

Thirteen

Revived

Jonny Newell

Published by Jonny Newell

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Thirteen

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Dedication

I dedicate this series of short stories to all those who have supported me over the years. Just to be believed in, is so more important. That is what makes your heart and soul strong and the desire to keep writing.

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge and credit friend and photographer - Shelley Ennis for her eerie shot of me at a gig I was playing in Brisbane Australia. I would only guess this was taken right in the middle of us belting out Nirvana's - 'Teen Spirit'. I know I used to lean over and roll my eyes at the crowd, in a psychotic sort of look, and then pull a devilish grin. As soon as I saw this pic and its strength, I knew it was the cover and with her permission, it now is!

Thank you, Shelley.

2014 Introduction

Welcome readers to my anthology - **Thirteen** which contains short stories, poems, and lyrics. The poems and lyrics in this book usually did inspire these stories but sometimes the odd one i.e. Second Chance, was the complete opposite.

I hope you enjoy these short tales and please feel free to review my words at where you purchased this book, as any others of mine you may have read as reviews help the author.

'Til next time we meet in the darkness

Jonny

2020 additional notes

In a year of uncertainty and change we all have had time to reflect on the roads we've taken and the mistakes we have made through the years - this book was no exception! Being written way back in 2015, it was still my very early days of writing. Never since high school had I ever contemplated being an author. Of course, the New World with its multi-media and do-it-yourself approach to publication excited me and has made this possible for me (and millions out there) to create, share, and sell our publications. When I completed my 1st anthology, my

excitement had me upload it ASAP and I was away; I was an author!

This anthology - **Thirteen**, continues to be one of my most sort-after eBooks (which I am very thankful for) but yes, of course there's always a - 'but'! And it simply wasn't up to my current expectations and writing skills! It was filled with terrible grammar as very questionable and inconsistent styles. I cringed when I started looking through and rereading parts of it, and only recently in this year 2020. So as I (like the majority of you all) have been forced to stay home during this Zombie-like Apocalypse we face, and was going nowhere. So I knew it was time to do it! So, here it is – stories revamped, restyled, improved, and with grammar checks (bet you still find some) to an acceptable standard and with a few extra pre-written stories from my 'Darkness' books (revised as well) thrown in for all that choose this eBook from this day forward.

Hopefully now, first impressions will reflect a true indication of who and where Jonny Newell - the author, actually stands in time.

Please enjoy the stories and poems/lyrics as that is the one thing I am proud of after all this time. I still love them and the imagination and where they originally came from; a deep dark and very weird place encased within my black humor! Feel free to share this free eBook on my behalf and stay safe.

Jonny 2020

Won't Fool Me

Words are blurring from a bunch of lies

World's been slipping like a water ride

Ain't no picture with a pretty side!

Mouth's been bleeding from this bitter wine

Try this 'n' try that ... but you can't fool me!

Say this 'n' say that ... but you won't fool me!

Times a healing? Well, that's not quite right!

Is chaos deciding time to exit the flight?

Ain't no song with good ol' loving pride!

Your heart's just aching, accepting a bribe

Try this 'n' try that ... but you can't fool me!

Say this 'n' say that ... but you won't fool me!

You can blame the Devil, so blame the Devil

It ain't gonna change a thing

When you expect, the best from the worst of sins?

You can pray to Jesus, so pray to Jesus

It ain't gonna fix this thing!

So accept the truth as your world caves in

Try this 'n' try that ... but you can't fool me!

Say this 'n' say that ... but you won't fool me!

Eyes are burning, no sleep tonight

With all this racing when you close your eyes

No rest for the wicked, for you to decide

Is your heart now aching, as we die inside?

Try this 'n' try that ... but you can't fool me!

Say this and say that ... but you won't fool me!

Cry this 'n' cry that ... but you can't fool me!

Stray this 'n' stray that ... but you won't fool me!

You won't fool me!

No, you won't fool me!

Stroke Me

Awaken

“Stop, stop it, stop fucking licking me ... fucking cat!” I thought I screamed but it was only in my mind. Then it dawned on me, I was lying on my kitchen floor, why? The last thing I remembered was I was making a cup of tea before my head exploded and the world drifted from me. As my mind awoke I looked around and tried to stand but I was motionless and accepted I had had a stroke. As I opened my groggy eyes little by little to the realization I was alone except my son’s cat – Wilbur. My son’s bastard ginger cat who was sitting directly in front of me ... and was he smirking? Wilbur meowed in that horrible scraggly tone of his as his tail flicked slowly from one side to the other. I tried my best to move but I felt trapped as my body refused any normal brain instructions. Wilbur was just looking at me as if he knew I was paralyzed and making the most of it. I couldn’t move, scream, or even whisper for that matter and it was obvious, I desperately needed help. All I could do was nothing so I lay there looking at Wilbur the Cheshire cat, as he sat sneering at my misfortune.

Timing – it’s all about timing and here I was fucked because of it. It was me who insisted on whats-her-name to take the boys to the snow early, I at least remembered that! She didn’t want to go without me but my usual persisting nature had left her no choice really and so now I paid the price for staying back just to stay and work for another day. And now the sick joke was on me, for I had no idea at all what I actually did for a living? My head was foggy and most of what I could remember was all blurred into fragments of time and random memories. If only I could remember something, anything about strokes (or my life for that matter) but all I could grasp was the vaguest memory about strokes, was that if I was one of the lucky ones (and since my heart rate felt relatively normal) to keep my spirit high by believing I was one of the luckier ones and that I should regain some movement and feeling on one side first. I had no choice but to wait out this nightmare.

*

I hate you

The cat was still here and his head was now cocked as I blinked. Did Wilbur know something I didn't? They say animals sense things that humans don't, like - the constant howling of dogs when someone dies or sensing if they liked you or not. Wilbur had a definite grin and it looked evil to me with those glistening eyes staring through my soul. I always hated the bastard - dirty stinky fucking feline! When Toby, our 12-year-old Rottie died, the wife (why can't I remember her name yet I can the dog's) insisted we go to the Animal Rescue and adopt a new dog but as soon as we walked in Adam (and all at the age of 9 ... yes, it was definitely Adam) took one look as we passed the cat cage and stopped dead in front this mongrel thing,

"I want him, Mum." I hated him instantly and he hated me. Wilbur could sense I wasn't a cat person and scratched me when I went to stroke him but it was the wife who talked me into it,

"C'mon Carl," *'Fuck, that's right, my name is Carl!'* Carl the cat-hating Ingram, "... you agreed you'd let Adam pick." I was over-ruled and the stinky fucking flea-bag was coming home.

A couple of hours passed and still, I was trapped inside my shell of a body and the outside rays of the sun were diminishing quickly. Wilbur was still here but now he was laying down on his side and he was cleaning his every bit of his disgusting self, including his privates. Dirty fucking cats cover themselves in cat-spit and they call that clean, truly? At least a dog gets washed by their owners but cats, oh no! Unless you want your eyes scratched out in the process.

Now I knew it was close to 6:00 pm for sure, as Wilbur was doing his nightly routine of moaning to be fed his sardines and tuna fish scraps from a can. 20 minutes must've passed and the prick was still meowing his freshly licked body off and now he was nudging me.

"Fuck off ... no!" But I could not get the words out as he started licking the inside and out of my left nostril. I felt my tears roll sideways across my face as the right one rolled downwards and over the top of my nose and straight into my open left eye, as I did my best to blink and Wilbur started to lick them from my face. "Fuck off Wilbur!" And I startled him when he heard my voice's low volume mumble which even to me sounded more like a drunk, "Ruff rof rillbba".

"R-R-Rillba" I tried my best to call him but now Wilbur had retreated to his safe distance where I first had seen him, still glaring. The more I mumbled the softer my voice became and then it was all gone again and I was tired. The frustration of the next 15 minutes, summoning all my strength and directing it to my vocal box was pointless; it refused to work! I needed to rest so I closed my eyes and felt the tears.

*

Real world

Wilbur's awful meow woke me around midnight and I recognized it, he needed to go outside (where he spent his nights) as nature was calling. Then I smelt it and it was Wilbur's piss sprayed against the kitchen cabinet and I was now lying in his puddle that drizzled my way. I could just make Wilbur's silhouette from the filtering moonlight and he was restless as he'd finished his rank cabinet spray, demanding to be let out for his nightly prowls. I could admit that my sense of smell had returned so I grasped to the positive from the negative here; my brain was repairing and fast! Still, his smell made my nostrils burn like all Hell and there was no escaping.

"Rirty Rucken Ranmall!" I screamed and this time my garbled voice elevated to a near-normal level and Wilbur scampered off in fear. "Ro crum brack ... Rilbra ron't reave me ... rease." I felt my right hand twitch, as Wilbur left me alone in the darkness of night and I admitted ... I was scared.

I lay there alone thinking and rationalizing my rescue and how long I would need to wait before someone would eventually find me. How long had I actually been down was the other one? A night? A day? Possibly 2? If only I could get to the phone but where was the phone? I had no idea! Did we even have one? I was getting frustrated that all my memories of the fucking flea-bag were perfectly intact, even down to my hatred of him, yet I can't even remember simple things like my job, my wife, the phone's position, time frames or if I would even be missed by anyone.

I did my best as I lay there frozen to collate any memories into some cohesion so I did with the ones I could grab and yet they were all extremely sporadic. I was pretty sure the year was 2000 and it was the turning of the new millennium, as I remembered cutting my 50th birthday cake but not the party and if there was even one? And I was quite sure it this year and that it was possibly the month of December re the family off to the snow. Possibly for our Christmas vacation – snow and Christmas rang alarm bells of something and kept resurfacing in my scattered brain. My son Adam's name was clear in there, but the younger son's name was either Daniel or Damien? I kept changing my mind every time I thought about it. I relived funerals or the burials and coffins and felt it was my parents or maybe it was the sister's if only I could be sure. Memories were scattered but I did my best to reassure myself they would return, so be patient and ready to place them back in the order they belonged.

Sleep came from mental exhaustion and did eventually return for me, then I awoke to the sun directly in my eyes, burning my retinas. I kept them closed as best as I could for an hour or 2 until the bastard raised high enough so its burning rays passed me completely. My fingers on my right hand were able to move freely, twitching and I was starting to feel control. I practiced clenching a piss-weak version of a fist, over and over as my now only physical exercise.

"Meeeoow!" Wilbur was back and he was pacing back and forth quite rapidly; he wanted his food!

"Rorreee Ruddy." It was good to smell his disgusting ginger striped fur as he snuggled against my face because of my voice. "Roo rungru reh?" Did he understand me? Not sure but

he stopped dead and sat in front of my twisted face just as yesterday, cocking his head and undulating his tail. The fucker did his Cheshire grin again. And as quick as he scampered in, he was gone! So once more, I was alone. Was the little fucker torturing me as payback for my hate towards him?

The morning sun was all I had to gauge time on and all I had to occupy my mind that was hitting crazy. I just lay there staring at the cupboards from the kitchen benchtop, studying their woodgrain, searching patterns for anything to take my mind from its entrapment. Wilbur ventured back in still complaining of his first-ever time of being unfed and that he too was trapped inside this fucking Hellhole.

“Ro ruddy, rot re rucken gronna droo?” I asked the cat who just sat staring and meowing at me. The next minute, he came to me and rubbed his head hard on my face, purring and I cried to the comfort.

*

Mobile

The phone rang about midday so at least now I knew we had one! It rang again and again but unless Wilbur could perform some special type of magic, there would be no answering of it today. It finally went to message bank and I heard the incoming voice in the distance; it was Wendy! Yeh, my wife's name is Wendy and she was a tall redhead who wore glasses.

"Hi Honey, just letting you know we got here safe, the roads weren't too bad. The place is nice as always, kids still love it here! We're going snowboarding today, no choice in that matter, then Santa's visiting the resort tonight and then drinkies at the night club ... with you, so hurry up!" Tears welled up and flowed uncontrollably as I sobbed to her voice as I listened intently. "And ... you're in BIG trouble buddy!" Her voice sounded jokingly serious but she was 100% correct as I lay like a dying fish out of water on the cold tiled floor. "I told you to ring me on your mobile and you didn't, did you Mr. Workaholic. No surprise there eh? Haha!" Wendy laughed and I didn't, "Anyway gotta go, Honey, so hurry up and get your butt up here, we all miss you. Life's no fun without Dad and his bad jokes! Love you (kiss kiss)." And Wendy was gone but then in amongst my tears, I realized what she had just said ... *'my mobile'*. My fucking mobile phone was still in my trouser pocket and then it was like my sense of my leg returned and I felt the lump and weight of it!

So I settled my sobbing as best I could to a low whimper. Then I tried my hardest to move my right arm and with my focus on it, I actually moved the fucker from the floor upwards to find its landing position on my side. Returning the fucking thing to where it had just taken me all night to remove it from!

'C'mon you bastard!' I thought but no matter how hard I tried my engine was out of gas again. I would now wait and wait and wait, so I did. But it was pointless; nothing was happening in my arm department at present! So again I simply lay there defeated, crying my watery eyes to the burning. I hated God at that very moment and a million times more than I ever did Wilbur!

*

Nightfall

Nightfall did finally come around for the second time of the longest day of my life and so did the whining hungry cat. I could see Wilbur's water bowl from here and my parched lips wanted water. The bastard cat licked his fill as he had been all day, while I suffered watching with my parched mouth. Thirst was all I was consumed with now and I could see the water-bowl with its plentiful supply, and the cunt of a thing was only an arm and a half's length from my body. God was so fucking cruel!

"Rilbur, Rilbur ... Rum ova rear, russ russ," it worked! The miserable feline came that close to my face that I was able to lick the fresh drool from around his dripping furry mouth and as I licked Wilbur's drool, he decided to join in and started licking the fresh snot that was running from my nose. I could feel his rough tongue inside me, invading my surrendered body. It was the grossest thing in my life to date and yet the most relieving as the droplets of water quenched the desert in my mouth to some minimal degree, even if it was a few droplets of cat mixed water/saliva that I consumed. I closed my eyes feeling a tiny relief as it was so much better than nothing.

The cat was now starving (as I) and he was letting me know vocally, as his too many dinners and breakfasts times had come and passed without a single plateful of his chicken-flavored breakfast bickies, or me opening a single tin of desecrated fish. And he looked pissed if you ask me and his body language was definitely displaying he was very grumpy about it. After an hour he finally stopped in the cat complaint department (after filling his empty stomach with more water) and snuggled next to my chest, where we both slept.

I dreamt of Wendy and the boys in the snow resort and that we all left together and arrived at Mount what's-its-name at the same time, having fun playing in the snow. Making a snowman together, where I did my yearly expected Dad joke of - placing the carrot in the penis area instead of his face. Why did I remember that? Wendy shaking her head as Adam and the other younger one were laughing at my crude dad humor. Yes, they had inherited that from me! But that was where the normality of dream ended.

The dream spun and fast-forwarded to us returning from the fun in the snow to be back at the resort and out for dinner, and to my horror, I could see inside that all employees of the restaurant ... were cats! Cat-humans, all standing and fully dressed in the relevant suitable human winter attire. All were polite and helpful in their disgusting cat-human ways with their long cattails swishing left and right. Cat bar-tenders, cat ski-instructors, and even an overly fat cat chef complete with a white puffy toque on his head and a pencil mustache. Instantly, I wondered how the Hell I remembered a French word. Why was it only me that seemed alarmed by these cat-humans? No one gave a fuck in there re the wrongness of this picture, as if it simply normal. Wendy and the boys were ahead of me as they opened the restaurant door and Wendy was waving her hand rapidly for me to come on in a 'hurry-up dear' motion as I stood frozen. We ventured inside and then greeted by the feline beast. I was just staring at the overly polite cat waitress with her overly large and revealing, womanly fur-covered breasts. Her eyes were heavily baked with bright blue eye-liner ... shitloads but her pupils were those closed arched ones cats get in the daytime and the make-up accentuated her blue cat eyes. I felt myself walk in and sit down, looking this way and that at the freaks of nature, while the other three followed

my lead but as all the other guests here, they were just acting like all was normal. I couldn't stop myself from eye-balling the female cat, and I was making her uneasy. Wendy whacked my leg from under the table and broke my gaze. Her eyes were drilling me and to stop it, immediately! The cat-waitress placed a full bottle of water and four glasses on the table as her tail flicked in my face and I blinked and coughed, as the boys laughed.

"Oh, so sorry Sir," The creature smiled at me but her eyes were of the Devil's, "saving up to have that removed, so much easier." Kitty the waitress as her nametag displayed, pointed to the fat chef and he never had one. We started perusing the menus as the cat waitress meowed and then asked,

"Would you like some drinks before you order? You must be thu-u-u-r-rsty?"

"Two cokes and a glass of red ... do you want a bourbon and dry, Carl?" Wendy asked as she smiled. I did my best to shake all this shit off and read the menu but then I saw the restaurant logo and name – 'Whiskers'.

I tried my best to answer Wendy's question with the words as my parched throat burnt, "Water, just water!" My voice was only a whisper through my teeth but Kitty the waitress heard me even though my mouth refused to open. Kitty placed a cat bowl in front of me and poured water from the bottle into it. Then out of nowhere the bitch creature from Hell pushed my face towards and ordered, "Start licking Sir." I fought hard against her strength but I couldn't break her grip. I glanced sideways and I could see was all the other fathers being forced to do the same by their waitresses. Then the pain hit me hard, I went to the floor. I had had a stroke right then and there in the middle of my own dream, in 'Whiskers' restaurant, amongst the disgusting cat-humans.

"Are you okay Hon?" Wendy's face started to look anxious as the kids did as well, hovering over me. Then I felt myself sink, downwards (in slow motion) through the floor ... or was it the way to Hell? Then a hundred ghost cat hands were outstretched and touching me, pulling me downwards and they were all paws with claws protruding and scratching! Kitty the cat waitress went into emergency mode and started shouting,

"Shit, he's sinking! We need help!" The disgusting cat creatures came rushing from all directions, reaching into my submerging hole grabbing me, so they could pull me back to their reality. The cat-waitress screamed again, "He's not breathing, call an ambulance! We have to do something!" I pleaded with my eyes to Wendy to save me as she stood back and watched, helpless. Kitty the cat-waitress went into CPR procedures and was only inches away from placing her fish-breath lips over my mouth. I wanted so to scream, yet my words refused to leave my frozen body. I tried to refuse as her revolting mouth opened wide, showing me her needle-like cat teeth and her pink and black ribbed roof of her mouth. I could smell her terrible fish breath and I wanted to vomit, but my body refused. I was gagging in my mind as her mouth covered mine and our lips connected ... then it all spun away to nothing; it was just a dream! I awoke to Wilbur licking inside my open dribbling mouth and as an instant reflex, my right arm flicked around and scared the little monster away. I had just fucking well moved my arm ... with one full swing!

Now my chest raced re the night terror and my right arm was pointing towards the kitchen sink at a ninety-degree angle from my body. I held my breath as best as I could to slow my heart rate and not hyperventilate. I waited for 5 minutes and I settled. If only I could control my arm. I tried to move it but the movement was so minimal and frustrating. Defeated, I lay there convincing myself time will heal all as the batteries recharge.

The dream unsettled me and I convinced myself Hell was filled with cats, all shapes, sizes, and breeds. Then my imagination was of the Devil himself as one, all blood-red and furry, sitting there scowling on his throne of fire, pitchfork in hand... and he was waiting for me,

“Carl Ingram, come on down!”

*

Family

Wilbur returned and he was circling frantically, meowing and complaining about something, and then he did it! He had held it in long enough and pooped a steamer right in front of me in the corner of the kitchen. The smell was disgusting and was a cat poo for sure. I admitted dog-shit smells like dogs and cat-shit smells like cats, baby-shit smells like babies and they were easily recognizable, suddenly ... I smelt my own! Had I been oblivious to the fact that I had been lying in human feces for god knows how long or had I just regained my sense of smell? I felt dirty and helpless, embarrassed that when I'm found, the rescuers would be holding their noses and cringing their faces. I could smell it, so they would too! I could feel it there between my buttocks, squashed like a baby's dirty nappy. Wilbur the dirty beast paid no attention to my stink and snuggled into me again before he started to lick his anus clean as I nearly vomited. Not that I'd never seen him do that before, of course, I had! But the smell was too fresh and it was like watching a 3D smellovision version of it on TV. Finally, after he was clean, he could settle and rest, so he did.

