane and the ones who didn't still lived in Queensland. When I was four I was a flower girl at Paul's wedding. I don't remember being a flower girl but I must have been because my mother had the photos. I looked cute in my frilly dress with my black patent shoes and lacy socks. I even had ribbons in my hair. I don't remember ever having ribbons in my hair.

We didn't see Paul or his family often, only a few times a year. My father and he had all but lost touch in their early adult lives and that gap had never been properly bridged. Paul did pop by regularly for a few weeks after my father died, but his visits soon waned. I hadn't seen any of my Queensland relatives including Paul's children for decades and wouldn't recognise them if I bumped into them in the street.

As for my grandmother, we saw her regularly when I was young, but when I was about six or seven we stopped and didn't see her for years after that. As a child I could sense my parents' resentment of her. I disliked her; she frightened me. She was cold and humourless and even when she tried to be nice, she wasn't. My father didn't like her either. Nor did he like the rest of his family from what I could tell. He had lots of aunts and uncles and cousins, but we rarely saw them. My father didn't have many friends either;

in fact I can't remember a single one to name. My parents were isolated and as a result, so were we.

My mother's isolation had taken seed during the war. She was sixteen when the German army swept into Poland. Life for Jews had been steadily deteriorating for several years prior to the outbreak of war. Once it broke out and anti-Semitism raged, my mother's once charmed existence was systematically eroded.

Freedoms were cancelled and human rights undermined as Jews were persecuted simply because they were Jews. In 1942 her family was forced to leave their home and security and move into the Warsaw ghetto with thousands of other displaced persons. My mother was interned in that ghetto with her parents and her brother, Stefan, who was seven years' younger and forbidden to leave. They were squeezed into cramped surroundings which they shared with other families and the few possessions that were permitted. Conditions inside the ghetto were dreadful. The allocated area was overcrowded and food was hard to find.

My mother's family was luckier than most as they could afford to buy food, at least initially, on the black market. But as time went on, food even for those with the means to purchase it, grew scarce. The little that was available was of poor quality and little nutritional value. Disease spread readily in the unhygienic conditions. Typhus was rife. People died of starvation or disease or from the cold. Corpses piled up daily on the street waiting to be cleared and my mother, like other ghetto residents, was obliged to step over dead neighbours as she went about her business.

The Nazi captors were cruel and their sadistic games of humiliation and dehumanisation gained further momentum. As cruelty became torture and torture became murder, Jewish survival often depended on twists of fate. Assassinations took place on a whim and supplemented those occurring on a mass scale by order of the SS, Hitler's henchmen.

My mother didn't speak about the horrors of those years until she was in her sixties and self-published a book detailing her pre-war and war time existence. Her book highlights her dogged determination to survive. In stark contrast she also describes the magic of an indulged childhood and the richness of family and friends who loved her. She makes no mention of her mother's temper, her coldness or the passing parade of nannies caring for her. She contrasts this with a picture of a warm and loving yet mainly absent father. She also writes about the envy she felt when her brother was

born. His arrival after seven years in the spotlight undoubtedly shook her world. No doubt my mother's early years were not as idyllic as they first appeared.

Nothing that happened before the war broke out compared with the tragedy of life during the occupation. When selections for death camps became a daily reality, my mother's parents devised a plan for her to escape. She had already gone on several escapades outside of the ghetto walls, seeking food and medicine for her family. She had proven that she could escape, but plans were needed to ensure that she could survive once she left the ghetto for good.

Her parents used their few remaining resources to purchase false papers. She would adopt a new identity and live as a Catholic country girl on the Christian side of Warsaw. As my mother practised the persona of her adopted disguise, she prepared to leave her family and old life behind her for good.

I have tried time and again to imagine how my mother must have felt as she left her parents and younger brother behind, knowing she would probably never see them again. How confused she must have been walking out of the ghetto all alone, with only the clothes on her back and her mother's handbag with a few priceless mementoes - her mother's powder puff and gold watch and her father's gold chain. She strode through the gates of that ghetto without looking back; any show of emotion would have meant certain death.

In August of 1942 my mother became an orphan of the world, displaced and dispossessed. And she left with her father's final words to her ringing in her ears: 'Always follow a straight path.'

My mother adopted her new identity and lived in daily fear of being discovered. Any sign of her prior identity would have betrayed her. A few months after her escape, Stefan was smuggled out into her care. His escape unlike hers was ill-conceived and he arrived without the necessary papers. Within hours they were exposed and both of their lives threatened. My mother pleaded with her captors and was forced to hand over the valuables in her possession to ensure her own survival. Stefan could not be saved and was sent back to the ghetto. My mother never saw him again. Within months she learned of his murder. Her mother and father had also been exterminated.



The news of her family's annihilation marked the end of her prior existence. Yet she could not react; circumstances demanded her silence until the end of the war. She could not openly grieve; nor could she tell her story to a single soul, for she had no allies in her new life. She left Poland and lived out the rest of the war in Germany under cover. The extreme nature of the disconnection she employed would secure her safety, but would impact her life in a multitude of ways in the future.

The story of how my mother survived the war is in her book. Suffice to say, she suffered unspeakable trauma for six years. The experience had desensitised her to the impact of any other traumatic events ever since. Like many holocaust survivors my mother never found any trauma to be as significant as that suffered during the war. After the war, she sought to start a new life and did so by marrying my father, denying her Jewish heritage and moving into an alien society. Once again she disconnected from all things familiar, including her own sense of 'self'. My mother abandoned European society without ever embracing Australia and as a consequence still feels alienated here after more than half a century.


Like many other Holocaust survivors my mother imbued her life after the war with special meaning. She denied the guilt she must have felt for surviving and glorified her survival thereafter. She believed there to be a reason she survived when so many others perished and that as a result, her life was sacred. She tried to live every day to the full and she expected her offspring to do the same. In marrying my father and settling in Redcliffe, she started afresh. Simon and I were born from the rubble of her previous existence. We were special and our lives had to be happy, even if they weren't.

By the time my parents' ship docked in Dover, my parents were betrothed and they married within weeks. They settled in England, but life wasn't easy for them there. My father struggled to find work and when he did it was in a rough school that he hated. His students were unruly and disinterested and my father soon became despondent. In poor and unheated accommodation, they shivered their way through the harsh English winter and even the news of my mother's pregnancy did little to alleviate my father's mood.

My parents stayed in London until Simon was born, but when he was six weeks old they climbed aboard another ship and headed back to Australia. Neither of them was keen to return, but they had little choice.

They couldn't afford to stay away. It seems that my grandmother had made up her mind about my mother before meeting her. She didn't like foreigners. Who was this Polish woman who had stolen her son? When they arrived, my grandmother snubbed my mother and barely greeted her son. Family folklore has it that on inspecting her grandson she exclaimed, 'All in pink!' My mother had committed the unpardonable Anglo Saxon sin, she'd dressed a baby boy in pink.

The tenor of the relationship between my mother and grandmother was established on that day and little love was lost between them after that. To her dying day my grandmother had no idea that her daughter-in-law was Jewish, or that her grandchildren were for that matter either.



ripped apart

## chapter 11

After eighteen months in therapy I was starting to feel better. The panic attacks had stopped and I rarely felt anxious. My increasing ability to trust, a skill that I was acquiring through therapy, was improving my other relationships. Because I was more in touch with my thoughts and feelings, I could connect better with friends and family. I still wasn't gregarious; I didn't feel comfortable in large groups and so my social circle had contracted, but the relationships I did have were becoming more meaningful.

I was functioning better on a practical level too. I could shop, cook and clean and even manage some of the washing. And even though I still felt down at times, I barely gave The Gap a passing thought, let alone tempted fate by frequenting it. Understanding more about my parents and their background had also helped to ground me. All in all I was feeling more stable and more secure in my own skin.

The photos I'd pulled together had been a godsend. I pored over them regularly, relishing the images they elicited and the memories I retrieved as a result. One day as I was looking through my album, the photo of the doctor I'd seen at my mother's place popped back into my head. I felt immediately uncomfortable and, try as I might, I could not get his face out of my mind. After several restless days and nights I decided to go back and take another look at the original.

Back at my mother's place I flipped to the page in question. One look at him and I felt sick to my stomach. I slammed the album shut, and sat for a few minutes to settle my nerves.

The doctor was short and stocky and his hair, glistening with Brylcreem, was pasted hard onto his skull. His cold icy eyes penetrated me from the page, with his nicotine-stained sneer, dominated by an ill-fitting gold incisor. In the photo, his arms encircled me like the tentacles of an octopus entrapping its prey. His fingers dug into my flesh. As an all too familiar cocktail of stale sweat, halitosis and nicotine assaulted me, I remembered the holiday my mother and I had taken in Sydney right after my father died.

Simon hadn't come with us; he had a holiday job picking tobacco in northern NSW. My mother and I had driven for two days and were exhausted when we arrived. My father had been dead only three months and I'd been sick for weeks. Nothing serious; listlessness mainly and a few aches and pains. My mother was sick of me being sick. She had no patience for illness of any kind; however, she was relieved that we would be staying with the doctor; not only was he a close friend, but he was, in her opinion, omniscient as well.

I had met the doctor a few times before. He and his wife had come to Brisbane on a number of occasions to visit us. I'd never felt comfortable with the doctor, but that didn't worry my mother. She adored him and that was all that mattered.

\*

*'Of course Lucy, my dear. Don't worry! You've had enough, more than enough to handle. But you'll have to wait a little I'm afraid. Not too long but I have a couple of patients to see. I'll be as quick as I can.'*

*The doctor leads us down a hallway connecting his house to his surgery. 'Just wait here, will you?'*

*The doctor indicates a scatter of faded orange plastic chairs.*

*'Shouldn't be long. Now... er, Mr and Mrs Smythe, sorry to keep you waiting. Come on in, yes, that's right. Through here.'*

*An elderly couple gets up and follows the doctor into his consulting room.*

*I sit on the plastic chair next to a coffee table on which a heap of National Geographics and Reader's Digests fight for space. A dust-impregnated pot plant takes up the corner.*

*When I can't sit straight any longer I sprawl out across a few of the chairs and fall asleep. I awake to the doctor's hand stroking my arm.*

*'Come on, Catherine, there's the girl. Come with me.'*

*I reach across and tug on my mother's arm.*

*Even at fourteen years' old I was scared of going anywhere new by myself.*

*'Let Mum have a rest, eh? There's a good girl.'*

*'Go on Bubs! Off you go!' Once my mother waves me off I have no choice but to go with him, alone.*

*I look around the doctor's office. It's messy and I don't like the look of the instruments strewn over his desk. I don't know what they're for.*

*'Come on Catherine. Lie down over here, there's a good girl.'* The doctor pats the top of a hard looking couch draped with off-white butcher's paper.

*'Now lift up your arms, there's a good girl.'* The doctor eases my shirt off over my head.

*'Now, sit forward. I'm just going to listen to your chest.'* The cold metal rim of the chest-thingy makes me shiver. The doctor lifts it off the back of my chest and places it on the front.

*'Sit up again and say, 'Ah'.*

*I gag as the cold shoehorn thingy squashes my tongue.*

*'Good girl. Now lie down again, will you? I'm just going to have a bit of a feel.'* The doctor pulls my shorts down, feels my tummy and whisks my panties off. I don't say a word. I can't. His fingers push into my skin, move on and push again. They venture down to the skin between my legs and feel around. Minutes pass; I still can't speak. They feel some more.

*'All done! Get dressed now Catherine and, ah tell your mother that there's nothing much wrong.'*

*I scurry back to my mother with tears in my eyes.*

*'What's wrong Baba, come on now! Out with it!'*

*'Mum, I'm sorry. Please don't be angry!'* My mother is angry already; I can feel it.

*'Well it's just that Monty touched me. He touched me, in... in bad places where, where he shouldn't and... and it felt bad.'*

*'Oh Baba, don't be silly. Don't take any notice at all. Monty's always doing that sort of thing. He's a bit funny like that. If it happens again just tell him to stop being silly!'*

I was a sick, shy and recently bereaved fourteen-year old and my mother had spoken. There was little I could do other than try to forget, and move on as best I could. And forget I did, although that particular episode was not repressed as others were. I pushed any memory of it to the back of my mind and stopped thinking about it.

Seeing the doctor's photo made me face that incident, but doing so, I was badly affected. Before long I was cycling through the downward spiral I'd worked so hard to avoid. Restless, agitated, alone and depressed I

struggled to feel safe, even with Kate. But this time the sleeplessness of my nights heralded a new era of terror.

I hadn't dreamt for years and if I had, I didn't remember any of my dreams. That soon changed.

When I had my first nightmare I didn't know what it was.

It felt so real. I'd only ever been on a raft once, and the one in my nightmare didn't resemble that one at all. The raft in my nightmare was shoddily-built and its flimsy ties strained to hold the roughly hewn logs together against the turmoil of the rapids.

*The raft strikes a boulder on the bottom of the river, shudders and sighs but stays in one piece. I'm drenched, and incredulous that I've survived. There's little time to celebrate before the current shoots the raft off downstream. It rips along but then gets caught in an eddy and stays trapped for several minutes as another raft sweeps past.*

*I recognise the other raft; it's the one my daughter took when we set off, but she's no longer on it. My raft jolts away; the momentum hurls me backwards. I manage to hold on, but within minutes, the raft gets wedged again. Stuck still, I catch sight of my daughter's body in the water upstream and watch helplessly as the water sucks her under, and her head disappears. And hold my breath as her head pops back up, and disappears once more. I see nothing until her body tumbles towards me in the current. I reach out my hand to grab her and manage to touch the tips of her fingers, but can't grab hold of them. Then she's gone.*

When I awoke from my nightmare I was sitting bolt upright, with one hand stretched out over the side of the bed. The air touching my finger tips felt frosty and I was shaking like a leaf. I tried to calm myself down. After all it wasn't real, I reasoned. It was only a nightmare.

## chapter 12

After my first nightmare I endeavoured to reclaim my equilibrium, but it didn't happen. Logic couldn't quell my constant anxiety and before long nightmares, like the first one, became a recurring event.

*There's a fire consuming the forty-storey office block where I work. Fumes are choking all of the exits. As I clamber across the roof looking for a way out, the flames catch up with me. The smoke weighs heavily on my chest. I gasp for air, but can't get enough. I pray that someone will come to help me but no-one does. The smoke and flames close in.*

I awoke from my second nightmare with a splutter and so too, with the third and the fourth. In fact over the weeks that followed all of my nightmares saw me trapped, alone and fighting for my life, with little hope of being saved. Although I experienced a variety of nightmares, one in particular recurred frequently.

*I am a child, ten at the most, and I'm running through the jungle alone. A soldier in full combat gear is thundering at my heels. His machine gun is pointed mere metres from my temple. The twisted branches and vines whip against me as I hurdle over them. When my foot gets caught in the roots of the jungle floor I stumble and right myself, only to stumble again and crash to the ground. I pick myself up and take flight but the soldier gains ground. My pace slackens and my legs begin to buckle. I look up and see the vegetation thinning, muster all my strength and with one final burst, I trample through the undergrowth and out into the light on the riverbank.*

*There's a bamboo wharf jutting out into the stream. A small dugout canoe is just leaving it. I recognise my mother in the back of the canoe, reclining while a native fans her with a giant palm frond.*

*The palm frond cuts through the mist. Someone inside the canoe points me out. My mother sits up and shouts. 'Sorry Baba. It's too late.*

*I can't come back for you now.'*

No matter how many times this scene played out in my head, I was flattened. I couldn't interpret it, but realised that my mental state had something to do with the doctor. Desperate to understand more I returned to my mother's place to see what other clues I could find. I took my mother's



handbag out of her wardrobe and read the sympathy card and the note that the doctor had written. I then went downstairs to review the photo.

I couldn't fall asleep that night and tossed till the light of dawn delivered a modicum of safety. I finally nodded off as the sun rose, only to be jolted awake by my cries soon after.

*I'm strapped to a plank which is being fed into the blade of a circular saw. The blade is spinning furiously. As my body is forced closer, the whirring intensifies and I hear a high-pitched squeal. The teeth of the blade puncture my skin and sink deep into the heart of my pubic bone.*

When I woke I was sweating all over. I looked around and couldn't see any saws, or blades, or timber mills. I was in bed at home and my husband was snoring beside me. I'd had a nightmare, nothing more, but my perspiration was real and my panic, palpable and I didn't stop panicking then. I could get neither the nightmare, nor the disquiet it aroused in me out of my head. I recounted the nightmare in therapy and asked Kate for her opinion.

Whenever I requested that she interpret my dreams, she always asked what I thought they meant first. Not getting a straight answer frustrated me, but on this occasion I could have strangled her. I had my suspicions, but I wasn't prepared to divulge what they were. In the weeks that followed I did my best to push those thoughts away; they seemed too far-fetched for words.

Then came the session, several weeks later in which I marched into Kate's office and stated it; 'I was raped.'

It was curious, because by the time I could articulate the words, I could announce them confidently. Somehow I was sure of the fact, even though I couldn't remember a definite incident. I recounted the nightmare of the blade piercing my pubic area and asked Kate if it indicated that I'd been raped. I suspected so, but needed to hear her opinion.

'It might mean that you were penetrated, either with his fingers or with his penis.'

It's hard to describe how I felt hearing those words.

On the one hand I'd been waiting for them, but on the other, they cut me to the quick.

'Oh my God, I knew it. I just knew it. But how's it possible? How can I not remember?' I pleaded.

'But Cathy, you know how much you've remembered already. Just give yourself time.'

It may have been okay for Kate but it felt anything but okay for me. But then she wasn't the one who'd been raped! And she wasn't going crazy!

'But it doesn't make any sense? How could I forget something like that? How?'

I found it hard to leave Kate's office that day. I felt too exposed.

I don't remember getting into my car or driving home, or putting myself to bed, but I must have, because I remember trying to sleep. If I slept I wouldn't have to think. I couldn't sleep; however, because my mind was working overtime. I lay in bed agonising over what I believed and yet couldn't explain.

Eventually I got up and started scrubbing the walls. When the kids got back from school I was furiously wiping down banisters and polishing items which hadn't been polished in years.

'What's wrong, Mama?'

'Oh nothing, darling. Just doing some cleaning!'

My kids had seen me switch into overdrive during the previous year and a half, and my words didn't reassure them one bit!

That night was tumultuous and when I saw Kate the next day I couldn't believe the words that came out of my mouth: 'Yes, I was raped but it only happened once!'

On weekends, my husband and I often take a walk. Like many modern couples, we jog through our weeks, frantically chasing our tails without properly touching base. This particular Saturday came at the end of the week's revelations in therapy. The house was spotless and I hadn't had much sleep. I was exhausted and Dan was concerned. Despite several attempts to prise me open, he still had no idea as to what was troubling me.

I hadn't opened up for several reasons. First and foremost I was confused. Given that I couldn't remember any details, I was concerned that he wouldn't believe me. What if he thought I was crazy? And if by some

miracle he did believe me, what would that mean? I felt ashamed because in my mind, I had betrayed him. I may have been raped but it was still a betrayal. If he believed me then how would he ever be able to trust me again?

We set off on one of our regular routes, a well-trodden cliff walk between Bondi and Bronte, but this was no 'normal' walk. I couldn't chat about the petty details of my week; nor could I simply walk. I was holding too much in. I kicked at the ground and at several unsuspecting shrubs on route but that didn't help; the tension continued to build up inside me. I soon conceded that I needed to tell him what was going on regardless of the consequences.

We sat down on the grassy slope below Waverly Cemetery. On the path behind us, Saturday Waverly life continued unperturbed. Panting joggers puffed by, backpackers sauntered past and young lovers embraced.

I started talking about the doctor's photo and the nightmares I'd been having. Dan had suspected as much; he'd been woken by my screams on more than one occasion.

'What did he do to you? Darling, please tell me! Whatever it is, it'll be okay.' My husband gently turned my face towards his.

The waves rolled and crashed onto the rocks below, rolling and crashing ...

'Darling, come on. Please!'

I got up, unable to speak. We walked on together, hand in hand. I stopped and tugged at a fence post. I didn't want it there.

'He raped you, didn't he? Didn't he? My God, whatever it is, it doesn't matter to me.'

I nodded and lowered my head onto his shoulder, pushing it in as far as it would go. I wanted to bury my shame so no-one could see.

'Oh, my darling, my poor darling!'

My husband wrapped his arms around me. More walkers pushed past.

The pernicious secret was out, the cork eased from the vat of shame. Another stage of my journey had begun. I had started to tell.

Within days I remembered more about that trip to Sydney. I remembered the cheap hotel, infused with sickly-smelling disinfectant, which broke up our journey. I remembered the doctor's house and his surgery in the western suburbs, with three rooms to the surgery; a

consulting room; waiting room, and a spare room. All three rooms were in an annexe which was separated from the house proper by a long corridor.

Patients would register at the reception desk in the waiting room and take a seat before being ushered into the consulting room. The consulting room sported a desk, couch and several plastic chairs matching those in the waiting room, as well as a dresser with instruments. A door opened from the consulting room into the spare room. I was allocated the spare room for the duration of my stay. The room was drab and rather pokey and had nothing but the bare necessities: a three-quarter bed shoved up hard against the wall with a bedside table next to it. On the table stood a rickety lamp draped with a floral cotton hat. The room had only one window. It was tiny and sat high up on the wall over the bed. The little natural light which ventured inside the room was readily obliterated with a brisk tug on the Venetians. Each time I pulled on the Venetian, a cloud of dust floated down and settled over my sheets.

Opposite the bed stood a narrow cupboard, in which I hung my sky blue velour dressing gown and, along from the bed, a sliding door opened onto the corridor. The heavily scuffed floor was full of strange swirls and squiggles; the flow of the pattern was interrupted by an oval shaped raffia mat, which was coming apart at the edges. Across the corridor through the sliding door was a toilet, wash basin and shower recess, where a flimsy plastic curtain hung with its mould trim.

I was quarantined in the spare room with a diagnosis of Glandular Fever, an infirmity for which the doctor prescribed complete bed rest and daily penicillin injections. Everyone other than me, including my mother, slept in the main house. And my mother slept well on the barbiturates the doctor prescribed, washed down with a nightcap of brandy every night.

*'Now don't worry your pretty little head, Lucy my dear. I'll take good care of Catherine, I promise. You just relax and leave everything to me.'*

## chapter 13

Our marital bedroom is a private space which overlooks our backyard. For several months every night my husband and I would turn in, anticipating that memories about the doctor could assault us at any time. On some nights they did and on others, they didn't. We could never predict which it would be.

My husband generally falls asleep within minutes of his head hitting the pillow. It's an ability I've always envied, never more so than at that time. I'd lay beside him on full alert; listening out. Suddenly I'd sense that someone was coming and then I'd know it for sure. I'd wake my husband up so he'd be there to support me. When I did it though, it wasn't his adult wife waking him, but a terrified fourteen-year-old.

'What's happening?' he'd ask sleepily.

I'd put my finger across his lips. I didn't want him to speak. I needed to be sure that I could hear every sound. The first thing to hit was a sense that someone was coming and then I'd hear footsteps reverberating down the corridor, leading from the doctor's house. As the tread of the steps became clearer, every muscle in my body would tense and my breathing would quicken. I'd throw my arms around my husband's neck and the fourteen-year-old would cling to him for dear life. I would remember the doctor's footsteps nearer, ever nearer, and I would clamber over my husband's body to escape. But there was no escape; my fate had been sealed decades earlier.

*I am the ideal prey: young, naive and freshly traumatised. I have a mother who chooses not to see or respond. She's already dismissed me once, and in so doing, has removed any possibility of my approaching her a second time. The goings-on in the surgery have taken the stuffing out of me. Nervous at the best of times, I am now on tenterhooks.*

*I have spent a fitful first night alone in the annexe and am awake now, in the morning, feeling very frightened. I haven't seen my mother since yesterday, when she quashed my concerns. I force myself to get out of bed, do my ablutions in the bathroom across the hall and rifle through my bag*

for my favourite T-shirt, when I hear the doctor's voice. I look up. My mother isn't with him.

*'Good morning, Catherine. Now, tell me, my dear, how did you sleep?'*

*The doctor walks into my room, slams the door shut with his foot and shoves me up against the wall.*

*I don't get to reply to the doctor's social niceties. He slips his hand up under my singlet and starts doing embarrassing things to my nipples. As he keeps on doing it I can't utter a word. The doctor touches me down below just like he had on the previous day. I try and wriggle free but I can't; he's too strong. He slides his hands freely over me, up and down, above and below. I want to scream but I can't. My voice has disappeared. And I can't move either; my muscles won't work. My body, mind and soul freeze over and I stare in horror as the doctor unzips his trousers. He takes his thing out from inside his underpants and I watch it flop to one side. The doctor grabs my hands and takes them inside his. With his hands around mine he makes me hold his thing. And forces me to rub his thing with my hands and says, 'This is special, just between you and me. Just you and me. Now be a good girl, you hear? And don't tell that mother of yours! Don't tell Lucy, or, or she'll be angry, you know that, now don't you?'*

*I don't want my mother to be angry; I never want my mother to be angry. Nor do I want to hold the doctor's thing. I don't understand what is happening but I'm too scared to object. And the doctor makes me rub his thing and he makes me rub it faster. And he breathes on me and he breathes into me and his breath stinks. I can barely breathe at all. The doctor breathes funny and he breathes faster and he makes funny noises and the noises get louder. And the doctor lets out a great big sigh and the noises stop. And he takes his hands away and I take mine back. His thing flops down; my hands are sticky, but I don't know why.*

*The doctor takes a handkerchief out of his pocket, wipes his thing down and puts it back inside his underpants. He straightens his clothes and leaves. His footsteps disappear down the hall. The corridor goes quiet. I peek out and scamper across the corridor to the bathroom. I smother my hands in soap and rub them together until the lather thickens enough to rid me of all the sticky stuff. And I scrub my hands until they are clean and then scrub them again until they aren't yucky. I listen out; the corridor is still quiet so I scamper back to my cell. I crawl into bed, curl up and pull the covers up over my head.*

*My mother calls me, 'Baba, why aren't you up yet?  
'Sorry Mum, I...I must have slept in.'*

\*

I don't remember anything else that day.

*It's night time on the second night. I don't hear the shadow come into my room. The shadow clicks the light on and the brightness lights up the flowers on the shade. The flowers have dust on them. The shadow is the doctor. I pretend to be asleep but the doctor doesn't care. He rips my pyjama top up over my head and off. Then pulls my pants and my panties down and leaves me uncovered. I pull the sheet up over me but the doctor tears it back off, leaving me naked and exposed. The doctor puts his hands on me and his hands do lots of things that I don't want them to do. And the fingers on the hands play with the skin on my body and the shadow's hands play with my bits down below. The doctor's fingers go everywhere and the doctor's fingers go inside me. He pushes them up inside me and I scream out. The doctor clamps one hand over my mouth as he slaps my cheek with the other one. I startle, but something snaps inside me and I start fighting back. My hands make fists and my fists beat the doctor's back. He slaps me again. I squeal into his other hand. He grabs me around the neck holding my head in a vice-like grip; his talons dig into my throat.*

*'Be a good girl, Catherine or, or your mother will be angry. I'm a friend, a good friend, remember? And good girls don't hit friends, now do they?'*

*The stink of the doctor's breath makes me gag. He slaps me again. I'm hurting badly down below.*

*'Be a good girl, I said or your mother will be angry. Do you hear me, Catherine? This is special. It's just for you and no one else, not even for you, for your mother.'*

*The doctor does something to me down below, but he doesn't use his fingers. He uses something hard and sharp and I don't know what it is, but it hurts really badly. It hurts so badly that I feel like my flesh is being shredded. I want to scream, but I can't. The doctor won't let me. I want to run, but I'm not game to even try. The doctor hurts me and he hurts me*

again and there is nothing that I can do to stop him. As the thrusting quickens and the doctor reaches what I now know to be his climax, the searing pain lessens but the throb beneath it intensifies. The doctor takes the thing out and it is his thing, the same thing he made me rub the day before. The doctor wipes himself down, flops his thing back inside his undies, zips up his trousers, tucks in his shirt and leaves. I am stripped raw.

*As he walks away I lie perfectly still. I'm too terrified to move.*

*I'm lying flat on my back drowning in a sea of cold sweat and secretions. Mine is no ordinary bed anymore; it's been party to my violation. I pull the sheet up over me and curl into a ball. And the tears come and I sob with the pain and confusion about an act for which I don't even have words. I reach for my pyjamas, but it's too late because my shame has already become an integral part of me. I lie curled up in a tight ball sobbing, too scared and in too much pain to move, but then the horror of the filth the doctor has deposited within me mobilises me. I am compelled to rid myself of every ounce of him.*

*I try to get up but my legs won't work. I'm paralysed with fear and with pain.*

*I talk to my legs and explain to them why I have to get up. I instruct my legs to carry me to the bathroom so I can expunge the doctor's yuk from the inside of me. My legs listen and allow me to swing them around and onto the ground. As my legs touch the floor; the throbbing intensifies and a hideous ooze trickles down my thigh. Seeing and feeling the ooze forces me to my feet. The lino feels cold against the soles of my feet. I push myself to stand, but can't stand straight up because it hurts too much. I limp to the bathroom bent over in two.*

*I grab a washer from the basin and bathe around all of the bits that are too sore to touch. I stand stooped over that basin until every last bit of the doctor and his ooze have been purged from inside of me. A puddle forms on the floor beneath me and I bend forward to mop it up, but bending down hurts too much, so I leave the puddle to itself.*

*I check out the corridor before embarking on the return journey. The other side of the corridor seems a long way off. Half way back across my legs buckle underneath me. My bottom strikes the lino and I bang my head. As my head bounces against the floor, the squiggles and swirls in the lino go fuzzy. I lie dazed for a moment before pulling myself up to sit. I sit cross-*



*legged on the floor, tears streaming, and I throw my arms around myself, but the lino is too cold and hard, so I crawl back to my room.*

*As soon as I get there I notice the doctor's ooze on my sheets, so I cross back across the hall for the washer. I scrub the ooze off the sheets, return the washer, put my pyjamas on and climb gingerly back into bed. I curl up into the tightest ball possible and pull the sheets up over me, but can't rest because it kills down below.*

*I spend the next day in bed and only get up to go to the bathroom. I have to go a lot and when I do go to it stings really badly. I hate going. As the sun sets, I hear more footsteps advancing down the corridor.*

*And so it is each night at the doctor's house.*

The process of recovering these memories made me more fragile than ever. I needed to see Kate frequently and sought her constant reassurance. And yet I didn't recover any of the memories to do with the doctor in Kate's office; they only came back when I was with my husband at home. At first I couldn't even tell Kate what was going on. I felt too ashamed. There was also a part of me which could not accept that the assaults had actually happened. 'If I was finding my memories hard to accept, how would anyone else believe me?' I reasoned. What if Kate didn't believe me? What then? Perhaps I was going crazy. Perhaps I was mad. Perhaps I was making everything up!

But I wasn't; I couldn't be. I had a witness. My husband had witnessed every act perpetrated; at night in our marital bed, he was my witness.

When I started to tell Kate I spoke in generalities about the doctor, the doctor friend who did bad things to me. And every time I opened my mouth to speak I would look away, or cover my face with my hand. I couldn't make eye contact with Kate, because the shame I felt withered me. I was worried that Kate would realise how filthy and disgusting I was and that, as a result, she wouldn't want to see me again. My shame was a bomb, ticking away inside of me. I sat with that timer ticking away, session after session, with help at hand, but unable to harness it.

I was agitated, restless and quickly becoming self-destructive. The bomb was about to explode and the only way to stop that happening was to let the secret out. Kate understood the pressure that was building up and

suggested that I write down what I was remembering as a way of reducing it.

‘When you write, you’ll be putting the memories outside of you, getting them down on the page. That way the pressure won’t build up as much.’

I’d written during the process of therapy before and found it useful, but committing details such as these to paper was not an easy task. I resisted doing so for several weeks and once I started, I still resisted saying much. I’d endeavour to let the thoughts flow, write them for as long as I could bear and then quickly put the writing away. Often I couldn’t read over what I’d written previously. It was as though reading about what had happened would grant the horrors an authenticity which they didn’t deserve.

Thirty years later, my husband’s arms should have felt safe, but as soon as I heard those footsteps down the corridor of my mind, I would panic.

‘No not again! No, please no! The doctor’s coming.’ I would announce to my long-suffering husband. And as my body replayed the acts that the doctor made me perform, like a body possessed, the adult me had no idea what would happen next; it all depended on what the doctor had made the fourteen-year-old in mourning do.

My husband would observe helplessly as I writhed around on the bed, crying out against the degradation and agony. Sometimes he would try to stop the memories when he felt I was becoming too distraught, but I wouldn’t let him. When I was in the midst of them, I couldn’t let anyone come near me, not even him. Although on some level I was aware that he wanted to protect me, in my fourteen-year-old state, I had no husband. All I knew was the man who was hurting me in my mind. And so I would push my husband away and face the horror alone.

Each time the doctor approached me his foetid breath made me want to hurl all over again; but there was nothing I could do. I was trapped. He was in control and he knew it. He whispered sordid instructions into my ear which manipulated and instructed me at the same time. As a girl of fourteen I had listened and complied. The re-enacting adult would repeat his words out loud before complying with the acts again. Now there would be a witness to his instructions.

*‘Be a good girl, now. You’re special. You know you are, don’t you? I’ve chosen you because you are special, but you must be good, you hear? You don’t want your mother to be angry now, do you?’*

*The doctor shoves his thing up inside me, thrusting. All of a sudden the thrusting stops and he takes it out. I'm not sticky like I usually am. I see his thing coming towards me. The doctor bears down on me. I see his face, the sadistic pleasure in his eyes and his demented sneer.*

*'No, please no!'*

*He pushes his thing into my mouth, stretching it wide. He forces my tongue down and his thing chokes me until I can barely breathe.*

*My husband watches aghast as I fight for air. My husband shakes me and I slowly come around.*

*Sometimes, the doctor returns several times a night. Strides into my room, switches on the lamp and strips me naked. I am an animal stunned by the glare of headlights, expertly prepared for the kill. The doctor removes his trousers and folds them neatly on the chair in the corner of the room and parades around in his underpants, leaving his starched short sleeved shirt on, fully buttoned. After it's over, he takes his handkerchief out and cleans himself off, leaving me fouled and fumbling for a sheet. Every night I pray that he won't come, that he'll leave me alone. I reason that maybe he is giving me special treatment and I don't understand. Maybe I am being ungrateful; he is my mother's friend and he is looking after me. I have to be good. I don't want my mother to be angry.*

*My mother pops by to see me most days and is puzzled that I can't get out of bed.*

*'Don't worry, Lucy. Leave Catherine to me. She just needs plenty of rest. She'll be fine, just fine. I'll take care of everything.'*

*And the doctor does take care of everything. Every night as the sun goes down, he takes care of everything.*

In the months during which those memories returned, the abuse occupied my every waking and sleeping thought. Daily journaling was providing me with some release and at Kate's insistence; I was bringing whatever I'd written to my sessions. At first Kate would have to read my journal to herself because I couldn't bring myself to read it to her. And whenever she read out loud I would bury my head in my hands to avoid hearing what she was reading. I felt as though the words I'd written were announcing my shame to the world.

When after a few more weeks I was able to read some of what I'd written, I would still skip the sections that I wasn't ready to face, or dilute some of the details of the memories which sounded too bizarre to believe. Even though I knew that articulating what had happened to me was an important step in my recovery, doing so took its toll. With every word I uttered out loud, I detested myself a little more.

I detested myself for being young. I detested myself for being gullible. I detested myself for every act the doctor had perpetrated against me. And I especially hated myself because I hadn't done anything to stop him. I felt worthless and hopeless and soon became convinced that I would be better off dead.

From a phone booth opposite The Gap I dialled Kate's number. She picked up.

'I'm sorry. I can't do this anymore. I... I've had enough. It's too hard.'

'Do you think that your family would agree? What about them?'

'I can't. It's too hard. I... I'm sorry.'

'Think of your children, Cathy. They need you. Your children need their mother. Think about what this would do to them. You, more than anybody, must understand that. What it means to lose a parent. Is that what you want?'

'Please. You tell them. You explain to them how hard it's been.'

'Cathy, listen to me. So you think your children would be better off without their mother then?'

I tried to concentrate on what Kate was saying. I'd heard those words before and they always resonated when I was incapable of feeling the least bit connected to my life in the present. But when my angst escalated past a certain point, I would become deaf to any rational argument. On this particular occasion I was able to listen to Kate long enough for her to convince me to drive straight back to see her. Within fifteen minutes I was sitting in my chair in her office.

'I'm sorry. It's just no good. I don't feel any different now from, from when we spoke.' I pleaded.

'Would you like to write something? Would that help?'

On several previous occasions, when I'd felt suicidal, I had signed a contract to seal a commitment that I wouldn't hurt myself. We had come full circle.

‘No not now. I don’t want to. Not today. I can’t do it today. I wouldn’t have a way out. I need a way out. But I’ll think about it.’

Kate sat forward in her chair and looked me in the eye, ‘But Cathy, you can always ring me and we can talk. You know that, don’t you?’

I nodded. ‘You know that we can talk about anything. That there’s nothing you can’t tell me. Cathy, you can’t give up now. Not after everything you’ve been through. Don’t let him win. Here, see what you can do with this.’

As I took the pen and blank sheet of paper from Kate I thought about what I could write.

‘No, I’m sorry. I can’t do it today. I need to think about it first.’ I handed the paper back.

Kate looked at me intently. ‘That’s fine. But promise me; promise me that you’ll ring me if you feel bad. You know that I’m here and that I’m thinking about you. You know that you can always ring me, don’t you Cathy?’

I nodded, got into my car and drove back home to my family. I didn’t say a word when I got home, not a word about how close I’d come to never coming home again.

I saw Kate first thing the next day, accepted the blank sheet of paper and pen from her and filled out my contract: ‘I commit to not visiting The Gap or the area around it. I also commit to not hurting myself or putting myself in any danger.’ I signed and dated my contract and she added it to her file.

## chapter 14

I don't remember how many times the doctor raped me. Or forced me to enact whatever sordid deviation took his fancy. I lost count early in the first week of my captivity. Why didn't I bite it off, one snap of the jaw; my teeth clench tight? Why didn't I do something to stop him? Why didn't I even try?

I shudder to accept how often I betrayed myself by feigning enjoyment when he ordered me to. Every second of doing so was excruciating, but I had no choice; I was his slave and he, my master.

*'Oh, yes please, I'd love to. I'd really love you to, yes!'*

*'I...I'm sorry. I haven't done this before. Forgive me, please forgive me. I'm sorry.'*

*'Thank you, thank you so much. No, no I do love it. I... I really do. Thank you. Yes, it is special, yes.'*

Not only did he commandeer my body, but he also stole my self-respect. I was forced to meet all of his demands and in doing so, he all but took my soul. The longer the doctor abused me, the cockier he got. My master would force me to kowtow to him and drop to the floor to pay my respects.

*'Yes, master. No, master. Thank you so much.'*

*'I... I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, master. I've never done this before. I am trying, I'm sorry. I really am trying. Yes master, yes. I'll try harder.'*

On the rare occasions on which his thing refused to do his bidding he would turn on me.

*'You're hopeless, you are. You know that, don't you? Hopeless and, and good for nothing, yes, good for nothing! I knew that I should have chosen your mother. I just knew it! She would have known what to do.'*

When I threw myself on the floor and relived the incomprehensible display of deviations forced upon me, my husband watched from our bed; aghast. Toying with me was a game to the monster. I was a set of holes to penetrate, an inanimate object to manipulate. He flipped me over, and onto my back, face down, and back onto my side. Positions and acts changed constantly, on a whim. With each thrust of the doctor's member came the

throbbing of fresh wounds reopened; and the sacrifice of another layer of myself.

*Each time he leaves, I crawl back across the corridor to the bathroom and scrub my skin until it weeps. Then I pat myself dry and scrub my skin some more. I scrub like a banshee because scrubbing is the only thing I can control. Scrubbed, raw and oozing, I limp back across the lino and hoist myself back into the bed. I cover myself up and cover myself over and I lie in my bed, in a cold and spartan room with my table, my cupboard and the darkness; black and alone and in pain.*

*'Your mother wanted me. Well who wouldn't? But, I chose you I did. More the fool me! And you're lucky, you're really lucky because I do lots of things for you and they're special. You know that, don't you? And you know that your mother would be angry if she found out, very angry. And she'd never forgive you because she wants me herself, she does. You don't want your mother to be angry now, do you?'*

'I can't take this anymore, I really can't!' I announced during my Monday morning session. I was seeing Kate every day and phoning her frequently between visits. 'I'm going to do something to myself.'

I was making regular pilgrimages to The Gap. My distress had reached crisis point. 'Cathy, should we put you in hospital?'

Kate and I had discussed my admission into a clinic before, but I'd always resisted. I'd visited too many hospitals and clinics over the years, and besides, I might have been suicidal, I might not have been coping, but I wasn't like those 'mental' patients; or was I?

'What good would that do? The walls would hold me while I was locked up, but as soon as they let me out I'd do it then. Nah, there's no point.'

'But do you realise what you're saying? What losing you would do to your children? Surely you understand the legacy you would be leaving?'

'W... well I suppose that they would be sad... a bit sad.'

'Cathy, listen to yourself will you? Every member of your family would be devastated. Your suicide would affect their entire lives. You, more than anyone, should know what a parent's suicide means for a child.'

I shrugged my shoulders. I couldn't let those feelings penetrate.

‘Cathy, we’re going to have to talk to Dan. I feel as if I’m being irresponsible. What if something happens to you and we haven’t told him how you’ve been feeling? What then? Either you talk to him, or we will talk to him together.’

I hadn’t shared any of my suicidal thoughts with Dan because, as irrational as it sounds, I hadn’t wanted to worry him. The last thing I wanted to do was to hurt him, or my kids. I loved them all way too much for that.

I couldn’t bring myself to speak to Dan directly, so that weekend, Kate, Dan and I met in Kate’s office. Although I had given permission for the meeting, I hated every aspect of it. Her office was my space and one of the few in which I felt safe. I hated anyone invading it, even my husband. Besides, Kate was my therapist and I didn’t want to share her. What’s more, I felt like a wayward child, who was being hauled up in front of the principal; all because I wanted to end my pain.

‘So Dan, do you know why we’re here?’

‘Yes, yes of course. Cathy’s been having a really hard time.’

‘But Dan do you know how hard?’

I was sitting in my armchair, doing my best to disappear. Dan and Kate were sitting opposite one another and Kate was filling him in about my mental state in no uncertain terms. I felt like an alien and being discussed in the third person was not helping, but my own discomfort faded as the shock of my husband’s reaction hit home. His face looked strained, drained of its usual tones. Witnessing his distress triggered mine and caused me to dissociate.

Dissociating was a defence which I’d mastered early in my childhood to protect my mind from destructive assault. I would do so whenever I was under too great a threat. As I faded out from my immediate world I could still manage to perceive that my husband was struggling to hold it together. After several minutes he broke down. As he sobbed in his chair I disappeared further. While I had a sense of him crying on some level of consciousness, at that point his tears flowed in a world which was far removed from mine. As I curled in on myself in the corner of a foreign chair, I was distanced from the drama unfolding in the room around me. Every now and again, the alien I’d become would pull herself back from her cloudiness to confirm that her therapist and her husband were still talking about her. Dan’s face looked blotchy. His body was trembling. And Kate was sitting forward in her chair with her serious face on. One part of



me ventured out to smile at him, but I couldn't complete the smile. Dan looked back at me; his eyes were tortured.

'But I had no idea. Darling, sweetheart, you know how I feel about you. Why couldn't you tell me?'

As he spoke he dissolved into tears and the alien disappeared into a space far removed from a therapist's office.

'Cathy! CATHY!' Kate used her business like voice to bring me back to the here and now. 'Cathy, what do you think about what Dan is saying?'

I couldn't answer; I was too far away. As I battled my way back through the layers of dissociative disconnection, I found recognition in my husband's distress, and his anguish yanked me right back. I was able to recall how much he loved me. I remembered the wonderful family we had created together and was able to absorb the generated benefits of loving them.

'Darling you know how much we all love you.'

I nodded. How could I have pulled so far away from them?

'Sweetheart, look at me, please!' Dan was pleading. I tried to look at him, but the shame of what I'd put him through forbade me to.

'Sweetheart, it's okay. I'm here for you. We all are!'

Witnessing Dan's distress allowed me to reconnect with him and the kids, and acknowledge the legacy I would leave if I took my own life. I had been caught in a recurring trap. Whenever I returned there, I lost touch with reality and severed the very connections which sustained me.

After that meeting I resolved, yet again, to hang in there no matter what.

Another night in our marital bedroom and more memories were coming.

*I am fourteen and I can hear footsteps approaching down the corridor. The light goes on in the surgery next door, cupboard doors open and close. The light goes off, the footsteps approach; there's a short sharp click and the flowers on the lampshade bloom.*

Acts from another horrific night of fear and pain, terror and hurt are relived.

During my session the next day, I recoiled into the corner of the chair. I was terrified, breathing hard and no longer able to speak. I'd taken my journal in and read what I'd written down out loud. I'd read about several brutal rapes

and torturous assaults and highlighted the stultifying dread I was feeling. Fifty minutes had passed.

‘Cathy! CATHY! You’re going to have to start coming out of it.’

‘Is she fucking crazy?’ I thought to myself. ‘How on earth can she expect me to leave now?’

I couldn’t leave. How could I leave? I’d just been raped and tortured. How could Kate expect me to leave now? What was wrong with her?

‘Help me! Help me!’ I shouted in my inside world.

‘Cathy! Cathy, come on now!’

There was no way I could leave. I was paralysed with fear. I’d just been devoured. How could I ever leave?

I looked up at Kate longingly.

‘Cathy, would you like to sit quietly in another room until you’re ready to leave?’

I thought about what she’d said. About the offer she’d made which showed me that she actually did care. I shook my head. ‘No, I’ll be alright.’ I whispered. Kate had acknowledged my distress; that was enough for now.

I got myself together, got up out of my chair and walked up the drive to my car. I got behind the wheel, tipped my seat back and passed out in the safety of Kate’s street. By the time I came to, I was ready to drive home and go straight to bed.

*This night the routine changes. He strips me naked but leaves his pants on. Pulls several lengths of rope out of his pocket and ties my wrists and ankles together so tightly that the rope cuts into my flesh. Then he takes out a piece of material and slowly, ever so slowly, eases it out of his pocket like a cobra being charmed into the light of day. It’s a scarf, a crimson scarf. He holds the scarf at either end, toys with it, folds it over and then ties it around my head, covering my eyes. The festering sweat from his armpits assaults me. The edges of the scarf dig into my earlobes. He lays me on my back; arms stretched taut above my head, wrists strung together, and forces the soles of my feet flat on the bed. Ankles bound, he pushes my knees wide apart and leaves. The room goes quiet. Everything in my body aches.*

*Several moments pass. Nothing happens.*

*Smoke fumes; I feel warm down below.*

*'N...no, no, thank you. No, I don't smoke. No, not I don't. No, I don't smoke down there. Y... Yes, I'm sure. N...o, no...I don't smoke at all.'*

*Burning, smoking, smouldering heat, the smell of singed hair. He puts the burning thing inside me and takes it out, puts it inside again, takes it out. The doctor puts it back in, but this time he leaves it there, burning. I'm terrified my flesh will catch fire. As he takes it out; I can see through the blindfold that the cigarette has been inserted butt first. I breathe a sigh of relief, but my relief doesn't last long.*

*The doctor puts the cigarette in my mouth and holds it there. The smoke floods my nostrils, filling my lungs until I splutter and gasp. He whisks the cigarette away as my lips start to smoulder.*

*'N...no, thank you. I don't smoke. No, not in my mouth either. No, I don't smoke. No, thank you.'* The smell of smoke lingers with the doctor's pungency admixed. Raw, silent fear stupefies me as the doctor revels in every ounce of my disquiet.

*He hammers away inside me, shredding the little of me that remains. Then withdraws and everything goes quiet. Several minutes pass. Cupboards open and close in the surgery next door. More footsteps; he rams an instrument of cold hard metal high up inside of me. I grit my teeth as the rod splits me in two, shearing me from myself. 'Please, please let me die!' But I don't die; my mind splits me in two.*

*From this time on, whenever the doctor violates me, my mind splits into two. One half I name; 'Little Half'. Little Half is the victim part of me whose role it is to be a passive receptacle. 'Other Half' is what's left of me while Little Half is being brutalised and it's Other Half's job to scamper to safety, regardless of what Little Half has to endure.*

\*

I was lying in my husband's arms when I first relived splitting into Little Half and Other Half and started to cry. 'Daddy, why did you have to die? Why, when I miss you so much? Why did you have to leave me, Daddy? You would have protected me. I know you would have. I love you so much Daddy. Why did you have to die?'

I was sobbing as though my Daddy had only just died and as my grief plummeted to new depths, I visualised Daddy and me sitting on the couch in our lounge room. Daddy's arms were around me and we were nuzzling

close. 'Don't worry, princess. Everything will be all right. Daddy's here. I'll look after you.' That's when I learned about the mechanism by which Other Half had kept us alive; she would conjure an image of my father, the one person who had nurtured me in my early years.

From then on, Little Half and Other Half performed their jobs every night of our remaining stay in Sydney. As Little Half withstood whatever punishment the doctor dished out, Other Half took refuge. And so by virtue of a psychological defence mechanism, a young girl in mourning survived the acts of a psychopath which would have otherwise destroyed her. Without it, I don't believe I would have survived.

*The doctor drags me into the middle of my room and leaves me there, naked and exposed. I'm bound and blindfolded. Although the room is quiet I know he's still there; I can smell him. I wait and I shiver. He pounces on me from behind and spins me around until I'm dizzy. Then he instructs me to get back into bed. I know better than to argue. 'Yes master, yes master.' I lurch forward, knocking into walls and furniture. I fall over and get up. I can still smell him; he's watching. I'm getting closer and can feel the end of the sheet. I grab onto it and start to pull myself up, but the doctor rips the sheet back out of my hand. I drop back down and lie on the floor, as helpless as an upturned beetle. I lie there trying to anticipate his next move, but that's just the point. I never know what he'll do next.*

*When after several minutes no-one appears, I start to turn over, but as soon as I move he pounces. He drags me backwards across the familiar cool of the lino and the prickles of the raffia mat, then he lets go. His smell fades as his footsteps retreat and I painstakingly begin the journey back in search of my bed. I crawl; my whole body is shuddering. Some bits throb, some ache. Others I can't feel at all. I catch hold of a corner of the sheet and wait, but he doesn't come. I pull myself back onto the bed and slowly writhe back between the sheets. Just as I do, the bed starts shaking. I feel a tug on my ankles and then a pull, and within an instant I am dangling in mid-air. The doctor leaves me hanging and hanging. He leaves me for so long that my back starts to ache. Then footsteps, and then the too familiar agony as my insides are ripped apart again. Poor Little Half!*

My memories had reached the last night of my fortnight's holiday in Sydney. I reasoned that if I'd made it this far, surely I would be able to

survive the rest.

*Footsteps down the hall. The click of the lampshade.*

*'You're never going home, you know. Never! Hmmm, you thought you were going to get away from me, didn't you now? We'll, guess what? You're not! And you know why? Well, let me tell you, eh? Now look at me when I'm talking to you!'*

*'Y... yes master. Sorry master!'*

*'I'm going to lock you up, I am. Yes, that's right, all locked up, you'll be. I'm going to lock you up in a room under the house, a secret room that only I know about, a place where no-one will ever find you. And do you know what? Even your precious mother won't know what's happened to you. At first she will ask after you, but then she'll stop asking. And then she'll forget about you and so will everyone else!'*

*That last night the doctor delivers his threat and disappears. He returns much later and without saying a word, he goes about his business. He strips me naked, binds my wrists and ankles together, blindfolds me and ties ropes to my lashed ankles. Then he levers me off the side of the bed and drops me bottom first onto the cold lino. With the rope he drags me across the cold lino and onto the raffia mat. And off the mat onto the lino and lifts me up and stops in front of the cupboard which has my velour blue dressing gown inside. He lifts me up, throws me into a cupboard, slams the door shut and leaves.*

*He leaves me locked inside the cupboard; the rain is pelting down onto the roof outside. I listen for his footsteps, but the sound of the rain masks them. Instead I smell his arrival. The door opens; a shaft of light enters. The doctor doesn't touch me; nor does he speak. There is no human contact; it's all done with rope and metal instruments. The shaft of light, the tug on the rope, the clunk and pain shooting through my spine as my bottom crashes to the floor. The doctor uses all his accessories that night: ropes and blindfold, a range of metal instruments and a leather whip, which he cracks inches from my toes. That night he obliterates me and obliterates me again. Then he dresses, throws me back into the cupboard, closes the door and leaves.*

*The cupboard is tiny and when the door is closed, no light enters. It smells musty; it couldn't have been aired in years. I'm all scrunched up, twisted in on myself, wracked with the pain and the hurt of the parts the doctor has devoured, and the agony of the contortions he has forced my*

*joints through. I try to sit up but I can't; the lightest of touch causes spasms to shoot from my nether regions which double me over. Kneeling also squashes my swollen and lacerated bits, but a little less when I keep my feet to the side. I ooze freely from down below and the ooze freshens each time the doctor does what he does. After it is over and I rest as best I can, the ooze slows and dries but when it dries, the skin of my nether region sticks to the wood on the floor of the cupboard. And when I try to shift even an inch, my flesh gives way and oozes afresh. I try not to move, but I have to move for fear that I will seize up altogether, though when I do the rawness throbs more and Little Half cries.*

*Little Half tries to be brave and she is, but when Little Half cries, Other Half gets scared and doesn't know what to do. And Other Half cries with the pain and she cries with the fear. What if he locks us away? What if no-one knows where we are? What if our mother forgets that we ever lived? What then?*

*Other Half finds our Daddy and she clings to him tighter than ever before and she tells him what the doctor said and they cry and sob together. And Other Half tries not to look down and see what is happening to Little Half but sometimes she can't stop herself looking. She wants to help Little Half but she can't because she has to save both of us. Only if Other Half stays protected and cared for can we survive.*

*The doctor shoves a long fat metal instrument high up Little Half; Other Half passes out. We all pass out. When we come to, we're back in bed. We don't know how we got there, but we're grateful that we did. I wake up and try to pull the sheets up, but I can't because I'm tied up and my head goes fuzzy with the pain of trying to reach beyond where I can. I pass out again.*

*'I'm here, wrists! I'll come as soon as I can.'*

*My wrists are lashed together and my arms are strapped to my sides. A rope encircles my chest and I can't separate my arms. I lift my fingers up and they feel all pins and needles and I try to wiggle them and I can. And I can move my fingers and my hands and my wrists and maybe yes, they do come apart and could it be? The ropes have been removed. And I can lift my arms cautiously away from my body and straighten them. They're tingling as the blood rushes through them but they're alive and they're mine and I have my arms back. And my hands can stroke one another and my wrists and arms can connect with one another and they're all attached to me and to Little Half who's attached to Other Half and me and we'll all be okay.*

*I pass out again and sleep more peacefully knowing that I have my arms back, but awaken with cramps in my calves where my legs are tied together. But I'm mistaken, my legs are not tied together anymore because I can move them and wriggle my toes and run my toes up and down my shin and feel my legs and my legs can feel one another and I can be whole again.*

*Then I remember that the doctor is going to lock me away where no-one will ever find me. That I'm going to perish alone in the dark. And even though all of my bits hurt, I don't feel I can help them, because I'm going to die and that means there's no hope. I don't get up and go to the bathroom to wash the doctor away because I'm going to die. I am naked, but I don't cover myself. I'm going to die. I pull the sheet up and try to go to sleep, but I can't because I'm going to die.*

*I curl up, throw my arms around me, squeeze tight and pray that the end will come soon. I stay snuggled in the corner where the bed meets the wall and spend the whole night, listening out for the doctor's footsteps to enforce my live burial. I can't hear any footsteps because the rain is falling too heavily on the roof. I can't hear him coming at all.*

*My mother comes to get me bright and early the next morning.*

*'Baba, why aren't you ready? Don't you realise that we have a long drive today?' My mother is angry because I'm not up and dressed. And I haven't packed.*

*'Catherine is taking a little longer to recover than I expected Lucy, but don't you worry. Just leave her be, and let her rest. Catherine needs lots of sleep.'*

*I do need a lot of sleep. The doctor is right.*

*I climb into the back seat of our old Hillman and fall asleep before we reach the highway. 'Little Half' falls asleep as soon as we get into the car and doesn't wake up for another thirty years. I think that she just wants to forget about it and so do I.*

*I sleep for most of the two days it takes to drive to Brisbane and by the time we get back, I don't remember why my bits are throbbing. And I don't ask.*

## chapter 15

For thirty years I had forgotten about how a family friend had feasted on the flesh of an innocent child. How he'd plundered her soul and stolen her spark. Now that I remembered, the rage that I'd kept locked inside for years, cascaded. At first I feared that I wouldn't be able to control my fury, but as I allowed myself to express it, I was able to direct it against the person who had caused it instead of turning it against myself. I started to appreciate the depth of fury that leads to murderous rage. I wanted to make the doctor suffer as he'd made me suffer and fantasised about how to get my revenge! No punishment seemed too extreme as my head plotted against him. But I was deluding myself. I would never get my revenge. The damage had been done and the wounds inflicted. I already had the scars and no matter how much work I did, those scars would always be an integral part of me. The past could neither be undone, nor avenged.

Besides, the doctor was already dead. He'd died a good ten years before I had relived my first night of horror. A heart attack, a little pain across his chest and it was all over. The doctor had escaped my wrath before I even comprehended its source.

Aside from the fury, I grappled for a long time to accept that all of my memories were authentic. I repeatedly questioned their veracity and struggled to accept the possibility that such dastardly acts could be forgotten, especially by me. Prior to remembering, the nature of many of the acts was foreign to me. I questioned how it was possible for me to adopt such acts as my own, when I had never heard of such occurrences.

These discussions rattled around Kate's office for weeks. We reviewed the phenomenon of repressed memories and acknowledged the existence of the process. We reviewed the authenticity of my terror and pain and how real the range of sensations in my body had felt. And when I rejected everything I'd recalled, primarily because I couldn't bear to acknowledge it, Kate recounted her experience of my memories in therapy. She described her observations of my reactions in sessions; the way I'd recoil, the terror in my eyes, the contortions of my body. But even then, the doubts kept coming



because there was no-one who could provide the validation I really needed. There were no actual witnesses, none to the acts themselves.

There was, however, one person who could potentially provide some insight into the period in question and that was my mother. I knew that she wouldn't be able to help much, because my abuse had occurred in secret. I was also aware of how much she idealised the doctor and how that idealisation might colour her version of events. Nevertheless, I did expect her to be able to provide me with some details about the holiday, and perhaps confirm that I'd reported the doctor's inappropriate touching on that first day, to her.

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Since my mother had returned from overseas she had sensed a change in me. I was keeping my distance from her and on the few occasions on which I did see her, I was ill at ease. I couldn't help it. I resented the secrets she had kept over the years and the angst they had consequently caused me. On some level she was aware of how I was feeling. When we spoke, she did confirm that we had visited the doctor in Sydney after my father died. She also acknowledged that I'd told her about the doctor touching me, but denied that the touching had bothered me and questioned why it was bothering me now. She also confirmed that she had dismissed my concerns when I was fourteen and then proceeded to dismiss them again!

'Yes Monty was a bit of a womaniser. I remember how he used to pinch some of his female patients on the bottom as he was taking them into the surgery. But everyone knew that was how he was and they loved him regardless. He was a wonderful doctor and a very loyal friend. Your mother could not have done without his support over the years. He was amazing after your father died.'

Over the months that ensued, I told my mother more about what her wonderful doctor had done to me. I didn't describe any of the more extreme acts and often watered the details of the other acts down. I suspected that she would not accept a lot of what I was saying. Besides I didn't want to be discredited; I was having enough trouble accepting my new history without my mother fuelling my doubts. Although I didn't reveal everything, I did give enough information to leave her in little doubt about the thrust of what had happened.

‘Come on now Baba. Monty was a wonderful doctor. You must be exaggerating.’

‘Oh Baba, Monty was a womaniser, that’s all. Do you think that your mother would have let him hurt you? What sort of a mother do you think I am?’

It was curious. Even as a grown woman, in my late forties I wanted my mother’s acknowledgement. Her validation could have provided a much-needed balm to my troubled mind. As she continued to reject my memories and sing the doctor’s praises, I found it progressively harder to see her and speak with her. Whenever we did speak, we usually ignored the topic of the doctor altogether but failure to acknowledge the elephant in the room caused the tension between us to grow. When we did discuss it, we would invariably reach a discomforting impasse.

My mother is a lousy listener at the best of times. She habitually interrupts whoever is speaking in her enthusiasm to get her point across, and commonly jumps in before the other person has finished. When discussing contentious issues, she jumps in even earlier and with greater conviction. I finished writing my first book within a year of these conversations and gave it to my mother to read. The advantage being that the written word denied her opportunity to interrupt my flow. It also denied her the chance to invalidate me to my face, until she was finished reading what I had to tell her.

My first book didn’t pull any punches. It provided a factual account of the events at the doctor’s residence. As I handed the book over, I explained that the narrative had been constructed from my memory and that nothing had been knowingly fabricated or embellished. Still, her rebuttals came.

‘Baba, I couldn’t read a lot of what you wrote because, well, you don’t quite understand how it feels to be a mother.’

‘But Monty could never have done those things; I’m sure of it. And do you know? He was the most wonderful doctor.’

‘It was a good piece of fiction. You write well, but it wasn’t real Baba, was it?’

‘You don’t know quite how it feels to be a mother who always did her best. Baba, don’t you ever remember anything good about your childhood?’

‘Honestly Baba, you’ve lost your sense of humour. I liked the old Baba a lot better!’

While my mother failed, repeatedly, to acknowledge both my history and my pain, I spiralled into a series of self-destructive tailspins. Not only had she dismissed me at fourteen, but she stubbornly proceeded to do it again some thirty years later. I felt profoundly betrayed and had to face the fact that I had a mother who was incapable of putting herself aside. While she proved beyond doubt that she was emotionally unavailable to my needs as she always had been, I worked on giving up any hope that she would ever be any different.

Kate and I spent many a session grappling with how I could reconcile having a mother who espoused her love, but never demonstrated it and with how she not only failed to protect me, but also was incapable of taking any responsibility for doing so. I was an adult and yet I was a child. As my mother's adult child, I desperately searched for some sign that she would accept some of what I was saying and that maybe, just maybe, her doctor was not so wonderful after all. My mother's relationship with the doctor was undoubtedly more complicated than it seemed. She told me repeatedly about how special their relationship had been and I grappled to accept her loyalty to him. She also shared with me another family secret, about her third pregnancy and how she'd flown to Sydney so the doctor could perform an abortion. Indeed, their relationship had been special too.

Kate and I reviewed my mother's childhood and the influences which took their toll on her during her formative years. The unfathomable horrors of the Holocaust, the incomprehensible scenario which saw her send her brother back to the ghetto, the dehumanising desensitisation, degrading humiliation, constant fear, emptiness and loneliness of her war years. As Kate and I reflected on the destruction of my mother's soul we grieved her losses, but I could not forget how her failures had left me grappling with fundamental losses of my own.

When my mother failed to take any of the many opportunities I gave her to acknowledge my pain, new feelings of worthlessness swamped me. The child in me was reawakened and the feelings of intense isolation that I had experienced, dominated me. As a child I had felt worthless because my mother's actions telegraphed the message that I wasn't worthy of love or protection. As a child I concluded that something must have been wrong with me and those beliefs were re-agitated in the adult.

My mother's second severing of the umbilical cord cut me loose and my mood plummeted with my morale. I relived the isolation of my childhood, shunning family and friends and once again, I started to frequent The Gap. I was driven by the belief that if my own mother didn't care for me, nobody would. The born again child part of me did not appreciate my life in the present. That part of me had no connection with the family I'd created. I became more detached from them, pulling away from my husband when I needed him most. While one part of me realised that I needed to reach out to him, the other part stopped me from doing it. Kate pressured me to share my feelings with him. Sometimes I could speak up a little, but I mostly kept my angst to myself; my child-self didn't know how to seek the help and comfort I needed.

Sometimes, judging me to be in imminent danger, Kate would insist that I talk to Dan. Although I resented being told what to do, I generally folded to her ultimatums and as soon as I did speak with him, I would feel relieved by the caring warmth he offered. On the rare occasions on which I refused point blank to broach the subject with him, Kate would tell me that she was going to call him and I'd get really pissed-off.

'I don't want you to!'

'Sorry Cathy. You're leaving me no option. Either you talk to him or I will.'

When I refused to talk to Dan, Kate would ring him, just as she'd threatened. Each call would take him by surprise; I was so expert at hiding how desperate I was feeling. He'd be shocked to hear that I'd hit rock bottom again. That he hadn't picked up on it or seen the signs. At first I'd be angry that Kate had interfered, but my fury would abate as soon as Dan arrived home. Her call would mobilise him and he'd drop everything to be by my side. The moment I'd see his face and feel his loving care, I would feel safer and his support would mark the beginning of a turnaround in that phase of my recovery.

Despite my withdrawal I still made myself available for my children as much as I could. I didn't have much energy, but the little I had, I reserved for them. At my worst I couldn't get out of bed and my children had to deal with seeing me languishing; yet again. Even though I tried to time my sleeps to fall within my children's absences, I couldn't always manage it.

They were lumped with a mother who was absent, sleeping her days away, more times than was healthy. I regretted the impact that had, but at the time it was the best I could do.

I worked hard to disguise my mood when I was up and about. Sometimes I could convince everyone I was okay when I wasn't. Often times, some or all of my family could see through my charade and that made them worry about me. The reality was that for those months of returning doctor memories, I was deeply depressed. It was a state my children had seen before and it affected each of them differently at different times: one became hyper-vigilant; one stayed home from school; one felt sick a lot of the time; one acted out; another withdrew. Such is the domino effect of trauma.

Over weeks and months and years of processing I came to accept that my mother could never provide the succour I needed. I accepted that my mother had never been able to empathise; nor would she ever be capable of providing me with any empathy. And once I could stop hoping to receive something my mother was incapable of providing, the pressure eased and I felt more able to cope.

I presented my brother with a copy of my first book at the same time as I gave it to my mother. He read it and didn't question my memories outright. He was more circumspect and stated that he couldn't remember any of the things which I could now recall. Simon didn't come to Sydney often, so we didn't see much of one another; however, we did chat over the phone and when we did, the false memory debate was a regular topic of conversation. From the time I'd started recovering memories I'd read extensively about 'repressed memories' and the concept of false memories. Simon told me about my mother's conviction that my memories were false and implied that his view was the same; without actually stating it. He went on to say that he couldn't validate any of my memories because they didn't marry with any of his. I challenged him and asked him what he did remember about his childhood. He told me that his childhood had been happy up till the age of eleven, and after that, he recalled a pervasive sadness which he couldn't explain. I asked him for details of what he did remember and he told me that he'd fill me in later, but he never did.

I am well aware of the controversy surrounding repressed memories which peaked in the 1980s and 90s. In cases like mine, where victims of abuse had recovered memories, the disclosure typically elicited vehement denials from the accused and resulted in the alienation of the alleged victim from their family. This happened particularly in cases where a family member was the accused perpetrator. False memories can, of course, occur; their existence has been well documented. Their occurrence has generally been associated with a number of dubious therapeutic practices; however, extensive evidence also exists regarding the validity of many recovered memories. As with all memory, some details can be distorted. Recent studies have shown that traumatic memories are at no more risk of distortion than other memories, but with no-one to validate them, such memories can be readily debunked and the alleged victim labelled, a 'troublemaker'. There have been innumerable cases in which families have disintegrated after protracted court cases to establish the innocence of the accused, while the victim is ostracised.