The night was silent and my mind refused to shut down as the cat slept like a baby next to me. His purring was so loud yet I could feel his vibrations against my chest and admit it eased my escalating anxiety. Just having him close to me helped me believe I wasn't alone. I hated him and loved him at that very moment for he was all I had. I was nearly asleep when I felt Wilbur sit up to attention. I saw it and so did Wilbur.

A tiny grey field mouse took his sneaky midnight chance and ran through the Russian roulette field of Wilbur. He scampered at a frantic pace to reach the safety of the fridge frame. The hunter was already in action with his silent dominance over the tiny prey, simply waiting at the base of the fridge door. Then Wilbur would move to the side, doing his best to push his outstretched front leg and paw under, clawing at his target to make it run out from its safety. I watched as the cat returned to the front and sat patiently, ready to strike, tail swaying in the moonlight. It had to happen, it was bound to happen. I remembered Wilbur was a heartless killer bringing his trophies to us all the time, whether it be mice, birds, and even once he brought in a dead snake, never to eat but to display his supremacy. The mouse took a chance and made a run for it to the backdoor and the outside safety away from the murderous beast. And as the predator 10 times his size pounced, I watched as intently as possible as the poor creature reacted in a swift and nearly instinctively bad move, and turned direction. But its run to save itself was futile and was with-in his slayer's jaws. The bastard cat was smirking as the mouse panted heavily frozen in his mouth, simply waiting to die, not making a solitary sound. Usually, Wilbur would torment the fuck out of the mouse for hours but this time he brought him within an inch of my face and crunched down hard, as I heard the death-squeal of his latest victim. Wilbur dropped the mouse so it sat between my mouth and his as he fucking smiled again.

"Rie crant ... no Rilbur!" I pleaded to my cat savior but I was too hungry and too thirsty to defy his bloodied offering, so we chewed on the desecrated mouse together. I sucked as much as I could of the creature's blood that spilled on the floor tiles and the warm sickly liquid was absolutely repulsive yet thirst-quenching and eased the parchness. Wilbur chewed and cracked the bones of the dead mouse and he seemed to be pushing bits of the kill into my mouth as a parent bird would do to feed its young. It dawned on me then – this miserable piece of shit

animal, loved and cared for me and instinct had told him, I - his owner and carer, was in deep trouble. So we ate as – family, and I was finally able to let my disgust temporarily vanish to an unknown place and accept the situation as it was - simple survival. It was unspoken words between a man and animal and now we were truly connected. We had pissed, shit, and eaten rodent together; we were blood brothers!

*

With all my heart

I felt my arm regain a little movement – twitches and my brain instructions were returning slowly but my chest hurt. I was able to raise my arm to my side yet again. I did my best to reach into my right pocket as my arm moved ever so shakily and worse, my fingers still had a minimal amount of feeling so I was fingering the inside of my pocket blindly ... but finally, it was there in my hand. Wilbur was asleep next to my chest and it was comforting so I was very careful not to wake him. I struggled through and even that my grip was still weak as piss. I managed to pull the mobile from my trouser pocket and flip it straight to the floor. Which startled Wilbur awake, yet as my terrible grip had dropped the mobile in front of him, he looked at me as if he understood that we both needed this to survive. We were both trapped inside this god-forsaken house with only death awaiting us.

I rested as Wilbur settled checking my hand and arm for slight movement. My heart was racing and I could feel the pounding in my chest intensifying. It was increasing in speed and its timing was erratic! I knew I was close to a heart attack (possibly my second) and the pain was snowballing as the tightness of its belt strapped my ribcage in towards its torture. But I refused to give in, for me, for Wilbur! So I pushed my brain hard to scream commands down to my lifeless right hand!

I managed to flip the mobile over to view the screen light up. My hand was weak and shaking as my pulse rate hit the roof and the pain intensified. But still, I could force my pointer finger aim in the directional vicinity of the numbers. Wilbur was fully awake and sitting up looking at me then looking at the phone. His ginger tail swayed with anticipation as I lifted my hand above the mobile. I could see the mobile was on its last bar of charge and 1% was flashing on the screen, but it was okay ... we only needed to make one call.

“Rill bre ro-kay Ruddy!” As I reassured my new best mate, “Re are grettin’ routa ere reel roon!” I went to dial emergency and it dawned on me, I had forgotten the fucking number! What the fuck was it? I racked my brain! Fuck, what was it? It was so fucking simple was it 666 ... 999? Something told me that they were both wrong, then it came back to me, thank fucking cunt of a god that it did! It was time to save myself and my fucking cat! Then my heart imploded into a world of pain and I was losing my battle of life but my trembling finger hit the keypad.

So as the mobile flashed its last dying charge, I dialed in the 2 numbers.

And it was ... lucky 13

This story also features in Jonny's 'When Darkness Shimmers' – the full anthology collection of his short stories available at all good eBook retailers.

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Smash the Violin

The gloves are off, the bruises show but not a word is spoken

Lost love is such a bitch so cruel shows them your careless emotions

Innocent eyes that saw it all that will never see the same

Only they know their truth inside pray they cannot carry blame

Why break the fiddle when you can smash the violin

Mixed-up little head is cutting all the strings

Why break the fiddle when you can smash the violin

Once it's all over we'll never hear her sing

It was our fight that started out with not even such a scratch

Bitterness and anger shape up, 'Round 2' in an ugly match

Do you cry when it's late at night and never really forget

Damage can be devastating straight after the game is set

Why break the fiddle when you can smash the violin

Mixed-up little head is cutting all the strings

Why break the fiddle when you can smash the violin

Once it's all over we'll never hear him sing

A child's mind is way too young to truly understand

Darkness after separation always comes hand in hand

Why break the fiddles when you can smash the violins

Mixed-up little heads are cutting all the strings

Why break the fiddles when you can smash the violins

Once it's all over we'll never hear them sing

Smash the Violin

Games

“Violet Lyn Pettingrow ... in the car, NOW!”

Yes, that’s my father bellowing his usual overbearing grumpy voice, and why? And not because it’s my fault that Mummy is such a bitch and knows how to push his angry button every time I have to go to his house.

Being 13 years old can be a real bitch too! Especially since Dad and Mum separated over two years ago. But now I just shut my mouth and accept the yelling ... what for? You tell me? But I do know the apology comes right abou-u-u-t!

“Sorry Violet, I didn’t mean to yell at you.” Dad’s eyes were looking pretty sincere as they always do after he chucks a hissy fit over Mummy. I just kept looking downwards, fastened my seatbelt as he started the engine. I could see Mum standing on the porch glaring at him as we drove off and it made me wonder how many times I have gone through this same torturous routine.

“She drives me nuts! You know that, don’t you?” I nodded but never answered as to what was there to say? Surely as an adult, you’d be able to work out when someone was doing things just to drive you crazy? Yet Dad subjected himself to being sucked in by Mummy’s nasty words again and again. And as a child, I can work it out. So sometimes I wonder if he actually wants to be yelled at for being a naughty boy, because he was having that affair with his secretary, and which he thinks I know nothing of.

“Wanna get some Pizza from Joe’s on the way home?” Dad asked and his mood was now calm.

“Yeah alright.” I just kept looking at the trees flying by as we drove along Main Road.

“Pepperoni or Meat-lovers?” He knew what I liked so the question was pointless.

“Whatever.” I knew he was prying just to get me to look him eye to eye but I could play this game so much better than he ever could!

“Garlic Bread?” but I just kept looking out the car window.

“Yeh Dad, that’ll be nice.”

I won.

*

Home

It has been a long year, putting up with them - both (Mum and Dad) fighting constantly (twice as bad as last year, let me tell you) over everything you could think of. The divorce proceedings have finally started and Mum wants it all, and I believe she just wants it because it's Dad's, not because she needs it! She just loves to see Dad squirm like a worm in the sun, forcing him to use his nice voice. She loves making him crawl back in her good books (like a cockroach) before she sweeps him straight back out the door. He'll dust himself off and then run away as always. Yet, as he does, he calls her THAT name, the C one, the one I'm not allowed to use. Before it, all starts over again and repeats.

Where do I live? Mainly at Mummy's which is our old house in Brentridge and spend the weekends at Dad's which is a big poo, because all my stuff is at Mother-dear's so it is boring, boring, boring! Dad loves to watch sports all weekend and I hate it so I usually read a book or listen to my music (in my room) and keep to myself. He used to take me to the movies but now he complains he's too broke because of all his lawyer bills.

Mum kicked Dad out from our house (as if he had a choice to stay – not!), so Dad now rents a two-bedroom unit in Gatesfield. It isn't that bad but he doesn't have much furniture at all and Mum refuses to give him a single item, which even I believe is a little harsh.

But this isn't about them anymore - this is about me! For two long years, I've been putting up with their bickering and fighting and believe they have forgotten about their one and only child – ME! *Hello ... you two have a daughter here!* Dad's always worrying about money and Mum seems obsessed with making Dad miserable reminding him he has no money. My grades have slipped because of them and I have become very, very unhappy. I don't talk to anyone at school and now I'm being bullied on top of putting up with all this crap at home.

*

School

Beth Rudders (the bitch) is who I call my nemesis! If it wasn't for her and her bullying mates, here at Brentridge Public, then my schooling days would be my release and escape from the bitterness of home-life. But she, like a hungry hyena on a dead carcass, has claimed her position as the head-bully and elevated her status by belittling mine. It was only yesterday my bag in class was missing (again), passed from student to student until it was on the opposite side of the classroom – very original? *I don't think so!*

'Brentridge Public' has about 300 students, grades 1 to 7, and I have been attending here for four years now since Mum and Dad bought the house Mum currently lives in. I didn't mind it at first but the years have dragged me down as has my love of this dump. Principal Underwood is a total bitch too and is more worried about the school's image and rating, more than the students that came here.

My form teacher is Mr. Johnson and he is a dick (even I get that joke). He always gives me detention for not doing my math homework, yet he hasn't worked out that (because of my parent's fighting) that I'm behind the rest of the class and not up to scratch with his stupid arithmetic. If he asked me, I would tell him but instead, he treats me like a 'tard and keeps me in during lunch. So I share my lunch breaks with him and have to watch him eat like the pig he is, while I work out equations or try to! It just doesn't bother me anymore as Nasty Beth isn't anywhere near me for a whole hour.

Do I like any of my teachers or the kids here at 'Brentridge'? I don't mind Miss Davis, she was my grade 5 teacher and I remember that as my favorite year at school; I even got an A for science. I did have a friend back then too - Naomi Smith, and Mummy let her sleep over a few times but she moved away far too soon for my liking as her Dad got a new managerial position in another town selling insurance. We used to text each other for the first year ... then that was it.

I've never told Mum or Dad about the bullying at school, just thought they really wouldn't care anyway. Nasty Beth and her followers were simply idiots, so I let her believe she was smarter than me. I may not be that good in math but she will find out exactly how smart I am, soon!

*

Imagination

One thing that no one can ever take away from me is my imagination. It is the one thing that makes me laugh inside. I often picture Nasty Beth meeting Violent Violet in so many different scenarios of pain! My favorite one is her tied up on her bed, screaming for her mother and she's peed her pants. I'm dressed in a ballerina's outfit dancing around her, laughing and waving my knives and now and then I slash her arms or legs to make her scream even more.

I'm always getting in trouble from Mr. Johnson for daydreaming during class when most of the time I'm imagining him in a pigsty with a heap of pigs eating his lunch with him ... and then I come in with a red hot branding iron and brand his back with $8 \times 8 = 64$ times-table. His skin bubbles and he squeals like a pig in pain. Yeah, I get in trouble but I see him so clear - *Oink Oink!* I have another one of him as the student, while I am the teacher yelling at him math problems – 'What is 144 divided by 12? Well, COME ON!' Then as he stammers numbers (incorrectly), I whack him hard with a cat of nine tails (that I've seen used on some old religious movies on the tele), he gets the answer wrong a second time so I whip him even harder and this time blood ... lots of blood!

Even at home I do this. Dinnertime with Mummy is the time I often drift off to – 'Nastyland'. She demands we eat in silence yet she doesn't hear the blood-curdled party that is going on inside my head. I especially love the dream I have of her sitting at the dinner table and there is this big feast of food on the table, like those you see in the movies with the King and the Queen. But in the middle of the table is a silver dome-shaped platter and I offer to serve out the meals, I lift the lid and reveal Dad's head with an apple in his mouth, looking straight at her with red baby pickled onions as his eyeballs. I pop out one of Dad's onion-eyeballs and cut a nice slice of his cooked cheek for her as she screams and passes out! Yet, in reality, I'm simply sitting there quietly eating my microwaved lasagna and salad while my brain watches her take a mouthful of Dad's; it gets me through!

Now when I'm at Dad's place it's mainly in the privacy of my room as there's not much else in there – no TV, No sound system! I only have my iPhone as my entertainment! I hate the vision I keep seeing of him and Julia (his twenty-five-year-old secretary bit on the side) handcuffed naked ... *yeah, Dad naked, yuck*, on the bed while Mummy walks in and catches them both being naughty as I hand her the chainsaw. Oh seeing Dad's pee-pee fly across the room is the only scene that balances the disgust of imagining him with no clothes on!

I have never told anyone about my silly little thinkings but I keep them locked away in the deepest dark spot of my mind, like a favorite book of 'BLOOD' so I can read it over and over.

Grandma

Every month I get to spend a whole weekend with Grandma Joan (Dad's mum) at her house which is a huge two-story house and as a gran, she is ok. I seem to be able to talk to her a lot more than I can to Mum or Dad.

Grandma loves to take me shopping which I never complain about at all and if it wasn't for her, my wardrobe would be still Mum's shitty taste in clothes. Grandma lets me choose purple; anything purple! Mum's pretty pleated pink polka dots always end up at the bottom of my drawers.

Her house is the one place I do feel I can turn off the Violent Violet in my head and just be Violet Lyn the granddaughter. It always amazed me that Grandma Joan could see the little things that both Mum and Dad missed like I had a talent for drawing. Both my parents didn't even acknowledge that I could color-in.

I believe going to Grandma Joan's house is the release that keeps me from not exploding like a shaken up fizzy drink.

I do love Grandma Joan and wished I could live with her forever.

*

Prank

It was Friday morning before school holidays and I could see out the corner of my eye, Nasty Beth had been planning a farewell prank especially for me. Jimmy Tipping was in on it and he was lining up Bobby and Phillip while Beth was giggling with Tracy and Vanessa. At first, I couldn't tell what they were up to but they were all so predictable.

The big lunch bell rang and my school bag was actually near my desk (for a change – too obvious!) and I could hear them all snickering. They all scrambled out of the classroom before I was even ready to stand. Unfortunately for them, I had pre-empted their little plan of lunch swap-over of my salami and pickle sandwiches for some nice dirt ones and my melting frozen chocolate milk in my drink bottle to be replaced with one of the boy's warm pee. Had they never heard of a thing called Facebook? Oh my God, they can't help but brag about everything they do or will do – so my pretend friend (Trudie London from England) was Beth's Facebook friend and had liked her special plan for me!

Beth was a ring-leader and not a doer in this prank so she delegated the tasks out between her followers, which left me the ideal counter-attack of switching her lunch box with mine beforehand.

The switch-over went to plan (or so she thought) as she hadn't realized after the swap, I had switched the lunch boxes back over before the second period.

I exited the classroom last and made my way down the stairs to the bolted-down seating under B block. They were all there gathering and giggling and waiting for me to sit down to my nice meal of dirt and urine.

I did sit down as I could see their eyes open wide with anticipation but I knew what their grubby little hands wanted so desperately, but today I wasn't very hungry! I reached in my school bag pulled out my iPhone and plugged my earplugs in and listened to nothing as I wanted to hear their conniving words.

After 10 minutes Beth was glowing red like she knew I knew something but I just kept pretending I was listening to my music and I even teased them all. I reached into my bag again, pulled out an apple I had stashed in the side pocket, and ate that!

My plan worked as the boys' empty stomachs were now over the game and wanted their lunch so started eating theirs, soon followed by the girls except Beth; but I knew it wouldn't be too long!

Oh, it was all worth it as Beth opened her lunchbox and took a swig from her drink bottle first – exactly as Jimmy recognized the Bratz picture on the bottle (Beth's) he had peed in. I was laughing hard on the inside as I watched Beth dry-retch vomit as she had swallowed a good mouthful. She immediately threw the bottle down and pushed Jimmy hard in the chest with both of her fat little hands, before snatching Jimmy's drink bottle to wash out the piss taste. The other bitches, T & V, were pointing at me as I took my cue – I cocked my head and waved. I followed it up by pulling out my salami and pickle sandwich, bit, chewed, and swallowed it, pulling my best yummiest face I could.

“You’re fucking DEAD Mole!” screamed a pointing Nasty Beth as I blew her a kiss. And I found page 21 of my mind’s BLOOD book and reread the page where Beth is hanging like a piñata from the monkey bars, like all the kids of the school were (including bitches T & V) with me taking turns to whack the shit out of her – and I mean literally! There is poo everywhere! It is so gross but funny as the boys take their turn and whack her, causing her to fart and cry at the same time – over and over!

End period was amazingly quiet after the lunch fiasco with death stares coming left right and center but I could handle that, and for the first time I knew I had beaten Nasty Beth at her own game and I felt quite proud!

*

Julia

I knew Dad was about to make an announcement as he was looking uncomfortable.

“Violet ... I have something to tell you.” He looked quite nervous about it and his body language of scratching his balding head always told me so. He continued, “It has been a while since your mother and I separated ...” *God, he was doing his worm squirm thing!* “Well ... I know you know I have a lady friend.” Of course, I knew that! Boy, he really thinks I’m that unobservant! They are not my G-strings I see in the laundry basket, as the ladies deodorant in the bathroom cupboard, and I’m pretty sure Dad isn’t wearing mascara! But I was quite interested where this was going.

“Now Violet ... no one’s taking your mother away.” *Please do!* I thought. “You know Julia from my work, don’t you?” And at last, it was out there – BRAVE-BRAVE DAD! So I spoke up,

“You mean the one you’ve been sleeping with?” I looked him dead straight in the eyes and he had nowhere to go. He was such a pussy sometimes!

“What ... what do you mean?” Dad pleaded but answering a question with a question was a piss-weak way of turning the tables, so I did the same.

“Why are you telling me this Dad? Do you think I’m dumb? You do realize I knew you were having sexual relations with Julia from your work ... before you even left Mum!” I felt my thick red eyebrows frown.

“You do?” Dad’s faced looks puzzled – dickhead! He continued as he stammered, Err, w-well I-I want Julia to c-come to dinner tonight and ...” *spit it out Dad*, “for a sleepover ... in my room!” and then the words screamed in my head - *I DON’T think so!*

“This is total fucking bullshit!” There, I said it, as I felt his hand hit hard on my bottom. *What the f...?*

“Never say those words again, Violet!”

“What?” I was furious! “You never touch me again, you can’t ... you are NOT ALLOWED too!” I stormed off crying as he had NEVER hit me before – Mum yes, as she was the punisher with that iron hand of hers, but not Dad. So he chooses now of all times when he announces he’s bringing his trollop home, so now I have to accept and listen to screwing each other all night long. *Gross-out!*

Julia did come for dinner but I never came out of my room; I hated her! Her big firm boobs had been the one thing Mum could never compete with, with her flat-floppy ones. I still remember the three of us (Dad, Mum, and me) being the happy family before all this crap went down, and all because of Julia and her big tits! So they ate their dinner laughing and giggling as I starved in my room replaying page 35.

Page 35: I am driving Dad's car as I glance in the rear vision mirror and both Dad and Julia are bound, gagged, and sweating! I am wearing a chauffeur's outfit hat 'n' all. I press the play button on the old car stereo and the music blares out from all four speakers and it is Dad's favorite, a real oldie he always plays – 'Bad Moon Rising' and as I glance out into the night sky and the moon is full, it makes me grin as the song is on the money. I arrive at the drive-in movies and we are the only car in the whole drive-in theatre and I leave them in the backseat (restrained) as I go get some popcorn and a Coke. I return to the car and the smell of their sweat nearly puts me off my buttery popcorn. I offer them some then I realize the duct tape across their mouths, makes my offer pointless. The movie starts and we all watch the movie, one I've seen too many times (but we weren't here to watch a movie) yet, it's always my sad home-movie one from long ago, where Mum cries at night because she has caught Dad sneakily ringing Julia, thinking both of us had never heard. Then the scene changes to Mummy being so angry she is on the phone to the lawyer, drunk as a skunk or the day of her emotional death – the day he moved out ... and where am I? Not in this movie, I am here looking him in the eye from the front seat just as he realizes the heartache and pain he has caused. I pull my sawn-off shotgun from under the front seat and shoot Julia point-blank between the eyes, right in front of him. And as her brains are splattered all over the shattered back windscreen, he worm-squirms and tries his best to escape! *I DON'T think so!*

"Violet you need to eat." Dad interrupted my mind's rereading by handing me a plate of his bland spaghetti bog and a can of lemonade as I sat on my bed. He never said anything else just ruffled my ginger locks and closed the door behind him as he left my room.