I acknowledged to Simon that sometimes memories are 'false' but stressed that many are also valid. I told him about the well-established phenomenon of amnesia following major trauma, not just from abuse, but after war trauma and other cataclysmic life crises. I explained that I believed I had a case of dissociative amnesia, a condition in which a person who has been traumatised discovers serious gaps in their personal history due to this memory loss. I gave him some books and articles to read and asked him to consider the evidence they held.

I shared my previous doubts about my retrieved history and observed that with each new memory which returned, that I'd spent session upon session doubting my recall. I proffered the concept that there must be an explanation for the forgotten years of my childhood. As well as an explanation as to why I spaced out and dissociated as much as I did. My therapist had never used any dubious therapeutic methods, nor had she suggested any facts to me which I hadn't first uncovered without her input. Many of my memories had returned independent of therapy. I'd experienced a series of flashbacks in which each of my senses had been assaulted, and a range of emotions triggered. I had lived and breathed every memory as if the events were happening in the present. I told him that I was beginning to understand the reasons behind some of my behaviours and reactions. I told him that certain reactions made sense in the context of the

abuse I had suffered and that my memories were providing me with much greater insight.

He listened, but he didn't respond.

It was difficult for my brother. His memory of the years I was talking about, was poor and the memories I presented to him challenged his retrospect. Simon was wedded to his views and not prepared to let them go. He believed the family folklore of a happy childhood; it defined him as it once did me.

For years I had been the peacemaker in the family, hosing down the tension between my mother and my brother, trying to make things right. I had been available for their needs and often denied mine in the process. The dynamics were starting to change, because now I was the one who was needy and seeking to have my needs met.

I needed support and understanding, but neither of them could provide it. They had a lot vested in censoring and dismissing the secrets of past years, while I had no choice now but to continue exploring them. To proceed was to do so at the cost of losing my original family, but to not, was at the cost of losing myself. My process had begun and could not be stopped. As hard as it was, I was committed to it.

And so I continued on my way without my mother or brother and I grew a little more distant from each of them, every day.

## chapter 16

Six months after my mother and I returned from the doctor's place, Simon and I arranged a holiday for our mother; three days R&R in a mountain resort behind Queensland's Gold Coast.

I was a retiring fifteen year old, as tame an adolescent as one could find, but Simon, a first year medical student at Queensland Uni, had morphed into a full-blown party animal.

The moment our mother drove off, Simon went out and he stayed out all of that day and the next. The following evening he insisted that I go with him to a party. He didn't really want me to go, but he'd promised my mother that he wouldn't leave me alone and was too scared of getting into trouble to not comply.

*'Wait here, Catherine!'* he orders when we arrive at the party. He dumps me on a couch and disappears down a corridor. I switch into invisible mode, a state I've mastered over the years. I share the couch with coupling couples until the wee hours. Just before dawn, Simon wobbles over and shakes me awake. He reeks of alcohol, smoke and stale bodily fluids, but somehow delivers us back home in one piece.

*I flop into bed and sleep until the early hours of the afternoon. I wake to an empty house. Simon is out again - a mixed blessing given his antics of the previous night. On a positive note, my mother is still away and her absence provides me with a much-needed break from her temper.*

*My mother has never been calm but her fuse in recent years has grown shorter. I spend my days tiptoeing around her, though it's hard to keep out of her way when she's angry. When she's angry she searches for a victim until she finds one, and both Simon and I are copping large doses of her fury. Sometimes my mother loses her temper because of something we've done, but more often than not her anger is fuelled internally. When my mother's sparks ignite there is nothing that I, nor anyone else in the line of fire, can do to minimise the fallout.*

I always hated my mother's temper. It scared me; not because I feared being punished, on the contrary I was used to the punishment my mother dished out. The problem was two-fold; it was impossible to predict her



explosions and I was powerless to prevent them. When my mother's volcano erupted, as it inevitably did, the release, however devastating, brought me relief. The foreboding suspense would finally be over. She didn't just get angry, she would become enraged. As she turned red and puffy I would cower in anticipation of my punishment. More often than not, she would banish me to the bathroom and lock the door. Being relegated to the bathroom wasn't altogether bad, it made my mother's screaming more bearable; her screeching would be muffled by walls and doors, rather than being directed into my face.

I didn't mind being thrown into the bathroom; I was used to it. Once inside I'd generally sit back and enjoy the peace and quiet, even though at times I'd be too upset to do that. I'd shout, 'Let me out. Let me out. I want to come ouuuut!' and beat the door down with my fists until they throbbed. And when my throat was raw and my voice went hoarse, I'd crawl into my spot against the back wall, squat in the corner farthest from the door and let the tiles chill my bottom. Taking to the tiles in the corner allowed me to cool down while my mother's anger abated. When I was little it was harder for me to wait alone in the bathroom. I would cry hysterically until I fell asleep, but as I got older the bathroom became a bit of a haven from the madness of the household outside. As a teenager I would usually sit quietly, waiting for my reprieve. My mother wouldn't come while I was 'making a fuss'; not agreeing with her, or in this case, demanding to be let out. Sometimes I wasn't sorry, notably when I didn't know what I'd done wrong. Sometimes I would pretend to be sorry when I wasn't because I was tired of sitting. I would plead in my most angelic tones; 'Mum, please. I'm sorry. I really mean it. I'm very, very sorry. And... and I promise to be a good girl. I really do.' But nothing, not even that guaranteed my release. She'd make me wait until she was ready. Only when she was convinced that my will had been broken would I hear that key turn in the lock.

Sometimes I'd take myself into the bathroom and lock the door from the inside. I'd been thrown inside so often over the years that it had become my special place. It was a place where I could be alone with my thoughts and I would go there with my penknife and a piece of wood and whittle the hours away by myself. Sometimes I would carve figures in soap instead because soap was soft and easy to work with. I could carve more detail in soap than in wood; in soap I could even carve a face. I used to be proud of my faces and leave them in the bathroom for my brother and mother to see. But more

often the case, they wouldn't pay any attention and flippantly obliterate my handiwork in their wash.

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*On the last day of the weekend when my mother goes away I lock myself in the bathroom with my penknife. I get undressed and climb into the shower, turn the water on and flick the pen knife open. I don't have any soap with me and I leave the soap in its dispenser. I run the blade against my finger to see how sharp it is and cut myself on purpose. I watch in awe as blood emerges from the wound and starts to drip onto the floor of the shower below. Seeing the blood flow relieves some of the pressure that has been building up inside of me and I move into a surreal state.*

*Excited I make a bigger cut on my left wrist.*

*Cutting doesn't hurt me once I've moved into a state of relative oblivion; physical pain doesn't register. On the contrary, cutting myself, feels great because, it puts me back in control. I squat in the bottom of the shower watching small rivulets of blood form along my wrist and join together, flow across my hand and pour off the end of my fingertips. At first I feel calm and even a little dazed, but as the bleeding gets heavier, my initial relief fades and I become anxious. What have I done? What if I can't stop the bleeding? Before long I'm in a panic; my heart is pounding, weird spots dance in front of my eyes and I slump onto the tiles in the corner of the shower as everything goes fuzzy.*

*When I come around, I feel a cold shiver down my spine. The water's still running and even though it's warm, it isn't warming me. I look around and see blood everywhere. I don't know what to do. I've cut myself before, but never as deeply as on this occasion. I force myself to my feet, stumble out of the shower and pull a towel off the wall hook. I push the towel onto the worst part of the cut, climb back into the shower and squat under the shower nozzle. The water makes the blood stream again. I reach up and turn the tap off. As I do so, my head spins so I quickly squat back down. I hold the towel over my wrist and press hard. My head spins. I look out at the trail of crimson footprints leading across the bathroom floor. As I move to start cleaning them off, I feel faint again and slump back down. Although my head feels woozy I am perversely calm.*

*I am chilled and covered in goose pimples. Blood is seeping out through the towel and I need to do something about it. The thought of Simon returning mobilises me to get out of the shower; I drip my way into my bedroom. I'm reluctant to mess up any more towels; I don't want my mother to discover what I've done, but I do need to find a way to stop the bleeding. I pull two handkerchiefs out of a drawer and tie them tightly around my wrist. They're so tight that I worry that my circulation is being cut off. The handkerchiefs slow the bleeding down, but don't stem the oozing altogether. The wound is stinging nastily now; I'm no longer feeling numb. I tie an old T-shirt over the top of the handkerchiefs and dab myself dry with a different towel; I'm at pains to avoid getting any blood on it. I throw some clothes on and return to the bathroom to scrub the floor clean with the bloody towel. I rinse the bloody towel out but can't get it clean. I get some detergent from the laundry and try again, but I still can't get it clean. I take the towel outside and bury it at the bottom of the garbage bin and pray that my mother won't notice that it's missing.*

*I crawl back into the bathroom and close the door, slump down in my corner on the tiles and fall asleep.*

*I awake with a shudder and a T-shirt tied around my wrist. At first I can't remember what has happened. The T-shirt is almost white but the hankies are a blotchy pink. I take the T-shirt off and lift the hankies up for a peek and remember. The bleeding has virtually stopped but there is dried blood over the top of the cut. I replace my bandages, push the bathroom door open and poke my head out. No one is around, I am still alone.*

*Being a Girl Guide I know some basic first aid. I put my knowledge into action, cleaning the wound and painting it with the red stuff my mother uses on cuts. The red stuff stings as I put it on. I give my arm a shake, let the red stuff dry, plaster the cut with bandaids and wriggle into a long sleeved shirt to hide my wrist.*

*I tended to my wound over the next couple of weeks, keeping it clean and hidden. No-one found out; I was good at keeping secrets too.*

*The memory of how I hurt myself that weekend emerged out of the blue; I couldn't work out what triggered it. I was still processing the memories to*

do with the doctor when it revisited and the combined impact of all of these traumas together took its toll.

All of my adult life I had enjoyed taking showers and even more so, baths, when I had the time, space or inclination. Baths calmed me and provided me with the extra comfort I needed during challenging times, but prior to that shower flashback, I had stopped taking baths altogether and replaced them with showers. At the time, I was having three, maybe four showers a day. Showers provided me with a ritual of self-purification when I felt filthy on the inside; which I did throughout that period.

One day, a couple of weeks before remembering how I'd cut myself, I'd felt compelled to hurt myself in the middle of a routine daily shower. I couldn't explain what caused the compulsion, but it was so intense that I jumped straight out of the shower stall. After that, I could not countenance taking a shower again; I felt unsafe even thinking about it. I reverted to taking baths instead because they didn't affect me the same way.

As the memory of the shower incident returned, my feelings crystallised and I started to understand what was happening. I was feeling the same desperation I'd felt as a child and that desperation fed similar feelings in the present day as I'd experienced in past times. As my feelings of isolation peaked, I relegated myself to a metaphorical bathroom; a space in which I was fearful, alone and unable to feel the presence of those who loved me. When I went back in the shower inside my head, nothing existed, other than the intensity of my pain and my desire to be free of it.

My memory of cutting myself as a teenager set off another cycle of suicidal thinking. I was able to discuss those thoughts with Kate almost immediately, because I trusted her more than I ever had before. Learning to trust her had been a slow process. Children are born with an instinct and ability to trust, but mine had been betrayed and lost early. Instead of it being reinforced, my ability to trust had been eroded. Relearning trust as an adult took time and patience and was only possible because Kate had provided me with the sort of unconditional care and support that children ideally receive from their parents.

When I told Kate that I was feeling suicidal again, she reminded me about my family and how much they cared about me. About how my husband had supported me while I was recovering the memories to do with the doctor. How extraordinary he had been! How much my children needed me. And she repeated the process as many times as was required to contain

my distress and get me thinking rationally. And when working to strengthen my connections failed to contain my disorder, Kate reminded me that I had signed a contract.

‘But it was a long time ago. It won’t hold me, because I can’t feel it anymore.’

Kate suggested that we draw up a new one. I agreed straight away and in designing it, was forced to reflect upon my thought processes. As I did, I realised how irrational my thinking had become. Once again, a wave of isolation and despair generated from times past had ignited parallel emotions in my present.

After signing the contract, Kate affirmed that I had a large family who loved and needed me. I had a therapist who cared about me and good friends as well. I was no longer alone as I had been in my childhood bathroom. Kate had shepherded me from the brink, back into the arms of my family once again.

By this juncture Dan was better able to judge my mental state. Although I still didn’t willingly divulge the full extent of my suicidal thoughts, he could generally sense when I was slipping away.

Dan understood how badly my mother’s present-day denials were affecting me and he could not blithely accept the way she continued to invalidate me. He grappled to understand her idealising of her dead friend, Monty, along with her stubborn refusal to validate any of my memories. He challenged her repeatedly on my behalf, both, in my presence and in private, and routinely returned frustrated from those interchanges. One particular conversation spoke for them all.

On this particular occasion, Dan went alone to talk with my mother. Having observed the progressive erosion of my relationship with her and its impact, he was intent on convincing her definitively of the extent of the doctor’s bastardry. Having acquired consummate skills as a negotiator in his business dealings, he felt certain that he would be able to get through to her, and so mend the rift growing between us.

He focused on the rift and the distress it was causing us both and suggested that my mother might consider acknowledging the possibility that some of what I had disclosed had happened. He used every possible argument to help her see reason. The conversation went through a series of

phases during which he sometimes believed that he was making progress, only to discover in her next breath, that she remained resolute in her denials.

‘But Dan I do believe Baba’s memories. Of course I do, but these things couldn’t have happened.’ He was particularly perplexed by her capacity to make a firm statement with the utmost conviction, only to negate it and logically contradict it in that same sentence!

After a good half hour of wrangling, Dan realised that she had not shifted her views one iota and decided to present my mother with a hypothetical scenario which he hoped would provide her with some insight.

‘Now Lucy, listen to me please. I have a question for you and I want you to think about it, okay? Here it is. How would you expect a mother to react when her daughter comes to her to tell her that she was raped?’

My mother didn’t respond.

‘What sorts of things do you think a mother might say?’

My mother didn’t say anything. Silence.

‘Would she feel sad or angry?’

Silence.

‘Well that’s what happened to your daughter. Your wonderful doctor friend raped her!’

My mother could not answer him.

He left her house defeated.

Dan recounted the number of alternatives he offered my mother during that conversation and I was shocked. Despite my perception that I’d grasped the full extent of my mother’s inability to empathise, it was a devastating affront to have to concede that anyone, let alone one’s mother, could lack such basic humanity. I was finally being forced to accept that my own mother did not possess any capacity to nurture, nor to empathise. She was emotionally blind and I had been waiting for her to display the gift of sight.

I will never know whether my mother’s emotional void resulted from her war time traumas, or whether she had lost that capacity earlier, or never developed it in the first place. I know that as a young woman she lost everything that she had held dear and she had been unable to grieve those losses. Perhaps her losses had been so extensive that they could never

be grieved effectively. How can one ever comprehend the scale of the impact of experiences such as those that were suffered during the Holocaust? That said, I am also aware that my maternal grandmother was short-tempered and that my mother was scared of her explosions. When she speaks about her mother, she could be just as aptly speaking about herself. I wonder if my mother suffered from the same trauma that I did when she was young, or whether she too had a mother who could not provide her the love that was needed. I will never know.

I understand how the murder and mayhem my mother witnessed would have desensitised her to the suffering of others. I also realise that Holocaust survivors often believe that no-one's life experiences can ever compare with the horrors they faced. In the book my mother wrote, she alludes to an incident in which food and shelter were offered in return for sexual favours. I understand how awful her experience must have been, yet no matter what reason I find for it, nothing adequately mitigates my mother's behaviour, neither at the time of the doctor's abuse, nor since.

Around the time of Dan's confrontation with my mother Kate went away for one of her holidays. I hated her taking holidays and irrationally resented her life outside of her work. I expected Kate to be available when I needed her and couldn't bear to be abandoned by her. I had been abandoned in so many ways already. Conscious of my fragility, Kate was at pains to ensure that I could still contact her even when she was away. She left me her email address and her mobile phone number so I could message her if I needed to. Both of those options provided me the lifeline I needed to maintain my connection to her, and to my survival.

During the weeks before her scheduled time away, we would plan the structure around the coming weeks without her. We would establish a routine for me to follow, a system designed to help ground me. We would identify people to whom I could go for support in her absence. The list included family and friends and usually a substitute practitioner as well.

During this particular holiday absence, Kate had referred me to the psychiatrist who had prescribed the antidepressants that I had been taking continually since I first saw him. In one of the sessions with the psychiatrist, I recounted Dan's discussions with my mother. In seeking to highlight the extent of her emotional unavailability I said, 'My mother

wouldn't notice if I chopped myself up into pieces and laid the pieces down her stairs. She would step over me and keep walking.'

The psychiatrist was shocked. My statement was outrageous. Or so it seemed to be. The sad thing is though, that I was not exaggerating for effect; I seriously believed it.





daddy's part

## chapter 17

The onset of my shower flashback heralded a sudden and sustained aversion to taking showers. Once the memory emerged however, and I validated its existence, my antipathy disappeared and I was able to take showers again without any difficulty. Within weeks though, the very same repellent feeling returned, only this time it was in response to taking baths. I braced myself for the coming crisis. The first related flashback assaulted me at home and it transported me back to an era much earlier than any of its predecessors.

*I'm one, two, three, I'm four years old. I'm four because I already had my four-year old birthday party. It's bath-time and I'm a big girl because I can take my clothes off all by myself, but I'm playing pretend like I can't, because then my Daddy will help me, like when I was little and I like that. My Daddy is lying me down on my towel on the floor in the bathroom near the bath, and I'm lifting my arms up and Daddy is pulling my shirt up over my head. I'm lifting my arms up right up to the sky but my singlet is getting stuck on my head and that's funny because I can't see my Daddy like I can't see him when we play hide and seek.*

*My Daddy is taking my panties off and I'm wriggling because I have a pink body because I'm naked. My Daddy is blowing raspberries in my belly button and it feels blowy and tickly and giggly because it's funny. My Daddy is tickling me on my tummy; I love when my Daddy is a tickling Daddy.*

*I'm jumping up and running away from my Daddy but I'm not really; I'm tricking. My Daddy and me are playing chasey like when we play chasey with Cherry outside in our big yard but we're being careful because when you play chasey in the bathroom you have to be careful because it's slippery in the bathroom and you can fall over and hurt yourself. I don't like hurting myself. My Daddy is catching me and giving me a cuddle and now he's blowing 1,2,3,4 raspberries on my tummy like the same four when I'm four years' old.*

*I love my Daddy and I love having bath-time with my Daddy. I have bath-time with my Daddy every afternoon before we have dinner time. Bath-time with my Daddy is fun, because he makes me wriggle and giggle until*

*my tummy hurts that giggly hurt which is a fun hurt and not a yucky hurt. I like fun hurts but not yucky hurts. Yucky!*

*My catching Daddy is lifting me up under my arms and splashing me into the bath down the end without the taps and the poury thing that sticks out. My Daddy-bath is warm and bubbly because that's my favourite bath and my Daddy knows it is. I'm kicking and splashing and trying to wet my Daddy because my Daddy looks funny when he's wet because the wet makes my Daddy's hair on his head which is curly not be curly anymore. I'm rubbing the soap with my hands to make more bubbles in my bath-time. My Daddy and me are popping the bubbles and we're blowing them too. I'm blowing the bubbles onto my Daddy's nose and the bubbles on my Daddy's nose make him look funny.*

*My Daddy is washing me all over to make me clean and make me 'cleaner than all the other little girls in the world'. My Daddy is taking me back out of the bath and flying me through the air. He's catching me in my soft fluffy towel and calling me his princess and he's drying and cuddling me. I love my Daddy; I love my Daddy more than anything in the whole wide world and I love being my Daddy's princess. My Daddy is a special Daddy.*

More flashbacks followed from the time I was four. I experienced them at home first before reliving them in my sessions with Kate. The flashbacks confused me; sometimes they made me feel happy, but other times they were horrid. I was not prepared for the memories they brought.

*I'm having a bath-time with Daddy. My special Daddy has gone away and I don't know where he is. I'm not giggling but I'm still wriggling a different sort of wriggling. It's a wriggling to get away from a Daddy who isn't my special Daddy because this Daddy is holding me in a hurty way and I don't like it. This Daddy is holding me up in the air in my pink skin and making my legs kick.*

*'Put me down, Daddy! Put me down!' I cry and that Daddy does put me down and that Daddy lies me down with hurty hands into the bottom of a bad bath. That Daddy plays pretend games but they're yucky pretend games and I'm not giggling at all. That Daddy's fingers are poking and scratching me and I don't want them to do that and I don't want them to touch my pink skin and not the pink skin between my kicky legs.*

*That Daddy's arms take my pink body out of the hurty bath and that Daddy has a scratchy towel and the scratchy towel scratches my little girl's*

*bits that the bad Daddy hurt. It's not a washing bath and a playing bath and it's not a warm special bubbly bath; it's a hurting bath and a bad bath.*

\*

*It's another bath-time and my special Daddy is giving me a giggly bath because this is my special Daddy and my special Daddy loves me. My special Daddy wraps me in a friendly towel and the friendly towel makes me warm and soft. My special Daddy wants to play, but my bits are hurting from that other Daddy and I don't want to play with any Daddy.*

*'I love you princess,' my special Daddy says and he wants to cuddle me and I want to cuddle him, but I don't want to cuddle him all at the same time.*

*'Princess, I love you,' my special Daddy says, because my special Daddy calls me his princess and I feel bad because I love my special Daddy more than anything, but I don't love that Daddy who hurts me and sometimes I don't know which Daddy is my special Daddy anymore.*

I was having a session with Kate.

'Cathy, what's happening? Can you tell me what's happening?'

I was being swept away by a bath-time memory, aspects of which I'd started recalling at home. Although I was sitting in my chair in Kate's office my body was recoiling from the fingers of a father who was hurting my four-year old body. My eyes were squeezed shut.

'Cathy, what's happening?' Kate's gentle voice sounded out of the darkness that existed behind my eyelids.

'My Daddy hurting me! My Daddy hurting me!'

I wasn't able to say anything else that session but terrifying flashbacks just like that one continued to strike me both at home and in my sessions. One day when I was at home by myself with only fifteen minutes to go till my next session, a devastating image assaulted me. I'd felt the pressure building up all morning. By the time the image had crystallised, my level of agitation had reached fever pitch.

*A monster is bearing down on me and pushing me backwards. The monster grabs me; I cry out but I'm trapped and can't get away. I had no idea how I'd be able to wait the fifteen minutes out. I decided to take a shower but instead of stepping inside the shower recess I began to jump*

involuntarily, up and down, on the white-grey tile floor screaming, 'No Daddy! No Daddy! No!' As I jumped up and down my mind flipped back.

*'No Daddy, no!' The floor tiles are lime green. I stop jumping and look up into Daddy's eyes, but they are not the eyes of my special Daddy; they are the eyes of a scary monster Daddy and I don't want to stay with that scary monster Daddy. I drop onto the floor to try and get away. My body starts to rock and I rock hard and fast on the yucky lime green tiles of the bathroom floor. My special Daddy comes back and he bends over me but then he goes away again and the monster Daddy comes back instead and the monster Daddy puts his arms under my nakie bottom and hurts me. 'No Daddy. No Daddy! NO!'*

It was ten past two. I was ten minutes late for my two o'clock session. I was sitting curled in a ball on the white grey tiles in the corner of our bathroom, rocking, listening to the insistent ring of the phone in our bedroom. I suspected that it was Kate calling; she usually called when I was running late.

*'Daddy, it's Kate! I have to go!'* I said to the Daddy in my head.

I wriggled out of the Daddy's arms in my mind and hopped into my car. I asked the little girl to go away so the grown woman could come back to do the driving. I pushed the buzzer. There was no answer. I pushed it again. 'Answer, please answer!'

*'Hello.'*

I was sitting in the waiting room waiting for Kate, but she was taking a long time. The little girl in me started rocking while the adult sat and waited. I slumped down in my chair in Kate's office, shut my eyes and was transported back in time.

*I'm four years old and it's dark. I don't like when it's dark because the dark is scary. Scary things are touching me in the dark and they're trying to grab me and I don't want them to grab me. I want to get away but I can't.*

*'Cathy, what's happening? Can you tell me what's happening?'*

Even though my head was foggy I could still make out Kate's voice. Hearing it reassured me; I wasn't alone, she hadn't left me. She'd been watching; she'd seen the whole thing. She'd be able to explain what was happening for sure.

*'Cathy, what's happening?'*

I sank lower into my chair. Kate didn't know what was happening either.

‘I... I...’

‘Cathy, what’s happening?’

‘I don’t know.’ I mouthed to the air. ‘I don’t know.’ I was stuck in limbo between being a terrified little girl of four and a terrified forty-six year old patient in a therapist’s office.

‘Cathy, you’re going to have to start coming out of it. Sit up now, come on!’ Kate was speaking in the business-like voice she used when we were running out of time and she had to call in the patient after me.

‘Come on now, Cathy, sit up! Would you like some water?’

I nodded.

I heard the consulting room door open, the rumble from the water dispenser in the waiting room outside as the water trickled into the cup. I made out the door being pulled shut, Kate walking towards me, the plastic cup striking the side table to my left, and Kate walking away and sitting back down.

‘The water, Cathy, drink the water!’

My eyes were shut and I couldn’t see any water. I couldn’t see anything at all. I sat forward and forced my eyelids open. The room was glary and my eyes struggled to stay open in face of the bright lights. I caught a flash of ceiling and apricot walls, then looked down and glimpsed a small plastic cup on the side table next to me. I shut my eyes again and reached out to pick up the cup but my hand couldn’t find it. I told my hand to go back and have another look for the cup, stretching my fingers out until they could feel it and could pick it up. The cup felt cool; the water was cold.

‘Good girl, there’s a good girl; you don’t want to spill the water now, do you? Hold on tight, you hear!’ I instructed myself inside my head.

‘Now lift the cup up carefully. There’s a good girl. That’s it; right up to your lips, all the way now. Now lips feel the cup. That’s the way. Feel the edge first. You can feel it, can’t you? You can feel it’s there. Now tip the cup up slowly; tip it up; tip it up carefully. You don’t want to spill any water. You don’t want to spill any. If you spill the water, your mother will be angry. You don’t want your mother to be angry. You don’t want that!’ I never wanted my mother to be angry.

The water felt cool and refreshing against my lips. It filled the inside of my mouth, cooling my gums and my palate and the roof of my mouth. As I swallowed, the water flowed down the back of my throat and woke more of me up.

‘Finish it, Cathy. Finish it.’ Kate insisted.

I sighed knowing full well that the four-year old would never be able to finish a whole cup of water in one go. The water spun its magic and woke the grown up inside right up. As I returned to the present, the images in front of my eyes wavered. I closed my eyes, opened them again and struggled to focus. I glanced across at the paintings on the opposite wall and tried to pick out the detail in them but I couldn’t. I looked up at Kate’s face, but it was still blurred. I didn’t want to stare so I looked away. I looked back at one of the paintings and I could make out some of the people in it. Then the vase by my chair became clearer. Kate’s face, yes, nearly and the carpet on the floor. Kate’s face, yes, perfectly and the titles on the spines of the books piled on her desk.

Kate got up out of her chair and walked over to her desk. She always walked over to her desk when it was time for me to leave. I looked up at her longingly. Can’t I stay a little longer? Please pretty please, cross my heart and hope to die. I won’t be any trouble; I promise.

Kate shuffled a few papers on her desk. It was a further signal; I had to go. I didn’t want Kate to be angry. I massaged the soles of my feet and instructed them to make contact with the floor. They pushed through our socks down into our shoes and trod down hard on the floor to make me stand. I was a little wobbly but managed to stabilise myself before I took a few steps towards the door.

‘Cathy, are you alright?’

I nodded but I was anything but alright.

I stumbled out of Kate’s office and perched myself on the brick wall along the side of Kate’s house. I sat on the wall listening to the birds twittering in the trees, car engines driving past. A faint breeze brushed against my cheeks and I felt it and that meant that I must still be alive. I sat on the wall outside Kate’s until my head was less foggy and sat a little longer until I had grown up completely.

I got up and walked up the driveway to my car. Got in behind the wheel and felt the heat from the sun streaming in through the windscreen. I put the key in the ignition, tilted the seat back and passed out. The little girl of four fell asleep. The adult did too. I stayed asleep for ages and it felt good because it was safe to be asleep out the front of Kate’s place.

\*

I don't know how long my father subjected me to the bath-time games, but I suspect that they took place at different times during my early childhood. I believe that my mind 'forgot' them in a similar way to the manner in which it pushed all memories of the doctor away.

It took me some time to assimilate these bath-time memories. Try as I might to deny them, they continued their battering. I needed to resist them because they threatened my perception of my father. His warm and caring nature had comforted me during my earliest years and helped me form a core, strong enough to help me survive. I had no option other than to idealise him; he was my sole nurturer. I couldn't allow the 'bad' things he did to penetrate my psyche because then I couldn't have held him dear. Nor could I have used my idealisation of him to sustain me further.

Children's minds utilise a range of defences to protect them. One of those defences works to expunge whatever information threatens the child's survival. My mind 'forgot' those things which could have destroyed it and clung to those which provided it with sustenance. Through that process in childhood I had quarantined the abusive events from one another. By compartmentalising each horror, I had ensured that one episode of abuse didn't compound another, and that combined, they didn't destroy me. I only continued to function because this defence mechanism had taken over.

One of the most crucial processes in my therapy has been that of integration - to finally bring the fragments I was recalling together to form a coherent history, but before I could progress further through this process, I needed to collect every possible fragment of memory that I could, and establish precisely what and how much information I had to work with.

And so the memories continued....

One day driving home from therapy I passed a stack of cardboard sheets which had been dumped onto the footpath awaiting collection. The stack conjured an image of a hunched body, and that began to trouble me. Within a few days the image crystallised, and even though I couldn't put a face to it, I could visualise the body of a man and was picturing him standing in a doorway. I soon recognised the door in my mind's eye picture; it was the door to my bedroom in Redcliffe.

I immediately thought of the doctor, and wondered whether he was the man in that image. After all, he and his wife had visited our family in Queensland on several occasions. But soon, feelings of warmth began to



accompany the image. I then knew for sure that the image was not that of the doctor.

It had to be someone else.

## chapter 18

*I'm eight years' old and I'm sleeping in my bed in my Redcliffe house. I wake up and see a shadow and the shadow is standing in the place where you come into my bedroom. I blink my eyes to make the shadow go away because sometimes blinking does make things go away, but it doesn't this time. I rub my eyes but the shadow still doesn't go away. I pull my sheet and blanket up over my head and that makes it go. But I don't go back to sleep because I feel something touching me on the shoulder through my sheet and blanket. I don't like that touching feeling and I don't like shadows. I pull the sheet and blanket up more, but the shadow touches me on the shoulder again so I take a little baby peek. The shadow is right next to my bed and it smiles; the shadow is my Daddy.*

*My Daddy doesn't say anything but he waves his hand to the side to make me wriggle over so he can sit next to me on my bed. I wriggle over to make room straight away because I want my Daddy to sit on my bed next to me. My Daddy does sit and he touches me on the cheek with his hand. His hand's a little bit cold and his touching me makes me tingly. My Daddy hasn't been talking or playing with me for a long, long time. I look into Daddy's eyes and they look at me and they are sparkly like the stars in the sky. My Daddy's eyes haven't been sparkly for forever. They haven't been sparkly from when he stopped working at my Humpybong School and that's when my Daddy's leg started its dancing.*

*My Daddy is talking to me and he's asking me what happened today at school and he's asking me what things I was doing. My Daddy calls me his princess and he hasn't called me that for a long, long time. I'm really excited that I'm Daddy's princess again. I can't believe that! I'm jumping up and throwing my arms around my Daddy. Hugging my Daddy feels yummy and I don't let go for ages because I love hugging my Daddy sooooo much. I know that if I hold my Daddy long enough then he won't ever leave me. My Daddy and me sit on my bed next to each other and we talk. We talk about lots of things like we used to before my Daddy didn't want to talk to me. And then the best thing happens - my Daddy starts telling me a story and the story's about a princess like me but the princess in the story lives*

*far, far away. I love when my Daddy reads me stories; I've missed them heaps. I don't remember when my Daddy told me a story last time but I want him to tell me stories always. My Daddy tells me that he is having a special visit with me but he doesn't have to tell me that because I know that already. And my Daddy tells me that I mustn't tell anyone about his special visit, and that it's a secret and he puts his pinky over my lips when he says it's a secret. He says that it's a secret that we mustn't tell Mummy, because it's a secret that she wouldn't understand and don't I know that she wouldn't understand? And I do know that, of course I do and I tell Daddy that.*

*I've missed my Daddy heaps. I've missed my Daddy talking to me and I've missed my Daddy tucking me into bed and saying good night to me and I've missed my Daddy reading me stories. I've missed my Daddy kissing me too but now my Daddy's come back and I'm my Daddy's princess all over again and I'm a very, very happy princess.*

*I don't know how long my Daddy stays with me on my bed but it isn't a long enough time when he tells me that he has to go away. I really wish that my Daddy could stay forever. 'Don't go my Daddy, please don't go.' My Daddy bends down and he gives me a big sloppy kiss on my cheek and I go all shivery in my back. And my Daddy tucks me in like he used to tuck me in and he says, 'Sleep tight, princess'. And because Daddy says 'sleep tight' I know that I will sleep tight and I do sleep really, really tight.*

*The next morning I get out of bed straight away and I run into the kitchen so that I will be able to see my Daddy. I'm too excited and I can't wait to see him but it's no good because when I do see him he isn't the same Daddy as the Daddy in my room. 'Good morning, Daddy,' but Daddy doesn't say anything to his princess and I'm very sad about that and I go back to my room and shut the door because the Daddy from my bed has gone away. I wonder if the Daddy from my bed was a dream.*

*I'm having another dream; I didn't know that you could have the same dream more times than one. Maybe if you wish hard enough, dreams really do come true; that's what the fairy tale books say and maybe dreams can come true more than one time. My dream comes true lots of times. It comes true three times that week and lots of times in the weeks after that week.*

*I don't ever know which night my Daddy is going to come for his special visit so every night I try and stay awake, because if I do and he*

comes, then I'll be able to see straight away when he comes. I try really hard to stay awake; I really do but I get really tired and my eyelids get too heavy and they make me fall asleep. And I'm always sleeping at the time my Daddy comes but it's okay because he wakes me up and then we can talk together on my bed.

I don't know how many times my Daddy has been coming to my bedroom before things get different to before but they do. The first thing that happens is that my Daddy stops telling me special long stories and he starts telling me short silly stories instead. I still like them, but not as much as the special long ones. My Daddy does still play with me, well he does sometimes and that feels really good, because I like when my Daddy plays with me. I like when my Daddy tickles me too because tickling's my favourite. I like when my Daddy tickles me under my arms because that tickling makes me giggly and wriggly and wiggly. Sometimes I wiggle so much that my sheets come out from my bed and my bed gets all messy and my Daddy has to fix it up for me. And I like it when my Daddy pokes me in the ribs because when my Daddy pokes me in the ribs, I laugh a funny laugh and I like funny laughs. Sometimes my Daddy pokes me too hard and it hurts and I don't like that and sometimes my Daddy pokes me in places where I don't want to be poked either. And sometimes my Daddy tickles me and I don't want to be tickled and he pokes me where I don't want him to poke me and I don't like him doing that. I don't like some of my Daddy's games at all, but I don't tell my Daddy that I don't like them because I love my Daddy lots and my Daddy is the best Daddy in the whole wide world.

*'Princess, I've been thinking and... I have a special idea. I know you'll love it, you really will. How about we... er...unbutton our shirts? Come on, it'll be fun, you'll see. Come on, let's try.'*

*Before my Daddy stops telling me about his special idea, the buttons on his shirt undo themselves and mine do too and my Daddy and me sit on my bed next to each other and we don't have our tops on and our skin is nakey and that is funny. The front of my chest is flat but my Daddy's chest isn't flat because his nipples push up a little bit and I like looking at his nipples because I think that they're funny. And every time my Daddy comes after*

*that time we take our shirts off and I poke my Daddy and he pokes me back and we giggle. I like giggling with my Daddy.*

*'Princess, it's silly for me to be outside of the bed when you're inside. How about I slip in under the covers with you, then we can be together. How about that? What do you think?'* My Daddy climbs into my bed, he chomps his jaws and he pretends to eat me all up. I chomp my jaws back. My Daddy grabs hold of me by my tummy and he makes me play rollies with him underneath my sheets and I like playing like that because I am laughing. I am laughing, but then I get a laughing pain in my tummy and I tell my Daddy to stop playing rollies. I like when my Daddy and me are playing rollies together; I like that.

*'Princess, don't you think that it's silly to lie in bed with our clothes on? People don't go to bed dressed now, do they?'*

*'But, Daddyyyy they wear jarmies, you silly boy!'*

*My Daddy doesn't say anything about jarmies at all. He wriggles under my sheets and he lifts his legs up and he takes his pants and undies right off and throws them away onto my floor.*

*'Come on princess, it's your turn now... Isn't this fun?'*

*I wriggle and my Daddy tickles me and I wriggle some more and I take my jarmie pants right off under my sheets but I don't throw my jarmie pants on the floor; I keep them under my pillow to keep them close to me.*

*My Daddy does touch me and he touches my body in lots of places and my Daddy touches between my legs and I don't like him doing that. I don't say anything to my Daddy about it because I love my Daddy soooo much and I don't want to make my Daddy sad. But I don't like my Daddy touching me between my legs and I don't like my Daddy asking me to touch his naughty bits. I don't like my Daddy's naughty bits one bit. 'Yuck, no my Daddy! They're too yucky!' And my Daddy tells me a long, long story about fairies and witches and I love that story. I love when my Daddy tells me stories and I love fairies but I don't like witches. Witches are yucky!*

*I hate that thing that hangs off the end of my Daddy's tummy because it's really yucky. That thing is like a squelchy worm but sometimes when my Daddy is lying next to me the squelchy worm isn't a squelchy one because it's a hard one, but it's always a yucky worm. I don't like when it's a hard*

worm because when it's a hard worm it pokes into me and my Daddy is in my bed next to me and I can't get away from the hard worm and I don't want it to poke into me but it does.

In the morning after the night when my Daddy comes to me in my bed I run out to see my Daddy but it's always bad, because my Daddy is always sitting back in his chair and when he sits in his chair he doesn't move. I hate when it's morning because when it's morning time my Daddy looks like a ghost and I don't like ghosts. And my Daddy's eyes don't look at me when it's morning time, but they look right through me like I'm a window and I don't like my Daddy's eyes looking through me.

When my Daddy does come to my bed he doesn't ever play with me now and I don't know why. My Daddy does things to me which I don't like him doing and they're yucky things like twinkling my nipples. I don't like my Daddy twinkling my nipples but my Daddy likes doing it and I giggle because I want to make my Daddy happy. And when my Daddy twinkles my nipples he touches me where I don't like him to and I don't like my Daddy doing that but my Daddy likes doing it; I can tell that he does. I don't tell my Daddy that I don't like him doing those things because I don't want to make my Daddy sad.

I like the hairs on my Daddy's chest; I like the hairs on his chest so much. My Daddy doesn't have many hairs on his chest not like some of the Daddies at the beach but he does have a few fun hairs and I like playing with the fun hairs that he does have. When I touch the hairs on my Daddy's chest they curl up like little baby things and I make them my pets and I pull faces at them. And when I put my head on my Daddy's chest, my hair pets tickle me on my cheek and they sometimes crawl inside my ear. I love my Daddy's hairs; I love the ones on his chest.

Sometimes my Daddy tells me to get out of bed and he does too and then he lifts me up onto his knee. My Daddy's knee is my favourite place in the whole world because it's a really special place. It's a special place when me and my Daddy have our clothes on, but now when my Daddy puts me on his knee he is naked and his worm sticks into my bottom and it's not special at all. My Daddy says that I'm a wriggler and I am. I'm a really big wriggler when I'm naked and my Daddy is naked and I want to wriggle really far away from my Daddy's worm.

*'I love you, princess and I love being with you.'* I love my Daddy telling me that he loves me; he never tells me that enough times. My Daddy asks me if I love him and that's a funny question, 'Of course my Daddy, of course I love you. I love you more than anything' and I jump up and I throw my arms around my Daddy and I give my Daddy the huggiest squeeze I can without our nakey bottoms touching because I don't want his worm to poke me and stop us hugging.

*'Well, that's my princess all right! I love you so much, you know that, don't you, my princess? And that's why I... I love coming to visit, but remember now...'*

*'Yes Daddy, I know. I must never tell Mummy.'*

*'Oh, you're a smart one! That's right, princess. You must never tell Mummy. She wouldn't understand, now would she?'* My Daddy is right. My mother wouldn't understand.

Sometimes my Daddy lies on top of me when I lie down but he's a big Daddy and he squashes me. My Daddy squashes me because I'm little and I'm skinny. That's what he says. And when my Daddy lies on top of me I feel like I'm a little baby sparrow bird and the sparrow bird is getting squashed by a great big yucky eagle.

One night when my Daddy is in my bed my Daddy whispers in my ear and he says that he has a surprise for me. I love surprises, especially Daddy surprises.

*'What is it, my Daddy? What is it? What's the surprise?'*

*'Well princess, it's something really special! It's something that two people do when they love each other like we do. And we really do love each other, now don't we, princess?'*

But my Daddy's surprise isn't a good surprise at all because he sticks his worm into me and it's a hard worm and not a squelchy worm and the hard worm hurts a very big hurt when my Daddy sticks it in. It's the biggest hurt ever and bigger than that. And I'm a baby sparrow bird and my Daddy is a yucky eagle bird and the sparrow bird cries out and the eagle has a big shock and the eagle stops and it pulls its hard eagle worm out of the sparrow bird. The sparrow bird is hurt lots and lots and some of the juice that's on the inside of the sparrow bird comes out of it and the juice runs down between the legs of the sparrow bird.

My Daddy sees the juice of the sparrow bird running out of the bird and down its legs and he cries and the sparrow bird cries too and the sparrow

*bird looks at the sparrow juice and the sparrow bird feels scared. And the sparrow is bleeding blood juice and the Daddy is crying.*

*'Don't cry my Daddy. Please don't cry!'*

*And the sparrow bird doesn't like when the sparrow bird's Daddy is crying.*

*'I... I just had a little baby shock, my Daddy. A little baby shock. And it's only a little bleeding coming out, my Daddy... only a little. Please my Daddy, don't cry. Please don't cry. My Daddy, please.'*

*My Daddy looks at me and my Daddy's cheeks have tears on them. I want to wipe the tears off my Daddy's cheeks because I don't ever want my Daddy's cheeks to have tears on them.*

*'I'm so sorry princess. I... I... er... I wouldn't ever do anything to hurt you. You know that, don't you?'* My Daddy and I have a big squeeze hug and that makes me feel a little bit better. And as my Daddy snuggles into his sparrow bird, the sparrow bird snuggles close to her Daddy.

*'I'm so sorry princess. I won't do it again if you don't want me to.'* But Daddy wants to do it. I can tell that he does.

*'No, my Daddy. It doesn't hurt much, really it doesn't. Please Daddy, please. It's special; you said so my Daddy, please. Please my Daddy, please don't cry.'*

As my Daddy climbs back up on top of me, I close my eyes. If I can't see my Daddy I won't be able to feel anything bad, but I do feel something bad and it feels really bad and I want to cry out loud but I don't because I don't want to upset my Daddy. I lie on my back and I don't move like when I play 'stiff dolly' with my Daddy only it's lying and not standing, and my Daddy hurts his princess, but his princess isn't there anymore because his princess's head has gone all fuzzy and his princess has gone away to the place where sparrow birds go when mean yucky eagles eat them up.

*I'm sitting on the extra chair that stays in the corner of my bedroom and I'm watching my Daddy take the bad sheets with the sparrow juice blood off my bed. I'm watching my Daddy go out of my bedroom so that he can get some good sheets and he comes back in and puts the good sheets on my bed. And I'm watching my Daddy go back out again and he's bringing back a washer and it's the washer from my bath because it's yellow and it has a duckie on it and my Daddy is a nice Daddy because my washer is warm and*



*it's wet; it isn't a scratchy washer. And my Daddy puts the washer on where the juice blood is coming from. I think it's because some of my bits are missing. The warm feels good but the water doesn't because it hurts me but I don't tell my Daddy that the water hurts me because I don't want my Daddy to cry.*

*And my Daddy gets my jarmies and he helps me put my jarmies on and he taps the side of my bed and I hop into bed and my Daddy pulls the sheet and blanket up and he tucks me in like he used to do all the time and he sits on the side of the bed and he holds my hand, 'I love you princess; I really do. And you've made me really happy. I'll come back again soon. Would you like that?'*

*'Yes, Daddy. I love you, my Daddy.'* And my Daddy kisses me on the cheek and he places a fatherly kiss on my cheek and walks out.

*I am eight years old.*

*It is hurting really badly between my legs. I get out of bed and go and get my washer and bring it back and put it between my legs on the place where the bits are missing. The washer makes the bits feel better but when I have to get up to go and have a wee my bits hurt me and I put the washer back between my legs. And I have to get up to wee a lot and I put the washer back and I get my Teddy and Teddy stays with me and Teddy makes me feel a little bit better. And when I lie on my back because it doesn't hurt so much when I lie on my back, Teddy lies on his back too.*

*The next time my Daddy comes into my bedroom he wants to do the same thing. I don't want him to, but I don't tell him that I don't want him to because I'm worried about my Daddy; I'm worried about how he sits in his chair and about how he stares and how he doesn't talk to me in the day-time. I don't want my Daddy to be sad; I want my Daddy to be happy. I'm worried that my Daddy is dying and I don't want him to die. Maybe if my Daddy doesn't do the thing to me he will be sad and then he will die and I don't want that.*

*I don't know what it is that my Daddy is doing to me in my bed with his hard worm and I don't have anyone to ask what it is, but I want to find out, so one night I sit on my bed by myself with my pants off and I cross my legs like when I'm sitting on the floor for story time at my school. I bend my head down and I look at where it's hurting between my legs where the bits*

*are missing. I don't know what it's supposed to look like between my legs and I can't tell if it looks bad or not and I can't tell what bits are missing. I try to put my fingers inside me where Daddy puts his hard worm, but it hurts and I don't want it to hurt so I take my fingers out.*

*I get out of the bed and take my dolly off the shelf. I take her dress and her undies off her and I hold her upside down. She doesn't have anything down underneath her like I do and there's nothing to push something into. But I want to push something into my dolly, so I get my coloured pencils and I put them in her mouth and I push. And I push the coloured pencils hard into my dolly's mouth and I make the hole in her mouth bigger. And when my dolly doesn't cry I bite my dolly's fingers because I want my dolly to cry; I bite my dolly's fingers right off. And I bite my fingers too and I rip my fingernails off and I pick at the bits that are left at the bottom of my nails. It hurts when I pick at my fingers, but it doesn't hurt as badly as when my Daddy puts his worm inside me and pushes.*

*I pick my dolly up and I hold my dolly upside down but she still doesn't have anything on the underneath of her. I put my clothes back on and walk out of my bedroom to my mother's sewing machine and I take my mother's scissors out of the top drawer of her sewing machine and I go back to my dolly on my tippy-toes. I stay as quiet as a little mouse when I'm on my tippy-toes because I don't want my mother to be angry. I make a hole in my dolly between her legs because when my dolly has a hole she is like me and I can push things inside my dolly's hole. And I push my pencils inside my dolly and I take the scissors and make the hole in my dolly between my dolly's legs bigger. I take my hairbrush and I try to put it inside my dolly, but my hairbrush doesn't go in so I make my dolly's hole bigger. I push the hairbrush inside my dolly and I push harder but she still doesn't cry so I take my hairbrush out of my dolly and I put the hairbrush inside me but I don't push because it hurts really bad so I take it out.*

*When my Daddy keeps doing the special thing lots to me it makes me feel different and it makes me feel different when I'm at home and when I'm at school. It makes me feel like I don't belong anywhere and it makes me feel like I don't belong with my friends.*

*'Cathy, what's wrong? Why don't you ever want to play with us anymore?'*

*I walk away from my friends when they ask me to play because I don't want to play with them because I want to be by myself. I don't feel like being*

*with my friends and I don't know why. My bits hurt all the time, but I can't tell anyone about it and especially not Mummy because my Mummy will be angry with me. I don't like my bits hurting. When I'm in my class at school I get into trouble for not paying attention from the teacher and for looking out the window when I should be looking at the blackboard. I don't like getting into trouble because Cathy never gets into trouble; Cathy's a good girl. Cathy's always a good girl and she doesn't like getting into trouble. But it's no good because in the classroom I have to keep putting up my hand because I need to go to do wees all the time. Sometimes I don't even make it to the toilet before I do wee in my pants, but when my pants get wet I don't tell anyone because Cathy's a good girl and only bad girls wet their pants.*

*Cathy's a good girl and she doesn't want her mother to be angry.*

## chapter 19

The moment I took hold of the wheel I felt spacey. I tried to override the fuzziness by giving myself a talking to and proceeded to back out of the driveway regardless. When I clipped the branches of several unsuspecting camellias on the way out, I decided that my head was too fuzzy for me to be driving after all.

I parked my car outside my next door neighbour's place and sat quietly for a few minutes. I felt a little clearer in the head after my time out and negotiated my way up the road to Kate's place. I was completely spaced out by the time I got there and considered sitting in the car for a while before going in, but decided against it. I didn't want to be late for my session.

With each step I took down that side drive I felt a little younger. By the time I stepped foot inside Kate's waiting room I'd regressed years.

I was a little girl of nine.

I wriggled as I waited by myself in a big brown leather chair that was meant for grown-ups. I didn't like waiting; especially alone. By the time the nice lady called Kate called me into her office, I was feeling sad and confused, because while I was waiting, I was thinking how my Daddy hurt me. I didn't like thinking about how my Daddy hurt me because I love my Daddy and Daddies don't hurt their princesses.

I preferred to think about nice things; I didn't like to think about yucky things. Sometimes when I thought about yucky things or got scared I broke into parts in my head. Then when I wanted to run away, some parts of me could run away while others stayed behind. When I wasn't scared or thinking about yucky things anymore, the parts could join together and make a whole.

*I'm not me. I'm nine years old. I'm not the same. I'm not the same as before. My Daddy keeps doing this thing and it never goes away even when I want it to. I love my Daddy and I have to do everything my Daddy wants me to do but I wish I didn't because my Daddy hurts me and I don't know why. Everything feels different. My room feels different; it doesn't feel like*

*the same room as before. I want my old room back, the room where I can talk to my toys and where my Daddy doesn't hurt me. I want a room where I can feel happy and where I can play and have nice dreams and be a princess and whatever I want to be.*

*I want to know what is wrong with my Daddy. My Daddy sits in his chair all day and stares. And he doesn't look at me or talk to me. My Daddy cries a lot. When my Daddy cries I don't know what to do. Daddies aren't supposed to cry. I hurt my dolly and look at her with her bits missing. My dolly doesn't cry and I hate her. I hurt her more because I want her to cry. Teddy tells me that I shouldn't hurt my dolly because she's my friend. I feel bad for hurting dolly and give dolly a cuddle. I hate her because she still isn't crying. Teddy doesn't know anything so I hate him too. I throw him away and I cry because Teddy is my best friend and I don't want to be mean to him. I pick Teddy up and say I'm sorry and I give Teddy a really big squeeze. And I say sorry to dolly too and I hug her because dolly's my second best friend.*

*Every time my Daddy comes to my bedroom at night he hurts me. I don't like the yucky things my Daddy's doing; I don't want my Daddy to be yucky. I don't want my Daddy to be bad so in my mind, I chop off his head. After that, when my Daddy comes he doesn't have a head and so he isn't my Daddy. My Daddy doesn't come to my room to hurt me anymore because the man who comes isn't my Daddy anymore.*

*One night when the man without the head is in my room and getting ready to do the bad things that he does to me, my door is a little bit open; I think I see Simey standing in my doorway. I can't see him clearly because my head has gone fuzzy.*

*'You won't say anything to Mummy, will you boy?' My Daddy's voice comes out of the mouth of the man without the head who is on top of me.*

*'No Dad'.*

*And the boy in striped pyjamas who sounds like Simey, and is Simey, walks away. The man without the head who is my Daddy keeps doing the yucky things to the little girl under him who is me.*

*A couple of months later my mother sees us.*

*'You should both be ashamed of yourselves. Cyril, go back to bed this instant.'*

*The man without a head gets off the little girl who is me, puts his pants back on and leaves my bedroom.*

I felt as though my head was splitting in two. Sometimes when I felt it split, one half would feel too fat to ever be able to fit back inside my head, or half of my head would feel as though it was going to explode while the other half would regress and get smaller and smaller until it shrank so much that nothing was left. When that happened, half of my head would feel vacuous. I would feel empty.

*My Daddy doesn't ever come back at night again and I miss him. He goes back to sitting in his chair and he stays there forever. Sometimes I can't tell if my Daddy is awake or asleep because his head is always dropped to one side and his eyes are always closed. And he dribbles out of the corner of his mouth like a baby except that he isn't a baby. The dribble sits in the hair on his chin when he doesn't shave and when there's lots of dribble it falls onto his dressing gown. My Daddy's dressing gown smells bad. I don't like my Daddy's dressing gown.*

*Sometimes I give my Daddy a push to see if he's dead and when he groans, I know that he's not dead. I wish he'd talk to me but he doesn't, only when I talk to him and only sometimes even then. He never talks to me just because he wants to. My mother gets angry at my Daddy and she screams at him like he's a naughty child at school. I don't like when my mother screams and I especially don't like when she screams at my Daddy.*

*Daddy goes to work some days. When he goes to work I know that my Daddy isn't dead. When Daddy comes back from work he goes straight to his chair and he stays sitting in his chair looking, but not really looking. I know he's not really looking because when I stand in front of him he doesn't see me. Nor does he move. That's when I get worried about him being dead again.*

Kate was talking to me, but not all of my parts were sitting in the chair listening. Some parts were flying around Kate, dive-bombing her without her realising. They weren't trying to hurt Kate; they wouldn't ever do that. They were just having fun like little kids do.

The magic carpet didn't always arrive in time for when the parts wanted it to. If the magic carpet didn't come I would have to tell Kate about the yucky things that my Daddy did. The parts didn't like talking about those things and when the talking got too much, freaky things happened to big Cathy's head. She would have all sorts of weird sensations, like bits of brain leaving from inside her skull. Sometimes she'd even experience a trap door opening in the back of her head and parts of her brain stepping out to go flying off around the room.

*My head is clever because I don't always want to run away, sometimes I want to have fun. All of the parts are excited. The magic carpet from inside my head zooms in, swoops down and takes us parts for a ride around Kate's room. The parts think the magic carpet is really cool but they can't all get on at once; they have to take turns. Sometimes they aren't good at taking turns; little kids don't like waiting much. They push each other because they all want to be first but the magic carpet is fair because everyone always gets a go.*

*All of the parts enjoy the magic carpet rides because they feel like they are in a fairy tale. They aren't really in a fairy tale because the magic carpet is not make-believe. It is a real magic carpet, a real carpet which comes from the inside of my head and it whizzes around the room and does flying tricks like figure eights and rollie-pollies. The parts have to hold on tight so they don't fall off and hurt themselves.*

## chapter 20

For the first fifty minutes of my session I'd been right out of it, deeply dissociated and trapped in an ill-defined, all-encompassing terror. Time was almost up and I still had no idea what was happening to me.

'Cathy, come on now, it's almost time. You have to start coming out of it.'

I was slumped in my chair; the water had been poured and was waiting in a plastic cup next to me. I hated sessions like this. Ones where my time was up when I felt no better at the end of the session, than when I had arrived.

Unable to resolve any of my major concerns I focused on my cup of water. Okay here we go. Come on, come on. You can do it, yes you can! Stretch that arm out. Yes, well done. Okay, okay you found the cup. Now pick it up. Go on! Yes, you have the cup; it's in your hand. Cup heading to mouth. Drink the water down.

I was really proud of myself. Not only had I managed to locate the cup and pick it up but I'd finished all of the water inside it and that was quite a feat for a nine-year-old girl!

'Cathy, CATHY! Would you like more water?'

Frightened, I nodded.

'T...thank you!' I mouthed politely, just as my mother had taught me.

I gulped the second cup of water down. I felt like a good little girl! But even after drinking the second cup I didn't feel any more ready to leave than I had, ten, twenty or fifty minutes earlier.

'Cathy! Come on now. GET UP PLEASE! CATHY! CATHY!'

'Hey don't shout at me! I'm just a little girl!' I thought to myself.

I hated when Kate shouted at me. Not that it was real shouting. Big Cathy knew that Kate was just being firm, but her raised voice sounded like shouting to me and it made Kate sound angry. She wasn't really angry; she was just under the pressure of time. She had to keep to her appointment times so she wouldn't run behind schedule and keep other patients waiting.

I hated Kate shouting.



‘Cathy, come on now. It’s time!’ Kate repeated in a softer voice. She must have realised that raising her voice wasn’t having the desired effect.

I heard Kate get up out of her chair and walk in my direction. She put her hand on my knee; I felt her shaking it.

‘Cathy, Cathy come on now! Come on get up, will you. And jump, jump up and down and wave your arms around. Come on!’

Kate was shaking me by the shoulder.

‘Come on, Cathy!’ Kate was speaking loudly, but at least she wasn’t shouting. She took me by the hands and pulled me to my feet. My eyes were shut and I couldn’t open them because I didn’t have any idea where my eyelids were. Kate held me steady.

‘Cathy! It’s TIME!’

‘Okay, okay. There’s no need to shout!’ I thought again.

I tried to do what Kate asked; I didn’t want Kate to be angry but I couldn’t because I still felt disembodied. I was a little girl without a body. I waved my arms around as much as I could, and I tried to jump up and down as I’d been told to, but in my state, I wasn’t strong enough to jump around and keep my balance at the same time. I flopped back into the chair and hit my head against the wall as I landed. I came to, momentarily, before feeling pulled further and further back inside my head. I was nine and I didn’t have a body. That meant that I virtually lost contact with Kate’s world altogether, but I was there inside my own head.

Inside my own head I was frenzied, because on the inside, I was searching for myself. I was searching for all of the parts of me that I needed to make me whole because I needed to be whole to be able to get back out of the chair and leave.

‘Cathy, Cathy! Come on now, it’s time! Come on. Come out of it now!’

I can’t explain how I eventually managed to exit Kate’s office that day, or at the end of the sessions which followed. Since early childhood I had honed the skills required to exist across several states of consciousness. Those skills were accompanied by the mechanisms to flip back and forth between those different states, before finally plucking myself back out to my space in the present.

On this occasion my skills were found wanting. Losing myself in my entirety left me ungrounded and frantic. I was lost. Not only had I

disappeared, but all of my parts had disappeared too, and that had never happened to me before. At one point I couldn't find any of my parts and that was utterly terrifying.

Not only did this feeling make it virtually impossible for me to leave my session, but it consumed me long after the session ended. It stayed with me the next day and the next. It didn't lessen after that and it didn't wax and wane as these states typically did. I was left locked inside a terrifying space of nothingness, a space in which I searched for familiar aspects of myself, but found none. And with each search I felt more bereft. I could only conclude that no parts of me remained.

'Excuse me, excuse me. Have you seen any part of me anywhere? Hello, hello! Do you know where I've gone?' I asked repeatedly inside my head. But no answers came. I had been delivered an existential blow and ruminated over my predicament for hours. I couldn't draw any conclusion.

'Given that I don't exist', my head reasoned, 'I mustn't exist. If I am nothing...'

I searched all over for parts of myself, for something to connect with, something to hold on to, with which to form a core, an anchor, any anchor with which to ground myself.

I was scared silly and that state of terror lasted for weeks. Therapy sessions came and went as weekly life passed me by. No 'self' returned.

Without a self you have nothing. You are no one. And without a self you can't connect with anyone around you. Despite my best efforts I couldn't connect with my husband or children. When I was with them, I could see and hear them, but I couldn't internalise any part of the interchanges I had with them. I felt too far removed. Any relationship requires, at minimum, two people engaging with one another. When any one of the two people in a relationship doesn't exist, or as in my case feels as if they don't exist, the relationship flounders. With my sense of self gone and the possibility of maintaining my relationships vanishing along with it, I was left feeling bereft and alone. And before long

On this occasion, the danger arose differently. Despite having lost any real awareness of my self, I developed a sense that one of my parts wanted to destroy me. Convinced that my life was under threat from the inside, I became hyper-vigilant, and kept on guard against myself. It was exhausting. I could never take a break; I was always under threat! I was already spent from searching for myself and now, it was too dangerous to rest. How could

I fall asleep knowing that someone inside me was trying to kill me? I couldn't take the risk.

I eventually reached a point at which I could not cope any longer; I had no mental energy left. I concluded that I needed to be locked up in a place where someone else would keep guard. I definitely needed protection because the part plotting my demise had been fantasising about a range of ways of finishing me off. It would have to be in a place in which no part of me had access to anything sharp or pointy, broken or smashed, poisonous or intoxicating, high up, or underground or submerged. If left to my own devices, it would only be a matter of time before the scheming part had its way and finished me off.

I told Kate about my self-destructive part and explained that I didn't feel safe. I told her that one of my parts was trying to kill me and that I didn't feel capable of protecting myself. I begged her to help me. I was desperate!

Kate listened and understood, and continued to provide more support than her job demanded. With frequent face-to-face sessions and phone calls, she contained my angst as effectively as any one person could. But in my heightened state of desperation, nothing she did felt adequate. The reality was that Kate could not do anything more for me; short of never leaving my side.

Together we considered all of the options. We discussed hospital admission and seriously considered it. One part of me yearned to be hospitalised and cared for, even if it meant being confined to a ward. I fantasised about lying in bed and having someone else keep me safe. Going to hospital would have been a relief; I would be able to let my guard down. Someone else could do the worrying. But this option had a major downside; Kate wouldn't be able to look after me in hospital. In hospital I would have to see whichever doctor or therapist the hospital appointed, and in my desperate state, I would have struggled to trust anyone new, even just a little.

Although the worried part of me was considering going to hospital, the other part kicked up a fuss at the very mention of the word. It, and therefore I refused to countenance the idea and stated categorically that I wouldn't be going anywhere.

I told Dan how I was feeling and Kate talked to him too. I also told a couple of close friends and made a list of support people to call when needed. I saw Kate every day and spoke to her often in between consultations; sometimes we talked several times a day and at night as well. I told her that I felt as though I needed a security guard, twenty-four hours a day, maybe a team of them. Kate tried to assure me that she could contain me just as well as a team of guards. She wanted me to feel as though she was always watching over me. Sometimes I could sense her attentive presence, but at other times, I couldn't feel anything at all.

One Friday evening, in the midst of my turmoil, a small crack appeared in my despair. I finally recognised my perilous mental state of recent weeks as a sign; it had been the harbinger of a new set of memories that were on their way. After seven years of recovering lost memories I had become an old hand at the process, but in the thick of my horrors, all logic would fly out the window. I would be so subsumed by the feelings of the day that I would lose the capacity to sit back and read the situation.

There was one physical symptom in particular which often heralded a new memory; a pain that built up around my eye, and then moved to the centre of my eyeball and bored into it like a dentist's drill. So, when the pain came and my eyeball hurt until it felt as though it might burst, I felt curiously relieved.

'Finally' I reassured myself. 'Perhaps I'm not psycho after all!'

My head was thumping, but I felt buoyed; I really was about to get another memory.

That weekend I couldn't settle at all. I couldn't concentrate long enough to get to the end of a single article in the newspaper, let alone sit down to read a book. Nor could I listen to music. Any musical tones, no matter how dulcet seemed too intrusive. It was as though I had developed an allergy to even the slightest external input; the turmoil inside of me was too frenetic to receive so much as the slightest sensory cue of a normal day. Conversations grated; words abraded. Touch burnt; light eroded. I was restless, yet decimated; desperate for care and protection but unable to reach out. I was on a hair trigger, snapping at my kids and at Dan, pushing them all away when I needed them close.

On the Saturday night of that weekend, I woke up full of energy. The bedside clock showed ten past three. I snuck out of bed; I didn't want to wake Dan. He was still snoring, unperturbed as I pulled the bedroom door shut, behind me. 'Operation Leave Bedroom' was a success.

I crept into the kitchen and looked around. I couldn't think of what to do. I walked downstairs and into the garage, grabbed the secateurs and hand saw, and ventured outside. The street lights cast an eerie glow over our front garden.

I rolled up my sleeves and got to work; chopping, pruning, trimming and hacking. The night hours passed in a hectic blur. Dawn broke and with it the early birds in search of their worms or whatever it really is that birds do at that hour. I pruned on. By 7 am, when Dan usually walked outside to collect the morning paper, the driveway lay heaped with branches and cuttings. He stood by the front door aghast. Every plant in the garden had been given a number one; no plant had survived unscathed.

During that weekend, interludes of manic activity punctuated those of despair as I careered from one mood to another. Monday finally arrived and with it, my scheduled session, at two in the afternoon. I dialled Kate's number.

I heard someone fumbling for the receiver at the other end.

'Hello' I strained to hear what I imagined was Kate's voice, but it wasn't her normal voice; this voice was husky.

'I'm s...sorry...I.'

Kate sounded groggy.

'I'm sorry. I've woken you up.'

I glanced at my watch. It was well before seven. I hadn't thought to check the time.

'No problem, Cathy'. Kate's voice was already sounding clearer.

I detected sounds of stirring at the other end of the line. I suspected that I'd woken Kate's husband up as well. I heard her get out of bed and walk into the next room. As I explained how I was feeling Kate listened carefully; she had managed to switch into full professional mode in the blink of an eye. She listened until she was certain that I was in a fit state to let her go, but before she hung up she changed my appointment to the first one of the day. I was grateful for the gesture, but as soon as I hung up the

phone I panicked that I wouldn't be able to contain my angst until the appointed time. It was more than an hour away. While on the one hand I knew she was putting herself out by giving me a time she didn't usually schedule, on the other I resented having to wait at all. I clicked back into overdrive to cope with the hour and a half I'd have to wait. I ripped around my house like a mad thing, moving objects from one place to another, then moving them back again. I didn't care what I did; I just needed to keep busy until I could see Kate.

The monster grabbed me the moment I sat in the consulting chair.

*The monster's big, hairy and ugly and it's drooling all over me, smearing me within its foul stench. The monster's smacking its filthy lips; its putrid tongue shoots forth and its mighty jaws open to reveal a jagged set of monster teeth. The monster grabs my head and draws it into its mouth. The monster snaps its jaw shut and takes its first bite.*

I arched back writhing in pain as the monster pierced my psyche.

*The monster holds me in its clutches and devours me, piece by macerated piece. I try to pull free but there is no escape. The monster clamps its jaws harder, drawing my head inside it, tightening its grip by clamping its jaw down around my neck, constricting my throat. I can barely breathe.*

Chilling sounds emanated from the throat of a dying neck; one last guttural gag, one final choke, a short gasp and I was no more.

'Cathy, CathYYY! You're going to have to start coming out of it!' Another fifty minutes had passed; I couldn't imagine where they'd gone.

Sip after sip of water delivered a fledgling sense of the here and now. Devoured and fragmented I rose up through the layers of my entrapment and came to, in an alien muted apricot room. I drew a breath in and proceeded to check myself, but before I could complete my appraisal I was unceremoniously turfed out of the only place I felt safe. Kate had to see the patient after me; there was no choice, I had to leave. As I stumbled up the driveway to my car, I felt completely alone with the monster within my head.

The monster didn't leave me; it wouldn't let me go. That monster held me in its clutches, tormenting my every waking and sleeping hour as I waited out the twenty-seven hours until my next scheduled session.

I walked down the driveway, through the gate and into the waiting room. Sitting back in my chair, within seconds it was as though my last

session had never ended. Ghghghghghghghghg....  
khkhkhkhkhkhkh.....ghghghghg....gkkkkkkkkk.....’

‘Cathy, Cathy! What’s happening? Can you tell me what’s happening?’