Saved by the Boll!

*

Mum

“You are a bastard! How dare you bring your SLUT over to stay when you have Violet there.” Mum was pissed at Dad again.

“It’s none of you goddam business, Joan!” Now, Dad’s volcano was rising.

“Yeh well if you want to see your daughter then you’d better start acting like a father and not a teenager ... you IDIOT!” and Mummy slipped in her usual personal insult.

“Shut the FUCK up Marie! I’m sick to death of your bitchiness and all your demands ... I’m not putting up with it anymore. Go FUCK yourself!” Dad turned away from her and started waving his hand above his head as he stormed off to the car, while I stood there with my backpack in my hand. Mum gets the last calm word in as always,

“See you in court!”

I suppose I was the one that brought this one on but I didn’t want Julia Big Tits at Dad’s house on my weekends.

Mum did go overboard and ring her lawyer and it cost her (and Dad) a packet to relay letters back and forth for something that could’ve been settled by speaking nicely to each other but it was far too late for that.

I found Mum crying again and it had been quite a while, yet it didn’t make any sense to me at all, she fucking hated him! Why does her pain always place me amongst her suffering and she still hasn’t got it – that it wasn’t my fault!

Life was even more miserable now as I wasn’t allowed to go over to Dad’s at all and that was that! Mum wouldn’t let me call him, confiscated my iPhone (which I complained profusely about) and so I lost my music escape hatch because of two enormous tits!

I disbelieved that I could ever want to go back to school early but these holidays were total shit!

*

Truth

“You’re dead meat!” Nasty Beth pushed me to the oval’s ground as all her followers surrounded me. I stood up as I dusted off my checkered pleated school, as she lunged at me again. I went down as Beth kicked me before T & V added their bonus foot punishment. This time they actually hurt me as I scrunched up into a protective ball. I cried and was more upset that they could see me cry like a baby,

“Leave me!” I got the words out but it was too late ... I was already got!

As I walked home I noticed the blood on the front of my dress, reliving the embarrassment of having to pick up all my scattered books, one by one, while Beth’s army simply laughed and yelled abuse.

It made me realize how sad I really was. I had no friends and no fun at all and finally not even a pathetic Dad. Mum was either drunk or abusive, yelling at me for nothing. It made me conclude to something that I had not wanted to admit – I truly hated them all and their shitty wasted lives and how I was being treated!

Maybe I’m going crazy or maybe I’m just angry? But I’m only 13 and this is very unfair so I’ve decided to fix all this ... and by myself.

*

Timing

I knew what had to be done but it was all about the timing, otherwise, the plan would fizzle. I set about writing up my steps one at a time in the back of my science pad. I remember Mr. Johnson teaching us something about a flowchart where you start with one box and it splits into two then to four etc. My starting point needed to be meticulous and so it was imperative to write up the different paths and roads that I could take to get to the finish line – Grandmas.

Starting the plan with Mum won the contest, and then that would lead me straight to Dad's (flowchart Daddy) possibly by the police or someone official, but I guessed the police. Of course, my first action plan was how to kill Mummy ... and I had to make this look like an accident! I could not afford to draw attention to me or I would be wasting my time (and Mummy's life).

My imagination was in overdrive and it was ridiculous as always e.g. How about throwing the plugged-in hair dryer into the bathtub while she was sleeping and soaking in a full scented bath or, the understanding of the situation of just eating rat-sack in her bacon and eggs just before she drops dead in her breakfast or, ask her to go hiking and when she wasn't looking, push her off the edge to fall to her bruised and bloodied death, bouncing off the jagged rocks on her way down to Hell? They all did give me a chuckle but would not pass in reality, maybe the cliff one but too many variables, *is that what you call it? Sure I've seen that on TV*. So it had to be way more credible ... and then I got it!

I was able to move through the steps now and document them meticulously with variables as well. I had to be prepared for all twists and turns. I've seen enough crappy TV shows and DVD's to know what a plot diversion is, as well as a surprise ending. But there would be NO surprise ending in Violent Violet's story!

The plan of events was finished with my dates and timing. So now I would go over and over and even practice in the mirror some of my variable script lines I'd prepared.

*

Act 1

By 5:00 pm, Mum was drunk as usual staggering and slurring her speech.

“Violet ... be a love and pour me another drink please?” And as always I did but they were getting a little stronger - drink by drink. Mum passes out around 9:00 most Saturday nights but I needed her out a little earlier than this.

Mummy's lights were out at 8:15 pm which was my first variable but wasn't that big a one! It still gave me one hour and fifty-five minutes.

I made sure I got the first three steps of the act correct and the first one was administering just a little of her Eszopiclone sleeping pills, broken down, plus a few of her cracked open Zoloft capsules. And as Mum sunk more into oblivion, I very well knew that her taste buds would become more and more nulled; I could increase the dosage! So I mixed double the number of crushed pills in with the vodka, tomato juice, Worchester, and a bit too much pepper to conceal the taste and fully knew they would do the job intended. Then before she was too out of it, I would carry her (under her stagger) to her bedroom and set her up comfortable, so I could finish her off in there.

Her body was awkward but she still had enough power left in her legs to take the weight off my struggling shoulders as I guided her as best I could. She did bang the walls a few times and I thanked God that her bedroom was downstairs.

The TV was turned on as I propped her in a sitting position, pressed play on the DVD remote, to start her favorite show – ‘Glee’. It was the ‘Grease’ episode and her favorite so she was singing along with her extremely out-of-tune unison. I kept the drinks coming and I expected her to be out but she was still going strong and it was 7:36 pm glaring out of her digital clock-radio.

Variable #3 was the twelve capsules: forensics would pick-up that there were no capsules in her stomach (or vomit) so she would have to eat them! Mum ate like a bird at the best of times but to get her to eat my chicken and plastic cap sandwich was not going to be easy but it was a simple must! I quickly prepared her dinner and did my best to cover them with mustard and mayo. I knew it would taste disgusting but she was so out of it now and all I had to do was get it down her throat.

I was correct at presuming Mum wouldn't be hungry but I called her bluff by pausing her terrible rendition of ‘Hopelessly devoted to you’ (as if) and demanded she eats something for me, as I was worried by convincing Mum she might throw up and needed something in her stomach, to help soak up the alcohol (along with a full bottle of sleeping pills and a strip of anti-depressants).

The vomit soon followed and then she passed out and I had to turn her several times from her natural sleeping side position to the lying on her back position. I must make her choke on her own vomit and fill her airway; she must not survive!

Mummy was dead at 9:46 pm and her vomit smelt worse than I thought but now I must move on to the next act – Call DAD!

I had taken steps for my alibi by hitting my face with Mum's bedside lamp and strategically thrown it on the floor after placing it in Mum's hand for fingerprints. I had to make it look like she had got angry at me and hit me with it, not just hand-smack but an over-the-top hit. Then I had placed the empty pill bottle and packet on her bedside table with her fingerprints again.

I went to my room and waited as I went over the night's events just in case I had left a loose end; but I hadn't, as yet!

It was 10:10 exactly, time to ring Dad – let the games begin!

*

Cops

“Oh, Dad ... I’m sorry,” I ran to him as he got out the car, exactly the same time the police did in theirs, the ambulance pulled up seconds later so I kept my motor mouth act going full-tilt so they could all hear. “... we had a fight, a big fight! Mummy hit me!” I pointed to my bruised face and continued, “I went to my room ... and I heard the DVD playing the menu over and over ... I went to turn it off and she was ... dead ... spew everywhere. I tried to wake her ... I tried Dad, honestly, I tried!” Dad cuddled me and made me sit on the curb with him as one of the police (a male cop) rushed inside with a paramedic. The policewoman shook Dad’s hand and knelt and placed her hand on my shoulder as she spoke,

“Hey Sweetie, it’s all over now ... Dad’s here with us! Are you ok ... are you hurt?” Her voice was sincere and I could see a tear in her eye. She was softer than her hardened police face showed, she stood back up straight and introduced herself to both of us.

“Hi, I’m Detective Sgt. Kerrs ... please call me Sandy.” She pointed to her police badge and number as Dad stood and answered for us both,

“Peter Pettingrow ... and this is my daughter Violet ... and my ex-wife ... Marie is ... was her mother ... inside.” Dad started crying as they shook hands, so I stood as well and held onto Dad as tight as I could. My body was shaking and they would all believe it was fear but in truth, it was adrenalin – pure cold-blooded adrenalin!

“Sweetie, I need to ask you some questions ... don’t worry, Dad will be with you.”

Sgt. Sandy was leaning in toward me again and her hand had re-found my shoulder as I stared straight into her pool-blue eyes. She was so pretty even with her blonde hair tied in a bun, strands poking out from under her police hat. I nodded and tried to smile but it was fake. At that moment the other policeman came out the front door shaking his head, which I knew meant that Mum was officially dead - but I already knew THAT!

The questioning was what I had predicted so my answers were prewritten and acted out as planned. The argument, Mum’s drinking, the pills, and of course me finding her - *Shock! Horror!*

The night was long but I was a child so I was taken away from the death-scene to Grandma Joan’s to spend the night there while Dad cleaned up the mess, so to speak.

Ruby

I hadn't predicted or even thought about counseling or that it would follow soon after the trauma of a 13-year-old, finding her mother dead, covered in vomit. So the next day I had a visit from a fat Negro lady called Ruby Rose. I didn't like her – instantly! And she didn't like me, I could tell. So here was my first unpredicted variable.

“Violet, tell Ruby how choo are feeling?” her big brown eyes bulged out further than her fat cheeks and her voice was direct with her southern accent.

“I dunno?” I wasn't saying much at all

“Do choo feel sad or angry 'cause what cha Mumma's gone 'n' done?” I just raised my shoulders and pulled my *I dunno* face again. “Now girl, what she'd been through ain't no ordinary thing ... choo know! Now 'tis ok to be feelin' sad 'n' scared or lonely, Honey!” Ruby's eyes scared me, it was like they were X-ray or something. I didn't trust her so I thought it was best to act sad.

“I suppose I'm sad.” My voice was quiet and I looked at the ground to break Ruby's eye hold on me.

“Go on girl ... tell me what choo feel ... as I said, choo'd allowed being sad now.”

“Well ...” I turned on the waterworks as I thought of my very last happy day – the day before Mum caught Dad with Julia Big Tits in her bed and we were all laughing playing cards together, (and now I couldn't even remember the rules of Chasey Ace) so long ago. I kept talking as my words were sad and gurgled, “Mum was angry at me for not doing the dishes ... and we had a fight and she hurt me,” I pointed to my alibi bruise. “... and I stormed out of her room but I wasn't ... I wasn't angry for long ... I promise. Then I found her ... it was horrible!”

“Ok, Violet ... that's good.” She handed me a tissue and I blew my dribbling nose and wiped my crocodile tears. “So I hear choo'd been pretty sad since Mumma and cha Pappa broke up?” her head was cocked and her bottom lip was protruding.

“Who told you that?” *How did she know?* I trusted her even less!

“Ya pappa did ... says choo'd all been fighting lots.”

I wanted out of here NOW as I'd had other things more important to be attending to. Ruby wrote notes in her diary as I looked around the room, doing my best not to show her any body language; I'd had enough!

“Violet – Honey ... I will be seeing choo'd in a week and we'll talk some more ok?” *What!* I didn't want to see her again – NEVER! I slipped up as my reaction was obvious on my face, as it screwed up with my eyes shooting death-arrows to hers. Ruby wrote more in her diary. “Ok, Honey, that's it for today! So choo'd call me if choo ever chust need to talk ... chust talk ... about anything.” Ruby handed me her business card and I put it my purple blouse pocket.

*

Funeral

Mum's was the first funeral I ever had to attend, as I usually ended up at someone's place for the day being too young, so it was an experience – a good experience, actually. Mum was in an open coffin and I haven't seen her look that pretty in a long time. My final memories of her were always miserable, drunk, or angry but here she looked beautiful and at peace.

Dad and I were sitting at the front with Nana Lynia (Mum's mother) who had flown all the way from France to be here. I hadn't seen her in a year and I knew she was a nasty old bitch! I think she liked it when my parents broke up as I heard her whining about Dad to Mum over the phone heaps. I hated the old crow and the way she treated me like I was her servant when she came to stay – *'Oh Violet please get me a cuppa tea, you know Nana's old!'* and so I would, then I'd get, *'Violet where's my biscuits? Just like you're mother ... only do half the job!'* I used to feel my head explode so I had a special page in my book for her - Page 19 and here it is!

"Would you like a cuppa, Nana Lynia ... with Oreos?"

"Oh, Violet that would be nice." And I'd ask her this while she sat on the recliner in the backward position with her smelly feet dangling over the footrest, (while I removed her stinky shoes). After taking her stinky shoes outside and refilling my lungs with some fresh air, I'd make and bring her, tea, and biscuits.

"How about a nice foot massage, Nana?" I'd ask with a cheesy grin.

"Just maybe you are better than that stupid daughter of mine after all. Yes, love, that would be nice." So as everything is 'nice' I would get the foot cream and commence rubbing and massaging the old bitch's feet. But what she wouldn't know is that I had dropped in a few of Mum's crushed sleeping pills in her tea and when the pills make her pass out then the massage-fun would begin! I'd put on Mum's toilet cleaning gloves (the big rubber green ones) and Dad's gas mask from his toolbox (that is still in the garage) and pour hydrochloric acid into a rubber bucket. Go to the laundry and grab Mum's wooden bristled scrubbing brush and then I would be more than ready for Nana's special foot massage!

As sat in church, I forgot myself, and that I was at the funeral and burst out laughing imagining Nana waking up with just skeleton feet up to her ankles, screaming and carrying on like she always does.

"Vi-VIOLET! RING an AMBULANCE!" I calmly walk in grinning, holding up the big bottle of industrial-strength pool acid in one hand, scrubbing brush in the other, while still wearing the gloves as I say, "I DON'T think so!"

Nearly everyone was crying at the funeral, even Grandma Joan, which was the only person I cared about. Dad was crying which I didn't understand at all, as I thought he was over Mum, long ago and I'd done him a favor. I was glad he didn't bring Big Tits along, at least he showed Mum some respect.

I nearly did laugh again when the priest spoke as his voice was very funny like he was trying to do a ventriloquist's voice, surely that wasn't real!

I hated the singing though; I refused to! Besides, I didn't know those stupid church songs expect the 'Saints marching' one.

Nana Lynia's eulogy speech was total bullshit! It was the first time I'd ever heard her say anything nice about Mum. The perfect daughter - my arse! Why can't people speak the truth?

Why not tell it as it was Nana, like this – 'My daughter was a drunken miserable, no-good mother who never lived up to any of my expectations! She lost her husband because she was so anal about everything that never mattered!' Now that's what I wanted to truly hear! What got me was Nana would've had no problem at all telling Mum all this to her face but now she was dead, she would lie to the world and everyone in it! But as I listened to all the tributes, I accepted that they all would all lie! Surely God or the Devil sees through this ... and as bullshitty as I do?

Watching the coffin descend into the open ground was awesome. *Wow!* It was way better than in the movies simply because you knew who was inside and would be food for worms very soon. Her headstone was nice but again total bullshit. '*Here lies Marie Eve Pettingrow*' with bullshit thrown in '*loving wife, devoted mother and loving daughter blah blah blah*' so all the things she wasn't, was etched for all eternity to remember her by. This and all the lies, (close your ears, I'm gonna say it) FUCKING annoyed me!

I couldn't believe that as soon as the funeral is over, they throw a party (at Grandma Joan's house) and get drunk! That's absurd, totally crazy! Let's all remember Marie Pettingrow, formerly Marie Wilson – wife, mother, daughter, friend, co-worker and while we do, let's ALL get drunk together, call it a WAKE and party-on! Just fucking crazy! Who made up these stupid rules?

*

Visitor

Two days passed and Dad told me I was getting a visit from Fat Ruby again. She irritated me with her mispronunciation of the J's and Y's as C's – truly how hard is it? Asians I except with language pronunciation difficulties but Ruby sounded like she just got off the cotton farm! *Yeh - I've seen a slave movie or two on TV and I know how they speak from the South and Ruby sounded like she just had.*

“So how choo'd been, Honey?” Ruby's bulgy eyes were cutting me up like last time, while all I could think about was that terrible dress she was wearing and I wondered if maybe she did live on the cotton farm after all; it was hideous! All saggy and beige colored with a horrible burgundy neck ribbon, she looked like a giant sack of potatoes! I answered her question

“Shitty, actually!” I decided to tell Ruby the truth.

“Now child ... choo can tell Ruby why.” And the sack of potatoes leaned forward and looked me eye to eye while she listened intently.

“Lies! I hated the lies they told at the funeral.”

“Go on, Violet.”

“Mummy wasn't a good mother ... she was a shitty one!” I felt the tears well inside me.

“Tis okay to cry, Honey ... cha Pappa said that choo'd never cried at the funeral. Let it out, Sugar and you'll feel better ... and Ruby's telling cha the truth!” I couldn't help myself and as the tears flowed so did my mouth.

“Nana Lynia lied about how much she loved Mummy ... so did Dad in his speech ... and the headstone at her grave ... it's all bullshit! Mum and Dad hated each other and I believe they wished each other was DEAD! Nanna was always putting Mum and Dad down, she is a total BITCH ... I HATE her! I'm glad she had gone back to France already.”

Ruby was listening quietly as she scribbled notes into her diary, then she put down the pad and hugged me. It was weird and freakish so I pushed her away which startled the fat cow. Her face changed as my tears cut their flow instantly and I stood up announcing,

“Leave me alone you weirdo ... I'm going!” I left the kitchen in Dad's unit where we were and ran upstairs to my room slamming the door behind me. I put my iPhone on play and listened to some Christina to make me feel happy. I'd had enough of feeling angry and sad for now.

At dinner, Dad told me Ruby had left and was worried about me but I laughed and out loud, and then I got in trouble for calling her a stupid fat sack of brown potatoes!

Truce

I never went to school for two weeks and on the last weekend before returning to school, Julia did come over to stay again except this time I would eat with them both. It was a very important part of my plan that Dad and Julia Big Tits would believe I was finally accepting of their perverted relationship.

“So, Violet, your Dad tells me you listen to a lot of music. Who’s your favorite singer?” Julia B.T. did her best to pry some info from me so I complied,

“I love Christina ... Pink but my favorite is Rihanna.” I smiled as I twirled a forkful of Dad’s routinely Saturday night spag bog.

“What about Justin Bieber ... do you like him?” J.B.T. was trying.

“No way ... I HATE boys!” I put my finger in my mouth with my tongue protruding.

Dad was smiling and laughing lots as I think he had been waiting for this night for a very long time. I played along as best as I could, even though looking at her perfect breasts reminded me of what Dad would be doing with them later – *disgusting!*

I went to bed at 10:30 pm and heard them making their revolting sex noises by midnight; I nearly vomited!

My iPhone alarm vibration went off at 2:30 am and all was quiet. Showtime! It was time for act 3 and my adrenalin kicked in. I reached under my bed and lifted the shoebox to sit between my legs on the bedspread. I opened the shoebox I had covered with cut-up pictures of pop stars and lifted it out and it was beautiful – Dad’s forgotten revolver from Mum’s house!

*

Act 3

I quietly tip-toed to Dad's room holding the revolver with both hands. It was heavy but I had got used to it when practicing my aim in the mirror. I knew I would have to be accurate and quick I would only get four shots maximum, or one of them would take me down. I was buzzing as this act was the most exciting to date and the feel of the gun was so powerful.

Julia B.T. never stood a chance when she saw Dad's brains splattered over the bed and then she would be going down from a point-blank shot (I only need one for him). She was crying in disbelief, as she sat there frozen with the barrel pointed at her third eye from my kneeling position on the opposite side of the bed. I moved like a panther and pulled the trigger around Dad's finger grip on the gun and her head exploded over the curtains as her body slumped backward and fell out of the bed.

I had to move like the wind if this act was to continue, so quickly let go of the gun in Dad's right hand and watched his arm drop to its lifeless position – gun in hand. A position to make it appear he had shot himself through the mouth (which I had done as I knew he always slept on his back snoring, catching flies) my only variable here was his body was in lying position when he shot himself but hey, I could live with that as they would believe he still did it! His grip held the murder weapon and most of the gun residue.

I sprinted back to my room and took off my latex disposable gloves and the towel around my right arm. I quickly changed my nightie. I would have not worried about the blood on it but the brain matter did! I knew an instinct on finding your father with his brains blown out would be to run to him to save him - if you could? Blood would be everywhere by then! So I would - and I would get it on my new nightie I put on immediately. I hid the gloves and the brown splattered nightie in a clip-seal bag under the floor of my schoolbag and I would get rid of them at the first possible convenience.

Now it was time to play out the daughter-in-shock routine. So I ran to Dad's room and swung open the door! I ran to Dad's bloody body and grabbed it by the shoulders and shook it. I had enough blood on my nightie to look like the one I had worn all night. I ran out and downstairs to ring emergency services (I had to assume that they had already been contacted re the gunshots by neighbors and would be on their merry way) - so I did within only a few minutes after my kill.

What would a girl do after finding her father and his girlfriend's head blown out? A perfect place would be in the corner of the lounge room near the front door, huddled in a ball with my head and legs tightly tucked between my arms, waiting for the Ambulance and Police. I needed to be crying a lot, so before I sat down I mixed some dish-wash liquid, salt, and lukewarm water and rubbed my dipped fingers into my eyes; it stung like all Hell! But I could feel my eyes burn instantly and they were red. I tipped out the soapy saltwater and rinsed the glass and left it in the sink with the rest of the dirty dishes.

They found me like this approximately seven minutes later (as I was counting the seconds). It was Detective Sgt. Sandy Kerrs who found me in the huddled ball of acted fear. She grabbed me and ran me outside as her partner got the lucky job (again) of viewing the murder/suicide scene.

I told Sandy my made-up story with the cover-up tears to help with believability, especially about the fight between Dad and Julia during dinner about Mum with me then overhearing Dad (in his room) accusing her of having an affair with someone. I said I heard the name, Ben Butler. Yeh Ben Butler, I had found him on Julia B.T.'s Facebook page. He went to her school with her and she had conveniently befriended Trudie London (little ol' me - remember) and her friend Ben Butler had accepted Trudie's friendship – it was all too easy and even if it wasn't true. So I knew he fancied her and that they had conversed ... a lot!

Sandy looked like a tough cop, but maybe because I was just a child, her eyes welled up when I replayed my running-in vision of the crime scene (which was partly true) and finding them both dead with heads blown apart.

Forensics arrived as I was driven away to the station in the squad car with another backpack of clothes for Grandma Joan's house, I packed with Sandy. She was holding on to me for dear life. I was expecting Grandma Joan to be there waiting for me but it wasn't ... it was fat Ruby!

*

Questions

“Tell me, child, are choo okay?” Ruby’s brown eyes were there in my face immediately.

“I think so.” I kept looking down and then across to Sandy.

“Can you tell us what happened again, Violet?” Sandy spoke as she touched my left shoulder.

“I’ve told you ... I was asleep and I woke when I heard a shot ... then another one ... about 10 seconds later.” I started the waterworks and continued, “Then I ran to Dad’s room and I could see Julia ... on the floor and all her blood was on the curtains ... and Dad was lying there ... his head was all open and horrible and ...” I started crying hard as Sandy comforted me.

“It’s all right, Violet, Sweetie ... we understand.”

I looked at Ruby and she was stern and unemotional.

“Go on, child,” Ruby demanded.

“Well Dad’s blood was all over the bed and up the bedhead,” I hesitated to wipe my fake tears and glanced uncomfortably around the room before continuing, “... I ran to him to see if he was alive but ... (I cried hard as they listened) the back of his head was open with a big hole and empty ... it was horrible!” I kicked out and placed my head between my legs then sobbed!

“It’s all right, Sweetie, we know this is very hard for you!” Sgt. Sandy touched my left shoulder again.

Rubes’ fat chocolate face was still in stern mode and hadn’t even batted an eyelid when she shocked Sandy ... but not me.

“Did choo kill them, Violet?”

“Hey – hey - HEY!” And Sandy came straight to my rescue.

“This is over! That’s IT!” She stood up grabbed my hand and virtually dragged me out of the interview room as I glared back at Ruby, who’s eyes were watching mine like a hawk. She knew, of course, she fucking well knew!

“Sweetie, do you want a Coke ... or something. Grandma’s on the way.” Sandy’s eyes were honest and kind and she did her best to change the subject so I played along.

“A Coke please ... can I have an Oreo bar too? I feel a little bit sick ... I’m a little hungry.” I pointed to C-23 of the dispenser machine, next to the drink one Sandy was already dropping the quarters in.

I ate my biscuit bar and sipped on my Coke as Sandy went back into the interview room and I could hear Sandy screaming at Ruby. It was then I heard Ruby’s voice loud and clear.

“She ain’t no innocent little girl, I’m tellin’ cha. She’s a cold-blooded killer! And now I believe she probably killed her poor mother too ... there’s something wrong with her! Mark my goddam words! Be-Jesus! Open chour eyes, Detective Sergeant!”

“You’re outta here, NOW!” Sandy opened the door and Ruby grabbed her suitcase, stood up and walked past me, eyeballing my eyes as best she could and whispered to me under her breath,

“Choo’s ain’t no little girl ... choo’s the devil himself!”

Grandma Joan picked me up around an hour later and I was glad to get out of the Cop Shop and at long last, I was with her.

The one oversight I hadn’t thought through was - Grandma’s misery. Of course, I could contend with Dad’s death but I forgot all about her son ... her only son.

*

Hibernation

Two months had passed and I had returned to school and even Nasty Beth left me alone regarding my parent's death (for the first few weeks anyway). Dad's and Julia's deaths were finally closed off as murder/suicide, just as I had hoped. Forensics in T.V. – NCIS or CSI or even SVU seemed to be able to solve the most ridiculous of crimes, yet, I was amazed that Dad and Julia's death was wound up so quickly. How could they not tell that Dad was shot before Julia? Just goes to show – DON'T believe everything you see on television! And being the only now-orphaned 13-year-old daughter of murder/suicide victims was the best alibi anyone could ever get! Dad and Julia made the news this time and I was the talk of the town,

'Poor little girl with no parents, how will she survive?'

Grandma Joan was still quiet but doing her best to get over Dad's death. Though for me, I was the happiest I'd been in such a long time. I knew it was best to lay low and put my final act on hold, otherwise, it would draw attention straight back to me. Ruby was taken off my case and a new lady counselor was assigned to me, on Sandy's recommendation - Georgina Edwards. She was easy-peasy to fool with a tear or two, so counseling days were just part of the ongoing game. Sandy had taken a shine to me (maybe because she was there at both my parent's death scenes) and visited me now and then, with a packet of Oreos and a can of Coke (it was our special thing). She was nice and I liked her.

I felt like a snake in hibernation, hiding and waiting for the warmer weather to return to hunt, and before I could finish my story ... the finale that had already been written.

*

Trip

Huntingwood was Brentridge's school camp of choice and as we were the seventh graders now; it was our turn to go. Grandma Joan tried to talk me out of it but I convinced her I just wanted to spend time with my friends (you ask, do I have any?).

I DON'T think so!

Four days away from here was just what I needed, but not to rest, but to kill! Nasty Beth and the bitches were going down ... for good! I knew I would have to take a bit of a punishing from them before the outcome but it would all be worth it!

"Now, Violet, remember to ring me every night," Grandma looked worried, "... and if you have any problems, you tell Mr. Johnson ... understand?" I nodded and hugged her tightly as I did my best to comfort her with my words,

"Grandma ... it's gonna be fun ... stop worrying!" She hugged me back and kissed my forehead as I grabbed my bags and crossed the car park to the waiting bus.

I could see Nasty Beth, Tracy, and Vanessa were already on the bus up the back and Beth was already leering death-stares at me through the window, when Mr. Johnson grabbed my bags and told me to get on the bus. As I entered the aisle the bitches were all giggling, as Beth run her finger from the left side to the right side of her fat neck and mouthed her cutthroat silent threat, *'You're DEAD, BITCH!'*

I found two empty seats by themselves and one became mine and was pretty sure no one would want to sit next to me but I was wrong ... as Mr. Johnson did. The attempt at the small talk was quite annoying!

"So, Violet, have you ever been to camp before?" *Oh my God! Is he that dumb?* He knows only grade sevens get to go on camp! Have I been in grade seven before? And he was the teacher so I wanted to scream, *'No you stupid dumb-arse idiot!'* but instead I smiled and answered,

"No." Then he asked more questions!

"Do you like swimming?" I gave in and just answered him.

"I can't swim." I looked downwards as this answer made me feel weak or like I'd done something wrong, like, I'd peed my knickers. So I twiddled my thumbs as my feet touched the bus floor with my tippy toes.

"Didn't you do swimming lessons at school?" His ugly face had an eyebrow raised as he tried to get me to give him eye contact.

"No!" I looked at him now and eyeballed him as Ruby Sack of Potatoes used to do to me! It worked, as he patted my leg, broke my stare, and sat back in his seat. Now, this was a total

lie as I was a great swimmer but here was a variable soon to be in my favor or as it may be needed, a non-swimming alibi.

The trip took about six hours with two toilet breaks and a half-hour stop for lunch at a truck stop which unfortunately for me, was a perfect opportunity for Beth's bitch-fest to inflict some pain; I got cornered in the toilet!

"Let me out of here ... please." I asked nicely but the three bitches had the doorway blocked as I finished washing my hands.

"Be warned Red ... you won't be having any fun at camp, mark my words mole ... you're going down!" Then Beth's two bitches grabbed one of my arms each restraining me as Head BITCH took a free shot straight to my stomach. Then Beth pulled my hair as I fell to the ground gasping for air, then exited the ladies, laughing with the final words I heard from Beth, "See ya mole!"

It was obvious I had been crying when I got back on the bus but I refused to let them know they got to me. So I sat back in my seat, put on my headphones, and with a zealous enthusiasm went through the act of Beth's drowning.

I found my inner smile as I pictured Beth gasping for air as my hand held her face under the water, splashing fruitlessly as her body was about to give in. I knew for a fact she couldn't swim very well, as I had heard the boys joking about it in lunch break months ago. They were planning to play a special water joke to scare her at camp. It was a too-perfect opportunist window for me to pass up. I knew I had to kill three birds with one stone, so framing T & V for their best friend's accidental death was as good as killing them. It would haunt them for the rest of their bitchy lives! And the bonus would be for the boys as well, as they would always remember their part as the original instigators of the dunking prank.

Overhearing the boys planning this on Beth in the schoolyard was where my original plan had stemmed from. Since the peeing in the bottle prank-gone-wrong day, the boys and the bitches hadn't got along at all! The boys were the slightly sympathetic ones to my family loss and shared a few passing words to me ... now and then.

I knew I had what they would want and an exchange would be made. I had swiped a bottle of Grandma's scotch so I would offer Jimmy and his boys the deal of a lifetime and use it for my revenge when required!

After the headcount, Mr. Johnson sat down next to me as the bus resumed its course on the highway. I kept my eyes closed so he couldn't see the redness from my tears until he tapped me on the knee which startled me and I opened my eyes as he offered me some M&Ms.

*

Camp

We arrived at Huntingwood at about 4.00 pm and it was just as it looked as in all the school photos in the office hall. I could see the cabins and the lake with the pedal boats and canoes on the water's edge.

Miss Davis was first off the bus followed by Mrs. Green (a volunteer mum) and then followed by Mr. Johnson who was already bellowing instructions to us all,

“Now I don't want any stupidity from you lot ... or else they'll be no campfire tonight!” It somehow worked as the bus was dead silent. He went on, “Now from the back to the front we will exit ... WALKING!!! NO RUNNING!!!”

Of course, Beth was first to stand up from the backseat, as the other bitches were too scared to; it was the BITCH order of things! As Beth walked by and I had moved across to the aisle seat, I never saw it coming - gum in the hair! Bloody Bitch!

Lucky for me in her haste to gum me, she'd failed to get a good hold of my hair so I had it out before it was my turn to stand.

Before we even got to begin our holiday, Mr. Johnson had us assembled for our group photo before we were allowed to dissipate to our two respective groups (one boy group and one girl group).

Huntingwood had a couple of guides here, a man and a woman – Jesse and Toula. They both seemed a little too overly excited about us being there.

The first bit of luck was that the girls' group was under Miss Davis which unluckily included the bitches of course. But Miss Davis wasn't stupid, she knew we never got on so I would be protected while she was around.

The cabin held twenty bunk beds and I waited to see where Beth chose so I could be as far away from her as possible. Beth chose the end bed so I believed she was thinking the same. I was smart and picked the lower bunk close to Miss Davis'. Judy and Bobbi Emmers (the twins) were next to me on the other side and no one took my top bunk which suited me fine.

The afternoon was spent exploring the grounds but for me, it was just a little more than that; I needed to find a kill zone!

*

Campfire

Sitting around the campfire that night was quite a lot of fun as all the teachers told a scary story each, as the screams and shrills of all the girls (and a few boys) sent shivers up my back and causing all to laugh. 'Sleepy Hollow' was told in brief by Mr. Johnson and he did quite a good job, I'll give him that. Then it was our turn and we were asked to put up our hand if someone had a scary story – so I did ... and then there was silence!

I could see Beth and her two loyal subjects snickering as I stood up. Miss Davis' face was beaming as I knew she knew I had it in me; she was the only one! I cleared my throat, death-stared straight at Nasty Beth, and started.

"Once upon a time there was a fat princess with dark hair," The boys pointed at Beth as she glared at them and they screamed out laughing with a 'ssshh' from Mr. Johnson. I continued, "... for she had NO friends at all in her father – the King's land but she believed she did have two, a slimy toad and a crow." The boys erupted as they pointed to T & V as Mr. Johnson waved his hands for them to be quiet. I restarted again, "The fat girl with dark hair called herself Princess Beautiful for yes, she was a princess, yet she was far from beautiful for she was SO UGLY ... the ugliest in the land!" The boys pointed straight at Beth. I smiled and continued, "Princess Beautiful lived with her evil father - the Wizard King of DEATH!" And as soon as I said the emphasized word – death, all screamed and wriggled and laughed which made me chuckle. I bit the toasted marshmallow that was left on my stick, that I was using as my story-telling conductor's baton. I resumed where I left off, "Princess Beautiful was anything but as she was rude and cruel to the town's people. Her father was the only person that truly loved her in her fat miserable life! The princess was sick to DEATH (they all screamed and laughed again) of being lonely so she made her evil father use his sorcery on her only friends - the slimy toad and the crow. She begged him to change them into girls so she would have someone to play within her lonely miserable life." I hesitated and bit my marshmallow again as the boys were itching for me to go on so I did, "The evil Wizard King did just that and right before her very eyes, two little and very ugly girls ... even uglier than she was. One had warts all over her face while the other was feathery looking with the blackest crow-like eyes!" Jimmy screamed out pointing at the bitches,

"Toad Tracy and Vanessa the crow!"

"Shut up Dork-head!" retaliated Tracy without Beth's permission.

"That's quite enough!" Mr. Johnson ordered and it worked as they were quiet as mice. "Please carry-on Violet," Johnson frowned a warning to the boys including all of them, even the ones that weren't in Jimmy's clan.

"Princess Beautiful named her friends ... Toady and Crowessa." Now I could see Miss Davis smirking, looking downwards as Mr. Johnson surrendered to the boys' eruption and admitted defeat by waving both his arms in the air and shaking his head, but the bitches weren't happy! So I directed my attention from them to the boys. "The three girls walked their father's land because they were of royalty but they were so ugly, so-so ugly, and no one, could even look at them! The town's people were constantly talking about the three ugliest and nastiest of the

land! The evil Wizard King of Death was embarrassed by this and demanded the Princess to keep her two new ugly friends locked in her room.” I could see the boys were waiting impatiently so I chucked in a bit of gore to keep them enthused, “One day, Princess woke up and could not see ... for now she was blind! So she felt her eyes ... and her fingers went deep into her empty eye sockets ... her eyeballs were gone except for the warm blood that covered her fingers!” This got a little scream from the girls and chuckle from the boys, I shuffled a bit and carried on, “Princess went to scream but only a croak came out and as she felt her face, there were warts all over it! She could not see or talk so all she could do was listen and then she heard her two friends speaking perfectly and they turned to her as the conversation,

“I was a beautiful toad ... and she was a happy crow, while you were the Princess, an ugly one, but still a Princess. Now things have changed, you are all the ugliness of the land, a blind hairy toad with warts!” Crowessa laughed and added,

“Your eyes tasted wonderful ... so juicy!” Princess Beautiful mouthed out silently the words that they both could lip-read easily,

‘Why have you done this to me? You are my friends.’ So Toady answered her,

“Because you changed us from what we were just to become your ugly sad and cruel friends and just because you were lonely! You never gave a thought or care about our wishes or happiness; you were NEVER our friend!” The Princess tried to cry but she had no eyes or voice so her tears were deep and silent, trapped inside.” I knew I was getting to the good bit so I stopped, took a breath, knelt, grabbed my water bottle, and took a sip while the boys especially were restless with anticipation. I stood, waved my stick at the boys, widened my eyes, and continued to Miss’ chuckles, “Then Toady and Crowessa tore her apart limb by limb ... and ate her piece by piece ... only spitting out the bloodied bones!” The boys cheered! I took a super-quick glance around the campfire and all were smiling, as the Emmers twins hugged each other laughing. It was time to finish off my story, “The evil Wizard King found her bones and the left-over bits of torso ... or what little remained, scattered throughout her bedroom. He turned to see her two friends sitting there smiling with blood-stained lips wearing their new clothes, the Princess’ clothes, soaked in her blood. The Wizard King was confused as they were both sitting straight up on Princess Beautiful’s bed, just sitting there as if nothing had happened. He stared at them as he noticed that the Toad’s warts were gone and Crowessa’s black crow eyes were now blue as the ocean, not that he knew she had exchanged them with the Princess’ and not eaten them at all; that was a lie! His eyes kept staring for they weren’t ugly but beautiful, so beautiful it was mesmerizing! They had stolen only the beautiful parts from Princess and only left the ugly bits for eating! No more would he - the evil Wizard King of ... DEATH (I got my last jump) had to be embarrassed by his daughter’s ugly looks but be proud, so he adopted Toady and Crowessa as his new pretty daughters and crowned them princesses and paraded them proudly through-out the land. The town’s people loved the King’s prettiest-in-the-land two daughters. Did the Wizard King miss his only true Princess? For she was as ugly on the inside as much as she was on the outside ... so he NEVER did! The end.” I was cheered and applauded by all except you know who!

The boys were giving me the thumbs up as I sat back down on the log and I was blessed with a bonus that I hadn’t seen coming, as from that moment on, Nasty Beth had a new

nickname from the boys – ‘Princess Beautiful’ and the two bitches were now stuck with ‘Toady and Crowessa’!

After the campfire stories, a game of hide and seek was played and the Princess, Toady, and Crowessa would be making a special point of finding me but I had a surprise for them too – it was silver, shiny, and stabs like a ... BITCH!

*

Confession

“Wanna try me?” I had the knife at Beth’s throat as she stood perfectly still against the tree in the dark. “Now, Princess Beautiful here’s a nice present ... especially from me ... to you.”

My imagination was working overtime as I waited in the dark for Beth to come my way and find me. I wanted so desperately to have the upper foot (or threat) in our relationship. It was obvious she would be that one for sure so I was ready! But I was wrong, it wasn’t Princess Beth but Crowessa who came around the corner, crying ... which put my knifing game on hold.

It was clear by Vanessa’s crying that something was more than a normal wrong, sitting right here in a near breakdown. I hid the knife quickly behind my back and slipped it into the elastic of my pants and covered my shirt over it. Vanessa saw me and she fell on her knees and was still crying, then she looked up at me and moaned in emotional pain,

“It was Mr. Johnson ... he ... he,” Vanessa was a mess, her nose was dripping and she looked terrible, “... he hurt me ... he used his finger!” It was clear that she wasn’t making this up, yet it had only been an hour since the campfire stories. I sat down beside her and put my arm around her.