*The monster releases its grip; its face flashes before me.*

‘ghgghhghghghghghgh’

*The monster reels backwards and roars. The monster looks down at me with evil eyes. Its nostrils flare and I take a long hard look at it for the first time, but there’s no mistaking what I see; the monster is my Daddy. It has been all along.*

*It’s an afternoon, like any other, except that it’s teeming with rain. My mother has gone out shopping and I’m lying on my stomach on the floor of our Indooroopilly home, with my face six inches from the TV screen, watching my afternoon wet weather line up of F troop, Rin Tin Tin and I love Lucy. I’m sprawled out at Daddy’s feet. He’s in one of his dazes and seemingly dead to the world. But I’ve checked him out and I’m sure it’s okay. My Daddy’s drooling and the drool is moist, so he’s not dead. When you’re dead you can’t drool and your drool isn’t moist.*

*Daddy awakens from his stupor; wipes his drool aside and leaps to his feet. He has a wild look in his eyes; he bends down and grabs me up off the floor. Wraps his hands around my neck and shakes me so hard I feel like I’ll come apart.*

‘You little bitch, you told her, didn’t you? I know you did. How could you? ‘Don’t play the innocent with me! You told her, didn’t you?’

*Gulping hard I try to be firm. ‘Daddy! You’re hurting me! Stop, please stop! What, Daddy? Who? Who did I tell?’*

*Daddy doesn’t answer my questions.*

‘You little bitch, you... y.... You told her, didn’t you? You told her, I know you did. You little bitch! Bitch, bitch, bitch!’

*Daddy is being rough; my Daddy isn’t usually rough. And he’s cussing and swearing and his eyes look crazy.*

*I don’t recognise this Daddy. It’s not my real Daddy and it’s certainly not my special Daddy. I don’t know who this Daddy is. This Daddy is saying that I betrayed him, that I told Mummy about his night-time visit, that it’s my fault that she found us.*

*'No, Daddy. I...I promise. I wouldn't do that, Daddy, I swear. Pl... please, please believe me! Cross my heart and hope to die. I would never tell on you. Never! I don't know why Mummy came. I had nothing to do with it. Nothing! Can you hear me, Daddy? You have to. You have to believe me!'*

*Daddy is holding my arms really tight and shaking me still.*

*'Daddy, let go, pl..ea..se! You're hurting me! Dddd....aaaa....dddyyyy!'*

*'You little bitch. I'll show you!'*

*Daddy hurls me onto the floor and barrels into his bedroom. When he comes back he looks smug; he snaps a thick black leather belt in my face. I turn to run but he catches my arm and swings me round. His fingernails pierce my flesh.*

*'I'm going to show you once and for all!'*

*Daddy marches me into his bedroom and pulls my pants down, undies and all. As he tosses me onto his bed, Cherry scampers away with her tail between her legs. A blur of black rises into the air and rips into my flesh as it lands.*

*As a monster thrashes me, I tremble. I am confused; I can't understand how my special Daddy has turned into a monster. I beg the monster to stop hurting me, but the monster doesn't stop. The black rises and falls. Whack! Whack, whack! I sob; I can't abide a hurting monster Daddy. I mentally remove the head from the monster Daddy. As a headless figure wallops my bottom, a princess pleads for mercy. But the arm beating me cannot hear the princess's pleas because it is no longer my Daddy's arm.*

*My Daddy wallops me until his fury is spent. Then he drops the belt to the ground, and looks at me. I try to smile but my Daddy gets angry again and his eyes go wild. The monster takes me by the neck and shakes me so violently that I think I will smash into little pieces.*

*As my monster Daddy rages, his hands tighten around my neck.*

*'You little bitch. You told her, didn't you! I know you did!'*

*My Daddy's fingers are pushing into my neck; I'm struggling to get enough air in, and swallowing hard between gasps.*

*'Chhhh chhh Daddy, please let go!' The tears are streaming down my cheeks.*

*'Chhhh chhhhh chhhh please!' Daddy startles and loosens his grip. His hands drop down by his side and he runs out without uttering another word. I crumble to the floor; my breathing is as laboured as a puffing steam train*



going uphill. At least I'm breathing and I'm grateful for that. I think about running after Daddy, but I'm scared; I'm scared that he might try and hurt me again.

But Daddy comes back by himself and when he does, he's the monster Daddy. The monster Daddy shakes the little girl with his monster hands. I'm scared I will come apart. But I can't let myself come apart and I don't. I save myself by making my arms and legs float away. And I make my body go numb a bit at a time, until I cannot feel any part of myself anymore. I call out to my bits one at a time and they don't answer. That's when I know that they've gone away and that they're safe. But then I get scared because I'm not a whole little girl anymore. I'm only a neck and a head and my neck panics because it has a head on top of it but nothing underneath to support it. Little girls' necks need bodies and little girls' bodies need arms and legs too. Without all their bits, little girls aren't whole and they aren't little girls anymore.

The little girl's head still has a mouth and the mouth cries, 'Daddy, please stop! Please stop, my Daddy! You're hurting me.'

But my monster Daddy squeezes my neck harder.

'Daddy, please. You have to believe me. I'm your princess, remember. I would never do anything to hurt you.'

But the monster Daddy can't hear what I'm saying and he doesn't stop squeezing my neck and he doesn't stop shaking me. And my head gets scared and it tries to run away but my neck begs the head to stay because a little girl's neck doesn't want to be left alone with a Daddy who is squeezing the living daylights out of it.

My head stays and it pleads with the monster. My mouth begs the monster to let go, and at long last, he loosens his hold and looks into my eyes and hears what my mouth is saying.

'Daddy, I swear, I swear. I wouldn't do anything to hurt you. I just wouldn't. Daddy, please. Please believe me.'

As my tears flow, my Daddy reaches out his hand, the same hand that a minute earlier had wielded the strap: 'Oh, my sweet, sweet princess. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. How could I? How could I hurt my princess? Princess, I love you. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.'

The little girl's neck swallows hard as her head breathes a sigh of reprieve but the relief only lasts till the head realises that it doesn't have a body. And when the head remembers, the head panics and so does the neck,

*because without a body a head and neck can't live and without arms and legs, a body can't move. The little girl's head calls out for its bits to come back, but they don't. It calls again and again until the numbness fades and the little girl's bits come back to her in her mind. Once the bits come back the little girl can be a whole little girl again.*

*Daddy starts to cry and I get scared. It's scary when you are little and your Daddy starts to cry. I try to help but I'm too small. My little girl's arms stretch out as far as they can but they can't reach all the way around a big Daddy. But Daddy doesn't mind because now he knows that I'm his little girl princess and he hugs and kisses me. 'I'm so sorry, princess. Please forgive me. I'm so, so sorry.'*

*'Daddy, please don't cry. It's OK, really it is. It wasn't you. I know that it wasn't you. I love you. I love you, Daddy!'*

*I plant a super-doooper kiss on a cheek that is as sodden as mine, and for a split second I allow myself to believe that everything is going to be alright.*

*I peer up into the back of my eyelids and visualise my Daddy but he isn't the monster Daddy who attacked me before; he is my special Daddy. And my special Daddy asks me what is wrong, but I don't want to tell him because I don't understand and I don't want to upset him. I sob my story out to him except I don't tell him who the monster is because I don't want to upset my special Daddy by talking about a monster Daddy. My special Daddy listens and he gets upset and he wants to search for the monster, but I tell him to not to bother, to just stay and hold me instead.*

*I lay curled in a tight ball in the corner of Kate's chair, sobbing. I was racked with sobbing convulsions, but still not making a sound. My sobs were always silent.*

Whenever my monster Daddy returned during sessions I would dissociate. As I dissociated, and my mind's eye would go blurry, I would perceive my body as having fragmented into parts. As the parts separated from one another, my head would become cloudier and I would become far more deeply dissociated.

When I remembered about my monster Daddy and what he had done I could appreciate how completely my mind had to lose itself in order to survive. In the process of remembering I got back in touch with how

terrifying it was to not be able to find any part of myself. I understood how ingenious that life-preserving defence had been. The mechanism was simple; whenever my 'self' couldn't be found, even by me, I could no longer be hurt. When there was no 'self' there to hurt, my monster Daddy couldn't hurt me anymore. As parts of me fragmented and freed themselves, they would float away to safety. Only when the monster Daddy went away, would the parts look for one another. Once found, they would join together to make a whole little girl again. In this way, a frightened little girl had managed to survive my monster Daddy.

## chapter 21

*'Thank you for the lift, Mrs McKay! See you Judy!' I slam the door of the McKay's old Ford shut. Judy is my best friend and her family's house is my home away from home. I know that something is wrong right away. Daddy's Fiat is never parked in our Indooroopilly driveway at this hour on a school day. I don't know whether to hurry or dawdle, as I work my way up the drive. I want to make sure that Daddy is okay, but on the other hand I'm worried that I'll find something concerning that I won't be able to fix.*

*That's how it's been lately. Daddy has had all sorts of bad things happen to him and I haven't been able to help him even though I've tried to be there for him. I'm only twelve, so there are lots of things which I don't understand. I wish I was older and smarter too.*

*By the time I get to the top of the front steps I'm tripping over my feet to find out what's up. When I see that the front door has been left wide open, I stop in my tracks; Daddy's keys are dangling in the lock.*

*'Daddy, Daddy. Are you there?'*

*No answer.*

*'DADDY!'*

*I'm in a real panic when Daddy still doesn't answer after I call out to him.*

*I peer into our house from the security of the front veranda. I can't see anything unusual so I take a couple of teeny steps forward. A funny noise is coming from the lounge room so I stop and listen to it to see if I can make out what it is. It sounds like a person is moaning or crying or both. Or maybe it's more; two people and one is crying, and the other moaning.*

*I wonder if Daddy is sick; Maybe that's the reason he's home early. I wonder whether someone's come to help him; maybe it's the doctor. Daddy's been sick a lot lately. I creep towards the noise but a rustling sound behind me makes me freeze. I turn around as Cherry scampers in. She jumps up and licks my leg but I shoosh her away. The moaning keeps getting louder. Some of it sounds like Daddy, then not, but then some of it does again. I peek into the lounge room; Daddy's sitting in the middle of the floor with his legs tucked up under his chin and he's rocking back and forth like he's in*

*a rocking chair except he isn't. Daddy's half crying and half moaning all by himself. I squat down next to him and put my hand on his shoulder so he'll know it's me.*

*'What's wrong, Daddy?' I ask, searching his eyes for an answer.*

*Daddy's eyes look weird; they're not focusing and he looks through me instead of at me. I hate when Daddy looks through me as though I'm a pane of glass.*

*'Daddy, it's me. It's your princess!'*

*Daddy tries to say something but I can't make it out. 'Sorry Daddy. Can you say that again?'*

*He doesn't. I try to put my arms around him, but before I can he cries out. It's a primal cry like an animal in pain and it freaks me out. I jump back. I think my jumping scares Daddy, because he starts sobbing. As he's sobbing I don't know what to do. I hate Daddy being upset.*

*I bend down and try to put my arms around Daddy but he pushes me away.*

*'Look, just look what they've done!' Daddy cries, turning around towards me, his finger pointing across the room. At long last he's looking at me, but his eyes look tortured. They're set deep in a face screwed up within a tight ball of distress.*

*I look over to where Daddy's pointing and my jaw drops open.*

*'Oh my God, Daddy!' I exclaim as I stare in horror at the shattered remains of my father's prized record collection, strewn across the floor in front of the place where the record cabinet once stood.*

*'Daddy, what happened?'*

*Off to one side I spy the sorry remains of what was once the cabinet, in a tangle of wires and gramophone bits. A splintered cabinet door lies marooned at the end of the trail of black vinyl.*

*'Come on now Daddy, it's OK. We can buy some new records, you'll see.'*

*Daddy continues to whine like a cat that's taken bait without ingesting enough to finish itself off.*

*'Daddy, Daddy it's okay. We can buy some more records. We really can!'*

*I try to cheer Daddy up but nothing I say helps at all.*

*I've never been so excited to see my mother as when she barrels in, laden with groceries, twenty minutes after me. I'm crouched beside Daddy,*

*stroking his hand; he's still mumbling incoherently. My mother drops the bags out of her hand and rushes over.*

*'Cyril, what happened? Tell me what happened?'*

*My mother kneels down next to my father and talks to him as calmly as my mother ever does anything. Daddy is moaning continuously as she speaks to him.*

*'Come on Cyril let's get you to your chair!' My mother feeds her arm through my father's arm and tries to pull him to his feet.*

*He doesn't budge. She calls me over to give her a hand; it's no easy task. My father's a dead weight.*

*'Daddy, come on now, Daddy. It'll be okay. You'll see.'* We deposit Daddy back in his chair.

*My mother, calm in an emergency but agitated most other times, sifts through the rubble and finds two records which are still intact. The records provide a magic potion for my father; a walking corpse now springs out of his chair and snatches the records out of my mother's hands. Daddy returns to his chair, and sits there whimpering, his booty clutched to his chest.*

*'Come on Baba. Let's fix this up!' We drag the cabinet back to its spot and right it, minus the door. We place the gramophone back on top of the cabinet, realign its dismembered parts and hope for the best.*

*'Baba, stay with your father, will you? I'm going to call the police!'*

*'Let's play one of your records, Daddy.'* I suggest, praying that our repairs will hold.

*I put my hand out to take one of the survivors, but Daddy won't part with it.*

*'Daddy, Daddy, come on now! You'll enjoy hearing some music, you'll see. Please give me one. You can keep the other one!'*

*'No, we've had a break in and I want to speak to someone in authority, now!' My mother's voice sounds from the kitchen as I gingerly direct the needle onto the first track. His Master's Voice cooperates with a scratchy Beethoven's 5th. Daddy leans forward and smiles. I can't imagine why he's smiling.*

*Three detectives bail up within the hour. Two of them paint powder on our windowsills and doorframes. The other interviews us and takes photos of the crime scene, as he calls it. He even questions the neighbours, but all*

*told, the detectives don't find any evidence of a break-in - certainly none that they share with me. The detectives inform my mother that they'll get back when they find some clues. As far as I'm aware they never do come back.*

*The next day Daddy isn't well enough to go to work. He's sitting in his chair when I leave and he's still in the same pyjamas when I get back home. I don't think he's moved; he certainly looks as though he hasn't. Daddy doesn't look at all well; he looks peaky and quite pale and his eyes definitely don't look right. I ask him what's wrong, but he doesn't answer. His whole body seems to be trembling while his right leg is jiggling way more than is usual; even for him. I speak softly because I don't want to scare him any more than he is already. Eventually he says a few words, and when he does, he talks about a 'conspiracy'. I don't know the word, 'conspiracy' and I don't want to upset Daddy by asking him what it means. He looks way too upset already. When he nods off I go over to the bookshelves and pull out our Pears Encyclopaedia - 'Conspiracy: act of conspiring (good or bad).' Daddy's conspiracy sounded 'bad' to me.*

Decades later, when I was searching through my mother's place I found evidence of a conspiracy against my father, a bad one. I found lots of letters at my mother's house - most of them written between family members on holidays. One bundle; however, was different. That bundle contained letters which I believe indicated that a conspiracy had been mounted against my father. Each of the letters in that bundle lay in its original envelope; all had been addressed to my father and postmarked 1965.

Each letter was handwritten and signed by a different person. I didn't recognise any of the signed names but the content of all of those letters was scurrilous. I was appalled and couldn't fathom how anyone could accuse my father of the transgressions outlined within, transgressions such as him falsifying his teaching credentials. Outrageous! After reading the letters I had no doubt that during 1965, there was a conspiracy against my father.

The good news was that I also found some letters of support. Even though there weren't as many of those as there were of the nasty sort, at least some people were on my father's side, apart from me. I was always on Daddy's side.

*Cf: James Craig. Mary Craig.*

*Dear Cyril,*

*Just a short note to tell you that your solicitor welcomed with open arms the witnesses' statement that I put in his hands. He is going to see a couple of them to persuade them to amplify their statements a little, especially as one; Mrs J has some comments to make on this week's happenings. I'm very glad that you've been able to bring a couple of Redcliffe witnesses in addition to the four you have here. Your case seems quite complete. But I agree with you that it is better to move slowly and have a solid case to present to the Education Department and a statement to corroborate your writ before you move.*

*It is indeed a great pity that these people lacked the manhood to admit their mistake years ago. We might yet find all our work unnecessary, but we are dealing with incredibly foolish and stubborn people.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*J. Davenport.*

The letters explained some of the things happening during that fateful year. I didn't find any letters which talked about the time my father's records were trashed, but there was one which showed that a Mr R Jamieson had broken into our house on at least one occasion.

*'I, your leaving results are pathetic just like you. And you call yourself a teacher. You couldn't even teach a fish how to swim. Get out of teaching now while you have the chance. You heard what the headmaster said. Give up now. If you don't I'll have to make you stop. I know where you live. You shouldn't leave the back door unlocked. The other day, I slipped in and you didn't notice the difference. I've got you worried now, haven't I? By the way, did you find my note? You see. I am telling the truth. I was there. Oh, and by the way, I had your key copied. You shouldn't leave it lying around because now I can break in whenever I want.'*



One day when Daddy gets back from work he seems particularly upset.

*'Daddy, what's wrong? You, you look awful. Come on Daddy, come and sit down.'* I lead Daddy over to his chair and sit him down.

*'Daddy, just stay there. I'll go and get your slippers.'*

*'Daddy, would you like a drink of water?'* Daddy is shaking.

*'Here, Daddy. Drink it. Here you are. Now Daddy, what happened? Tell me what happened? What's wrong Daddy?'*

*It takes a while till Daddy can tell me what's troubling him but the gist of it, is that there there'd been a break-in at school. Someone had taken some of Daddy's things out of the staffroom; curiously it was only his things which were stolen. A couple of weeks earlier vandals had taken a chisel to Daddy's car in the school car park; that time his car was the only one to be targeted. How unlucky was Daddy!*

*'Now do you understand lassie? It's a conspiracy!'*

*Brighton Rd,*

*Sandgate*

*23rd March, 1965*

*I,*

*So you lock your car now and your house and of course as you can see, I expected that and had this little note ready for you.*

*So you managed to tell your lies to those fools at the CIB and they swallowed them, but you don't expect us to swallow them and not the boys at school either. They've had you as laughing stock for a year now and they wouldn't want to give that fun up, would they? Even if you weren't a liar, that wouldn't make any difference. But of course you are a hopeless liar and they all know it.*

*Those lies you told the CIB cooked your goose and you'd better keep your house locked. I was there the other night and know how to get in next time.*

*R Jamieson*

When I read through those letters I wished that I could recall more about 1965 but I couldn't. The cutting I unearthed from a newspaper, called *Truth*

told me a little more.

### **TEACHER HIT BY POISON PENMAN**

Detectives in Brisbane are investigating the claims of a public schoolmaster that his life is being made a misery by a poison-pen writer.

The schoolmaster, Mr Cyril I, is married with two children. He said he was continually harassed by mystery letter writers who have strongly inferred that harm may come to him and his family.

For no apparent reason the writer has mocked, denounced and threatened Mr I since he began teaching at the Grammar School last year.

‘I can’t understand them. There must be something wrong with them. I have racked my brain to find out who is responsible for these brutal and terrifying letters. At first I regarded them as a joke but not anymore. The police are doing their best. I just hope that they are successful.

I wouldn’t have a clue as to who the writers are. I have never made an enemy in my life.’

*It’s Saturday morning. My mother has powered through the dregs of the weekly routine by the time I emerge from my bedroom at around 9 am. Several loads of washing drip from the concentric wires of the Hills hoist, the kitchen bench gleams and the floors are clear of clutter.*

*Daddy’s chair is empty and I can’t find him anywhere. I race around, searching in all of his regular hiding spots. There are no signs of a struggle, but I fear the worst. What if the enemy has broken into our house and taken Daddy hostage?*

*‘Come on now, Baba. There’s nothing to get upset about! Your father needs a rest, that’s all.’*

*‘B... but where is he?’ I snivel.*

*‘I’ve told you, Baba. He’s having a rest.’*

*‘I want to see him. I want to see Daddy!’*

*‘No Baba. You can’t. Your father’s gone and children aren’t allowed there. It’s for his own good, you’ll see. He needs a rest and he doesn’t need the likes of you and your brother bothering him. Besides he should only be away for a few months.’*

*I'm twelve years old. My Daddy means the world to me. I don't ever want my Daddy to go anywhere and certainly not without saying goodbye. I wish that I'd had the chance to tell him how much I love him. I hope he knows that, but I'm worried that he may forget. I'm also worried about how he's going to manage; I'm always looking after him. Who will look after him when I'm not there? How will he manage without me? Who will make sure he's safe? What about the people who are picking on him? What if they hurt him? What then?*

*On Saturdays I usually play tennis, but I don't want to play on the day they take my Daddy away. I stay in my pyjamas with Teddy, in my room, crying instead. Around five o'clock I creep into the lounge and turn on the TV. Lying on the floor, with the TV droning I miss him dreadfully. I do one last check; maybe he's hiding somewhere. I check his chair first, but Daddy isn't sitting in it. He isn't behind the settee, or in the garage, or flicking through his books, or jotting down notes.*

*Daddy has gone. Abracadabra. Kalakazam.*

*Make your Daddy disappear if you can.*

*Lo and behold - there's no Daddy to be seen.*

*But it's okay because Daddy just needs a rest. That's all - a rest!*

I only learnt the truth about my father's rest while I was searching for answers to my forgotten childhood in my late forties. I was starting to remember the period of time my father went away and asked my mother about it. She told me that she had sent my father to hospital, once or maybe twice, she couldn't remember precisely. But she did recall that one night she had awoken to my father's hands around her throat. She wasn't clear if that incident had actually happened, or whether it was a dream. Either way, my father's attack on her, real or imagined, was the reason he was sent away for his rest.

## chapter 22

*Daddy is coming home today. I've missed him; he's been gone for months and we haven't spoken much about him since he left.*

*'Mum, can I go with you to pick Daddy up? Please?'*

*'No Baba. Stay here with your brother and be good!'*

*I try to be good but it's hard because Simon's being a real pain. He keeps picking fights and I don't like it when he does that. I don't ever want to fight with my brother, and especially not today, the day that Daddy's coming home. But I understand why Simon's being painful; he's worried about what state our father will be in when he gets back. I am too.*

*'They're here!' I announce letting go of the curtains I've been looking out from behind.*

*I bolt down the front stairs and catch my mother leading my father back up from the front garden.*

*'Daddy, Daddy!' I run towards my father with open arms, keenly poised to give him a great big hug.*

*My mother blocks my way, 'Baba, I thought that I'd made myself clear. Leave your father alone! Can't you see that he needs a rest?'*

*I'm not game to say what's on my mind - Why does Daddy need to rest after months of being away having a rest?*

*I brush my hand against Daddy's cheek as he shuffles past.*

*'Baba, that's enough!' My mother's angry, but I don't care; I have the information I wanted. Daddy's cheek feels warm; he's not dead.*

*I stand aside as my mother tugs Daddy up the last step and in through the front door. Daddy spots his chair from the doorway and upon seeing it, has a spurt of energy. Straightening up, he shakes my mother off, and makes a teetering beeline towards his chair. His slippers, three months more worn than when he left for his rest, lead the charge. I keep my distance as Daddy reclaims his throne; I don't want my mother to be any angrier than she already is.*

*My excitement at having Daddy back home is short-lived because the Daddy who returns home is not the one I've dreamt of having back. This one sits in his chair without reacting to anything going on around him.*

*Sometimes he sits immobilised for hours at a stretch, and then from one minute to the next he comes alive, and races around the house, doing strange things which I can't explain. And Daddy looks weird; his skin has taken on the greenish hue of fresh puke, and he's lost a lot of weight, so much so that his clothes are falling off him. I hate looking too closely because he looks creepy. Most of the time I avoid looking at him front on, except at dinner. I have to look at Daddy at dinner because my spot in the nook is directly opposite his and the nook's squashy. In the nook he's always in full view.*

*At dinnertime Daddy makes strange smacking noises with his tongue and mouth and he dribbles half-chewed food out of the side of his green mouth. And the bits tumble onto his chin, and fall from his chin onto his dressing gown and I hate that. I hate every second of it. Every night I sit and pray that Daddy will finish dinner quickly, but he never does, because everything he does when he's half dead is painfully slow, until he wakes up again.*

\*

*'Lassie, over here. They can't see us here. Quick!'*

*At first I can't find Daddy; I can only hear him. Then I spot him crouched behind the settee. My father has no end of hiding places for me to find. I scan the room from my spot crouched beside him, but I can't see anyone else; I'm not as good at finding the enemy as I am at finding my father.*

*'Who Daddy?'*

*'Shh, silly girl, they'll hear us!' My father slaps his hand over my mouth.*

*'I can trust you, can't I?'*

*'Yes Daddy, of course, but who?' Daddy's breathing twenty to the dozen.*

*'Shh! You're the only one that I can trust and you, you have to help me. They're after me.'*

*Daddy informs me that my mother has joined the enemy which is plotting against him. He says that she's shown the enemy his master plans and that now that those plans have been revealed, he is in great danger. He insists that I have to stand guard over my mother, to spy on her every move and report back to him.*

*'But Daddy!'*

*'Shh! They're coming. Quick! An answer!'*

*'But Daddy, Mummy would never hurt you.'* Daddy's eyes flash then turn to ice. *'Are you turning, spinning, rotating away from me, me, me? Not you too. Two. I couldn't bear it!'*

*And against my better judgment I agree to spy on my mother.*

*'Psst. Psst.'* Daddy springs out from behind the lounge room curtains.

*'Shh, they're watching us. Be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick. Princess, I need your help. They're getting closer and I'm, you're, we're in great danger.'* My Daddy looks back over his shoulder; he's speaking so fast that I can only catch every second word.

*'Daddy, please. You're talking too fast. Daddy please, please tell me again!'*

*'Just do what I say, say, say!'*

*'Of course, Daddy! Anything.'*

*'They're coming. Quick, off you go. Quick before they see usssss.'*

*I glance back over my shoulder to the area Daddy had been watching, but can't detect anything untoward. The enemy always disappears before I can see them.*

*My days are an eerie mixture of hiding with my father, and spying on my mother and my nights are filled with the nocturnal demands of a father wanting to do things to me, that no child should ever be made to do. I do the yucky things he asks of me because doing them helps keep him alive. I'm convinced of it.*

*Although Daddy usually wants me to help him fight the enemy, sometimes he gets confused, and imagines that I've turned against him. It's terrifying when that happens because when he's in that state, I can't get through to him. I tell him that I'm his princess and that I love him, but he doesn't seem to register. Sometimes when he's enraged, he holds me down and that's even more terrifying. He's not my real Daddy then at all.*

*The other Daddy has a knife and he's sticking the point of the knife into the gulping bit of my throat. The gulping bit of my throat is gulping lots more than it usually gulps. As it gulps, the rest of my body breaks up inside my mind. Parts of my body float away and they float as far away as they*

*need to go to make themselves safe. All of the parts of my body float away, except for my head and neck, which are trapped by the point of the knife. My head and neck are terrified and my mouth, which is part of the trapped head, begs the Daddy to listen. At first the Daddy doesn't listen but the mouth keeps on begging and then the Daddy does listen and when he does listen, he moves the point of the knife away. I breathe again and check that I'm okay, and I am, and because I'm okay, I can call to my body to come back, but my body is scared and my body doesn't know where my arms and legs have gone. Without legs a body can't run away and this body wants to run away. My body wants to run away from a Daddy who doesn't recognise his princess and it wants to run away from an enemy that it can't see.*

*'Quick, get up, they're coming!' Daddy shouts but my legs don't recognise themselves.*

*'What are you doing? Stupid, stupid girl!'*

*'Come on legs. Help us please!' A little girl's mouth begs a little girl's legs to return so she can run away when her Daddy tells her to.*

*The little girl's legs are very brave legs and they do come back despite being terrified. And they're strong enough to lift the little girl up and run her to safety.*

*One afternoon I'm playing with Cherry in the back yard, tossing sticks for her to retrieve. I toss one over to the far corner of the yard, but instead of chasing it Cherry heels in front of a thick bottlebrush, barking furiously. The bushes part.*

*'Lassie, I'm in trouble. They're getting closer. I need you to go back inside and see what you, what you can, cancan find out. Report, port back, back at 1500 hours. She's poisoning me!'*

*'Who is Daddy?'*

*'Mummy, of course. Stupid girl!'*

*Daddy describes, in pressured staccato, how my mother has been poisoning him systematically for weeks, by putting stuff in his food. He's suspected it for ages, but now he has proof he tells me.*

*'No Daddy! Mummy would never do that. She loves you and she would never hurt you.' I plead with him as Daddy grabs me around the throat.*

*'So, you're turning against me too! Go, just go, go to her you little bitch!'*

*'No Daddy. It's not true. I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die. I didn't mean it. I'll do anything for you, anything at all.'*

*A kookaburra cackles from on top of the Hills hoist. Cherry tears around the clothesline; yapping furiously. I give her a smack. The kookaburra flies off. Daddy lets go of me.*

*'I'm sorry princess. I didn't mean it. I don't know where else to turn, to turn to.'*

*My father hugs me, and runs off. They're watching.*

*I spend every afternoon with my mother in the kitchen, watching.*

*'Muuuum, do you need any help?'*

*'What's going on, Baba?'*

*'Nothing Mummy, I want to help.'*

*I'm useless in the kitchen, messy and inept and it's not long before my mother's limited patience runs out.*

*'Baba, go on, off you go! Go and find something useful to do!'*

*Daddy isn't well; he gets sick lots, especially at dinnertime. From my seat opposite him, I observe the nightly ritual in horror. He chews laboriously one minute and then without warning stops at mid-mouthful and gags. He jumps up and rushes out of the room, choking and spluttering as he disappears. I'm left listening helplessly, as he throws up in the backyard, ridding himself of the poison my mother has put in his food.*

\*

*One day Daddy bustles into my bedroom brandishing a bottle labelled, 'The Mixture'.*

*'Do you believe me now? She's trying to kill me!'*

*Daddy is screaming blue murder and I don't know what to do.*

*'You'll believe me when I'm finished with you, you stupid bitch!'*

*Daddy lunges forward, and throws me to the floor, forces my mouth open and pours some of 'The Mixture' down my throat.*

*'Now you'll believe me!' I gag and a little of 'The Mixture' dribbles out of the corner of my mouth. I try really hard not to swallow; I don't want to be sick like Daddy.*

*Daddy startles, looks back over his shoulder, grabs 'The Mixture' and hurries off.*



*I stick my fingers down my throat and dash into the bathroom. I throw up in the bathroom, just like Daddy does during dinner, but the good news is that I don't get sick. I manage not to swallow any of 'The Mixture'; I'm luckier than Daddy.*

Over the months that follow, Daddy spends less time sitting and more, bustling around the house attending to his papers. Daddy's notes are strewn all over the place and Daddy dashes from room to room, flustering through them, sorting and re-sorting. Sometimes Daddy plonks himself in one room, pulls a pile of papers off the nearest shelf, rummages through them, selects one or two of interest and carries them off to another room only to continue the process. Daddy is always looking back over his shoulder for the enemy, regardless of what he's doing. And each time he spots them he grabs hold of whatever's closest and runs off to hide. Sometimes Daddy and I set a time and place to meet, but he changes it because they're watching.

*'Princess, it's no good. I can't... on like... We're going to have to get rid of her.'*

*Daddy is speaking fast in a mumbling jumble. I ask him to slow down but I don't think he can.*

*'Sorry, Daddy, what did you say?' Daddy drags me to the corner of the garden and looks around.*

*'Sh... they're listening.' We move.*

*From another corner, he looks furtively around and mutters something incomprehensible. We move again.*

*'Princess, we have to kill her. Are you going to help me?'*

*I check over my shoulder. 'No, Daddy. Please don't hurt her. Please Daddy. I'll watch her all the time, I promise.'*

*Similar conversations rage for days until at last I get Daddy to acquiesce.*

*'But you must watch her all the time, princess. All the time!'*

*I cop lots of flack from my mother for 'hanging around', as she calls it. My mother hates people hanging around and she tells me so frequently in no uncertain terms. I struggle to manage. I'm on high alert and in a permanent no-win situation, dividing myself between the conflicting expectations of my parents. The demands wear me out and cause me a lot of*

*angst, angst that I keep close to my chest. I'm not used to sharing my problems and there's no one to share them with anyway. I've learnt to internalise my worries and do it well. I'm going to school every day, keeping up in class and playing tennis as usual.*

*One night Daddy bundles into my bedroom. 'Quick, get up, up, up!' I throw on some clothes, still half asleep, but an expert at rude awakenings. I follow the beam from Daddy's torch downstairs and into the garage. The beam settles on a pile of sheets which are heaped behind the workbench. Daddy folds the sheets back, removes the cardboard lying under them and the stack of planks below that. The light from the torch is dim and projecting concentric rings on the web-infested concrete wall behind it, but only a little light onto the subject at hand. I rub my eyes hard, taunting the poorly-lit image to morph and disappear but it doesn't. I can't believe that the stack of knives, axes and saws in front of me is real.*

*'But Daddy, wha...'*

*'Shhh, do you want everyone to hear?'*

*'Who Daddy?'*

*He grabs me around the throat. 'You stupid?!'*

*'Ssss...orry', I squeak.*

*'Sh! We're going to fight. To fight the night light.'*

*A shudder runs down my spine.*

*I feel as though I've been sucked inside my television. I'd understand if I was a cowboy ridding the West of Indians, or an ally fighting against the Germans in WWII. But this is a different sort of battle; this is my Daddy's war, a war against an enemy that I've never seen. But not seeing this enemy is not going to stop me having to fight, because together Daddy and I are going to fight the night light. There's nothing I can do or say to stop it happening. Daddy needs me and that is that.*

## chapter 23

*On another night, Daddy barges into my room, rattles me awake and hurries me downstairs to the garage. He strips the covers off his weapons, shifts a few to the side, then drives his hand to the bottom of the cache and pulls out a rifle.*

*'What's that for, Daddy?' I ask in the calmest tone I can muster, a feeling of rampant panic rising within me as I speak. I'm not even fully awake; only minutes earlier I'd been snugly curled up in bed.*

*Daddy strides out of the garage and into the night, puffs his cheeks out, points the rifle towards the sky and pulls the trigger. I cover my ears.*

*'What a stupid hussy, you are! The rifle's not loaded NOW!'*

*Daddy chuckles. 'Not NOW!' he scoffs as he heads back inside. He reaches his hand back under his prized pile, feels around, struggles a bit and then with one almighty tug produces a metal box. He opens the box and shows me the ammunition inside. 'But Daddy, you don't know anything about guns!'*

*'Oh, really now? I don't know anything about guns? Well we'll see about that!'*

*Before I can apologise, Daddy loads the gun with ammunition.*

*'And where would my sweet little princess like to be shot? Daddy pokes the loaded barrel at my tummy. 'How about here?'*

*I shake my head.*

*'Or maybe here?' Daddy aims at my chest.*

*I shake my head again. I'm crying, but Daddy doesn't seem to either notice or care.*

*'Or here?' Daddy holds the gun against my head and pushes it into my temple. My legs buckle beneath me.*

*'Well which which is it?' As Daddy's voice shouts, my mind steps in to save me. My psyche breaks me into pieces and as different parts of me vanish into separate spaces in the ether, the quivering shadow of a former self is left facing a loaded gun. The parts peer out from their hiding spots at the shadow of a little girl that's left behind. They want to help but they*

*can't; it's too dangerous to even try. Just suppose the shadow's Daddy pulls the trigger and shoots the shadow, what then?*

*'Well WHICH?' Daddy's voice reverberates through the still of the night. His voice is getting louder; he's becoming enraged.*

*I try to answer, but I can't speak out loud; I'm paralysed with fear.*

*I call out to my parts with my silent voice and beg them to say something before Daddy pulls the trigger. 'Someone please, someone, anyone please,' I say to myself.*

*'But Daaddy, I don't want to be shot anywhere.'* A tiny voice whispers from within.