“What do you mean he used his finger?” I was pretty sure I knew what she meant but I couldn’t believe my ears and as she cried, she pointed down there so I had to ask, “How ... where?”

“He saw me hiding behind the canoes and called me over and,” Vanessa was sobbing hard again, so I held her tighter and she continued, “... he told me he had the best hiding spot, where no one would find me.” I was listening intently now. “Mr. Johnson asked me to follow him to his cabin ... then he told me to hide under the covers on his bed ... I didn't know! I didn't know!” I couldn't help to feel sickened of what I knew had happened by that filthy old man!

I felt sorry for her as she continued her sobbing and told me how scared she was when he hopped into bed with her. I asked her why she didn't get out and run. But she explained how petrified she was. Vanessa had laid there while he lay next to her with his dirty thing exposed in his hand before he put his finger down there! And as I had predicted, Beth found me but there would be no knife in the throat ... well, not tonight.

"What's wrong Ness?" and I looked at Beth straight in the eyes as I widened mine as she knelt to talk to Vanessa. "What's wrong ... tell me?" I should have guessed it would've been her turn to glare at me as if I did something. Yeah, if only it was her here first, then they both definitely would've had something to glare about!

"It was, Johnson!" I spoke for Vanessa as she was even a bigger mess now since she had seen Beth. So as I, Beth needed confirmation of her suspicion. I replayed Vanessa’s story as simple and as straight as I could. “The dirty bastard tricked her into hiding in his cabin ... told her to hide in his bed, the sick prick ... and then he used his filthy finger on her.” Then I demonstrated with my hand and one finger, my disgusting image that was stuck in my mind.

“This is shit! Did this really happen, Ness?” Now Vanessa was able to look at her and she nodded with a sad clown’s frown confirming my brief explanation. Beth was about to ask more when Tracy and the boys found us.

After re-explaining the events we all sat around comforting Vanessa who was still suffering from shock. Tracy suggested we go and tell Miss Davis but both Beth and I thought this wasn’t such a good idea. Everyone heard that they had dated a while back and we all knew it was a little more truth than just oval gossip. Yeah, and who would believe us over them? And here comes the twist, it wasn’t me but Beth who suggested what we all wanted to do.

“I wish we could cut his balls off!” I was amazed at the reaction and the flared-up anger from the boys, as the girls, so I couldn’t help myself ... but I could help this situation; it was time to take control!

“Well, we could use this!” I drew out the stashed flick knife and clicked the blade out into stabbing mode! “We can do it ... cut his balls off ... but only if you want to?” There was dead silence as I had flabbergasted them all, then Beth spoke up.

“We can fix this ourselves ... Ness?” She leaned over and pulled Vanessa into her cuddle zone and added, “What do you want us to do Ness? What do you think we should do? Should we tell Miss or fix this ourselves?” Vanessa broke down once again and answered,

“I don’t want anyone knowing. Not Miss, not Mum, or the kids at school. I wouldn’t be able to look at them. This is not fair ... I hate him ... I fucking hate him!”

“So what the fuck do we do now?” asked Jimmy.

We all sat around in a circle of silence for what we knew it was, the calm before our storm, the brainstorming of our planned revenge from beginning to end. We knew we had to go back to the cabins and all agreed we needed to sleep on this, think straight before taking any action. We would meet back here tomorrow before breakfast and for us all to bring our anger for Mr. Johnson’s downfall to Hell.

Tonight’s priority needed to be about taking care of Vanessa.

*

Planning

We all arrived at the canteen for breakfast one by one, with Beth and Tracy holding Vanessa's hand. They sat her down and kept her protected from her abuser. Then like nothing had happened, in walks Mr. Pervert and just smiles at us all. The other kids that were oblivious to the previous night's events helped us to hide our faces of disgust and disapproval, just by blending in amongst theirs. I took the opportunity to eyeball the monster and send him the message. - *You're going down!* He caught my glance and just stared at me, then couldn't help but glance over at Vanessa, before he caught Beth's and Tracy's eyes as well. Now he wasn't quite sure if we knew or not and that is exactly what I wanted. I wanted the sicko to worm squirm and let the panic and paranoia set in ... what was coming next – nothing or the authorities? But he would never guess it would be us!

We all agreed to meet at the big tree before breakfast for our final meeting and run through before our first planned outing of the camp week: the trek race.

*

Game on

I had packed my back-pack for the trek race and placed the half-empty bottle of scotch in there as well. I looked across to the end of the cabin and Beth and the bitches were nodding as they were packed as well. We all knew our part now and we all had swigged a mouthful of straight scotch to seal the deal ... we were a team - a revenge team!

I think Johnson 's first sign of concern was when we all joined his line before anyone else was evening getting to the line-up (except Vanessa who joined Miss Davis' team) but what could he do but raise an eyebrow? He couldn't remove us just for any reason? *Oh yeah, we knew he was a pedo!* And if he did have his suspicions, he would want to keep us close by, to find out the truth ... yet, he had no idea that this is exactly what we wanted too?

Miss Davis was my only worry as she was curious why not one of the other two bitches were in her line and standing in his, so I smiled and grabbed Beth's arm to her horror, showed her that we were besties now ... err NOT! Beth played along and waved to Miss while Vanessa was under the care of the Emmer's twins.

The Trek was a game between the five camp teams of ten (including the leader) to reach 'Pilson's Point', grab the initial targeted red flag. Move like the clappers and be the first team to return and place it at the campfire to take out the title for this year! Unbeknown to all, was that the title we wanted to win was last place - Mr. Johnson. We all had or maps and compasses and it was a canoe start upstream for a mile around the bending river. Then disembark on the riverbank, drag the canoes while we trudge through the forest (carrying the canoes for a good five minutes) then cut through to the other side and back into the river for another leg, upstream. Then, leave the canoes on dry land before our final trudge uphill to 'Pilson's Point', claim a colored flag and then reverse it all, easy-peasy! It was Jimmy whose big brothers Luke and Taylor had done this camp over the previous three years (and he stated nothing ever changed on these camps) so he had heard over and over every detail of what to expect; this helped our plan take the advantage!

All five teams were waiting around in our sexy life-jackets for the starter gun to go off and with a bang, there it was! All teams were off and running to the team leaders bellowing instructions, then choosing their two-man canoes from the row to drag to the riverbank. Tommy Redmunds and David Wellings were in our team along with skinny Judy Granger. They were just a little more enthusiastic about the race than us and made it to the canoes, like the rest of the teams ... but we were in NO rush! We needed to be at the back of the pack and we never needed any unannounced witnesses turning up.

Mr. Johnson was doing his best to hurry us up and we got there but we fumbled our way into the canoes. Jimmy's boys could've won an academy award with their stumbling performance. Beth and I climbed into our canoe together and I reflected as only yesterday, I would've had her in this same canoe but with a knife in her back. It made me chuckle as the

funny way life's little roads divert you in a completely different path (as Beth's). Twenty-four hours ago she was going to make my life misery and I planned to take hers away in return and now here we were - a team! *Quick, twitter that!*

The rest of the teams were way ahead of us upstream and disappearing around the corner. The dirty old Mr. Pervie was yelling from his and skinny Judy's canoe at us (the revenge team), as we were purposely lagging in our catch up to their two leading canoes. Tracy was in with Jimmy while Bobby and Phillip were in the other one. Beth and I were last in the water. I had used my clumsy no-hoper last pick of the bunch image to paddle totally out of sync with Beth and we were both cackling. *Yikes! Were we having fun?*

"Hurry up you bloody lot or we'll lose 'em!" Johnson's face was getting redder by the second and he was getting pissed off. "Stop bloody stuffing around ... I've never lost one of these races in the past four years ... and you lazy lot aren't going to break that!" I couldn't help but think, *Oh winning, I DON'T think so!*

We all caught up to them at the first bend and the water was still with no current at all, it was still and glass-like, except for the paddlers breaking its perfect form for only a few ripples before it returned to its ironed flat level. Both sides of the river were now just masses of green trees and the only sounds were our paddles, besides an odd bird call or a dragonfly buzzing by. No one spoke as we paddled and it was kind of eerie. The six of us were communicating only by eye contact and yet it was loud and clear ... revenge was coming!

We reached the destination point for the next leg and no one else was here so we knew this was our best leeway; the window of opportunity was wide open! Tracy had been designated to take care of Tommy, David, and skinny Judy as we knew we needed them out of the picture and this was an important detail of our exercise. We pulled our canoes out of the water and we were supposed to carry them above our heads. Johnson was first out of the water with Judy bellowing instructions to us all and then the plan was in action as soon as Jimmy fell on the rocks.

"MR. JOHNSON - MR. JOHNSON!" Beth was yelling as we were all screaming, she winked at me and continued, "I think Jimmy is having a fit!" Jimmy was rolling on the ground convulsing and foaming at the mouth. Tracy was going hysterical as the other three were frozen stiff while we all surrounded Jimmy.

"Get help, Sir ... we need to get help!" I eyeballed the pervert and his face was white as Casper's and I don't think my words registered as he watched Jimmy convulse, so I pushed him hard, "Sir we need help!" He nodded as I could sense him going through his mind's first aid training of what to do and then he started to react

"Shit-shit ... oh shit, Jimmy!" His face was white as Jimmy kept his convulsing act up so I spoke up,

"Sir I think we need to get help! They (pointing to Tracy, Tom, David & Judy) can catch up on the rest; they're the fastest of us! Miss Davis used to be a nurse, remember Sir."

Now I knew he wouldn't be thinking rationally so my suggestion was a grasp at straws and it would do. We needed to buy us some private time with him alone, no interruptions. Johnson was holding his head with both hands as we placed Jimmy on his side in the recovery position and to make sure he wasn't choking on his tongue, as he continued his convulsions in spectacular form. I must admit it was an award-winning piece of acting. Jimmy's older brother Luke was epileptic, so Jimmy had first-hand experience in this situation and everyone knew Luke handled his brother's regular convulsions at school. So it was plausible that this would run in the family; well Johnson was convinced! His fog cleared and finally, he spoke,

"Okay, you four ... run as fast as you can and find Miss Davis – QUICK!" Tracy had her bit of the plan totally under control as the four were off and running together.

"Jimmy ... can you hear me? We need to clear his tongue. Violet can you ..." Johnson's voice pulled up immediately when he realized I had the knife at his throat, as Soldier Bobby quickly grabbed his left arm and Soldier Phillip, his right.

Beth yelled, "NOW!" Jimmy quit his acting skills by pulling the now empty scotch bottle out of his backpack and smashed it on the rocks. He had it in Johnson's face as the pervert was on his knees in shock and disbelief.

"What the heck ... what is going on?" Johnson was eyeing us one by one but our gazes were strong and steady, yet we had the upper hand here and he knew it. Nasty Beth, as usual, took her lead,

"Listen here pervert ... we know what you did to Vanessa last night!" Beth's voice was strong and sounding repulsive toward the predator, as she hand gestured the boys to bring his hands together behind his back so she could bound his hands and feet with the zip ties, which had I conveniently brought to camp with me for Beth of all people (not that she knew). He was starting to get angry so I pushed the blade just a little deeper into his jugular and he submitted.

"You kids are fucking crazy ... you wait 'til we get back to camp!" Sir's bluff didn't worry me so I turned the table,

"Who said you're going back to camp ... you fucking SICKO!" I saw a trickle of blood from the blade's tip and he felt it too, as he took a swallow of saliva. The boys were silent but strong (like they were Beth's and my soldiers). Beth had the zip ties tight while he was still on his knees as she rounded to face him. She leaned over and grabbed his chin with her right hand and her teeth were gritted as she spoke straight through them,

"Your filthy finger and your filthy thing is the reason you are here, why we are all here and why ... you are in BIG trouble!" Her voice was so authoritative and I had to admit to myself she was very good at this and it was weird, to actually think I liked her like this (well a bit anyway). Johnson's eyes welled up as his face whitened again; Beth continued, "How many other girls have you touched?" And she slugged a big one right in his face. It was my turn now and time for the real show to begin so I bellowed my orders to my soldiers,

"Lay him on his back!" Bobby and Phillip responded as Jimmy kept up his guard with the broken bottle close to his face. "Now take down his shorts!"

“Shit ... look kids I promise I won’t say anything ... just let me go!” Johnson the pervert, tried his best but I took off one of my ponytail scrunchies and shoved it in his mouth, to shut the bastard up. He tried to turn away but Jimmy came in close with the scotch bottle again to his eye so he obeyed my order. The tears were flowing from his eyes as the boys pulled his pants to his knees and exposed his disgusting tally-whacker. I looked around at our gang and their faces nearly made me laugh out loud as they were scrunched up just as much as mine, while his disgusting doodle flopped around like it was trying to make a hop for it. But it was back to the plan so I asked, “So who’s gonna lift it up?”

“I ain’t touching it!” One of the silent soldiers suddenly became vocal and it was Phillip.

“I’m not touching it either!” And here was a little variable I hadn’t anticipated as Jimmy piped up before Bobby.

“Don’t look at me ... forget it! That’s Gay!” So I turned to Beth, who was shaking her head before she spoke,

“Pussies! You fuckin’ pussies - GAWD!” Beth lent down and with her head as far away from it as possible (and looking the other way) as if Johnson’s penis eye was looking at her. “Quick ... cut it off!” Johnson was thrashing and groaning now on the rocks and managed to pull his willie out of Beth’s grip. Beth complained, “Oh shit!” She grabbed it tighter, by the head with all four fingers, not just two this time. I pulled my knife from his throat position as Jimmy replaced it with his broken bottle.

“Go on ... DO IT VIOLET!” Beth was pleading with her blood-crazed demand. I placed the switchblade at the base of his dick and drew a breath ... it was now or never.

“Stop that ... Violet don’t ... STOPPPP!!!” It was Miss Davis with Tracy and the others sprinting down the rocky path.

“Do it, Violet, do it now!” Beth was whispering under her breath ... but I didn’t! I couldn’t in front of Miss Davis but I did manage to get a little cut in and a little blood flowed as I threw the blade on the ground. I stood up quickly with my back towards Miss Davis as I set out my instructions to all of the revenge gang, clear and simple.

“We never intended to cut it off, guys ... we were only going to scare him because we all hate him okay ... we got to stick together ... okay! We’re kids and they can’t force us to talk ... so say as little as possible!” The boys were nodding and Beth was pissed but she nodded as well. I continued, “We’ve scarred him ... for life!” I pointed to the blood that was now covering his hairy balls. Then I directed my attention to Johnson and I spoke out softly but clearly and he heard and understood me perfectly, “If you press charges against us ... we’ll tell EVERYONE what you did to Vanessa ... and I bet you there were more eh! Do you want the cops involved?” I saw Beth’s ‘justice done’ smile as I felt Miss Davis take me down.

*

Aftermath

“So why did you do it, Violet?” Miss Davis’ eyes were red and she had been crying but all I could think was, *‘why cry over that piece of scum-trash’s filthy cock!’* I just looked downwards as I sat on the camp bench then looked straight past her face. I could see the ambulance putting Johnson in to take him away on a stretcher and I chuckled. Miss heard me so she turned to see what I was looking at,

“Violet ... do you think that’s funny?” She looked repulsed.

“What does he need a stretcher for ... one tiny little cut!” I couldn’t help my smirk.

“Shock Violet ... shock. He’s in shock!” Miss was crying again and she went on, “Phillip said it was your idea ... is that true?” *Of course he did, the WUSS!* I just went back to my golden silence and started looking around again as Miss did all the talking. “He said that you wanted to frighten Mr. Johnson ... because you all hate him ... Violet is this true? *Aha, maybe Phillip wasn’t such a WUSS after all!*”

“Yep!” Now that was enough explanation I thought.

“Why Violet ... what did he do?” I so wanted to scream out what he did but I just kept my mouth shut and it was clamped tight. Miss then announced, “Vanessa told me the truth, Violet. I know he touched her.” *Holy SHIT!* There was another variable I never saw coming! Miss’ tears were flowing free.

“Why didn’t you come to me first?” She grabbed me and hugged me; man that was surreal! “The police are on their way, Sweetie ... so please tell them the truth!” Miss Davis let go of her embrace and had me at shoulder distance with one hand on each. “If he did this, Violet ... he will go to jail!” Then it was like all the pressure of my cooker welled up to the surface and it overflowed out like a relief. I couldn’t speak but just cry and my nose ran like a tap, as Miss held me again.

I was last to be interviewed by the local police and the revenge gang was not allowed to see each other so we had no way of communicating or covering our tracks. I wondered how Beth went in her interview but I had a feeling nothing much was said from her. Now Vanessa herself was a problem as she was the innocent victim in all this and it was all for her ... but she was the one who broke first.

Another two cop cars came and I got to see Beth for the first time (since we were all separated) in the back of the squad car as we were being driven straight back to Ridgetown Precinct, for individual questioning (with Child Agency Authorities overseeing). Beth and I never spoke but our smiles confirmed nothing was said and it was clear as mustard she had heard Vanessa had cracked. Phillip was first to be taken away in a cop car with Bobby and he saw me and yelled toward us,

“Don’t say anything ... we’re just kids!” After knowing Phillip stuck to our plan of saying nothing, I knew we had a very good chance of getting away with this! Hey, what damage was done? Nothing!

The drive was long as I sat in the back next to Miss and we only stopped for toilet breaks and something to eat but the trip was silent (bar the low volume of the police radio) with the officer just on driving duties.

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Inquisition

We walked into Ridgetown station at 9:26 pm as per the wall clock and it was quiet as a mouse, except for some smelly drunk slouching in one of the reception chairs. Then I saw waiting for me, was Grandma, Sandy (in her uniform), and to my horror, both Georgina Edwars and the Rose of Fatness (who was already shooting her death arrows towards me). Miss was talking to Grandma as I saw Beth and she glared at me so I spun to her and stated,

“Don’t say a fucking word ... they know nothing! If we say nothing ... this’ll all go fucking away!” Beth and I were now a team and she was fearless like me and she answered her commitment,

“Lips sealed!” Beth motioned her lip-zip closure between her top and bottom lips. We reached out and our fingertips connected as sisters being torn apart, just as we were dragged off to separate interrogation rooms. Yeah, and I bet you can guess who Ruby followed?

“Violet Honey ... tell us what happened? From the start and ALL of it.” Detective Sandy asked. The room with just us three (Sandy, Ruby, and myself). It was dead quiet in there until it was broken by Sandy’s voice, yet she wasn’t as sympathetic sounding as usual. I just looked around the room twiddling my thumbs. Sandy tried again as Ruby shoved a notepad under her nose. “We just wanna know why this happened? VIOLET!” Sandy yelled my name as my attention was drifting around the room and I could sense her frustrations. “Violet, we know what he did to Vanessa ... but we need to know why you and the others did what you did? You must tell us!” And then I knew it was coming! The old sack of potatoes was itching to say something,

“Choo going down child! We all know choo started it!” And there it was, as Sandy glared at Ruby (it was obvious Sandy didn’t like her too) so I just smiled and blew her a kiss as I threatened,

“Shame you don’t have a cock, you FAT BITCH! I could cut it off for you too!”

“The Lord knows what choo are and choo is going to pay not just for this but for cha Mumma and cha Pappa’s death ... swear to Almighty God, I will take choo down!”

“Ruby ... STOP IT!” Sandy lost it! “Swear I will drag you out by the fucking hair if you don’t contain yourself! YOU are here as under child protection laws YOU are required for her (as she stood up and pointed to me) ... NOW ... do your fucking job!” But then Sandy diverted her anger towards me. “And you ya little shit! Stop fucking us all around, has she (now pointing to potato lady) got some of this right? ‘Cause I’m sensing trouble follows you here, there and everywhere!” Sandy sat back down and took a deep breath. After a few seconds she continued, “Violet honey, Johnson is a pervert ... we know that! He will be charged but you kids are in trouble too! Unless you can convince us otherwise ... did he touch you?” I gagged at the actual thought of his man-size gropers going anywhere inside or even near my pants,

“No ... yuck! He’s a pig ... someone should brand him! Brand his back, better still his forehead with what he is ... deviate!” I was angry and I had been angry for the last two fucking years and I couldn’t hold it in anymore. It was like the monster inside was finally unleashed!

“FUCK HIM! FUCK HER! (Pointing at Ruby) FUCK YOU!” I stood up and ran to the door ... it was locked. Ruby the fat bitch laughed as I smashed my fists on the door.

“Choo ain’t going nowhere child ... chust to Hell!” Ruby was smiling as I pulled down as hard as I could on the door handle repeatedly screaming,

“Let me out ... I want Grandma! Let me out, fucking LET ME OUT! I WANNA GO HOME!”

I don’t know what happened but I snapped and flew at Ruby and her fat neck and I bit her face hard before she even realized. Sandy acted swiftly and tried her best to pull me off. I could taste the blood of her fat potato cheek on my tongue. I swung and got my last connections in on the fat bitch as Sandy pulled me to the ground and sat on me with my arms pinned to the floor above my head. I thrashed as best I could as I had wanted to kill, KILL RUBY!

“I’ll fucking take you down BITCH!” I was screaming when Sandy slapped my face ... and it hurt! Then the door flew open and two other cops grabbed me, threw me down and over on my stomach as Sandy cuffed me. I sideways looked at Ruby who was holding her cheek as the blood poured through her fingers, I smiled ... I had scarred her too! So I screamed out, “FUCK YOU ... see YOU in HELL!” And then I felt someone lift my shorts and panties to expose my right butt cheek for the needle to go straight into it and within seconds, I felt sleepy and I felt cal...

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Rain

It must've been raining for a week when I got a visit and a special surprise from Grandma and it was better than any sunshine.

I had been ordered to go under psychiatric assessment due to my anger issues (from Ruby's attack as well) as all the other shit that I had to deal with in my life. I'd had these tests before but this time I was committed to further scrutiny. Here at Burroughs, they were way more frequent and intense. I have spent the last three weeks here being interrogated and yet I had not shown one actual negative emotion, so I was due out for good behavior and going home to Grandma's within the next two weeks.

"Now, Violet ... I did bring someone one to cheer you up today." Grandma stood up from her chair at my table near the window and went to the door and opened it and then I saw them – Beth and Vanessa. They both ran at me and hugged me as I'd never been hugged before in my first three-way girl hug. I cried tears of happiness to see them both. We had been texting like mad-women but this was the first time I had been face-to-face with them since that day at camp.

"Hey, you CrAzY girl! How have you been?" And suddenly like a Harry Houdini trick, Nasty Beth had disappeared from my life completely and my new Sister Beth had replaced her as she spoke. "The boys said to give you this." And as she let one arm go to reach in her pocket, Grandma smiled and watched my face as she handed me a photo – a photo of all of us at camp and it was the campfire night just before story-telling, we were in group and Beth was sneering at me; I cracked up! It only made me cry harder as it made me realize after all this time I had finally found friends – true, trustworthy, cut-the-dick-off-together friends!

"Johnson was arrested ... I have to go to court with Mum." Vanessa had a tear in her eye as she held me. "We want you back with us at school, Violet." Then she turned her mouth to my ear and whispered so Grandma couldn't hear her, "Thank you."

We all sat on the lounge with the television on as we gas-bagged about school and the shit that went down after Johnson's demise and that ALL of the revenge gang had kept their traps shut! So there was nothing more to say about it besides my outburst at Fat Rubes. The school had hush-hushed it as I expected the bitch Principal Underwood would.

It was a great day and I cried again when they left. I went back to my room and placed the camp picture on my bedside table, leaning it against the base of the lamp. I laid there for hours staring at their faces one by one and I realized for the first time in so long ... I had true friends.

News

It was a Wednesday just after lunch when I got a visit from Sandy and her face was solemn.

“Violet ... we need to talk!” Sandy cuddled me and it was strange but I see she had been crying as her eyes were red. She walked me to the lounge to sit as she grabbed my hands and sat face to face. “I have some sad news. Your Grandma has had a heart attack ... Sweetie ...” My body felt heavy as my heart raced before Sandy continued, “I’m so sorry, Violet, she died before the Ambulances got there ... this morning.”

All I could think of was if only I was there and not here ... not here in this shithole but with Grandma, I could have saved her. Johnson had had the last laugh or was it, Ruby? My world felt like it sunk below the ground level, even beneath the dirt where Mum and Dad were buried. A place where nothing moved, only blackness; it was a frozen place of loneliness! Sandy grabbed me as she was the bearer of my bad news and held me before I broke her hold and walked alone to the window. As I gazed through the Burroughs’ Rehab Clinic’s barred-up window, simply watching the cars drive by in the distance, the silence of death engulfed me. My life had finally seen a bright light of hope in the distance but in one sentence ... it all changed and came back to the beginning.

No tears ... only misery itself.

*

Grieve

Grandma's funeral was so different from Mum and Dad's as this one was so sad. I felt the loss inside and my heart ached and ached to see her even just one more time – to say goodbye. Beth, Tracy, and Vanessa came to support me with Beth's mother which I appreciated. It felt weird having to sit up the front and with no one but Sandy and the grandparent from Hell - Nanna Lynia. And that was the part I hated the most all too well, knowing there was no one left in my family but her.

"Please, Sandy ... can't I come and live with you? I don't want to leave Ridgetown ... I have friends here." I was hugging her and sobbing at the front of the graveyard before I was leaving for the wake and Sandy back to police duties and her own life.

"Look, Sweetie ... you know that can't happen. I'm a cop and I'm hardly ever home." Her beautiful blue eyes welled up as she was admitting the truth as much as I – she had been my first friend or more like an Auntie, something I never had, being a single child from two shit parents. Sandy continued, "I will write and phone, Violet ... I promise. Paris will be exciting, all the places and things you can see ... it'll be an adventure of a lifetime, I promise ... and I want pictures!"

"I don't speak French!" I thought it was a relevant point! Sandy, then kissed my forehead.

"You're a smart girl, Violet ... you're a very smart girl."

And as she drove off in the distance I knew that it would be the last time I would see my Auntie Sandy – forever; I just knew it in my heart! It was my penance for my actions just as losing my new found friends that I could see in the distance, all standing at Beth's mum's car wanting desperately for me to ride home with them, but I couldn't out of respect anyway. Nanna Lynia shut-down their request even if I wanted to and forced me to ride in the hired black limo with her. At least they were coming to the wake at Mum's house (where Nanna and I were now temporary living).

The three of us sat out back of Beth's house where her Mum offered to hold the wake, beside the pool and away from the adults.

"So when do you leave?" Beth asked as we ate the catered chicken and lettuce triangular sandwiches.

"In ten days ... Nanna says she has to tidy up the mess left here first and that I've still got to go back to the shithole for more therapy because of this crap." I couldn't help but screw up my face and let it out, "I don't want to go!"

"We don't want you to go too!" Tracy started as Vanessa and Beth both came in sounding like chirping birds in agreement – "Yes-yes!" Just then Grandma's neighbor - Mr. Deumont

walked out the back near us to light a cigarette before he waved, we waved back being polite. Beth questioned in a lower voice,

“I wish there was something we could do?”

“Yes, can’t we change this?” Vanessa stepped in, “You helped me when I needed help ... now you do!” And as I sat silently with eyes focused on the leaves floating aimlessly around the blue pool water, Tracy also stated,

“She doesn’t even like you!” Was it that obvious my life was to be fully shit yet again, even to my friends? Then Beth spoke up,

“We have 10 days to fix this – like Johnson! Together!”

Oh my God! Did this mean that I actually hadn’t gone back to the beginning? I never had friends like this there.

“You would do this for me?” Emotions were surfacing now and they comforted me as old Mr. Deumont smoked at the fence and just thought the tears were to do with my grandmother – well it was ... but the wrong one! Just then Nanna Lynia and Beth’s Mum came out back toward us, Nanna lit a smoke as Mr. Deumont finished his – like a tag cig team. Beth’s mum came over to us and stroked my hair,

“Violet, Honey, we gotta go now, say, goodbye girls ... I’ll be inside.” She left us and it was Beth who came up with the whole new chapter in my mind’s death book – ‘Sisters of Death Party!’

*

Party

Nanna Lynia finally agreed to let Beth's mum host my going away party at her house, but boy! - did I have to work hard on the old crow to let me even have one at all!

"But the girls are my friends!" I was pleading but still the old crow wasn't bending.

"You don't need it V," and suddenly I was shortened to V like it was wasting her airtime saying the rest of the letters ... but at least it would now be Beth, T, & 2 V's! "... you'll make new friends in France. Plenty of time for that." Her face was emotionless as always. "I think it's for the best." So I turned on the girly crocodile tears,

"I've lost my Mum, my Dad, Grandma, and now ... I can't even say goodbye to my new friends." I sobbed my hardest as I slumped back into the golden velvet lounge. Suddenly I saw it - a hint of being a real human being ... and she broke.

"Okay, but I want you home by 11:00!" After the shock settled, I jumped up wiped my tears, and hugged the O C, yeah, I can do it too!

"Thank you, Nanna." I ran to my room and text Beth straight away.

I spent a lot of time in my room going over and over scenarios to take Nanna down and what was the objective here – but to stay in Ridgetown. So murdering her wasn't the only answer to this one. I had no other family left, so, unfortunately, she was it! What must we do? It was simple just like Johnson – the upper hand! Once I knew this, my mind stepped up a notch to come up with three different scenarios. I would need to set up a meeting with the girls and the soldiers (that Beth assured me was in!) so I scammed the O C to let me go over Beth's for an hour after school.

Beth, Tracy, Jimmy, and Vanessa were here after we all walked home after school to help plan the party. Beth's mum left us alone in my room thinking we were simply planning music, decorations. All the party shit had already been completed before lunch and it WASN'T on this meeting's agenda. So I started,

"For me to stay here we need to let her know - who's the boss!" They were all nodding as I spoke, "We have to do this quickly during the party between 8:00 and 9:00 ... we need to keep some of the others occupied for the hour ... a diversion."

"I'll take care of that!" Tracy had her arm in the air.

"Jimmy!" I looked at him "... can anyone of your boys drive?"

"I've driven go-karts and Dad's let me drive his Nissan in and out of the drive-way ... it's an auto." I smiled and it would have to do I knew we only had a few miles to travel but no public transport was going to help, we needed a car –Beth's mum's car.

“Jimmy needs to drive your mum’s car!” I looked across at Beth and knew it was pushing the boundaries but the timeframe was essential.

“Oh, Shit! Are you trying to get us all killed?” Beth complained as she looked deep into my eyes, “Okay! Okay!”

We went through the rest of the plan step by step and the finer details would be worked out then reworked to suit. I knew this would be the last time I would see them all as I was due back to the clinic and then to school. Beth was now in charge to organize the rest of the revenge gang and to delegate the relevant duties to the right soldier. I trusted her with my life ... and she knew that too!

The countdown had begun - five days and counting.

*

Party-time

“Hi, Grace, nice to see you again ... can you make sure she’s in the cab at 10:50. She’s got to be home by 11:00!” Beth’s mum glanced across at us and I could read her eyes – *‘How do you put up with this shit!’* Then she spoke,

“I’ll make sure she is, Lynia.”

“Behave yourself!” And the O C just about slammed the door in Beth’s mum’s face after she waved her arthritic witch finger at me.

The rumpus room (that opened up to include the backyard pool) had been drastically changed and I couldn’t believe the transformation the girls had done for me. Streamers of all colors were twisted in the Cheezel-like shapes, draping from all corners, meeting in the center into a hanging battery-operated mirror ball, which was chained to a ceiling fan throwing off its multi-colored reflections all around the open area. Outback, purple and white plastic flowers were floating in the pool. A huge sign had been made that was sticky-taped to one of the sliding doors and in felt markers read ‘BON VOYAGE VIOLET’ hand-written by the girls (it was far too neat and perfect for one of the boys) with lots of various French references e.g. cut-outs of the Eifel Tower and a croissant glued underneath. Beth, Tracy, and Vanessa were the only ones here and the music from Tracy’s iPod dock was already loud as Pink sang about U using UR right hand and I thought that was a bit weird, but maybe it was only my sick mind that took me straight back to Johnson’s finger. Beth’s mum complained about it being too loud so we turned it down while she was there, but as soon as she was gone, we’d nudge it back up to ten! Grace had gone back to the kitchen and just as I was revolumizing the stereo, the girls ran at me with gifts.

“Quick open it!” Tracy demanded as tore off the purple wrapping paper – it was make-up. They all bought me make-up!

“Now sit the fuck still!” Vanessa ordered me as Beth was chuckling to my fidgeting.

“Shit! That friggin’ hurt!” All three of them were on the bedroom floor now as one of my eyebrows was half its bushy size and I still had one to go! Beth laughed,

“You’re lucky we’re not allowed to do legs!” *Christ!* I never even thought about this beauty crap before, well, for me anyway! I was the plump redhead dork, dressed in purple – it seemed pointless!

They finished my make-up and hair and I looked into the mirror at whom I didn’t recognize. I smiled in my heart, I wasn’t as ugly as I thought I was. Even my curls were straightened to a now much longer length. All my freckles were gone and replaced with a mono-

toned skin base. My eyes looked happy and sparkly and *oh my God!* I had eye-lashes that went forever and they were mine - black not red. And as I gazed into the mirror, I was reminded of a famous actress – I could've been Nicole when she was this very age. I turned and hugged all three of them.

It was 6:30 when all the guests started arriving and I hadn't seen the boys in ages. Jimmy and William were dropped off first with William's mum getting Nanna's unreasonable demand passed on from Grace of her no later than eleven o'clock finish.

All kids were there by 7:00 and the girls had rounded everyone up; it was buzzing! There must've been thirty kids (to my Nanna's horror), partying around the swimming pool.

It was fun dancing, laughing, and having fun as a teenager. I felt so different from the old Dark Beth like the light had finally turned on in my darkness and I could see all without swinging my blade of death. I wanted to be Light Violet, not Dark Violet tonight but I still had one more little thing to take care of before this could ever happen – Nanna Lymia. But for this moment and the next hour, I would turn off Dark Violet and enjoy my party – my going away party.

I looked around the party at all the faces slowly, one by one, from Beth's girls to Jimmy's boys and the rest who had come for me, yes, they were my friends now and I knew what I had to do to preserve this forever.

*

Canceled

“The plan’s off! I’m going to France with the Old Crow.” My tears confirmed my truth as Beth hugged me before the rest joined in for a group hug.

“Are you sure?” Beth was whispering, “We can take her down ... together.”

“NO! NO more ... no more.” I didn’t want any of these guys involved in what I wanted so badly to do. So I continued, “I just want to enjoy the party ... and my friends.”

“We ARE your friends Violet!” And they dragged me back to the make-do dance floor where my smile replaced my tears.

Time was flying by and it was 8:30 when Tracy pulled up the party for game-time on the pool deck, where it was all set-up! It was a special surprise for me. First off she dragged me and Beth’s mum (Grace) to the center of our make-shift dance floor and blindfolded us. I could hear the laughter and could hear Beth’s laughter above the rest. Tracy had us feeling things and guessing them out loud. It was a stupid game but we were laughing hysterically when they’d put creepy stuff in our hands, like rubber spiders and such, touch us on the back of the neck with feathers. Grace squealed twice as loud as I ever did!

A reworked ‘Pin the Tail’ game of ‘Pin the brain on the Teacher’ (and a little too close a resemblance of Johnson) was fun and of course, Beth won ... the BITCH! I gave her the middle finger and she gave me two. Tracy brought out a piñata and Grace tied it up under her back verandah as we took turns at smashing it. I don’t know if it was rigged but they let me get the final smash in as the sweets hit the deck in every direction. Beth gave me the finger first this time so obviously, she received my gift of two in return!

I squeezed them all for what felt like an eternity as I didn’t want this to end as the cab’s blinkers flashed as Beth’s mum was pointing to her watch; it was over!

*

Over

“You okay, Violet?” Sandy asked,

“My dress is ruined,” I looked down and my brand new dress wasn’t just purple now, it was mostly red – blood red!

“Tell me what happened, Violet.” Sandy was sitting on the floor next to me leaning against the lounge room wall as her partner and the paramedic exited Nanna’s room shaking their heads – nope!

How could I tell Sandy what happened - when I could only guess. Beth was my last hug when I left yet as she did, she grabbed me and whispered in my ear,

“Your real present is coming!” I thought nothing more of it as she kissed my cheek goodbye thinking she had bought me more make-up. I paid the cab and noticed the front door was slightly ajar. The Old Crow was even too lazy to get up and open the door for me!

“I went into Nanna’s room and there was blood,” I told Sandy honestly this time, no lies. I hesitated then as I reflected over the night’s events before saying any more. I remembered walking into Nanna’s room to tell her about my wonderful night, only to find Nanna ... like that. No more than a sliced-up torso of carnage lying dead on the floor. My first instinct was to run to her and as I did, I slipped in a blood puddle and landed face-to-face on her dead bloodied body. Her cadaver eyes were level with mine and wide open – lifeless and yet hauntingly they knew what I had instigated. Her mouth was wide open and her death-breath invaded my sense of smell. I vomited as soon as I pulled myself off the dead body; I wasn’t ready for this at all! I would’ve taken her down in France, alone, away from here but instead, I was sinking in this blood-filled nightmare. I went to say something to Sandy and suddenly my body started shaking uncontrollably. My mind was exploding ... I couldn’t think ... I couldn’t speak! Sandy’s eyes saw mine just as I felt them roll backward.

“Shit! Shit!”

And that was all I remembered before waking up in a hospital with Sandy sitting in the chair next to the bed.

“Welcome back, Kiddo.” She smiled and continued, “You were in shock, Violet.” Sandy handed me the water cup with the plastic straw and I sipped.

“What went down? We know YOU didn’t do it, Violet! We’ve spoken to Beth’s Mum.”

“I don’t know ... I honestly don’t know.” I had my suspicions but in all honesty, I didn’t know!

All I did know was that Beth’s, Tracy’s and Vanessa’s dresses were spotless when I left, and then it flashed like an alarm bell in my mind! I realized I never saw her soldiers – the boys during the games by Tracy’s diversion! But Grace’s car was locked in the garage!

“Someone sliced her to pieces Violet ... while you were at the party ... why?” Her face wasn’t as friendly as she always was, no auntie here – this was her COP face! “Death and Violence surround you, Violet! I’m starting to wonder if Ruby is on to something.” I just shrugged as I raised my new thin eyebrows and poked my bottom lip out. “We will catch the killer ... and if you know anything about this ... you’ll go down too! Be sure of it!” Suddenly I saw the good ol’ cop in her ... and no longer my friend. Was she just pissed off as she was my main line of defense in my previous incidences and now she was again and questioned that?

“I don’t know what happened ... I just found her ... like that.”

“Well, who did it, Violet? Who do you think?” She had leaned forward and was eyeballing me as if the truth would light up in my retinas.

“I don’t know?” What else could I say? No way was I ever going to rat on my best friends. I will take my punishment but they will NOT! If they all did this for me – just to ensure I didn’t go to France then I must protect them. Admittedly, it was close to my plan but with one minor detail – we never killed Nanna in my plan only just threaten her into fear. Diverting the partying kid’s attention and Grace’s, was our main variable, we accepted that! So the boys would sneak me out in Beth’s mum’s car so we could break-in like thieves in balaclavas blindfolding her, tie her up, duct tape her to a kitchen chair! Cut her a bit but nothing serious! Return to the party ASAP as if nothing happened – an alibi for us. So I could find her like this when I got home from my party, ring Sandy, and that’d be it. Of course, we would need to have a plausible motif – so her diamond jewelry in her bedside table would make it robbery! Would she know who we were? It was a gamble we would take. But this was the gamble I was NOT prepared to take in the end (my friend’s not mine) well-being.

I could not believe I had missed both Jimmy and Phillip were wearing different baseball caps at the beginning of the party to the end! I was worried now as if I realized their missing time-frame and the baseball cap change, now they may be in BIG trouble ... somebody else may have noticed too.

“Violet ... Ruby is on the way. This time I will listen!” *Oh Shit!* That was all I needed, that fat troll chucking her two cents worth in. “She will send you back to Burroughs! I hope you know that?” Sandy stood up and poured herself a glass of water from the tap. She leaned back over me and whispered, “Once ... always!” What did she mean by that? I imagined it was a hooker saying ... and now she used it on me to psych me out! Murderer – not hooker! So say this instead - ‘once a killer ... always a killer!’

Sandy left me alone for a few minutes to answer a call on her mobile; she went outside for privacy! I had to think quickly and think straight if I was to get out of this one. Not knowing what was happening outside in the real world was the immediate problem. I ran to the kitchen bench and scrambled through my new birthday Kitty handbag and grabbed my mobile that was in there and rang Beth immediately.