*The Daddy laughs when he hears the shadow's voice.*

*'Plea...'* The whispering voice loses its ability to speak and no more sound comes out.

*Something startles Daddy; his eyes dart anxiously about as he lifts the gun off the shadow's temple and rushes off. The shadow's body feels numb, except for the circular indentation left by the barrel of the rifle. Her head goes woozy; she drops to the ground and passes out.*

\*

*The first thing I notice when I come around is the indentation in my temple. Most of my parts have gone AWOL and I don't have any idea where to look for them. At first, even when I beg them to come back, they don't appear; but gradually, as they overcome their terror they return; one part at a time.*

*When the parts come back they don't know how to fit together. It takes a while before they can work together again and be a team. When I first try to stand, I can't take my weight. I'm still numb from being fragmented into parts. As I psychically connect those parts, the numbness gradually fades and some of my usual strength returns. I slink back to my bedroom in the hope that I'll be able to rest and recuperate.*

*No such luck; Daddy's waiting behind the door. He's holding the rifle in his hand. Daddy pushes the barrel of the rifle into the indentation etched into my temple, and the pressure makes the existing ring deeper still. As the ring from the barrel cuts deeper, my body floats away and soon all that's left is an awareness of the ring of flesh where the gun is pushing in. My body floats up to the ceiling and curls into a ball on high, leaving only my eyes exposed, to keep watch over a Daddy holding a rifle to a young girl's head.*

*The Daddy forces the girl onto the ground and he does that thing to the girl that he does to me in bed, except that this time he does it while holding a gun to her head. And a Daddy is being rough as he pounds the girl into the floor. I want to help her but I can't; I can't afford to get hurt. Someone needs to be kept safe. But even though I have floated up to the ceiling I can feel the agony of her parts down below and I can feel the pressure of the ring on her head.*

*'Just remember. I have a gun!'*

*From the ceiling my mouth replies, 'Of course, Daddy whatever you say.'*

*And the Daddy takes his rifle away from the young girl's head and leaves the room, leaving the shadow of the girl on the floor and me, on the ceiling. The young girl is crying, poor thing; she's crying because she's sore and she's scared. And her bits are throbbing, and they're the exact same bits which are throbbing in me.*

*The Daddy has gone and the girl is distressed. The parts look around and decide to go down from the ceiling. Not that it feels entirely safe; the Daddy might come back at any time, but then again the girl needs her parts back and it's safe enough for now. My parts come down from the ceiling one by one and rejoin the girl until she is able to put her arms around herself. She's upset and needs a cuddle; I'm all she has.*

*The girl can't remember what Daddy just did to her; she's forgotten. I describe what I saw from the ceiling but when I do, the girl gets upset. She doesn't want to believe what I'm telling her about her Daddy and I understand that because most of the time, I don't want to believe those things either. She calls me a liar and that's okay; her mind needs to forget. I don't say anything else to her; I just hold her and try to make her feel better.*

*It's another night-time and Daddy directs me into the garage. He motions for me to sit down as he uncovers his hide. He lifts his weapons out one by one, brushes them down and lays them on the bench in front of me. Stands back to admire them, points out the advantages of each weapon before asking me to choose one, excluding the rifle of course; the rifle is his.*

*'You're a lucky duck!' He announces. 'Combat training!'*

*I can't choose between the weapons; I don't like any weapons. Daddy's getting agitated so I choose one of the axes. 'This one, D...'*

*'Not now. Ssh!' Daddy takes the axe back out of my hand, replaces all of the weapons and hides them carefully before hurrying me back to my room.*

*Daddy doesn't come back for several nights, but his absence does nothing to settle my nerves. On the contrary I'm on tenterhooks, anticipating his next move and barely sleeping as a result. The night he does return, I'm enjoying a long-awaited rest.*

*'Quick, get up! Brazen brazen hussy!' The voice shouting in my ear causes me to stir momentarily, but fails to mobilise me. The father behind the voice shoots out of the room and returns with a bowl of water. He pours the water over me and it shocks me awake. I sit up in bed and shake myself off, like Cherry after a bath.*

*'Now move!' With no time to dry myself, I slip into the clothes that I'd discarded onto the floor before bed. I shiver as Daddy and I march off together into the night. The training can't wait.*

*We follow the light of Daddy's torch to the garage.*

*'Now choose your weapon,' he demands. I stand examining the selection in front of me, unable to move.*

*Daddy pokes my axe with the barrel of his gun. 'I said choose!'*

*My father leads me and my axe into the bush, which thickens a few doors from our house. I pick my way through the undergrowth guided by the narrow beam of light from Daddy's torch.*

*Daddy indicates a copse of bushes in front of me. 'Now start chopping!'*

*I raise the axe above my head and thrust it into the first bush. It topples. I hack into the rest of the bushes in quick succession, leaving a trail of destruction in my path. I stand back, arms aching, to admire my handiwork. Then look longingly into Daddy's eyes.*

*Daddy shakes his head, and waves his rifle in the direction of another clump of bushes. I get to work.*

*'Get down you stupid girl! Look they're over there! They've found us. Ssh!'*

*I duck. I can't see anyone.*

*'You were too noisy! Stupid child! You're going to get us both killed!'*

*We crouch behind a fallen log, listening out for the sounds of an invisible enemy. I'm trembling from a combination of fear and cold, feeling exposed and hidden all at the same time. I'm just thinking that we should change position when Daddy runs off without saying a word. I don't know whether to follow him, but the longer it takes for me to decide, the further*

*away Daddy is getting. The sound of his footsteps has all but disappeared by the time I clamber to my feet to follow. Without a light to follow, and with legs of jelly, I struggle to track my father down, guided only by the sound of twigs and branches, snapping in the distance.*

*'Daddy, wait!' I shout in desperation.*

*The light of a torch held centimetres from my face burns my eyes. 'Are you stupid? They have machine guns! Sshhh! Over here!' He shouts, grabbing me and pulling me along with him.*

*As we squat behind a large eucalypt, Daddy signals for me to keep quiet but he doesn't need to; I'm too terrified to make any noise. Now that the bush has gone quiet I can take a breather. I glance up at the few stars flickering above, but the peace only lasts a moment before Daddy runs off into the bush at full pelt, rifle pointed ahead, trigger finger at the ready.*

*I nestle down in my hiding place, listening to the noises of a bush gone mad. I can't tell if the sounds I'm hearing are Daddy running, or whether they're the enemy chasing after him. What if some of the noises are the noise of battle, of Daddy facing the enemy and fighting them alone? What if Daddy is wounded or worse? I think about making a break for it, but am too terrified to venture out into the open bush, in the dark, alone. I could come face-to-face with the enemy and they might have their machineguns with them. I decide that it's better not to risk it and stay put. I wait alone in the dark for what seems like an eternity and am just about to stage my escape when Daddy comes racing back, brandishing his rifle in the air.*

*'I drove them away, princess! I drove them away! Are you proud of your Daddy? Of course you are, princess!' Daddy sweeps me up off my feet and flies me around in circles like he used to when I was little. Only difference is that he is holding a rifle firmly in his hand. Daddy's excited; he looks like a person who's hit the jackpot.*

*'That's great, Daddy. I'm really proud of you!' and I give him a big hug. 'But Daddy can we go home now please?'*

*'Of course, princess! Anything. Pick up your axe.'*

*I look around me but my axe is nowhere to be found. I'm worried how Daddy will react when I tell him that I've left it behind in the thick of the bush.*

*'Never mind princess, let's go and find it!'*

*I'm relieved that Daddy takes me to find my axe and that he's in such a jolly mood! But I'm concerned that the enemy with the machineguns is still*

*waiting for us. Daddy's making a lot of noise; he doesn't seem worried at all. I traipse along quietly in Daddy's shadow, heart thumping. We find my axe, retrieve it and march a victory march out of the bush together. By the time I emerge, I'm dog tired, scratched from head to toe, and my nerves are utterly frayed. If not for having to hold it together for Daddy, I would have collapsed there and then.*

*Teddy is waiting for me when I get back to my room. The minute the door clicks shut behind me I burst into tears and collapse into Teddy's arms; Teddy cuddles me while I let it all out.*

*The next day I lock myself in the bathroom with my penknife and cut into my arms; the pressure of Daddy's escapades has been too much for me to bear.*

*My timing sucks, because no sooner do I turn the lock in the bathroom door that I hear my mother banging on the door.*

*'Baba, Baba what are you doing in there?'*

*'Just a moment!' I cry in a panic, painfully aware of how little patience my mother has for waiting.*

*'Baba, BABA DID YOU HEAR ME?'*

*I open the door; my arm is bleeding.*

*'Baba, how could you be so silly? You know how much I have to deal with and now this?'*

*'I'm sorry Mum.'*

*When my mother takes my penknife away, leaving me with my wounds, I feel completely bereft.*

I accompanied my father on countless escapades in the last years of his life and each one was more terrifying than the last. My father was a great warrior because he always managed to defeat his enemy and escape physically unscathed. I was proud of him and yet, lived my life in fear, in a constant state of high alert, trying to predict when the next crisis would hit and what the outcome might be.

And then one October day I went off to school and was called out of class. My father was dead. And the amazing thing was that after he died, the enemy never bothered me ever again. It was curious - despite being chased by my father's enemy over many months I didn't ever see any sign of them.



I will never know precisely how or why my father died, but the moment my mother broke the news, I knew that he hadn't died from an attack. I'd been party to too many escapades to accept that his enemy had not played a part in his death. When I learnt that my father had been shot, I concluded that his enemy had finally caught up with him. And for some time after he died, I feared that the enemy would come after me, and kill me as well.

But then I wasn't privy to the report my father's psychiatrist had written, a document I found under my mother's house, decades after my father died.

Dear Sirs,

In reply to your letter of the 24th January 1969 I have to advise that the above named was my patient intermittently from the 27th May 1964 until the 6th August 1968. He suffered from a paranoid psychosis with multiple systematised delusions of persecution and episodes of severe depression of mood. He had various types of psychiatric treatment both in hospital and as an outpatient. At no time did he attempt to take his own life. I understand that he died as a result of a gunshot wound in the stomach. While it is possible that the wound was inflicted with suicidal intent the abdomen is an unusual sight for suicidal gunshot wounds.

Yours faithfully

Nor, at the time, had I found the single sheet of paper bearing the innocuous line: 'The flowers in the vase need changing' repeated on every line. Each time that line was written, it was penned in a different handwriting style. When I compared the writing on the sheet of paper to that in the letters from 1965, I found that the style used on each line, matched that in each individual letter. It seems that my father, wishing to establish the evidence he needed to justify his delusional world, had spent time mastering a variety of handwriting styles. These styles represented individual persecutors and supporters, each one a figment of his deluded mind. He created the characters who then wrote the letters. He put the letters in envelopes, addressed them in the matching styles and posted them to himself.

My father had not only constructed a sophisticated delusional system, but he had also mounted a body of evidence to justify his behaviour to the outside world. My father's enemy had been nothing but a series of delusions. And the conspiracy he lived daily during his final years had arisen from his paranoia. The repeated sightings of enemies and bugging

devices, armies and their weapons were hallucinations; constructs of a mentally ill father whose persecutions had come alive. As his daughter I was roped into my father's madness and had no way of judging its veracity. I didn't question it for a moment; to me, a child who had learnt not to question, every aspect of the bad conspiracy against my father was devastatingly real.

While I can only assume that my father died by his own hand, I will never know whether he intended to commit suicide or whether he shot himself in a delusional fog, attempting to escape the enemy who existed within his head.

I will never, ever know the whole truth.

## chapter 24

‘Cathy, you’re going to have to start coming out of it.’

For months Kate bore witness to the world of enemies and conspiracies that had engulfed me during the last few years of my father’s life. As the memory of each escapade abated, we would sit together in disbelief, reflecting on the madness that a young girl had faced alone. As the relentless terror and confusion I had suffered came alive in Kate’s consulting room, I struggled to contain the angst that came with revisiting my father’s delusional world.

While struggling to accept my mother’s ignorance of my father’s escapades I continued to question Simon. Most of the time he talked about Dad being spaced-out, but on one occasion he recounted an incident, reminiscent of those I’d experienced. During the incident in question, my semi-comatose father had sprung to life and verbally assaulted my brother.

‘Dad really lost it; I’d never seen anything like it. I thought he was going to hit me.’

Both the intensity of my father’s reaction, and the suddenness of it, had shocked Simon. Buoyed by Simon’s story I asked again.

‘Catherine, I’m sorry. I don’t remember anything like you’re describing. And quite frankly I can’t imagine Dad doing those things. He was always so gentle.’

And again!

‘Now that I think of it, Catherine I have a sense of something. Something’s there, it’s only a feeling but it relates to something you’re saying.’

My brother had given me a glimmer of hope. It wasn’t much, but he agreed that he would try and recall more and that if he did, he’d share the details with me. My mother however denied the very possibility of any of the events I recalled. While I accepted that my mother couldn’t authenticate memories that she didn’t share, I struggled to process the protestations of unconditional love which accompanied her repeated negation of my claims.

‘Baba, you know that I’d give my life for you if it would make a difference don’t you?’

‘Baba, if it would be better for you for your mother to disappear I’ll go and live in Italy! Or I’ll disappear altogether.’

‘You know Baba. I’ve been searching my heart for answers and I’ve asked myself many times, whether I’d do anything differently...’

During these conversations my mother would often break down. One part of me would want to comfort her, as I would anyone in distress, but another would be paralysed into inaction, grappling with the realisation that my mother’s tears were for her. Her concern was not even partially for me and never had been.

‘...but I wouldn’t. There’s nothing that I would change. I did my best. I gave you and your brother everything. I always put your needs first. I don’t think you quite understand how it is for a mother.’

If only my mother could have accepted a modicum of responsibility for what had happened to me, for not being there, for not protecting me, I might have been drawn to comfort her. But my mother continued to justify herself by projecting blame onto others as she always had. Under heightened pressure from my returning memories, my mother mustered new arguments in support of her rigid view of the world.

‘I used to think that your brother was like your father, but I was wrong. You’re much more like him than Simon is.’

And in questioning my sanity she also openly questioned my therapist’s expertise. Always one to disparage the practice of psychology she suggested that I see a psychiatrist for a second opinion. I told my mother that I’d already consulted a psychiatrist, as well as a number of psychologists during Kate’s holidays. I informed my mother that none of those practitioners had discredited my memories - that while they couldn’t confirm them, they couldn’t deny them either.

I explained how childhood abuse can affect a victim’s behaviour for a long time and that a lot of my behaviour and reactions were consistent with a history of childhood abuse. My mother ignored what I told her and summarily dismissed the composite opinions of the therapists I’d seen. She continued to draw parallels between me and my father and suggested that I too was delusional.

Around this time, my mother phoned a close friend of mine and asked her to meet for coffee. My friend, who was clued in to the issues I was having with my mother, suggested a phone conversation instead.

‘Now listen, Sophie,’ my mother reportedly began, ‘You don’t have to say anything; you just have to listen!’

Sophie’s description of my mother’s monologue reminded me of the one-way interchanges my mother had subjected me to all my life. She recounted my mother’s stream of self-justificatory statements as well as the overriding intimation that I was mentally ill.

Simon told me that my mother had consulted a psychiatrist, not to help her, but seeking a diagnosis for me. I confronted my mother about it, but she denied that she had ever said, or implied, that I was mentally ill. My mother’s abject denial of these facts was confusing in the face of third party confirmation to the contrary.

My relationship with my mother continued to deteriorate and at one point, she sought Dan’s advice as to how to mend the rift between us. As the breakdown in our relationship was distressing both me and my mother, my husband hoped, yet again, that he might help us bridge the gap. He went to talk with her, hopeful about a reconciliation, but returned from his visit, frustrated and angry. He recounted their conversation to me:

‘But Lucy, your husband was ill. He was seeing a psychiatrist for years. They gave him shock treatment for God’s sake!’

‘No Dan, he wasn’t all that mentally ill! Cyril was a wonderful man and a loving father. He loved and adored Baba. He would never have done those things to Baba, never!’

‘Come off it Lucy. Open your eyes. Can’t you see how much all of this has affected Cathy?’

‘Dan it’s been hard for me too. I don’t think you quite understand how it feels to be a mother!’

‘But Lucy, he was fucking mentally ill alright. We know he was. Not only did he do those things to Cathy but he was right off the air. And then, and then he shot himself. He bloody well shot himself! And you’re telling me that he wasn’t mentally ill? We have his psychiatrist’s report for heaven’s sakes!’

Dan enlisted every argument and every negotiating skill he could to try and change my mother’s point of view, but there was no shifting her. After that meeting, he too was forced to accept that my mother would not change her perception for anyone, regardless of the consequences.

I was devastated.

For years I'd been a loving and devoted daughter, repeatedly putting my mother's needs before mine, in a vain attempt to feel valued by her. But it had all been futile; my mother was not even willing to question her views to countenance mine. Nothing would ever change. My mother's ongoing negation undermined my fledgling sense of self. Having worked so hard to reclaim it, I decided that I was no longer willing to put my 'self' at risk.

When I finally broke off contact with my mother I felt a profound sense of loss. Consciously and subconsciously, I had yearned for a mother who would love, care and protect me... but it was never going to happen. It was time to accept that and move on. I didn't wish my mother ill. On the contrary, thinking about her life and the traumas she'd experienced made me very sad and I mourned her isolation, knowing full well that my decision would exacerbate her loneliness further. My mother's life had been tough, but that did not relieve her of any responsibility. We are all responsible for our behaviour and its impact on others.

As I reviewed the passing parade of friends my mother had dropped over the years, tradesmen she'd labelled as stupid, relatives she'd discarded, I understood the active role she played in her own isolation. Still, that didn't alleviate my sadness or the sense of loss that I feel to this day. However it did help me to come to terms with my decision. My mother's treatment of me was about her, and not about me or any inadequacy of mine.



many parts

## chapter 25

It started off like a run-of-the-mill session from earlier years, intense but not unusually so. I lay curled into the side of my chair, recoiling from an ill-defined threat. My hands were clutching the armrests, my eyes squeezed tight; the grinding of my teeth made a chilling accompaniment to my moaning. As the onslaught took hold, five, ten, maybe twenty minutes passed during which my body arched its reply; shock waves thundered through my body, silencing any recourse to the assault against my person.

‘Cathy, Cathy, what’s happening?’

I couldn’t speak.

‘CATHY!’

‘I...I. NO!’ A little girl’s high-pitched voice squawked.

Another muscle spasm, then silence as I caught my breath.

‘Cathy, please come on. Please tell me what’s happening.’

‘She she does doesn’t know!’ A sensible-sounding older child’s voice announced.

\*

Over the months preceding that session I’d been feeling calmer than I had for years. I’d processed a lot of the trauma generated by remembering my father’s delusional years and developed a narrative with which to relate it. Although I was still struggling to deal with the loss of relationship with my mother, and the deterioration of that with my brother, I no longer suffered the relentless blackness of mood which had previously cast a pall over my days. Life was looking up; I was becoming more sociable and more deeply engaged in a number of relationships, particularly with my own children. I could now actively listen to their concerns and offer advice should they seek it. I was even beginning to find some peace of mind. Much relieved and a little chuffed, I assumed that the worst of the memories had been recovered.

The reprieve didn’t last long. Within weeks a new tranche of feelings rocked me to the core. Raw and lacking a context, the feelings floored me.



Kate and I have reflected on this period since; they were devastating times and Kate's observations have validated just how diabolical they were. Apart from describing how dreadful I would look at the end of each session of new memories, Kate also commented on how 'my chair' looked; 'beaten', 'pummelled', 'pounded' were the words she used.

I would start to dissociate on the drive to see Kate. My dissociative state would deepen as I waited and by the time she called me in, I would be seriously spaced out. More often than not Kate would be obliged to lead me into her office by the hand as I couldn't walk unaided. She'd sit me down in my chair and once in position, I'd curl up cowering in one corner of the chair, hands over my head, anxiously anticipating my fate. Within minutes, previously unknown horrors would commandeer my mind and my body would writhe, flail and shudder as I relived unspeakable acts.

During that period a new phenomenon crept into my interactions with Kate, as I treated her with suspicion and a near paranoia, triggered by my terror and other forces I was yet to uncover. I would repeatedly question her motives and accuse her of betraying me. The nature of what I was recalling was so dastardly that it threatened to undermine the life-preserving trust which Kate had vested years of attentive patient care to establish.

The sensible-sounding older child, whose voice Kate and I heard in that particular session, often spoke in the sessions that followed. I called the child 'Sensible' because that's what she called herself. Sensible was my lifeline to my inner self during the innumerable sessions which followed.

When Sensible's voice first emerged from my mouth I was terrified; I had no idea what was happening. Fortunately it didn't take long for Kate to work it out. Over time she explained that children, when faced with overwhelming trauma can form separate parts inside their heads. She stressed that such psychic splitting is an ingenious defence mechanism, which should be admired rather than feared. At that point in time her words did little to relieve my anxiety; I was convinced that I was going crazy.

Through the mechanism of splitting, she explained, the trauma is compartmentalised; any single part of the child's mind experiences less trauma than the child as a whole. This mechanism prevents the child's psyche from being as overwhelmed as it might be otherwise, protecting the child's sanity and that of the adult, into which the child grows. As a

consequence neither the adult nor any separate part of the adult's mind carries a complete set of trauma memories. Only through remembering and a process of integration can a full narrative of the child's trauma be re-created and understood.

I'd typically start off my sessions dissociated as in previous years, but then feel myself slipping into a more distant space. Instead of recovering a new memory straight away, I would begin to speak, but I wouldn't be speaking in my usual voice. My voice would be that of a child. It would differ in tenor and lilt and utilise language more akin to that of a child than an adult. Often other parts would speak too, not just Sensible, and they'd each use their own voice. Sometimes the voices would have a conversation and I'd find myself listening to them chat like an observer. Yet each one of the voices would emanate from my mouth.

While all except my usual adult voice were those of children, some of the voices sounded very young while others seemed older and others, older still. My mouth would switch between the different voices without my anticipating it and I would never know what they were going to say until the words were out. Sensible spoke more often than the others; she was an older child and seemed steady and more knowledgeable than the others. Before long, it became obvious that her role was to act as an intermediary between me and the parts, between the parts and each other and between all of us with Kate.

Sometimes I'd feel as though I had a marketplace inside my head, even when no-one was talking on the outside. I'd have different voices speaking inside, and sometimes several would talk at once. The phenomenon was very disconcerting, especially at first. As the parts found their voices externally, it seemed that they wanted to be heard internally too. Whereas previously, I hadn't been specifically aware of the parts in my head, for a while they dominated my existence. My head would frequently buzz with the frenetic activity of animated discussions and the internal ructions that activity caused!

At first, the parts expressed a diversity of views which each one was intent on having heard. Some of the views were contentious and it was hard to accept them or indeed relate to the parts which voiced them. Kate told me that I should work on embracing each of the parts and accepting them and their views. At first I resisted, as they seemed at odds with my outlook on life, but eventually I appreciated the reasons behind her advice. Without

accepting the parts I could not accept myself and without integrating them, or at least coming to terms with what they were saying, I could not become whole. Knowing and understanding the reasoning behind Kate's advice didn't make the process any easier. The whole thing terrified me and that fear was multi-dimensional. To deal with it I needed to understand where it came from and before I could understand that, I needed to understand how the parts came about.

Kate explained that when I was little, and in mortal danger, my mind had split into parts which locked their own trauma memories away. This process had protected the other parts and 'Little Me' as a whole. Only now that I was an adult and supported in therapy, did the parts feel safe enough to re-experience their trauma and face the feelings it had caused.

Sometimes one of my parts would pipe up when I was out and about. That happened a few times with different friends and it was downright embarrassing when it did. I'd do my best to cover it up by making a joke of it, or by pretending that I was doing it intentionally. Of course that excuse sounded strange anyway. The parts spoke up reasonably often, with my own kids, because they felt comfortable around them. When that happened, I'd pretend that I was playing baby games. Sometimes I actually was, but a lot of the time I'd regressed in age, and was younger than my biological children!

Dan got to meet some of my parts too, but that was usually intentional. I encouraged my internal parts to speak to him so he could understand what I was dealing with. He didn't meet as many parts as Kate did, but enough to give him some idea of the challenges I was facing.

I resented having so little control over the various activities inside my own head. Not only did my mouth often speak without my permission, but it spoke on behalf of others, many I didn't know existed until I heard them speak. I wondered how Kate would accept parts of herself which she didn't know or couldn't control. I grappled to accept my new predicament, but eventually realised that there might always be parts that I didn't fully understand. My mind had been fragmented for a long time; it was imperative to achieve a cooperative headspace in which the parts worked together, but that was not always possible.

## chapter 26

My name is Sensible.

I didn't plan on speaking that first time in Kate's room, but the words just popped out. I was sick of sitting back and saying nothing. And Kate was getting worried; someone had to say something and besides Grownup-Cathy had been dealing with a lot for a long time; it was high time I introduced myself and helped her out.

Grownup-Cathy is the name that me and the other parts call the grown up person that Cathy has become on the outside. There are lots of us; I don't know all of us parts by name; no-one does, but I have met more of the parts than anyone else.

Kate and Grownup-Cathy didn't know about me until I started speaking. One minute Kate was asking Grownup-Cathy a question and the next it was me answering. They both freaked out when they heard my voice; I know because I saw them do it. My voice isn't as deep as Grownup-Cathy's and I don't know as many big words. I'm younger, but I'm not as young as some of the others, like The-Little-Ones for example. They're really young.

I was a bit scared the first time I spoke out loud. That's why I didn't say much. I'd never spoken to Kate before, even though I had listened lots to her and Grownup-Cathy speaking. I feel like I know Kate but not really. I don't know her myself.

Grownup-Cathy's mind has lots of parts. Kate says that everyone's mind has lots of parts but Cathy's parts are split apart more than other people's parts. Some of us are full parts and we have our own names.

The full parts had lots of bad things happen to them and they have lots of things to remember and tell the others about. Others are bits of parts; they only had one or two bad things happen to them.

All of us parts came about when Cathy was little; we call her 'Little-Cathy', which is funny because Kate does too. When Little-Cathy was really little, lots of really bad things happened to her and they're the things which Grownup-Cathy has been remembering. Well some of them anyway; Grownup-Cathy still doesn't know everything that happened to Little-

Cathy. That's why I'm speaking now; I have to help Grownup-Cathy find out about the other bad things and help her understand them all.

The things I'm going to tell you about are really bad. Little-Cathy got hurt lots. And it wasn't just Little-Cathy who got hurt, but other children and animals and babies too. Little-Cathy called the people who did the bad things 'baddies'. The baddies did lots of bad things.

They did bad things to Little-Cathy and they made Little-Cathy do bad things too. And the baddies made Little-Cathy watch them doing bad things. And the baddies did really bad things to children and animals and babies. I know because I was a part of Little-Cathy then. Little-Cathy was really scared and I was too.

Kate tells Grownup-Cathy that all of the baddies have gone. She says that they've been gone a long time. Kate explains that Grownup-Cathy is all grown up and that she has a family of her own. Kate tells Grownup-Cathy that the baddies can't hurt her ever again. Grownup-Cathy tries to believe Kate and she does most of the time. But when the young parts take over and remember what happened to them, Grownup-Cathy feels little and the feelings she had when she was little come back and she gets really scared.

I know more about the other parts than anyone because it's my job to help all of the parts. Not all of them can understand; some are too small and scared and others are too hurt and angry. Some of the parts only know about the baddies and how the baddies hurt them. And some of the parts are mean, parts like Growly; Growly is mean and scary and no-one likes Growly. It's lucky that Growly sleeps most of the time; we never want Growly to wake up, not ever.

I have lots to do. Sometimes, some of the parts don't want to do what the rest of us want to do, but I have to try and get them to do it even when they don't want to. It's not always hard to get the parts to do something together. Sometimes none of us are out, even on the inside and Grown-up Cathy decides what she wants to do by herself. On most other days only a few parts are out on the inside and most of the time we do what Grownup-Cathy wants to do anyway. It's only when the parts don't want to do the same thing that I have trouble.

Kate invites each of us parts to speak to her. She says that she needs to get to know us so she can help us understand each other. I help Kate by introducing the parts that I know. Not everyone is happy with me for doing that, because not everyone wants to meet Kate at first; some parts don't

trust her yet. They're little and hurt; it takes them a long time to trust anybody. Kate's great; she treats each one of us as if we're the ones coming to see her and never makes us think that we're not important because we're only a part and not a whole person. And when a young part speaks to her, she talks to them like you do when you speak to a little child and that makes them feel good.

Some parts don't come out at all; they hide because they're scared. Different ones of us are scared of different things because different bad things happened to us, but we're all scared of the baddies. Some of us are scared of each other; we're especially scared of mean parts like Growly. Kate doesn't like us calling any parts mean. She says that all of the parts are important and that we need to get to know every one of us, even the ones we don't like. She says that when we were little, each of us had a job to do and that doing those jobs saved Cathy. Kate tells us that the parts that the rest of us call mean were the parts which had to do the really bad things. She says that we should embrace the mean parts. I don't want to do that, even though Kate says we should.

We weren't born when Little-Cathy was born; we were born after the bad things started to happen, because that's when Little-Cathy needed us. Little-Cathy made us on the inside when she needed us to help her keep safe.

Kate speaks with as many of us as she can; she even remembers some of our names. Sometimes she doesn't know who someone is, but she says that she doesn't always need to. She understands us and that's the main thing. Kate's really nice and most of us like her a lot.

Sometimes when new parts speak, they're new to me too. I introduce myself to them and try to make them feel welcome. Sometimes that's hard to do because sometimes I don't like them. Lots of people don't like Growly. Kate says it's because we're scared of him. I'm scared of him when he does mean things and when he looks mean. But sometimes when Growly looks mean, he isn't being mean; it's just the way he looks. I'm still scared though.

Grownup-Cathy keeps trying to work out who all the parts are, but it's not easy. Kate tells Grownup-Cathy to be patient. Kate says that Grownup-Cathy doesn't need to know who everyone is because sometimes you can't know. I don't like her saying that and nor does Grownup-Cathy, but we're starting to understand what she means by it. It's because some of the parts

don't know what happened to them; they're scared and sore without knowing why. Some parts can't remember what bad things happened to them; they just know that there were things and they were bad.

I don't like when parts fight on the inside because you can't get away from the fighting. I try to understand what's going on and sort it out without taking sides. The other parts think that I should be able to sort the fights out because I'm Sensible but I can't always do everything myself. Long-Suffering helps me when she can - when The-Little-Ones are asleep and she's finished all of her work. Long-Suffering is great like that, but even when she helps we can't always make everyone make up.

Growly makes this hard because he likes to start fights and when he doesn't start them himself other parts fight because he's around. Growly's yucky and mean and he makes the other parts feel bad. Kate says that Growly does mean things because he's scared and because he has no friends. She says that Growly had to do yucky things when we were little and that if he hadn't done them we wouldn't have survived. She says that we should be nice to Growly because he saved us. But all of us had to do yucky things, not just Growly and I tell Kate that. All of us had to do yucky things!

Sometimes Distrustful says mean things about Kate, and she gets Pissed-Off going. I do my best to stop them saying mean things about Kate; I tell them that Kate is trying to help us all, but it's not easy being me all the time. And I don't like everything that Kate does either - like when Kate tells me to cuddle Growly! I'm never going to cuddle Growly! Not ever!

## chapter 27

Most Sundays from the time I was around five, my father would drive me to my grandmother's house. My father's mother was the only grandparent I ever got to meet and I didn't like her one bit. I hated going to her place and always objected, but my father took me anyway. I don't think he had a choice.

My grandmother was an ardent Presbyterian, whose rigid interpretation of her religion's doctrine dictated a puritanical lifestyle. As a little girl I thought being Presbyterian meant not being allowed to use bad words, or drink any alcohol, even at Christmas when everyone drank a little sherry, even those who didn't drink at any other time. My grandmother went to church regularly, not just on Sundays, but whenever there was any church activity. She was the treasurer on the church auxiliary and wore her role as a badge of pride.

As treasurer it was my grandmother's job to count the money collected during Sunday morning services, the takings from fetes and stalls and tally it all up. The job took up a lot of her time, but she loved it and she loved the status it gave her. Her involvement with the church didn't stop with the treasurer role. My grandmother always seemed to be knitting and crocheting - booties and babies' outfits, doilies, and 'kerchiefs to sell at stalls and fetes. And when she wasn't knitting, she was baking. She baked sponges by the dozen with cream and jam in the middle and icing sugar on top. And tubs of lemon butter as well as jars of jams and marmalade by the legion. She'd use home grown oranges and lemons, and cumquats from the neighbours' garden, and grapes from her vines out the front.