“Violet ... I don’t know what you’re talking about? We were all at the party with you, remember! Mum’s already given her statement to the police ... she’s verified it ... for ALL of us!” That was all I needed to know as her voice told me - we were A-Okay!

I quickly stashed my mobile back into my handbag just as I heard two voices growing louder by the second: they were Sandy’s and Fat Rube’s.

*

Aftershock

Ruby did send me straight back to Burrough's, as predicted – DO NOT PASS GO! Beth came and visited me. She took me to the open window to watch the passing cars in private as she explained what the aftershock had left behind.

All the kids at the party were interviewed by the police individually and lucky for us they had directed all questions about me and no one else – the fools! Ruby had convinced Sandy it was me; I guessed that! I knew my back was being watched for every little move and not protected by her now. Yet, thanks to Tracy's diversion (that even I missed), was center of attention and never left the party. It couldn't have been me - that was obvious! Jimmy and the boys were the ones that had saved my neck by breaking-in the front door when they did it. It was finally put to rest as a simple 'break and enter' gone wrong as the cops soon came to realize, ALL Nanna Lynia's expensive jewelry was missing; her bedroom had been ransacked!

The boys never took the car ... they had their bikes hidden and rode to my house via the bush shortcut. Beth told me they hadn't planned to kill her until she gave them the order to do so after my canceling of - THE PLAN. It was Beth's idea all along! A special gift to me from them and to ensure I wasn't going to France. She apologized for causing my little return visit here at Burroughs but told me she had a surprise for me, and it wasn't make-up. I asked her how the boys were and if they were traumatized by their actions. Beth fell silent and looked around the room to see who was looking – no one. Her mum was talking to one of the nurses here as Mr. Grant (the crazy schitso) was watching 'Deal or No Deal' on the tele. Old Mrs. Tippy was playing Solitaire on the table by herself; it was safe enough! Beth slid her iPhone out of her pocket and hit the picture folder icon. There it was – it was a picture of a balaclav'd Jimmy holding the knives into my dead grandmother's body as she was bleeding on the floor, then another of Phillip holding up Nanna's diamond earrings at his ears. He was still wearing his balaclava with Nanna's bloodied diamond tiara sitting upon his head. They were both grinning, I could tell them apart even with their balaclavas on, it was too easy to recognize who was who. Why I smiled I don't know, but I felt more for them than the dying old crow on the floor. I hugged Beth as she deleted the two photos and she stated,

“Now there's NO evidence!”

*

Home

“Well, child ... looks like choo gets away with it again!” Her bulgy eyes were in my face, searching my eyes for the guilt button she could never find in there. “Mark my words choo Lil’ devil ... old Rubes here will be there the day to see choo finally fall! That very day I will thank the lord Chesus for catching choo and cha anger and sending choo to Hell.” Then she pointed to the scar on her cheek placed there by the Lil’ devil - me! *Good luck with that!* I thought, then smiled thinking, *I DON’T think so!* I smirked and cocked my head at the fat bitch, stood up, and left her packing up her shit as I saw Beth and her Mum waiting for me on the other side of the clinic’s lounge room window.

I was going home and my soul sister had come through with the best surprise of all – I was going to live with them ... indefinitely.

Beth held my hand all the way home in the back of the car, she was more excited than me about this.

I entered my new home and I was met with a chorus of ‘SURPRIZE!’ All the Revenge Gang were here - Tracy, Vanessa, Jimmy, Phillip and Bobby as Grace hugged me and said the words that I’d been longing to hear forever,

Welcome home, Violet, welcome home.” They all ran to me. The boys picked me up as I screamed and Beth’s laughter drowned me out. They took me straight outside and threw me into Beth’s pool. Then they all jumped in fully-clothed as Grace laughed until the boys jumped out and grabbed her too – throwing her in to join our wet club.

*

Darkness

My life was finally normal, or whatever that was supposed to be? I had three soul sisters and three soul brothers now, a new step mum who never chastised me for being good as I always used to be. Beth and I became so close – we were the same, just from opposite sides of the fence.

I soon found out where her dark side stemmed from. Her Dad had beat her repeatedly during her youth and I cried when she told me he had done worse than Mr. Johnson to her as he was an alcoholic as well as an abuser. She loved her Mum and her Mum was also beaten by her Dad, so one day when the two of them were home alone (Beth and her dad), Beth got him so drunk on his drugged induced rum and suggested a swim together. So she virtually dragged him to the pool and held his drunken head under the water. He drunkenly tried his best to stop her, but it was useless (my actual plan for her death at camp, now how funny). Her mum was at work so she told the police she found his body in the pool when they arrived. I never knew this and she had never told anyone – not even Tracy or Vanessa.

Beth had found the exit for her mum and herself from their world of darkness; she had saved them!

*

Finale

“Good morning class, my name is Mr. Harris.” I could see he could spell too as it was correct on the blackboard. I looked across at Beth and Vanessa who were the only two that were in this English class with me and they were snickering. Beth pointed to the length of his pants, questioning whether they were long shorts or short longs? All the high school teachers seemed acceptable so far but this one had something wrong about him just as he caught Beth pointing at him.

“Stand up please Miss?” he cracked his ruler on the table which made us all jump. He made his way to her and checked out her sticky first-day name tag on her uniform blouse.

“Hmmm, Beth Rudders ... you seem to have a problem with my trousers ... please tell ALL the class what that is!”

I lost it and couldn't help it, my belly hurt as he turned to me and read my name tag, “Violet Pettingrow ... stand up also!” I made Beth start now, we were both laughing hysterically as the rest of the class started chuckling at our laughter. This annoyed Harris so much so, he was screaming,

“Ladies, you can explain this funny situation to the headmaster!” Harris went back to his desk, wrote on some slip he pulled from the drawer, and then screamed, “Get out! Get out!”

We were still laughing together to the principal's office strolling arm in arm on our very first day of high school. It was Beth who spoke first,

“Want to kill him after school?”

I smiled and thought about it ... but not for long.

“You betcha!”

This story has inspired Jonny to write a full novel based around this short story so please stay-tuned as 'Smash the Violin' – the novel has begun and will be available as Jonny's next release.

The Prince is Dead!

Town's bells ring, sad news is here tonight
King and Queen cry, the son is losing the fight
If only the potion could make it all right
But life is hard, darkness eats up light

For the young Prince, it's his destiny
Broken hearts, the hardest way
No fight left on this dying day
The reaper came to take him far, far away

Put on your best and shed a tear
Pray for his soul and pour a beer
Let's all toast for when his life was great
The Prince is dead! It's all too late!

All the King's horses and all the King's men
Failed to put the prince together again
The Queen's motherly love but to no avail
Who could've saved him, wrote a new tale?

Put on your best and shed a tear

Pray for his soul and pour a beer

Let's all toast for when his life was great

The Prince is dead! It's all too late!

I will miss him but I won't forget

that a life without love is truly death

Sleeping Dogs Lie!

D-day

There was nothing unusual about the day. The humidity seemed bearable enough for July and the smell of the freshly laid dolomite on Joe Scott's prize-winning roses assured him he had just advised the neighborhood, he had done so. Ethyl summoned Joe to the front porch where she had just laid out a tray of scones with her special homemade blueberry and apple jam, fresh whipped cream, and a pot of earl grey.

Retirement always had been Joe's big fear of the nothingness left in life but waiting to die. Yet, as he sat and ate, he looked into his wife of 52 years, loving eyes and admitted life had been good and was still extremely good.

"I heard Eddie Swartz finally passed away." Ethyl stated and then took a sip from the Royal Doulton teacup.

"Really? Poor ol' bugger never was gonna last long after the last stroke ... that was a biggie!" Joe smiled at Ethyl as he pondered on how many of his mates he had lost in the very short space of the last few years.

They both believed in being good people ... good Christians ... good parents ... good town citizens and were well-liked and respected in the township of - 'Tallis' - a small country town (even though it had tripled in the last twenty years) that kept to itself. Most people knew everyone else's business but overall, there was no better place for them both to live out their lives. They had met here, they had courted here, got engaged here, as well as getting married here and then also be blessed with the one miracle from God - their only son! William John was born 26 years ago, kicking and screaming into their childless life, and just when they both had finally accepted they would never be parents ... yes, it was a miracle!

They both sat on the porch in silence together as the scones disappeared from the plate and the teapot emptied. The sun shone brightly on what would seem just another day of their peaceful retirement before it was their turn to leave this Earth. The slow shut-down before God pulls your number out of the church bingo barrel.

But today was no ordinary day at all. For today - 'Death' was to enter their lives and eat them slowly but surely ... starting from inside their hearts.

*

Dream

Joe awoke abruptly from that dream – the déjà vu dream he had many times before but not for years! It was always similar yet it wasn't and was always so vague on awakening. He checked the time and it was 11:45 pm. Ethyl was still fast asleep but something had unsettled him this time; it was so more convincing! How come this time he could remember more pieces of the puzzle than ever before, and why did it feel so real, like he was there, watching, listening, and what did it all mean?

It always started with children playing in the park, just watching the kids be kids, and the feeling their joy of youth (as he had been once) was always warm and comforting and this was no black and white dream but full vivid colors of the brightest reds and greens. He could see young Jackie Thompson, crossing the monkey bars with the greatest of ease. Whatever did happen to young Jackie Thompson? But his mind moved on. Not wanting to disturb Ethyl's slumber, Joe's body lay as still as he possibly could, just looking across at the white netted curtains as they gently swayed amongst the ever-so-slight breeze that fluttered through their bedroom window. The curtains seemed to dance for him as he tried to piece more of his dream-puzzle together. Yet, like the dream, still left nothing concrete enough to even resemble any sensible story. For just as the children playing in the park would come then the bright greens and reds would fade and change to darkness ... lots of darkness and dust and it was like Joe could taste it. It was dry and eye-burning yet it was empty ... and there was nothing here, nothing in this part of his dream but silence and emptiness or a void ... but what did this mean? Joe had been here many times before but this was the first time he remembered so much.

The digital clock blinked 11:52 only a mere seven minutes after the last time he looked and yet Joe felt like he had been thinking about his dream for an hour. The curtains still danced as he watched and they seemed to take the form of ballerinas in white, swaying to the silent song that he could not hear, yet they danced so beautifully. Ethyl mumbled in her sleep as she shifted her body from cutting the circulation to her right arm which startled Joe as he was fixated on the curtains. The third part of his dream flashed in his mind which he remembered as the 'blue' part, all shades of blue like looking through a bright pair of blue binoculars.

Joe did recognize this place though, it was his old workshop and it was like it was when he was a young man, back in the sixties, fresh out of his apprenticeship. He could see Vic Rathbone's old M.G. on the hoist and wasn't she a beauty with her whitewall tires and she was gleaming her brightest of blue ... yet she was red? Joe looked all around the workshop. He started with his tool cabinet with his precious 'Made in USA' spanners that NO ONE was ever allowed to touch, polished and gleaming, ready for the next day's work. His view was very panoramic as he panned slowly to his right seeing all the things he had forgotten over time, such as the gleam of the old Castrol sign made of tin (and not one of those crappy corflute ones they use these days) or the empty coke bottle that had its era stamped all over it and screamed retro. What about the hula girl ashtray that overflowed with dead-ends and that he smoked like a chimney back then, and let's not forget the mirror, the rectangular cracked mirror that hung next to the poster of Barbara Eden as Jeanie. As Joe looked into the mirror he did not see his reflection as he expected, with the wrinkles of a well-lived life or even his younger face, the one Ethyl fell in love with at the tender age of 16. The face he saw wasn't that one or anything like

it, it was the face of his only son William's teenaged face, braces still firmly embedded on his teeth, and this was where the dream ended.

This time the dream never drifted between the dancing ballerinas and out the window but imbedded within Joe's mind – it made no sense but it stayed and it would stay now – forever!

*

Father Gormen

Father Gormen accompanied Sheriff Tony Demmins in the squad car to Joe and Ethyl's house on Tony's request. Demmins knew Father Gormen would support them as best as he could and remind them of God's faith in them both and theirs in him. Tony had received the call and email from 'Uncle Sam' and as Sheriff, he was indebted to his community to take the good with the bad ... and this was - the bad. He had delivered bad news before and nothing could be as hard as that little Cathy Roundtree. Cathy was only eight when he delivered that Hell to her parents. Yet still, William was Joe and Ethyl's only child and everyone in Tallis knew how special William was and not just to them but to the town itself – he was a hero, the only Soldier from this tiny province on a tour of duty in Afghanistan.

Demmins drove silently as he reflected the day William left and the party that was thrown by his Tallis friends for not just William but Joe and Ethyl too. William had made Corporal before his call of duty but it might as well have been General to his Tallis township friends and he would leave and return as their only hero ... but this was not to be.

Corporal William John Scott had not seen the land mine trip until it was all too late.

His body was awaiting to be flown back and it was imperative for Demmins to reach Joe and Ethyl before the immediacy of social media spilled the beans and all respect leaves the building (or the town in this instance).

Father Gormen, sat quietly clutching his bible as he turned to the Sheriff and reached out to squeeze his arm to pass on his outward strength as they turned into Belview Boulevard. They could see Joe tending to this year's most promising prize roses. Joe recognized Tony as he waved but then he also recognized Father Gormen sitting next to him and the question was answered by instinct as the waved dropped almost instantly, just as Ethyl and her morning tea opened the screen to see the police car pull up at their front gate. At first, she was smiling as they didn't get many visitors these days, she would need to get the Oreos, but just as the penny dropped so did the earl grey, while Joe stood frozen with the shears still in his right hand.

Sheriff Demmins did not have to break the news but just confirm and relay all relevant details to Joe as Father Gormen recited 'The Lord's Prayer' with Ethyl doing her best to accompany in-between her tears.

*

Drink to me

Ethyl was sedated and sleeping by dusk as Joe sat in front of the television where he watched the news and the repeated reports he could not escape from. Georgina and Nino Listi had left only an hour before on Joe's insistence. He knew how their good friends both meant well but he already had faced the truth ... this was not going away. The bottle of Chivas Regal had been sitting unopened on the sideboard next to William's picture (in uniform) awaiting his return where the two men would crack it and sit on the porch sipping on the fine scotch served only with ice until it would be empty. Joe had bought the bottle on the day William was deployed and they both had shaken hands on the deal to be drunk as skunks on William's return. But it would never be now, so Joe grabbed the bottle and two glasses and made his way to the porch. He sat in his chair and placed the two glasses on the white wicker coffee table; he cracked the scotch and poured two glasses (minus the ice). Joe toasted to his William and the reality that the Scott bloodline now ended with him and Ethyl. There was no one to toast him back but he refused to cry and only to raise his glass to the memory of his only son's life – the life of Corporal William John Scott for the tears would hold for another day. Tonight would be a celebration of life – not death!

Joe sat there sipping scotch until daylight but only a third of the bottle was gone. Joe did want to be drunk but it was not the case, he did drink for William, right up to the time he drifted under the rays of the full moon.

*

Penny Drops

“Good morning Mr. Scott. My name is Penny Stapleton for Channel 13 ... would you mind answering a few questions ... about your son, Corporal Scott, and his death in Afghanistan? Oh, so sorry, we would all like to pass on our condolences to you and your wife. When was the last time you spoke to your son?”

Joe awoke in the wicker chair to the bombardment of Penny Stapleton’s forthcoming interrogation. His neck hurt from sleeping awkwardly so he rubbed it deeply as Penny followed by her cameraman mounted the front porch stairs to be in swinging distance of a startled Joe. Anger swelled in the old man like a volcano as Ethyl came screaming through the screen door like the tornado-crazed Tasmanian Devil.

“Get out of here ... Get out of here!” Ethyl screamed at them.

“Mrs. Scott ... please calm down ... we only want to ask a few questions.” Penny Stapleton pleaded as she and her cameraman – Randy, were both now in reverse gear, backing down the stairs. Joe was fully conscious now and stood up.

“You heard her ... this is a private issue! Get the fuck off my property!” The old man stood beside his wife as the two-man reporter team exited quickly with Penny Stapleton getting the last word in as they drove off yelling at them from the van’s passenger seat,

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way Mr. Scott ... it’s all up to you? Have you heard the rumors? Are you so sure your son was a hero?”

Ethyl was now crying as Joe held her in his still ever-so strong arms.

*

Life must go on

Life has to go on, no matter if you like it or not! Bills, don't pay for themselves just as prize-winning roses can't water themselves, blooming into winners! Ethyl wasn't doing so well and the full military funeral was the icing on her cake of pain. Joe could sense his wife of so many years, had lost something deep within. Was it the pills or was the heartache? But whatever it was, it still remained irrelevant, as his commitment and soul love would always be there. He would support her through this shit until the whole Ethyl returned just as his emptiness had spoken to him and reminded him that time heals all wounds (well most).

"You and Ethyl are coming for a barbecue ... you got to get her out, Joe! It's been bloody months since the last one." Georgina Listi had tears in her eyes as she hugged Joe at the front gate. She was a dear friend to Ethyl and she and Nino had been over every day since the tragedy, taking care of the routine chores – cleaning, shopping, and making sure they both ate. It was killing her to see her best friend of thirty years, like this - soul-destroyed, sedated, and lifeless.

"Yeah, you're goddam well right, Georgie ... so is 5:30 alright?" Joe smiled and hugged his wife's best friend whom he admitted was half of the couple that formed two of their best friends, not just Ethyl's. "Tell Nino the ol' bugger, to dust off the dartboard ... I'll give him a chance to regain the title." Joe did his best to convince Georgina that he was himself or at least doing a lot better than Ethyl.

Joe persisted with Ethyl and they did go to the Listi's house for a barbie. To Joe, it helped to ease the pain by remembering what their life was like before and he wanted so much to regain that old feeling. But poor Ethyl struggled throughout the nights, she was not ready to accept and let go of her mourning. So many times she had broken down in Georgie's arms and at least three times had been virtually force-fed; she ate like a sparrow on a diet! Joe's eyes welled to see his wife like this and yet it was a simple feeling of being cruel to be kind. He wiped his eyes and as he turned his attention back towards the game of darts with Nino, he stated,

"Triple twenty." And much to Nino's disapproval, the bastard got it!

*

Dainty

Eleven months passed and even Ethyl had finally accepted William's passing and was able to refind her smile but Joe was concerned the anniversary of their son's death would be soon and his wife had come leaps and bounds in the past few months and no longer needed those wretched pills. God had replaced them and Father Gormen had been her true savior.

"I'm just popping into town Eth ... do we need milk or bread?" Joe asked and had used the question to cover up that he was going in to grab a beer for lunch at 'Luckys' with an old mate - George Dainty or the name he was dubbed back in secondary school and never could shake - Dainty George. They had both known each other since being boys but weren't close, more acquaintances until they bumped into each other at church bingo eight months prior and lunchtime beers on a Wednesday soon became a weekly routine, just as the stories that expanded over the time and all from the past. Joe and George, just two old farts that were now close beer-drinking mates.

"Two Buds, Love!" Dainty ordered from Joy the barmaid, as Joe shut the bar door behind him after his entry.

"Hello Joy, has this old dog been giving you any grief?" Joe smiled as Joy just waved her left hand at him suggesting 'No!' Joy placed the two opened bottles on the bar then she answered,

"You know I'd clip both of you behind the ears if I had to!" They all laughed as the two old dogs toasted to Joy's comment.

*

Nightmare

Joe had a few too many beers with Dainty today and Ethyl had made him lay down on their bed while she commenced taking off his boots.

“You’re getting too old for this you know!” Ethyl shook her head as she undid the left shoelace.

“I’m sorry Eth ... but I – I ...” and the old man was asleep yet still grumbling.

11:45 pm and Joe awoke with his head banging like a bass drum. Ethyl was fast asleep in the bed under the covers while he was still wearing his flannelette shirt but no pants, only his undies and he could see his trousers folded neatly over the end of the wooden bed-end. He needed a drink of water and a couple of pain killers to take the edge off of his impending hang-over.

The water straight from the jug was cold and refreshing as he ruffled through the second drawer of the kitchen bench in search of the paracetamol. He knew he’d seen them in there, somewhere ... then he heard something. A noise like scratching was coming from the bathroom. It was unsettling as it was repeating itself. Joe grabbed blade #1 from Ethyl’s knife block and made his way to the bathroom quietly. The noise grew louder as he came closer. The bathroom was dark as Joe eased the door open as the scratching continued. Joe raised the knife to head height as he burst in flicking the light switch on ... the room was empty and the scratching had stopped. He checked all around the bathroom but found nothing and then he heard the scratching recommence ... but now it was in William’s room. Joe’s hairs were now raised as he again found his attack position and made his way silently toward the kitchen. As Joe passed the mirror hanging in the hallway, he glanced to see the fear on his face and it was obvious; he was an old man! Out of nowhere, the mirrored image of his reflection exploded and now there was a new face staring back at him ... and it was a monster ... the Devil! Joe screamed and sat up instantly awaking Ethyl.