My grandmother loved baking. She also loved eating and it showed. My mother assimilated my grandmother's corpulence with 'a wardrobe'. As a little girl I couldn't grasp the comparison; my grandmother didn't have any doors. I did agree that my grandmother was fat though, and I still remember how gigantic her bloomers were. To me they looked like sails ballooning when the wind got behind them on the washing line. Her breasts were large too. My mother used to say that you could serve morning tea on grandmother's bosoms. And my grandmother wore dresses which looked



like tents, except her tents had flowers on them and they went right down to the ground. They fell so low that you could barely see her ankles at all. I remember feeling sorry for my grandmother's ankles because of the mammoth task they faced in holding her and her tent up straight.

I remember my grandmother scratching; she called it eczema but all I remember is her scratching. She'd scratch in the valleys of her arms past where the flower dresses' arms stopped and at the backs of her knees. She told me that wool aggravated her eczema, but it didn't stop her knitting and I couldn't understand that. When it was hot, and it got hot lots in Brisbane, my grandmother's eczema spread over her body and it made her skin peel and bleed, from her picking at it. When the weather was hot and her eczema grew more vicious than ever, my grandmother would acquire a particular smell about her. I don't know if it was the fungus that grew under her bosoms, or stale perspiration in the heat, but her smell was distinctive and aversive and I remember it with horror to this day.

My grandmother always held herself rigid and perfectly upright. As a child I assumed that it had something to do with being Presbyterian because everyone in my grandmother's church stood stiff like a soldier. And they all looked serious like she did; forever stern. I don't recall ever seeing her smile, let alone offer any suggestion of a laugh. Nor did she cry. In fact any show of emotion seemed foreign to my grandmother. She never hugged me, not once, but then again I didn't want her to. I hated her; she was mean. And when she did kiss me, which happened ever so rarely, it would feel like a spot on my cheek, a sticky yucky spot. Not a kiss like those from my Daddy which were soft and squelchy, but a yucky spot which I'd rub really hard when my grandmother wasn't looking, to try and make it go away.

Every Sunday we'd sit and wait on the front stairs of my grandmother's house for her to come back from church. Sometimes when we got to her house particularly early, we'd have to go to church with her and I hated that. In church I'd have to sit up straight like the Presbyterians and pretend to be singing the hymns which I didn't know. I'd look across at my father and he'd be mouthing the words like me. I don't think he wanted to be there either, but it didn't stop him going. I think he went to church when he didn't want to because he was scared of my grandmother, like I was.

My mother didn't ever come to my grandmother's place on Sundays, but Simon did; he was there the times when we went to church and the

other times, when we waited for our grandmother to come back from church.

## chapter 28

Little-Cathy's grandma's house is scary. It stands on top of wooden lumpy things which make houses stand up off the ground. When houses stand up off the ground they have rooms underneath them and the rooms are dark. The rooms under Little-Cathy's grandma's house are very dark.

After Little-Cathy's grandma comes back from church she goes down to the rooms under her house. Little-Cathy's Daddy goes down there too and he takes Little-Cathy with him. Bad things happen in one of the dark rooms under Little-Cathy's grandma's house and they make Little-Cathy scared. When Little-Cathy she gets scared she disappears and I come out. When bad things happen to me and I get scared other parts come out. Most of us parts were born when the bad things happened under Little-Cathy's grandmother's house because that's when Little-Cathy needed us most.

When Little-Cathy is taken under her grandmother's house Simey goes down there too. And other people come too, but Little-Cathy doesn't know who the other people are. All of the other people under Little-Cathy's grandma's house are wearing cloaks. The older children, like Simey, are wearing little cloaks and the grown-ups are wearing big cloaks. The big cloaks have hoods which go down over the faces of the grown-ups and cover them up so Little-Cathy can't see them. Little-Cathy can't tell which grown-ups are girl grown-ups and which are boy ones, but she can tell her grandma because she can smell her grandma's yucky smell.

I don't know how old Little-Cathy is the first time her Daddy takes her under her grandma's house. I think she is five, but she may be six. The first time Little-Cathy goes there, she doesn't know what she is supposed to do, but all of the other Cloaks do, and Simey does too.

*Little-Cathy's grandma is a boss of the Cloaks and she is known as an elder. The Cloaks stand in a circle and make funny scary noises. The funny noises scare Little-Cathy and she disappears in her head. I come out, but I'm scared too. The Cloaks say strange words and I try to understand them, but I can't. The strange words and scary noises get louder and I get scared and disappear back inside. Other parts come out one at a time and they stay*

*out until they get scared and other parts have to take over. The strange noises get louder and the Cloaks stand in a really scary circle.*

*The Cloaks pass things around in the circle and they say funny words over the things. They all know what they have to say, but the first time Little-Cathy doesn't know what to say. But each time she goes down under her grandmother's house she learns more about what she has to say. And when she isn't there anymore because she has disappeared in her head, one of us parts is there instead and that part learns what to say and next time it's Little-Cathy's turn to say something, one of us parts says it for her.*

*The Cloaks make Little-Cathy do things and we help her do them so she won't get into trouble for not doing them. Some of the things are really bad and Little-Cathy is too little to do all of the really bad things by herself.*

*The Cloaks hurt Little-Cathy, and when she leaves her head, they hurt me, and then the other parts when they take over. Little-Cathy doesn't want to get hurt and we don't want to get hurt either. No parts want to get hurt; we all wish we could stop the Cloaks hurting us. But we can't and we can't run away either. When you run away from Cloaks they catch you and bring you back and chop you up. We know, because our friend Jenny tried to run away and the Cloaks caught her and they chopped her up.*

*Little-Cathy doesn't want to get chopped up; I don't want to either. None of us parts want to get chopped up. Not ever.*

Some Sundays when my father took me to my grandmother's house, we didn't stay there. After she returned from church and everyone was together, we'd pile into my father's car and drive to a different place. I'm not sure where the other place was because my memory of how we got there is not clear. But I do remember how it looked; to me, a little girl, it seemed like a cave or more precisely two caves adjacent to one another which were connected through a cave-like doorway. I remember the doorway because I was carried through it a number of times, by people wearing cloaks.

I also recall that my father never came inside the caves with us. My grandmother always did, as did Simon, and I had no choice because the Cloaks forced me to go inside. Sometimes when I didn't want to leave my father's side he'd try to carry me inside, but the Cloaks would snatch me away from him and order him to stay outside.

I remember the first time my father took me to the cave. We drove there, got out of the car and walked together. I was holding my father's hand tightly. I was scared; I didn't know what was going to happen.

\*

*As soon as Little-Cathy gets to the front of the cave, big hands reach out from the shadows and grab her. The hands pull Little-Cathy away from her Daddy and make her cry. Little-Cathy stamps her five-year-old feet on the ground outside of the cave, but the hands from the shadows don't listen to Little-Cathy's feet and they lift her off the ground. Little-Cathy kicks as hard as she can but she kicks the air and little feet kicking the air can't stop big hands doing what they want to do. The hands carry Little-Cathy and drop her into the dirt on the floor of the cave. She looks around; it's dark and she's scared.*

*When the hands drop Little-Cathy down, she hits the ground and hurts her elbow and she cries out, 'I want my Daddy!' I come out and rub Little-Cathy's elbow because her Daddy isn't there to rub it. The cave is dark and it smells funny. I don't like it in the cave.*

*I cry because I want Little-Cathy's Daddy too and the elbow which belongs to Little-Cathy, but now feels like mine is hurting. I'm rubbing the sore elbow and as I'm rubbing it, other hands come out of the shadows and grab me. The hands hold me by the legs and I wriggle to get away from them, but I can't get away from them because they're too big. One of the hands smacks me and the hand's voice says that I'm bad girl. The hands hurt me and they say that Little-Cathy is a bad girl but she is not a bad girl at all. And I try to tell the hands that Little-Cathy is a good girl but they don't listen to me. The hands throw me into the dirt and smack me, but then I disappear.*

*The hands from the shadow are smacking Pissed-Off now and Pissed-Off wants Little-Cathy's Daddy, but Little-Cathy's Daddy can't help her because he is not inside the cave with her. Pissed-Off cries and they hit her, and Distrustful comes out and takes over. The hands hit Distrustful and she cries and they keep hitting each of us and we keep crying. The hands grab Growly and pick him up, but he doesn't cry. He lies quietly as he gets hurt by hands from the shadows because that's what Growly does.*

*The hands from the shadows strip the little girl naked and throw her into the dirt, and the hands tie ropes around the good girl's ankles and the little girl can't move. And a little girl of five lies tied up, naked and scared in the dirt on the floor of a cave. But the little girl doesn't cry and she doesn't call out because that little girl is too scared to make a sound. And the girl lies alone in the shadows with no clothes and no sheet and no blanket, shivering without a teddy or a Daddy, waiting to be hurt some more.*

*Little-Cathy's Daddy takes us to that cave on lots of Sundays. Hands grab her, take her to the shadows, strip her naked and drop her into the dirt. And she waits in the little cave. Little-Cathy hates waiting in the little cave, because it's a bad waiting and a scary waiting. It's a waiting that makes every hair on Little-Cathy's little body stand on end. It's a waiting that makes her ears listen out for hands reaching out from the shadows. And it's a waiting that keeps her eyes wide open staring into the shadows, checking for Cloaks. Waiting makes Little-Cathy shiver and it makes her tears come. Her tears come but they don't come out because when her tears come out, the hands from the shadows smack her. And the hands say that she's bad and Little-Cathy doesn't want to be bad; she wants to be good.*

*The hands say we're bad and they beat us in turn. They beat Little-Cathy and me and Pissed-off and Distrustful and Long-Suffering and Growly. Little-Cathy cries and we all cry in turn. We cry because we're sore and we're scared. We cry because when they beat us, it hurts really badly, but they beat each of us more so we stop crying and swallow hard instead. Little-Cathy wants her Daddy and then we all want Little-Cathy's Daddy too. And we want Little-Cathy's teddy, and we want someone to cuddle, and someone to cuddle us. And we want someone to tell us that everything's alright; even when it isn't.*

*When we're in the little cave, we can hear things happening in the big cave next door. The things that happen make noises which sound like the noises from under Little-Cathy's grandma's house, but different. More noises come out of the big cave and they go on for longer and they are bigger noises which make us put our hands over our ears. And the smell that comes from the big cave is the same, but different to the smell that comes from under Little-Cathy's grandma's house. It's the smell of smoke that burns from the special burny things out the front in the shadows and the smell from the things the Cloaks do, all mixed together.*

*The smoke puffs into the little cave and it makes us feel sick in our tummies while we wait. It sits on top of us and it pours all around us. Little-Cathy is tied up and she can't get away from the smoke and the smell and the noises that come from the big cave next door and we can't either. Little-Cathy wants her Daddy and we want her Daddy too, but her Daddy isn't in the little cave and he isn't in the big cave. We don't want to lie in the little cave, but we don't want the Cloaks to come and get us either. We don't want them to take us into the big cave because they do the bad things in the big cave.*

*The first time the Cloaks carry Little-Cathy into the big cave she whacks them and so do we. And she whacks them the second time too. And she screams and kicks. But after those two times, Little-Cathy doesn't scream anymore. I scream the third time and Growly screams the fourth, but after that none of us scream, except the sometimes that we can't help screaming because we're little, but after that, we can help it even though we're still little. We're little and the Cloaks are big and there are lots of Cloaks and they're hurting us and the Cloaks don't stop hurting us when we whack them and the Cloaks don't stop hurting us when we don't whack them. The Cloaks hurt us and beat us until there are no screams left to come out and there are no more tears on the inside. And when we stop screaming and when we stop crying, the Cloaks hurt us some more.*

*When the Cloaks stop doing the bad things to us, they leave a little girl lying in the dirt in the little cave. Lying naked in the dirt alone and sore from beatings and hurtings which come from hands in cloaks and shadows, she waits. She wants her Daddy but there is no Daddy in the little cave and she lies alone in the dirt waiting to be hurt again.*

*Simey doesn't wait in the waiting cave and he doesn't get tied up. Simey goes into the big cave by himself. Simey knows what he has to do and he does it. Simey's little but he's three years bigger than Little-Cathy and he doesn't say 'no' to the Cloaks; not ever. Simey knows what happens if you say 'no' to the Cloaks.*

*Simey is out the front in the shadows and they do bad things to him. The Cloaks do bad things to Simey and they hurt him, but he doesn't whack them back and he doesn't cry. Little-Cathy covers her eyes when the Cloaks hurt Simey because she can't watch her Simey getting hurt. The Cloaks take our hands away and they make us watch. We turn our head away but the hands from the shadows turn our head back around and we close our eyes. But the*

*hands make us open them, and we can't watch but we have to. And we watch because they make us, and we watch when Simey's eyes go glassy and we hope that he can't see. And we hope that Simey can't hear, and we hope that he can't feel. We want the Cloaks to stop; we beg them to stop on the inside, but they don't stop. And the Cloaks hurt Simey, and they hurt him a lot. Simey gets hurt even though he does everything that the Cloaks tell him to.*

*They toss Little-Cathy back into the dirt and they beat her and they beat us in turn, but Little-Cathy doesn't cry and we don't cry; we won't cry. The beatings beat the cries away and the beatings take Little-Cathy away and I come and they take me away and they take all of us and even Growly because none of us can take it anymore. When none of us can take it anymore we decide that we want to die and we pray to die but we don't know how to die even when we want to. But we do know that if we die that we won't feel the really bad things anymore, and we won't feel the hurt and the pain and we won't cry tears that don't even come out.*

*'Dead, please my Daddy make us dead!'*

*But Little-Cathy's Daddy doesn't make Little-Cathy dead and he doesn't make us dead either. And the little girl has to stay in the little cave until they take her to the big cave where they do bad things to her and make her do bad things to others. The little girl hates what they do to her and she hates what she does to others. She hates the Cloaks and she hates doing bad things and being bad, but she has no choice because nothing makes her die even though she wants to.*



## chapter 29

*Hands are holding Little-Cathy's body in the air and the hands are passing it around. Little-Cathy's body has gone wobbly like a dead body, but her body isn't dead. It's not dead, but it can't feel anything anymore; Little-Cathy's head has made all of the feeling in her body go away.*

*Now it's my body and the Cloaks are passing me around the circle, and the Cloaks are making funny noises over my body. I'm naked and I'm in the big cave and the Cloaks are dropping water on me. Hands that I don't know are carrying me out the front of the cave and they are holding my body high up above where they do the bad things. It's smoky with thick smoke like when there's a fire and I'm coughing and the mouths of the Cloaks are shouting and I'm scared.*

My head flopped from side to side as a Cloak presented my 'limp dolly', naked body to the group assembled around the circle.

The sadistic mob mumbled and grunted alone and together, loud then soft; foreign chilling calls from the mouths of Cloaks filling the darkness. They sprinkled ceremonial water over my body; the drops pinged against the skin of my face, stinging my eyes. I shivered, my naked body racked with fear, peppered with dirt from the ground, mixed in with icy water from the special bowl, the taste of dirt meeting the taste of fear in my mouth.

One of the elders laid me out on the roughly hewn stone altar. As the smoke thinned and the chanting stopped, I lay shuddering, a snivelling sacrificial offering to a cave of monsters. A searing agony split me down below and I let out a primal cry which shattered the silence of the ritual. As soon as the first Cloak split one of my parts, another part took over and in my head my parts worked together. We would gather up each obliterated part, cuddle it and tend to its wounds, then lie it back down so it could recuperate as well as any of us could while we were being repeatedly brutalised.

*Little-Cathy is lying back in the dirt in the little cave. There's blood coming out and we're hurting bad, but we're going away from the hurt in our heads so we can't feel the hurt anymore. Little-Cathy is sleeping, but I'm watching out. The hands from the shadows shake my naked body and carry me into the big cave. The hands give me my bowl and make me carry my bowl around the circle of Cloaks. My bowl is a special bowl because my bowl carries the special bits from the bad stone where they do the bad things. And sometimes when my bowl has special water in it the Cloaks take some special water with their lips and put their fingers in to make them wet. And the Cloaks put the wet on animals and babies and bits of the people that are on the stone out the front in the shadows.*

A procession of evil beings filed past the altar chanting. They each bowed and sprinkled a few drops of holy water over the victim strapped to the altar. After each of the Cloaks had played their part, the elder lifted the ceremonial sword high up into the air; the shadow out the front wriggled helplessly underneath it. The chanting grew louder; the sword flashed through the darkness and disappeared down into the black void. The shadow stopped wriggling and everything went still.

*I try not to watch, but sometimes they make me. I watch the sword go down and the wriggling stops. I watch to see if the wriggling comes back, but it doesn't.*

*When they chop my friend Jenny up, they take me out the front and make me watch. And after they chop Jenny up they put her bits into Little-Cathy's bowl, one bit at a time and they make Little-Cathy carry her Jenny's bits around the circle. And each Cloak bends down over the bowl and takes a bit of Jenny's bits out the bowl and does something with the bits that I don't want to say because I don't want to be sick like I'm always sick when I talk about Jenny's bits. And we all take turns to carry Jenny's bits, but most of us parts can't carry them, only Growly can and Growly does that because he can do it. The Cloaks say Jenny ran away and that she didn't do what they told her to do and they say that if you run away and don't do what you're told, you get chopped up. That's what the Cloaks say.*

*Little-Cathy's friend Jenny is a not little like Little-Cathy; she's eight years old and she is real y pretty. Little-Cathy likes Jenny because Jenny is the special friend that Little-Cathy gets scared with. When you're scared together you don't get as scared as when you get scared by yourself.*

I don't think about Jenny getting chopped up all the time like the first time I remembered. Some things do make us remember sometimes and then we can't help remembering - like when something scary happens or something with lots of blood comes on the television. When that happens we get scared and we think about Jenny getting chopped up. Jenny doesn't look pretty when she gets chopped up.

No-one does.

*Sometimes the Cloaks make us do bad things which we don't want to do. We hate doing them and we hate ourselves for doing them and we hate each other too. Sometimes Grownup-Cathy doesn't understand why we did those bad things and why we didn't say 'no' to the Cloaks. Kate says that it's because Grownup-Cathy forgets how little she was. Kate tells us that when you're little you can't do anything against baddies who are big and mean like the Cloaks are big and mean. Some of us get angry with other parts because we think they are bad and we have fights and want to get rid of the bad parts. We want to get rid of the parts that did the real y bad things like Growly. Lots of us are scared of Growly because he is mean and bad like the Cloaks and we think that Growly is going to do those bad things to us too.*

Kate tried to convince us to accept all of the parts of us but it took a long time. We'd repeatedly fantasise about getting rid of certain parts and made plans to do so. The splits we experienced in our personality felt so complete that we found it hard to grasp that getting rid of one part of us would kill us all.

*On Little-Cathy's graduation day there are lots of Cloaks. All of the Cloak's ceremonies are important, but graduations are the most important, because graduations mean that you know your job and don't need to be told what to do anymore. Because Little-Cathy's grandma is an elder, Little-Cathy has a special job, and that job is carrying the special bowl and what it has in it. Little-Cathy's graduation is a special bowl graduation.*

*On her graduation day Little-Cathy is allowed to wear a cloak for the first time, but she doesn't like doing that. The cloak feels scratchy and she doesn't have any clothes on under the cloak; Little-Cathy doesn't want to wear a scratchy mean cloak. Little-Cathy is standing out the front, next to the bad stone because that's where you have to stand when you are having your graduation. Little-Cathy is holding the special little sword which little children hold on special days and she is lifting the little sword up into the air because that is what she has to do. And even though the little sword is little, it's big for Little-Cathy. Little-Cathy holds the sword tight because she doesn't want to drop it on the ground and get chopped up. Two Cloaks come and they take the little sword away from Little-Cathy and they give the sword to the elder Cloak, and the elder Cloak takes Little-Cathy's cloak off her and makes Little-Cathy naked. The elder Cloak lies Little-Cathy down on the cold and hard stone and makes Little-Cathy's legs and arms go away from each other. Little-Cathy goes all goosepimpley and I come out. The Cloaks make painting lines on my naked skin and they paint lines across my tummy. They paint circles like circles of Cloaks around and about and they paint a great big line right down the middle of me.*

*They paint a really big line right down the middle of Jenny when Jenny is lying on the stone out the front in the shadows and they lift the big sword up over Jenny and they drop the sword into her tummy and pull the sword along the big line on her tummy and along the other lines and they chop Jenny up into bits. And they make Little-Cathy stand out the front and watch Jenny being chopped up, but she can't and she goes away in her head; I call out, but they whack me. I fall down and throw up but they lift me back up. The sword pushes right into Jenny again. I go away and the other parts come out in turns; some of us throw up but none of us cry because you don't cry when you're in the cave, you don't cry and you don't speak. I'm sorry that I called out, but I'm more sorry that they're chopping Jenny up.*

*The Cloaks make Long-Suffering carry Jenny's bits one at a time, but she can't carry them and she passes the bowl to Growly; Growly passes out. The Cloaks are getting angry because Little-Cathy has to carry, and she can't when she's passed out. I come out from the inside and carry Jenny's bits and they make me carry her bits to the outside of the cave. The Cloaks dig away in the dirt so they can bury Jenny's bits, but they don't dig one*

*spot; they dig lots of different spots and they put Jenny's bits in lots of different spots outside of the big cave. Jenny's bits are all alone in their different spots and that means that they can't find each other. We're never going to run away because we never want to be chopped up and be buried in different spots in the ground like our friend Jenny.*

*It is the day of Little-Cathy's graduation and Little-Cathy is on the stone out the front in the shadows and the Cloak elder is holding a sword high in the air over Little-Cathy's naked body. Little-Cathy goes away and each one of us takes turns to lie on the cold hard stone under the sword of Cloaks and Little-Cathy disappears and all of us parts disappear in turn. We don't know what happened next because none of us can remember; we think we all went away in our head together. Little-Cathy wakes back up when she is dropped back in the dirt of the little cave.*

*Little-Cathy is not chopped up because today is Little-Cathy's graduation day; it is not her chopping up day.*

*Little-Cathy's Daddy carries Little-Cathy back out of the cave and lifts her into the back seat of his car and lays her down. He lays all of us down. Little-Cathy's Daddy drives us home and carries us into Little-Cathy's room; he brings Teddy to us and puts us to bed. We don't get up to go to school the next day because we stay in bed instead, but the day after the one where we stay in bed, Little-Cathy gets out of bed and she gets dressed and she goes off to school because that's what Little-Cathy has to do.*

## chapter 30

Grownup-Cathy has been having a bad time. She hasn't been sleeping well and she's feeling more freaked out than she has for a long time. Grownup-Cathy has had a very big shock finding out about us all on the inside of her. And she's been trying to look after her outside children at the same time and that is making her very tired. She has been putting herself to bed a lot because she needs lots of sleep and rest. Grownup-Cathy hates having to go to bed all the time because she doesn't want her outside children to think that she's going to bed because of them. Grownup-Cathy loves her children a lot and she hates letting them down and making them worry but when she can't cope with herself, she can't cope with them either.

Grownup-Cathy doesn't want her children to know how bad she's feeling but no matter how hard she tries to hide her feelings they show through. I try to tell her that, but she doesn't want to listen to me.

I don't think she trusts me or maybe she thinks I'm bossy. I don't mean to be bossy. It's just that I've had to look after the others since we were little and sometimes that makes me seem like I'm bossy; I've had to be Sensible forever.

Grownup-Cathy is driving us to see Kate when I start coming out. I really want to come out today because I have to speak to Kate because I'm freaked out and me being freaked out is not helping anybody.

My coming out makes Grownup-Cathy's head go fuzzy. I try to wait to come out so Grownup-Cathy can keep driving, but sometimes I can't wait and this is one of those times. Grownup-Cathy is the only one of us who knows how to drive, and sometimes when Grownup-Cathy's head goes fuzzy when she's driving, she gets scared, and so do we. Sometimes Grownup-Cathy pulls over by herself and sometimes we ask her to as well. And when she does pull over we wait on the side of the road until Grownup-Cathy's head feels better to drive again. Other times Grownup-Cathy doesn't stop driving, but she slows down instead and that keeps us safe, especially Little-Cathy because we all want her to be safe.

This time Grownup-Cathy drives slowly the whole way. She finds a parking spot outside Kate's and makes sure that it's a forward parking spot

because she can't do the backwards parking thing when her head is fuzzy. I get out of the car with Grownup-Cathy and we walk down the drive together. Grownup-Cathy's head gets really fuzzy by the time we reach the gate. We both press the buzzer but I press it the most.

'Hello'

'Hi!' I answer because Grownup-Cathy has gone to that place at the back of her head where we all go to hide.

Changing over between us parts and Grownup-Cathy makes us tired. It's a funny sort of tired, not the sort of tired you get when you do too many things, but a tired that comes out of nowhere. That tired is a really big tired.

Sometimes our head goes fuzzy in Kate's waiting room, like when she is running late and doing what she does after the patient before us, leaves. Sometimes we fall asleep and snore really loudly and it's funny because we can hear us snoring, but we can't stop it even when we want to. Sometimes when Kate calls us to come into her office we can't get up. We can hear her calling and we try to get up but we can't because all of us parts have gone too far away in our head. Sometimes Kate calls us and we wake up a little and make ourselves wobbly-walk into her office with our eyes closed. Sometimes we trip, but we never trip badly because we know the way off by heart. Other times Kate comes to get us and she tries to wake us by shaking us on the leg but if the shaking doesn't wake us, she takes our hand and leads us into her office. Sometimes she pulls us out of the chair, but that makes us angry because we don't want to be pulled. Sometimes Kate sounds angry and we hate when she sounds angry because Little-Cathy's mother sounds angry lots. But Kate's angry is a different sort of angry and she isn't angry for long and she's not mean with her angry.

I like our chair in Kate's office. Sometimes Kate lets us fall asleep in our chair, but it's not an everyday sleep because we can hear what is happening around us. It's like being awake and asleep all at once. Sometimes when we are remembering the bad things we put our hands over our eyes and sometimes the light in Kate's office makes our eyes sting. We don't like the light being bright, because it means that the baddies can see us and we don't want them to see us. Kate tells us that the baddies have gone and can never hurt us again, but in Little-Cathy's head the baddies are still there.

I can't remember the precise details of the last time I was subjected to the Cloaks' ritualistic torture, but on the day that the memories returned, I was desperate to see Kate. I needed the security of her room, together with the safety of her bearing witness. I remembered lying on the cold hard stone of the altar in the big cave for ages. I remembered that lots of Cloaks took turns to do unspeakable things to me. And I remembered how severe the pain was and how many times I had to switch parts to make it through. When I came to in the dirt of the little cave I was caked in mud and blood and sweat and I was sobbing to myself. I could barely move; I was in too much pain. The pain down below, where I'd been repeatedly brutalised, was far more excruciating than ever before.

*We are lying in the dirt and feeling yucky and lots of stuff is coming out down below. Stuff comes out every time after we go to the cave and it makes us feel yucky and bad, but this time there's lots more stuff coming out than ever before and it keeps coming and doesn't stop. It's coming from where all of the Cloaks were doing the bad stuff to us. And we keep coming and going from our head and none of us knows who we are and that's scary.*

*It feels like the times when Grownup-Cathy is trying to swap with one of us but none of us is ready to come out and she gets stuck and we get stuck too, but different.*

*Little-Cathy is scared. Not like when she is scared when the bad things are happening but this time she is scared that she is never going to wake up ever again. We take turns to talk to Little-Cathy and try and make her feel a little bit good. We tel her that everything wil be alright but none of us really believe that because we can't stop the stuff coming out from down below and we can't keep ourselves awake either. We try hard to help Little-Cathy but she keeps leaving us and we can't get her back. And Little-Cathy has never left us before when we can't get her back and we are worried, because it's our job to look after her and make sure that she is okay, but this time no-one is okay. We can't find Little-Cathy to wake her up and we can't wake ourselves up either.*

When Grownup-Cathy is remembering that day in Kate's office she can't wake up and she's scared and so is Kate.

*We don't remember what happens at the end of that day in the cave. We think that Little-Cathy's Daddy comes and carries us out of the cave,*



*because that's what he does all the other times. I don't remember him doing that and the others don't either. Maybe we were having one of our big sleeps, or maybe we were dead in our heads.*

When I'm sitting in Kate's office remembering that last day with the Cloaks I start to cry because I can't wake up. I don't cry real tears because the tears don't come out but I cry on the inside and I shake all over like you do when you do cry real tears. Maybe I am dead, but I don't know if I am or not. If dead means that you can't wake up at all and you can't move either, then we must be dead. But when you're dead, I don't think you can feel scared so maybe we're not dead after all.

I start to wake up a little in Kate's chair; I'm not dead.

*My tummy feels sick and I want to throw up but I can't throw up because there's something over my face. And my hand lifts itself up and tries to push the something off my face, but it can't get the something off. I fall asleep again and no-one else wakes up instead, so we all stay asleep. Then we do wake up and the something is still there over our face and our hand is there too and our other hand is there, but we don't remember putting our hands there and our hands are pushing against the something and we feel sick and we want to throw up and we push the something away and it comes off our face. I throw up in my head and we feel half awake and we hurl in our head and we wake up more and we feel really sore down below.*

*We're really sore down below where the Cloaks did the bad stuff to us and we throw up and that makes us feel yucky and we are yucky and the bad stuff makes us feel really yucky down below, but we're not dead. We are throwing up lots and you can't throw up lots when you're dead.*

Grownup-Cathy knows that it is a mask on our face because she knows about masks because she's a doctor. And she tells us that it's a mask that special doctors in hospitals use when they put people to sleep so that they can do things to fix them. And Grownup-Cathy tells Kate but Kate knows already because Kate has been watching and she's knows that it's a mask because she's a grown up too and she knows about masks. And now we all know that we had a mask on our face and that the mask helped give us a thing called an anaesthetic to put us to sleep so we could have something done to us to fix us up.

## chapter 31

When Little-Cathy wakes up she isn't inside the cave and she isn't back in her bedroom either. And she doesn't have a mask on her face. She is lying in a strange bed all by herself, in a room that has walls that are the colour of lemons and a very shiny floor.

*Little-Cathy takes a long time before she is all awake and when she is, she feels scared. She lies very still and watches the door to see if there are any Cloaks coming. There aren't any Cloaks and someone walks into the room instead. The someone is a lady and Little-Cathy doesn't know who the lady is, but the lady isn't wearing a cloak and she is smiling.*

*The someone asks Little-Cathy how she's feeling, but Little-Cathy doesn't know because no-one has ever asked her that before. We know on the inside that Little-Cathy is feeling sore and hurt and yucky, but we don't say anything. The lady is wearing a blue and white dress and a funny-looking hat that stands up by itself. The nice lady in the funny hat comes in and out of Little-Cathy's room a lot and she tucks Little-Cathy's sheets in and she gives Little-Cathy sips of water. Sometimes the nice lady sits down on the white plastic chair next to Little-Cathy's bed and holds Little-Cathy's hand. Little-Cathy feels a little bit better when she does that and she falls asleep, holding the nice lady's hand. When Little-Cathy wakes up again she feels really sore down below and she wants to cry but she looks around the room and sees her mother sitting there. And Little-Cathy's mother isn't smiling; she's got her angry face on and Little-Cathy is scared of her mother's angry face. Her mother's angry mouth opens and it starts to talk, but Little-Cathy doesn't want to listen to her mother's angry mouth talking. Little-Cathy starts crying and I come out and listen for a while, but then we all fall asleep.*

*I wake up and hear Little-Cathy's mother's mouth say that 'nothing happened'. I shake my head to try and change the words I'm hearing, because sometimes shaking your head can change words that you don't want to hear. I don't want to hear Little-Cathy's mother's angry mouth saying that 'nothing happened' because lots of really bad things did*

*happen. I'm really sore down below and being sore and hearing that 'nothing happened' makes me cry.*

*The lady with the funny hat comes back into the room and she asks if Little-Cathy is okay. Because none of us ever says when we're not okay, I say 'yes'. And Little-Cathy's mother gives the lady with the funny hat one of her angry stares and makes the nice lady go away. I close my eyes and pretend to be asleep and Little-Cathy's mother who never sits still for long and who never stays when anyone is hurt gets up and leaves and we all go to sleep for real because we feel safe with Little-Cathy's mother gone. But we can't stay asleep for long because down below hurts lots because lots of yucky stuff is coming out and when we wake up more we feel some things poking into us on the inside of the down below bits. And the lady with the funny hat comes back and I'm crying and she holds my hand and I feel a bit better because I feel safe when the nice lady holds my hand.*

*I have to do wee-wee and I tell the lady with the funny hat that and she brings a cold hard thing with metal like from a tap and makes me sit on it. We do wee-wee, but doing it hurts and we cry more.*

*Growly takes over; Growly doesn't usual y cry or say that he is hurt even when he is. But this time even Growly cries and he especially cries when he wees because that's when it stings the most. Growly tries not to wee, but everyone has to wee, even Growly. And Growly has to wee lots and the lady in the funny hat holds Growly's hand and she gives him some reddy-orangey syrup to drink to make him feel better. And she sits with us and holds Growly's hand and the stingy bits feel a bit better; but then he has to wee again.*

*The lady in the funny hat says that she wants to give us a bath and she asks us if we can get out of bed and walk. We don't want to say 'no' so we say 'yes', but when Little-Cathy tries to walk she can't, because it's too sore between her legs to walk. Growly has had a sleep and he feels a little bit better so he walks with the lady with the funny hat even though it is sore.*

*Growly thinks he likes the nice lady, but he's scared in case she is really a Cloak. He asks us if we're sure that the lady is not taking us to the Cloaks to hurt us. We're not sure, but the lady takes us into a room where there is a bath and no Cloaks. Little-Cathy comes back out and the nice lady takes Little-Cathy over to the bath and helps Little-Cathy take her funny white gown off and asks her to get into the bath. Little-Cathy tries to lift her leg up so she can get into the bath, but it hurts too much and Growly takes over*

*and lifts our legs over so we can get in. Growly tries to sit down but the bath hurts his bottom and he stands straight up. The lady sits Growly on the edge of the bath and wraps a towel around him. The towel is soft and smells sweet so we all come out and take turns to have a soft sweet towel wrapped around us. We want to stay inside the towel forever because it's not scratchy like the towels at Little-Cathy's mother's place.*

*The lady tells us that she has made a special bath for us with salt in it. She says that the salt will make us better and that she knows that the bath is stinging but that if we want our sore bits to get better we have to sit in the bath. I understand what the lady is saying, but Growly doesn't so I take over from him. I know that I shouldn't, but I lift the bottom of the towel up and take a peek at Little-Cathy's bottom. It's bluey purple with grey and it has some black threads coming out of it like threads from sewing. The lady with the funny hat tells us that the black threads are stitches and that the stitches inside us will make us better. We don't know what stitches are, but we think that they are working because we don't have so much yucky stuff coming out like before.*

*Grownup-Cathy tells us that we must have been to hospital and had an operation. She tells us that a doctor put stitches inside us to sew up where we were torn. We didn't know that we were torn but maybe that's why it hurt so much and why so much yucky stuff was coming out.*

*We stay in hospital with the lady with the funny hat and with other ladies with funny hats for a few days. Little-Cathy's Daddy doesn't come to see us in hospital and we miss him. Little-Cathy's mother comes with an angry face and an angry mouth which says that 'nothing happened'. We have lots of baths with salt and stinging and sore wee-wees and we cry and we try to sleep and the nice lady with the funny hat holds our hand.*

*Little-Cathy's Daddy comes to take us home. Little-Cathy hugs and kisses him, but then Little-Cathy's mother comes with her angry mouth. Little-Cathy's mother's angry mouth screams a lot at Little-Cathy's Daddy because Little-Cathy's mother screams a lot when she is angry. Little-Cathy's mother is angry lots after we come out of the hospital and her screaming make us cry.*

*Little-Cathy's Daddy doesn't take us back to the cave ever again after our time in hospital. We don't know why but the good thing is that we don't have*

*to see the Cloaks anymore. And we don't have to go to Little-Cathy's grandmother's place on Sundays or any other day. We don't see Little-Cathy's grandmother for a long time; we don't know how long but we're happy because we don't want to see her because she's mean. And we don't have to get hurt on Sundays anymore and we don't have to let the Cloaks do bad things to us.*

Although my mother confirmed that we didn't see my grandmother for several years at one juncture, she would not validate any of my memories. Instead she described an incident in which my grandmother pinched me on the bottom, in response to me pinching her. The story was that my mother had been so outraged at my grandmother's assault on my person that she'd made my father drive her straight home... and as a result our family broke off contact for years. I don't remember the incident my mother describes at all.

## chapter 32

I'm staring at the walls of the room and the walls are boring. It's taking a long time for Kate to come and take us into her office.

I don't really want to see Kate today. The others don't want to either. We're feeling sick and Growly is too. Growly's been feeling sick for days. There's something wrong with him but we don't know what, and he won't say. Growly doesn't usually say much but this time he's not saying anything at all.

Kate's making us wait. I don't want to wait when I'm feeling sick; I think I'm going to throw up. Grownup-Cathy threw up on the weekend. She had a bad pain in her eye which wouldn't go away even when she took tablets to make it go away. Grownup-Cathy went to bed to get rid of the pain, but she couldn't sleep because the pain kept her awake. And she had to get up out of bed to go and be sick, and come back to bed and feel sick in bed, some more. And she did that lots of times.

'Cathy, come on in,' Kate calls out in a big voice.

Pissed-off calls out on the inside, 'About time!' but Kate doesn't hear her.

Grownup-Cathy isn't with us when Kate calls out; she's gone away and I've taken over because no-one else wants to. I go inside Kate's office by myself and I don't like doing that when I feel sick, but I have to because no-one else will. I sit down in Grownup-Cathy's chair and my body starts going away from me and that scares me and I'm worried, because no-one wants to take over because everyone is feeling sick, but then Growly does take over even when he is feeling sick too.

Something really bad is happening to Growly and we're watching from the inside, but we don't know what it is. Growly has his hands over his eyes and he looks really bad because really bad things are happening to him. We don't want to look because we don't want to see what they are, but we do look a little and that makes us want to throw up more. Bad yucky things are happening to Growly and we're scared and Growly's scared and Growly's

really scared and he's really sick and the things happening to him are really, really bad.

Growly is making lots of bad noises and he's getting hurt really badly but none of us can come out to help him because the things that are happening are too bad for any other parts and we're too scared to come out. Growly is all alone like he is all alone in a cave of baddies and the baddies are hurting him all over. And we're watching Growly when we can and we're watching his face and his face is all screwed up and Growly's crying and his eyes are closed and tears are coming out of Growly's closed eyes. When Growly does open his eyes his eyes look dead and Growly's eyes look as if they can't see anything and we get really scared because if Growly's eyes are dead then maybe Growly is dead too.

'Help! Help! Growly's dead!' I cry on the inside but no-one answers me. That's when Growly throws up on the outside; it's good that Growly throws up, because when you throw up it means that you're not dead.

*'Help! Someone help! They're trying to kill Growly!' I call out again. Growly is hurt and blood is coming out from down below Growly, but we can't do anything to help him. None of us can.*

When the memory stopped I became partially aware of my surroundings again, but soon lost contact with the Growly part of me as well as with Sensible. Despite having little idea as to what had been done to Growly, I felt exhausted and was snoring loudly even though I was partially awake. My body was trembling from a combination of the terror and pain that Growly had withstood; my snoring was shaking Kate's office to its foundations.

As I lay gasping in that familiar armchair in Kate's office I realised that Growly had withstood one hell of an onslaught and that if not for the Growly part of me, I would not have survived.

I was just starting to pull myself together, when I was assaulted afresh. I switched back into the Growly part of me as the grimacing agony overwhelmed my adult part. The second assault reached its climax, ended abruptly and I started snoring again.

‘I’m so sorry! ‘I’m so sorry! Please, please forgive me!’ I cry from the inside of Grownup-Cathy, shocked at how mean all of us parts were being to Growly. For the very first time, I can understand what Kate has been trying to tell us all. She’s been saying that Growly had risked his life to save us and she was right. Growly is a hero and instead of pushing him away and being mean to him we needed to be kind and look after him. We do need to embrace Growly after all.

‘We didn’t know!’ I shout out loud to Kate and I mean it.

As Sensible started to appreciate the gravity of what Growly had withstood so too did I. Growly had been repeatedly tortured within an inch of his life. I hadn’t ever fully grasped the depth of Growly’s experiences; the full brunt of those memories hadn’t surfaced before. But I had known about other times when the Growly part of us had taken the brunt of our abuse; it had suited me to ostracise the Growly part rather than to acknowledge it. There were many aspects of his personality and behaviour that I didn’t want to accept and internalise as my own. Not only had Growly perpetrated acts which I would rather deny, but he also exhibited characteristics which I preferred not to acknowledge.

I feel bad that I had called Growly yucky and smelly. If Growly had been yucky and smelly he had only been like that because of the things that had been done to him. And I had stood by while the other parts were mean and nasty to Growly and I hadn’t tried to stop them. I had let them keep Growly in a cage inside our head, and joined them in leaving him all alone, like when he had to be all alone when the baddies were hurting him.

As I accepted Growly’s suffering as part of our experience, I was overcome with remorse at my lack of compassion. As I reflected on what Growly had done to save us, I considered all of the other parts which had appeared mean at different times, as if they wanted to hurt us. And appreciated that the ‘mean’ and ‘bad’ behaviour of others on the inside was their way of dealing with the pain and the hurt and the ‘mean’ or ‘bad’ of their childhood experiences. After eight years of therapy, it finally twigged that none of the acts any of us perpetrated in that cave had been our fault. We had not been given any choice. Even when we did bad and sometimes terrible things, we were children under mortal threat. We were not bad and never had been. The Cloaks had been the bad ones.

‘But what about the Little-Ones? What if Growly hurts The-Little-Ones?’



Long-Suffering was expressing a fear which many of the inside parts had held for a long time, a conviction that Growly couldn't be trusted and that if we stopped keeping guard over him, that he would hurt us all and especially The-Little-Ones.

'What if Growly hurts The-Little-Ones?'

'No, Long-Suffering, Growly is not going to hurt The-Little-Ones. Growly is not going to hurt anyone. Growly saved and protected us all. We should be grateful to him!'

'But how can you know that for sure, Sensible? What if you're wrong?'

I want to answer, but I can't. What if Distrustful is right? How could I be sure that Growly wouldn't hurt us?

As Sensible's head clicked into a familiar cycle of mistrust and judgement, I struggled yet to unpick the messages which had been implanted into our psyche years earlier. As years of terror distorted our ability to think, we were sucked back into the poisonous indoctrination we had received at the hands of Cloaks.

Growly's snoring makes me come back out. I look out at him and am able to see him clearly; he looks like someone who has been badly beaten.

'Why didn't you tell us?' I shout. 'Why didn't you let us know?'

Growly shakes his head and looks away; I can see that he has tears in his eyes.

'Look what he had to do!' I shout to the others.

'But how do you know Growly won't hurt us? Long-Suffering's voice shudders. When I see how scared Long-Suffering is, I get confused and I don't know what to think. We've all been scared of Growly for a long time and it's hard to let go of that fear.

'Cathy, sometimes you have trouble being compassionate, don't you? One minute you're feeling sorry for what Growly experienced and the next you're being harsh and rejecting him.' Kate's voice cut me to the quick. 'Why don't you put your arm around him?'

I screw up my face. The thought of putting my arm around Growly makes me sick. Growly is smelly and yucky and I don't want to put my arm around him. The others are watching me and as I move away from Growly, the others follow my lead and they move away from him too.

'But I don't know who or where he is. He is not part of us. We're watching him from a place which is a long way away. How are we going to find him?'

‘I think the others will be able to tell you where he is.’

‘No, they don’t know.’ I reply angrily.

I hate Growly and I want to scream at Kate: ‘If you love Growly so much, you put your arms around him! You take him home!’

The internal battle to accept Growly paralysed me for months. Accepting the less appealing parts of our ‘self ‘ caused an inner tussle which challenged the fixed messages of our indoctrination. As children, we hadn’t had the tools to analyse the methods the Cloaks used to intimidate us, but their frequent threats had taken their toll. Much has been written about cults and the methods they use to brainwash people. Suffice it to say that the cult’s manipulative methods rendered me subservient, befuddled, self-hating and self-destructive. Reclaiming my mind after the members of the cult had systematically commandeered it, required a massive wrangle.

Every human being has parts of themselves that they find difficult to accept, parts they don’t like or feel proud of, as well as behaviours which scare, or shame them. In my case, those parts were distinct entities and some of those entities were responsible for past behaviours which seriously challenged my belief systems. It took a long time to accept all of those parts of myself and integrate them into a single being. In one respect it had been convenient to be able to externalise aspects of behaviours I didn’t like. Accepting Growly meant accepting a part of me which I found aversive. And it meant absorbing the shame and the hurt and the pain and the guilt of being Growly and all of the acts he had been forced to perpetrate. Before I could fully accept Growly, all of the parts had to do accept him, including Sensible.

‘Come here Growly. Let me help you. You look sore and sad.’

Growly opens one eye and he looks confused. Then he starts to cry and I mean really cry. I think it’s because no-one has ever offered to help him before. And as Growly cries, I do too and Grownup-Cathy comes out and she cries too and for once the tears come out of all of our eyes.

I reach out my hand and touch Growly and he isn’t yucky or scary at all; he feels just like a little girl who is just like me.

‘Growly, let me put my arms around you, so that I can make you warm.’

Growly pulls away.


‘It’s okay Growly. I’m not going to hurt you. Growly reaches out his hand and I take hold of it. We sit holding hands together and it feels amazing because we’ve never done that before. And soon Growly’s hand doesn’t feel as cold as it first did. I help Growly take his clothes off and I give him a nice warm bath, but I don’t put salt in the bath because I don’t want to hurt Growly. He’s been hurt way too much already. And I sit on the edge of the bath and hold Growly’s hand as he sits in the warm bath. I put a warm washer on his sore bits and he smiles at me.

Since that day Growly and I have spent lots of time together and we’re getting to be friends. Growly is funny and he makes me laugh and he’s not smelly or yucky or mean or bad at all.

Like Sensible I’m embracing Growly now too and I’m feeling so much richer for being able to do so. I’m embracing lots of parts of myself and gradually, ever so slowly, other parts are coming forward and introducing themselves. And as they get to know one another they’re embracing each other and they’re learning to embrace Growly too. As all of the different parts of us come together and start to accept one another, we are feeling much more peaceful on the inside. Life is looking up and we don’t need to go to The Gap anymore. We don’t even think about going to The Gap. We have far too much to live for and far too much to do and enjoy, to ever throw any part of us away.

We are finally accepting those parts of which we were ashamed, because now we understand that they were brave and only did what they had to do under duress. They were heroes who saved us all. On one level we’re all heroes because we survived things which many people don’t survive. Not only have we survived, but we have grown and developed and now we have a world which is waiting for us...a world in which there is a lot to embrace, not just Growly!

It’s late and all of the others are asleep but not Growly and me. We’re getting to know each other and we’re getting to be close. We’re even talking about joining together, because after we get back together, Grownup-Cathy will be able to go back to being just Cathy like she was meant to be before all of those bad things happened to her. And before any of us had to be born...



parting thoughts

Innocence.

I wish I was a fairy princess with gold hair and a pink lacy dress and sparkly wings, because when I am a fairy princess I can live right up in the sky in fairy floss clouds. And fairy floss clouds go higher up than I can reach when I stand on my tippy-toes and stretch my arms up as high as they will go and further. When I'm inside my fairy floss clouds I don't get scared, not ever because there are no monsters and no evil witch mothers in fairy floss clouds.

That's because fairy floss clouds let go when evil witch mothers lie down on them and when the clouds let go, the evil witch mothers fall down to the ground and they hurt themselves, and then they can't fly and hurt anybody like me ever again. And when I brush my gold hair with my magic fairy princess brush, I can make it go long and grow down to the ground. And fairy princesses who are getting hurt by baddies can grab onto my hair and they can climb up to the fairy floss clouds and the fairy floss clouds keep them safe. But if any baddies climb up, my hair breaks off and the baddies fall down and hurt themselves.

I want to stay in the fairy floss clouds with the other fairy princesses forever and ever.

I never was a fairy princess; nor were fairy floss clouds a feature of my childhood.

Over the last ten years I didn't recover many happy memories and none that I'd describe as magical. I haven't had any new memories for a year now and hope that there won't be any more. This moratorium has allowed me to enter a new era in which the past no longer dominates my everyday existence. That's not to say that I'm over my abuse; I don't believe that anyone ever fully 'heals' from childhood trauma. However I do believe that eventually you can reach a degree of acceptance, contentment and inner calm and a genuine sense of hope and wellbeing.

I still confront aspects of what happened to me, regularly. When I least expect it, a random trigger can re-ignite feelings or sensations from my childhood and the frightened little girl emerges afresh. But now I know almost instantly what's happening and can reassure that little girl and care

for her as she so richly deserves. And when I do, the feelings don't last for long and I can soon return to enjoying my day.

I will never be able to fill all of the gaps of those ten forgotten childhood years. It took me a long time to accept that; I railed against it, against the fact of it and the injustice of it. It's difficult to accept that aspects of your life will remain a mystery forever. While the concept of 'forgotten' memories and their subsequent recall is inaccessible to some, evidence for this phenomenon is mounting. More research studies in relation to 'memory', repression and dissociation are being conducted all the time and these are adding to the knowledge base in this area.

For a long time I searched for irrefutable validation for my memories, grabbing snippets of evidence which, although initially reassuring, invariably fell short. I eventually relinquished my search for concrete proof and accepted that Kate's bearing witness to my experiences in sessions provided validation in itself. I also stopped searching for validation from the people whose own defence mechanisms would never allow them to provide any.

To me the process of 'repression' or the 'pushing down' of horrid feelings and thoughts into the subconscious mind makes perfect sense. What better internal protection could there be for a child's psyche than to 'remove' noxious threats from conscious memory? How ingenious! Of course I not only repressed my memories, but I also 'dissociated' or 'disconnected' experiences, feelings and sensations from one another.

While we know that the processes involved in acquiring and storing memory are complex our comprehension of these processes is in its infancy. What we do know, is that all memory is subject to distortion. Interestingly, studies show that recovered memory is no more at risk of distortion than memory which has always been accessible to recall.

My memory has undoubtedly been affected by the passage of time, like anyone else's; some of the events I described might not have happened as depicted. In particular those retrieved from a young age are open to question as they are the interpretations of a child and a terrified child at that. In addition I was undoubtedly subjected to the 'brain washing' and manipulatory techniques of a sophisticated cult. Much of what the Cloaks did was designed to confuse, destabilise and control its child victims. I suspect I was drugged and intentionally duped and my narrative is my interpretation of horrors from within that state of mind, horrors for which

no child even has the language. Some of the story may represent a metaphor for events rather than an accurate depiction of them. Similarly others could be representations of activities or conglomerates of several acts, superimposed onto each another.

I do not; however, believe that the thrust of my story relies on the specifics of what did and didn't happen. Mine is a complex story, featuring an array of experiences which support the veracity of one another by their very nature. Whether every one of the events described happened, or didn't happen, as a child, I fully believed them and the feelings and sensations they evoked were intense and real. They are consistent in their tone and when considered in context, collectively explain my patterns of behaviour and the moods and outlook on life which accompanied them.

For a long time I sought to deny my memories because many of them seemed too far-fetched to accept. But the more I tried to deny their existence, the more they hounded me and the worse I felt. I've not written this book to shock or scare people. Nor have I tried to sensationalise the abuse I experienced. A lot of what I've written is difficult to read and I've omitted a lot of the graphic detail for that reason. There are some memories which I haven't even committed to paper; they were not worthy of being acknowledged as writing them would give them an authenticity that they do not deserve.

I'm aware of how hard it is to imagine that such things can and do happen in our community and especially in our homes. However, I want to make the point that victims such as myself have not only heard about such acts, but withstood them; as young innocent children.

Stories of abuse are so confronting that some people would rather discount them than countenance their possibility. Many people would rather pretend that shocking abuses and torturous betrayals don't occur and that if they do, then never in our society.

The sad reality is that many children continue to suffer serious abuse and neglect in secret under our very noses.

The more people who accept the harsh realities of abuse, the more chance we, as communities and as a society, have to prevent it. If I've achieved anything in telling my story, it is to chip away at the ignorance, resistance and denial which foster the conditions in which abuse flourishes. All one needs to do is step into the shoes of a young child of three, or four, or five, a child who's too young to understand what rape, sexual assault or

domestic violence are. A child who is alone and scared, who is told constantly how stupid and worthless they are, who is starved and beaten, ignored and humiliated and who has no-one to turn to for help, support or succour.

As each of us grows and develops we internalise our childhood experiences and the lessons those experiences bring. When we've been abused we internalise a sense of worthlessness. We feel unsafe and alone, exposed and unprotected, betrayed and helpless. Abuse can affect every aspect of a child's development and severely impact the adult that child becomes. My childhood prevented me from being the person I would have otherwise become. I spent a lot of my childhood struggling to survive a cruel world ruled by fear and harm. I unconsciously adopted a set of defences which proved ingenious enough to save me. However in so doing, they sabotaged my natural personality and imposed on it a set of defences which were not as constructive for an adult as they were for an abused child.

I had to learn to change my reactions to better suit my adult life, and let many of those defence mechanisms go. But first I had to let myself be vulnerable. The process gained momentum and soon I became so vulnerable that I 'broke down' completely. Once broken, I was forced to acknowledge the mask I'd been presenting to the world and dismantle it. In the process I was obliged to identify all of the internal parts of myself and accept them. Once I'd accepted them I could gather the fragments of my 'true self' together and reconstruct a 'new self' from what remained.

I'm fortunate that I didn't turn to drugs or alcohol or intentionally cause myself any lasting damage. For those who haven't experienced any desire to self-harm, the concept of hurting oneself is repellent. Self harm is never to be condoned; however, the drive to practice it can be understood. The act of being abused forces a person to relinquish all control over their own being. Hurting yourself, can make you feel back in control, albeit temporarily and by default.

I was lucky that when I was at risk, I had a therapist with the skill, patience and determination to stand alongside me and help me contain my angst. Kate's belief in me and the relationship of trust she fostered, were crucial to my survival. She kept me safe against all odds and her non-judgmental empathy allowed me to work through the shame which conspired to sabotage my sense of self worth.



I still see Kate every week, though not nearly as often as I once did. These days I'm rarely in crisis mode, recovering memories or dissociated when I see her. Rather than exploring the past, we discuss issues of the here and now and analyse ways in which I might best approach them. As a child I rarely had access to a 'thinking adult' as Kate puts it, a person who could help me interpret and process the things which were impacting me. I spent a lot of my childhood anxiously anticipating what would happen next, without being able to influence those events or the ways they affected me.

It took me a long time to trust Kate. I'd been badly betrayed from a young age by the very people I should have been able to trust the most. In the first few years of therapy the moment I left Kate's office I'd lose all connection with her; I couldn't keep her in mind as I had no model for doing so from my own life. My mother had never been able to keep me in mind; she'd always chosen to look after herself instead. My mother couldn't give me the unconditional love every human being deserves. I'm sad about that; she never was, nor could be, the mother I wished for and eventually I simply had to stop hoping that things could be different.

In reflecting on my mother's patterns, I have thought about her decision to return to her Jewish roots in Sydney after my father died. She didn't consider how confusing our new identity might be for Simon and me, especially without the grounding to go with it! My religious upbringing had always been unconventional to say the least. As a young child in Queensland I was sent to Baptist Sunday school and Christian summer camp, the teachings of which were mocked by my mother on my return home. My father was an atheist in direct contrast to my grandmother, an ardent Presbyterian. And then when I was fourteen, my mother declared the family to be Jewish and expected us to embrace our new identity; though never publicly. She, like some Holocaust survivors, feared that celebrating one's Judaism might attract untoward attention and a repetition of the sort of anti-Semitic feeling that had cost her, her family.

In moving to Sydney and severing all ties with our past, my mother was reliving her childhood and casting off one identity to adopt another. However the process was destabilising for Simon and me; we didn't have the tools or support to deal with it. Simon tried to join a Jewish clique at Uni but was ostracised and excluded and for him that was one trauma too many given recent events. He acted out using alcohol, drugs and adrenaline-charged oblivion; self-destructive behaviours which dominated his late

teens and much of his twenties. Even now in his late fifties he lives an unconventional life, which allows him to run from his pain and avoid dealing with it, in a more deliberate way.

I have chosen a different path of psychotherapeutic exploration. Although my journey was never focussed on recovering memories, the memories I did recover provided the framework for my therapeutic journey. As I joined the dots of my past and accepted the reasons for certain reactions and behaviours, I felt more remote from my brother. Our paths continue to diverge and that saddens me. He lives for the moment, eschewing past experiences and often denying the future as well. The loss of the potential for our relationship is another tragic legacy we are each obliged to endure. Although I understand the reasons for the rift between us, I wish it could be different; I fear though, that it may never be.

My brother sees my mother a few times a year and keeps in touch with her by phone. I can't see her, but I don't discourage my kids from maintaining contact; she is their grandmother and she loves them in her own way. My children have observed the relationships within their extended family deteriorate, and for a long time they couldn't understand the reasons. I couldn't explain what was happening to them until I had processed it myself. This book, although devastating for them to read, along with the discussions our family has had about it, has given them a lot of insight. But it hasn't been easy. In some ways, my story has left my children in an invidious position. Within a family of divided loyalties, conflicted emotions and ambivalent feelings, each of my children needs to reach their own conclusions as best they can.

For the first seven years of my therapy I was unaware that my mind was split into parts. I realised that I spaced out, but didn't appreciate the extent of it. Yet even after I became aware of my parts I struggled to deal with the intense and often aversive feelings they carried. The tension between the parts inside my mind as well as the parts' intolerance of one another's experiences took several years to fathom. All the parts were fearful and suffering and yet the disparate manifestations of their experiences kept them at odds for a long time. Sometimes the pain they felt drove me to The Gap. I wanted to be free of it, of Little-Cathy's pain and that of Sensible and Long-Suffering and even that of Growly.

For a long time my pain blocked my ability to enjoy myself and prevented me from being able to hold onto any of the positive feelings I did

experience. And with the pain came an explosive anger, born of suffering and of helplessness, of powerlessness and isolation and of innocence cruelly snatched away. That anger drove me to The Gap time and again and forced Kate to reiterate repeatedly how jumping would not solve anything. She stressed that if I tried to get rid of one part, that all of the parts would perish with me along with it. I didn't really want to die and I definitely didn't want Little-Cathy to die. Everything I'd ever done was to protect Little-Cathy as I wished I'd been protected.

I can sit back now and reflect on the process of integration, but at the time I was split into distinct parts, the thought of integration terrified me. The parts inside me reeled against losing their individual identities through joining together. At first they felt as though they were being annihilated, but over time they accepted that their reason for being, protecting Little-Cathy, no longer existed. She was finally safe.

Many of the different parts have since joined together and become part of me. They have accepted their differences and accepted one another, even the parts which at first seemed the scariest.

The scariest parts were the ones which were forced to perpetrate the most horrible of the acts. As I re-experienced each act I struggled to believe that I was only five, six, seven and eight when I was subjected to them. A part of me believed that I should have been able to fight back against the Cloaks and resist their commands. Kate instructed me to observe young children at play to help me acknowledge how little they are. She asked me whether I honestly felt they would be able to stop a group of sadistic adults from abusing and torturing them. On the one hand I knew how absurd I was to judge myself so harshly, but on the other it took me a long time to forgive myself for not having fought back against my assailants.

The Cloaks had made all of the parts inside me believe that they were bad and I internalised those feelings and felt unworthy and bad. I was also terrified of talking about the things I'd done. I had been brainwashed to believe that if I (or any of my parts) ever revealed what had happened in the cave, that the Cloaks somehow would know about it and would punish me for it. After all, my parts had learnt first-hand how Cloaks punished people and that knowledge ensured that none of us would betray the Cloaks easily. No-one wanted to get chopped up like their friend Jenny.

I was petrified when my memories of the Cloaks started emerging. The cult had used an array of techniques to ensure my compliance within the

cult as well as my silence, outside of it. Some cults actively train children to dissociate. I don't know whether I was trained or not, or how many of the acts I believed had been fabricated.

There were also occasions during my recovery in which I imagined that Kate was one of the Cloaks, or indeed working for them. The messages the Cloaks had made me believe as a young child caused me to be so paranoid, even years later, that I stopped trusting the very person I trusted the most. On occasion during those months the phone would ring or the buzzer would sound and I'd be convinced that one of the Cloaks was coming to get me. Such was the degree to which they had controlled, terrified and disempowered me. Their ingrained messages guaranteed my silence for decades.

It was horrid facing the dreadful things the Cloaks forced me to do. Part of their indoctrination was designed to make me feel bad and for years I hated myself; I hated myself so much that I almost destroyed myself. It took a long time for me to put the shame and blame back where it belonged, so that I could finally move on.

For a number of years I've been volunteering for a charity which helps adult survivors of child abuse deal with the impact of their abuse. There's nothing unique about an individual using a personal legacy to drive a passion for a cause. If I can't change my past, I can certainly change my future and hopefully the life's course of some fellow survivors as well. Perhaps I can turn the legacy of my abuse into positive action and ensure that my suffering wasn't completely in vain.

My journey of recovery has been long and fraught. I often felt like giving up, but I'm so glad that I didn't. Life is too precious to be thrown away and no matter how desolate one feels, life can and does improve; it's simply a matter of holding on through the worst of it until you come out on the other side. Every survivor has been granted the gift of life, not once, or twice but over and over again. It's a gift that deserves to be celebrated.

And survivors deserve to be proud of what they've achieved. They have survived under the very worst of circumstances; when they were young and innocent and trusting. It takes a lot of strength for a child to withstand the insults or onslaughts of adults. Survivors deserve to be admired, for they did survive when many others couldn't.

Had I not consistently received the right support, I would not be alive to tell my story. It's tragic to imagine how many people have not survived for

lack of the right support. I sure came close. It's not an easy road; many survivors struggle from day to day with the simplest of tasks that others take for granted. How many amazing people could society have helped, had someone listened or offered a helping hand? How much more compassionate would we as a society be, if we were to embrace our most vulnerable members?

When children don't get their needs met, they try to satisfy their needs in other ways. Sometimes those ways aren't constructive; especially in adulthood. Relationships fail and employment and educational opportunities are lost. And the pain survivors feel can cause addictions, self harm and suicidal thoughts. Mental and physical illness, brushes with the law... the possible effects are manifold.

Society's pervasive view is that adults should be able to look after themselves; they should stop whinging and get over it. If only that were the case! You can't just 'get over it' when you've been abused because you don't know how to. The abuse you suffered lives on in the present and it affects the way you think, the way you react and how you behave. Worst of all it sabotages the way you feel about yourself.

Abuse makes you feel worthless and those feelings of worthlessness become ingrained. Your self esteem plummets and you feel ashamed and powerless. You had no say in what happened to you. Your personal boundaries were shattered, your innocence stolen and your sense of self, exploded. When you're betrayed by the very people who are meant to care for you and protect you, the world becomes dangerous and you stop trusting anybody. You learn to withdraw and hide away until isolation becomes a way of being.

Child abuse dismantles a child's inner core at a time when it is only beginning to take shape. Without a strong core you can't feel confident, content or empowered. Child victims are made to feel guilty and ashamed. They blame themselves and they live in fear of being abused again, of not being looked after and of experiencing even more emotional and physical pain. Children who are abused often feel isolated and alone, as if there is no-one to turn to, or trust. Adult survivors often feel the same way. Abuse is isolating. It can alienate a person from those who might be able to help and from the community in which they live.

By some measures I'm a 'lucky' survivor. Not only do I have a loving family around me, but I have some very special friends, friends who've

stood by me through thick and thin. Friends who've rung me when I couldn't ring them; friends who've come and taken me out when I would have stayed hidden in bed left to my own devices. I've also been lucky to be financially comfortable, to be able to afford help for as long as I needed it. And I was lucky with my therapist too. To find someone with the skill, empathy and endurance to walk alongside me for so many years has been fortuitous to say the least. These are privileges that few survivors enjoy.

Despite my advantages, I've still had one hell of a time. I wouldn't wish my experiences on anyone. I still struggle; there are times I still feel especially alone and alienated. Some of it is the human condition and the rest undoubtedly stems from my experiences. It's hard because on some level I'm different and always will be. Yet I've also been given the opportunity to explore myself and understand myself much more deeply than most.

For the first time in years I am filled with a sense of hope and quiet enthusiasm. Prior to starting therapy I was fiercely goal-driven. I worked compulsively to dispense with tasks as they arose, but rarely stopped to 'smell the roses'. I was oblivious to much of what was happening around me. I appeared successful and by the usual societal measures I was. However I felt empty on the inside. I didn't know how to nurture myself; I hadn't learnt because I hadn't been nurtured consistently before. I rarely felt grounded and felt emotionally detached from myself as well as from those around me. For a long time I wouldn't risk getting too close to anybody because doing so would mean putting myself at risk all over again and I wasn't prepared to do that.

I was a successful doctor dispensing advice and wisdom and yet I had little insight. Worst of all, I had no ability to sit back and reflect on what I was doing. I would react to situations as if by reflex and lacked the capacity to consider my responses and make choices about my behaviour. My patterns of behaviour were so ingrained that I had little inkling that life could be lived differently.

When I was in the thick of recovering memories and the processing that followed, I struggled to survive day to day. The past overwhelmed the present and was often so compelling, that the present almost ceased to exist. And as for the future, I couldn't even imagine one. I was unable to plan even the simplest of activities; to me there didn't appear to be a future. I was depressed, anxious and often seriously out of it. The acts perpetrated on

me made me a victim and I remained a victim long after the abuse ended. Letting go of being defined solely as a victim has been an important step for me. I was a victim and I became a survivor but my abuse is only one part of me.

As my separate parts showed me, I have lots of aspects to my personality. Accepting them has allowed me to reclaim much of myself. As I've integrated the parts I've grown stronger and developed a right to have my own thoughts and feelings and claim a personality that is distinctively mine.

I don't imagine my journey is finished. There's still a way to go no doubt, yet I know that I've come a long way. The good news is that I can now engage with my life in the present and envisage a future. Now I'm not only anticipating a future, but actively planning all sorts of things. I've learnt that I can sit back and think things through. I have the right to choose whatever I want and once chosen I can embrace my choices and celebrate them. I have many things I want to do; writing this book and others, travelling, exploring, dancing, reading, music, theatre, films... the list goes on. But whatever I choose to do, I am thrilled that I can choose and revel in those choices.

I'm particularly enjoying watching my, now adult, children achieve greater independence. They've had a lot to work through, but together and with outside support they have come a long way. It's been hard on them, watching me struggle and more recently, reading my story. It's been very confronting for them and will be when others read it as well. I deliberated long and hard about whether I should publish this book as I was concerned about how it would affect them. I'm still worried about how they'll cope, but they have given me their blessing and so I am proceeding.

I know the damage that family secrets can cause and even though much of what I've written is hard for them, I am convinced that not saying will hurt them more. I hope I'm right. My process of recovery has certainly brought a new level of understanding to the family. We can discuss things much more openly than ever before and be aware of one another's needs in a far more constructive way.

I'm grateful that through my process of recovery I am becoming more available to my husband and children and their needs. And that now I have the insight and the patience to be available to them in a far more constructive way than before. I can sit beside them when they are in pain

and be there in a way which I never experienced myself. I am grateful that we, as a family have survived stronger than ever and we have many more good years to share - my children are my proudest achievement!

As my children deal with the impact of my issues and their own, I want them to know that I will be there for them as much and maybe even a little more than they would hope for. I'm proud that I've broken the cycle of abuse into which I was born. For my children will be the first generation in our family to have broken free from the scourge of abusive silence.

As I emerge from my personal holocaust into the light of a new day, I gaze across at the dawning of the next phase of my life and I am truly blessed.



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