“What’s wrong Joe ... what’s wrong?” A half-sedated Ethyl hugged her husband before returning to drug-slumberland as Joe’s mind swirled with the reality it was all a dream or should he admit - a nightmare! He rubbed his pounding head as he glanced at the clock on the bedside table and it was exactly 11:52 pm, again.

After the two tablets and a couple of glasses of water (no dream this time), Joe returned to bed where Ethyl was snoring in her deep sleep. He gave her a gentle push, she turned to her side and stopped. Joe never slept at all that night as the nightmare was just a little too unsettling and that image of the Devil's face was now burnt deep in his mind. Of course, he could never tell Ethyl what he had seen, not the face ... not the Devil, so the scratching is all he did mention. How could he tell his wife that the Devil’s face resembled him of their only son - William.

A week passed and normal sleep patterns returned for Joe and his son’s Devil face started to dissipate from his memory, as all dreams seem to. Night by night he would still think of that

dream but now, he could only picture the face of William with his Service's beret on, just as that picture that sat on the duchess next to the opened bottle of scotch.

The one thing that did remain was the simple question - why? Why did he see William's face as the Devil? William was the perfect son – smart and polite ... wasn't he?

*

Questions

“Penny ... can I call you Penny?”

“Yes of course, Mr. Scott ... can I call you ...”

“It’s Joe, sure, Penny.” Joe’s voice was calm and friendly on the phone to the reporter which was so opposite of their initial meeting.

“So, Joe, how are you both doing?” Penny remembered that day clearly how could she forget as it was one of those rare days she lost her usual cool and that frazzled her immensely. “It will be one year soon.”

“Yeah but, I know we’re both doing well, thanks.” Joe knew this was going to be hard on himself. “Penny ... I remember you mentioning ... a-a rumor.” There he said it and hoped she knew exactly what he was asking so he wouldn’t have to elaborate.

“Joe ... are you sure you know what you’re asking?”

Penny was a great reporter yet the upset she saw on two elderly faces/good citizens contending with the loss of an only child was soul burning and that night she lay awake for hours just staring at the ceiling only to come to the decision – let it slide ... she would simply let it go ... it wasn’t worth it! Not this time.

“Penny ... I have a feeling you know something I don’t ... I need to know the truth.” Joe’s voice was shaky and Penny could hear it.

“Joe, I think you should sleep on this ... think of Ethyl ... think of William’s memory ... I think you should think about this.” Joe heard the depth in Penny’s tone and it was honest, nothing but honest concern. “I will tell you all Joe but only if you call me this time next week ... and I pray you don’t!” Penny never gave Joe a chance to say a word by hanging up immediately. She knew in her heart he wouldn’t let it go so dwelled upon the forthcoming meeting and with her reporter’s gut instinct, did her best to accept Joe would never let sleeping dogs lie.

*

Answers

Tears welled in Joe's eyes as he opened the manila folder that Penny handed him from across the table at 'Harry's Diner'. Penny had hit the nail on the head with the old man, he had insisted on this meeting (without Ethyl knowing of course).

"Remember Joe, it is only speculation." Penny's eyes were watery.

Joe pulled the first photo out of the folder and it was a photo of a crime scene but not a police photo, but a long-distance photo of the whole scene, yet Joe could see what it was to his breaking heart. Sheriff Demmins was younger in this photo and it was taken about 10 years previous but it was the whole photo that made Joe feel sick, as it was little Cathy Roundtree's body lying there in the bushes with minimal clothing while the poor Sheriff's face was etched in time ... and his expression was of pure horror like he had just witnessed the work of the beast itself. Joe swallowed what spit he could find in his mouth as he turned the photo face down as he reached to pick up the next page in the folder and it was a copy of the police report. Joe read only a few lines before he stopped ... he already knew enough details of little Cathy's murder.

The next item was a missing person's report of ten-year-old Jackie Thompson's disappearance and how he just vanished into thin air after playing in the park. Penny reached out and stopped Joe's hand as his hand touched the final photo. She shook her head slowly without saying a word as Joe closed then opened his eyes before he smiled to her then nodded, for he was ready ... for the truth. He turned the final photo and it was a black and white shot taken from a telephoto lens yet it clearly showed the truth! It was a photo of William at the age of twentyish yet it did not look like William but more like evil itself ... and he was carrying something bloodied, possibly clothing. Penny reached and took the photo from Joe's hand as she piled the rest back into the folder.

"I warned you, Joe." Penny placed the folder back into her briefcase as Joe held his hand to his face and cried like a baby as Penny asked.

"So Joe do you want people to know any of this? What about Ethyl? This proves nothing!" Joe knew Penny was right he must protect his wife from all of this, it would kill her ... and that was the truth! Was his son a cold-blooded killer? And somehow deep inside, he just knew it.

The walk home was a slow one for this shattered old man, he had never felt this lost!

*

Sorrow

“Are you feeling alright, Joe?” Ethyl poured the tea as Joe just stared ahead into nowhere while he sat silently in his weathered porch chair as the once fresh warm scones, were getting colder by the minute. “Joe! Joe ... Honey, what’s wrong?” Ethyl rubbed his right shoulder and he could feel her warmth come through his checked flannelette shirt.

“Sorry, Eth ... no-no I’m fine.” Joe shot his wife a very unconvincing smile and he knew it, so added more words to ease her worry, “I’ve just got a cracking headache ... didn’t sleep well.” Now that was the truth as after returning home from his meeting with Penny Stapleton, his mind was swirling with all sorts of crazy misguided random thoughts. His whole life had changed from the knowledge of his son’s dark secret. But he would protect Ethyl ... he must protect her.

“I’ll get you some pills.” Ethyl made her way inside as Joe resumed his staring into no place, just as a solitary tear snuck its way out from its hiding place and ran down his right cheek.

*

Evidence

“Hi, Mum, hi, Dad, miss you both so much. As you can see I’m alive and well but missing your cooking Mum.” William held up a chocolate bar and a half-emptied bottle of water from his tent somewhere in Home Base - Afghanistan. “How’s Dad’s roses going? Silly question eh? It’s not too bad over here, we’ve got a show tonight some singer from Australia ... never heard of her but should be good.” Joe watched the DVD letter he’d watched so many times before but this time he felt sick for he knew he was watching the facade of a monster. Ethyl had gone shopping with Georgina and so he had taken advantage of the few hours alone to search for anything ... anything to sway his jumbled mind one way or the other. He turned off the DVD – there was nothing there to incriminate so he made his way to William’s room. Joe opened the door slowly to the untouched room, both he and Ethyl had not entered it since his death – this was their room full of pain.

The room looked as he last remembered it except for a year’s worth of minimal dust and a spider-web above the window. Joe felt uneasy in this room and felt like he was the one that was doing something wrong - was he? William’s desk sat close to the doorway and was neat as he always was. The drawer was locked, Joe tugged on it but it wouldn’t budge so he searched for the key around the table and found it, underneath, sitting on the top of the front left leg, concealed from view. He opened the drawer holding his breath expecting to find the secrets he had been dreading, only to find a photograph of William and his Ground Force Army buddies, laughing and hugging in their desert uniforms before their deployment.

Joe moved from the desk to peruse the rest of William’s room. The shelves on the wall housed trophies and a lot of trophies! How could Joe not remember William accepting ALL of them as any good father would? There was nothing here so he stepped to William’s still made queen size bed and a now bitter emotion rising and surfacing as he had remembered imagining his vision of a good son’s future. Walking in to bring breakfast for them, breakfast in bed, and a loving wife behind him or even better, mother of his grandchildren. But this image was now vanishing forever and not just disappearing but being replaced by a tarnished, tainted black, and disgusting void. He knelt beside the bed and lifted the hand-made patchwork quilt to see what was, if anything, under the bed. Gym shoes, football boots, William’s old toy box, and ... then Joe went back to the toy box. How could he not have seen the padlock and hinge that had been installed to it?

Joe dragged the heavy box from its dust-marked spot to let the sunlight hit it for the first time in a year at least. Looking around the room Joe spied the letter opener on William’s desk, he stood and reached for it. He jammed the opener behind the hinge and pried the hinge off of the aged tin toy-box, easily. Suddenly he heard a noise which made him scuffle. Voices from the front garden; Ethyl had cut her shopping day early! Joe quickly pushed the toy-box back under the bed and exited the room quickly but quietly, he was nearly at the front door when he realized he still had the letter opener in his right hand. “*Shit!*” whispered Joe under his breath as Ethyl was on the top step and about to enter. He was in view now and if Ethyl saw what he was holding, she would know for sure he had been inside the still off-limits bedroom. Questions would be asked and then he would have to lie – lie to Ethyl, something he just was no good at; she read him like a book! Joe quickly shoved the opener into his back jean pocket as Ethyl opened the screen door.

“You’re back early!” Joe’s voice was shaky and Ethyl lowered her eyebrows at him.

“What have you been up to, Joe Scott?” She smiled at him as he leaned and kissed her cheek and reached inside himself to his open his LIE folder!

“Surprise ... it’s a surprise ... so never you mind!” Yeah, even Joe thought that was pretty dismal but it was the only words that left his vocal box ... and incredibly, she bought them.

“A surprise hey ... better be good, Joe Scott!” Ethyl handed Joe the two bags of groceries and slapped his buttocks as he turned to walk towards the kitchen. Joe chuckled then remembered the letter opener and how close she came to touching it, fortunately, she hadn’t. A relieved Joe lifted the two heavy bags of groceries to the bench-top and for a split second in time, forgot all his woes - he was just a good husband and not the terrified father of a small town psychopath.

*

Dream

11:45 pm and Joe was awake or was he? The curtain ballerinas were back dancing in the wind. Joe slid out of bed not to awaken Ethyl, she shuffled a bit but lucky for him she had always been a relatively deep sleeper. Joe made his way to William's bedroom, passing the Devil's hallway mirror. He glanced into it only to see his scared reflection this time so he continued sneakily. Joe was in the room and on his arthritic knees, beside the bed in his resumed spot before this afternoon's previous interruption. The toy-box was in front of him now but instead of sunlight shining upon it, now it glowed from an eerie moon. Opening the lid slowly Joe swallowed his fear. Braving up, Joe opened his eyes to see neatness inside as everything was folded or wrapped; it was so neat!

Joe lifted out the first item which was a folded and clip-sealed bagged school dress. There was a sticker on the outside with the initials C.R. only and Joe felt sick almost instantaneously, for it was Cathy Roundtree's missing school dress. After taking another deep breath Joe placed the dress on the ground and continued to the next item in the toy-box. It was a pair of boy's shoes and they too were sealed but these shoes were covered in dried blood. The initials T.W. were handwritten on this sticker but Joe didn't have a clue who this was. Joe emptied the items which were all clothing and all sealed with initials stickered upon them. There were 13 items in total and Joe only recognized one more set of initials, and of course, they were little Jackie Thompson's, on his school back-pack and his flap-hat. Joe was about to place William's sickening collection back under the bed when he heard the scratching sound again but this time it was coming from under William's bed. Joe jumped to attention from kneeling as fear pushed him back against the closed bedroom door. The scratching was continuing and Joe was petrified as the sound felt like it was scratching into him. Joe flicked on the bedroom light and the scratching stopped immediately. He quickly replaced the evidence carefully into the toy-box and pushed the box with his foot, back under the bed. He flicked the light switch off before exiting the room hastily and he heard again, the scratching had restarted. Joe returned to his bed in a cold sweat lying awake as he stared at the dancing curtains, who both decided to dance crazily tonight. The scratching stopped at 11:52 but that could not be right ... he had been in there for at least half an hour, surely?

Joe drifted sometime after 3:00 am and this time he knew he was dreaming for sure as all was red – blood red. Joe's nightmare this time was viewing all from killing eyes – his son's eyes, and he was trapped and bound deep behind them. Joe could even taste the disgusting thrill that churned inside William.

It started outside a primary school. Joe tried hard to read the school sign within this dream but all he could read was a few letters M something, something S E, but then it was something the next word was definitely - Elementary. It was dusk and no other kids were around only a single child – a boy, who sat in the bus shelter alone.

Joe, tried to cry and yell in his dream but all he could manage was feeling sick as William pulled up in his Land Rover, right in front of the bus stop. "Run, run boy" Joe so tried hard to

scream but to no avail, for tonight he was just a witness. The car stopped, the passenger window went down so he could start a conversation with the boy through it. William spoke,

“What’s your name?”

“Billy ... why?” The boy had answered with innocence. Joe tried his hardest to scream again to Billy but it was pointless; it was just a dream!

“Oh, I thought it was you, Billy. Billy, your mum’s held up at work. I work with your mother, has she told you about me - John?” William the lying monster was here and his voice was different and darker.

“I-I think so?” Billy was not sure but if he gave the stranger the benefit of doubt as most eight-year-olds do. The monster spoke again,

“So Billy, your Mum’s asked me to take you to her work ... hop in.” Joe tried even harder to scream and scream out to little Billy as the passenger car door swung open and poor little Billy stepped up into the cab of death. Now Joe’s dream was cold, icy cold, and was playing out in a slow-motion silence. Joe finally screamed as loud as he could, sitting straight up in bed waking himself and startling Ethyl.

“Shit! Joe, what’s wrong? What in the Devil’s Hell is wrong?” Ethyl rubbed her dazed eyes as Joe held his hands to his face and cried like a baby and in between the sobbing, Joe admitted,

“Ethyl ... I need to tell you something, something about William. I need to tell you ... all!” Joe continued crying as Ethyl hugged her distraught husband.

“Tomorrow Joe ... tomorrow, you’ve had another nightmare.”

*

Accusations

Joe awoke and he felt a little blurry, he glanced over to the clock as it read 10:27 am – Joe never slept that late ever! He got out of bed and pulled his Japanese Komono over his striped flannelette p.j.'s and staggered to the kitchen; it wasn't the greatest of looks!

“Good Morning, Sleepy Head!” Ethyl smiled as she was finishing off the second batch of pancakes. “Hungry?” Ethyl summoned him with the wafting smell that was emanating from an overflowing plate as she raised her left hand to show him the smaller plate of freshly whipped cream and some of her homemade jam. Joe went straight to the tea-pot and poured himself a cup of earl grey; it was tepid! “Oi! I was just about to make a fresh one ... you can wait!” Ethyl stated as she reefed the cup from Joe's now empty hand. “Now go outside, the paper's on the porch table awaiting you ... give me two goddam minutes!” And before Joe could even function, a jam with cream pancake was placed in his open hand.

“But ...” He was cut short as Ethyl turned to him and faced him toward the front door announcing her final instruction,

“GO!”

“Ethyl,” Joe was more awake now after four pancakes and two cups of HOT tea, “Ethyl ... I need to tell you something ... it's quite serious.” She just looked at him in the eyes and reached out and grabbed his hand before pulling a closed-mouthed smile. Joe continued, “I have found something out about ... oh boy ...” Joe hesitated and took a deep breath, “I believe William wasn't our perfect son, Ethyl.” Her attention was on listening to her husband and now he had her at least intrigued. “I think William did nasty things ... to children!” Joe burst into tears as Ethyl stood and hugged her husband from the front with his head in her breasts. But why was Joe the only one crying and why hadn't Ethyl asked any questions and then it dawned upon him; she already knew! Joe pushed her back so he could see his wife's facial expressions and emotions. “You knew! You fucking well knew!” Ethyl just shrugged her eyebrows and smirked that embarrassing smirk as she stood silent – she was guilty, Joe knew it and he vomited over the porch rail, straight onto his now-blooming floribundas.

“Joe you are wrong!” Ethyl helped Joe take off his spewed-covered kimono. “William is a hero, Joe. William, was our good son Joe ... the perfect son so please don't taint his memory on the anniversary of his passing on to the Lord.” Ethyl seemed unaffected by his accusations and his mind was swirling as his head throbbed!

“I have proof, Ethyl!” Joe did his best to clear his head as he went inside, “Follow me, c'mon, follow me!” He was pissed now and he would show her he had proof!

They both stood in William's room at the side of the bed. Joe knelt and lifted the quilt to unveil the toy-box to Ethyl ... and there it was. Ethyl was silent watching Joe reach under the bed and retrieved the dusty toy-box.

“I think you should sit down for this!” Joe summoned Ethyl to sit next to him on the bed; she did! He opened the box slowly but his eyes widened as he looked inside only to find William’s old toys in there, his old Ninja Turtles and his entire Star Wars collection and that was it! “What the heck? I’m telling you there was stuff in here!”

“Joe, I think all these dreams you’ve been having are stressing you... I’ll ring Dr. Lake, you might need a check-up again.” Ethyl stood up shaking her head and left the room, “This is William’s room Joe ... get out!” Ethyl’s voice was now stern as Joe sat there on the bed holding Raphael in one hand and Chewbacca in the other. Joe was confused for he was so sure of this box’s contents ... had this been a dream, just a dream after all? Then his foot stood on the broken latch ... and he knew it was real. The obvious and painful question surfaced through the shit. Could have Ethyl moved the evidence?

*

Favor for a friend

Joe met Dainty for lunch as he needed to get out of the house. A week had passed since his accusation of William's evil to Ethyl. Ethyl had made him go for a check-up with Dr. Lake and beside his gammy gardener's knee, was as fit as an old fiddle could be, and bluffed his way out of any mental problems. The conversation had been strained between Ethyl and Joe since that day – polite, but minimal as Joe's accusation of William's character had temporarily strained their water-tight relationship.

“Why the long face ... Horse?” Dainty George laughed as Joe walked in. “God! Did someone find a dime and lose a dollar?” It was obvious Joe was not his usual smiley self but that was no excuse to take it easy on him.

“Dainty ... can we speak in private?” Joe's solemn voice was enough now for his best friend to take him seriously. Dainty picked up the two already poured beers and followed his friend to sit outside on the greying sun-dried benches in private.

“What's up, Joe?” No smiles were passing across the weather-beaten table now.

“I don't really know how to say this, bud, but here it is!” Joe spilled his beans and laid all of his terrifying thoughts to Dainty's aghast mouth. As Joe finished, he wept openly and his best mate held his shoulder tight as he sipped his beer to wet his ever-so dry mouth.

“So what are you gonna do? If you go to Demmins with this then you could ignite a volcano. Your life will never be the same! You'll be known as the father of a ...,” Dainty stopped there at the exact spot Joe was shaking his head and eyeing not to say it. So he changed direction, “What about Ethyl? If you're right ... she's an accomplice!”

“I don't care! Think of those poor parents ... but I need proof mate ... will you help me? Ethyl's been watching me like a fucking hawk! Can you give this to Penny Stapleton at this address.” He gave Dainty a crumpled envelope that was stuffed in his jean's back pocket with Penny's work address and a mobile phone number on the front. Joe looked at his watch and skulled the remains of his beer, “Ethyl will be wondering ... I've got to go, Daints.”

Dainty just sat there as his friend seemed to vanish before his very eyes, he was gone that quick. He looked at the envelope and wondered what was inside but accepted that it was not for him to know (and he already knew too much) otherwise he would've been told ... he accepted his role was just the courier.

Five times that day he did his best to contact Penny by phone but on the last effort he gave in to break his usual 'Fuck all Answering Service Rules' and left a message,

“Hi, Penny ... my name is George Dainty and I'm ringing on behalf of Joe Scott. He said you would understand as I have an envelope to give you from him about his son. Please contact me on this number so we can arrange a meeting. ” Dainty hung up and placed the envelope on

his wooden table as he turned on his old TV and sat in his old vinyl recliner lifting the footrest as he ripped open a cold can of Bud.

Dainty awoke around midnight needing a piss bad after the six-pack he had finished before falling asleep watching a 'Cheers' repeat. He was making his way to the toilet when he noticed the letter on the table was not how he left it, so he prolonged his bursting bladder to inspect it. The letter was torn to a hundred pieces.

"What the heck?" He picked up the torn bits of the letter, more importantly, realizing – someone is here! Dainty didn't have time to respond to his own realization when he felt the sharp pain in his back and chest. He looked down and the ornamental Japanese sword that had hung above the table for the last 15 years was now protruding from his chest. Dainty froze and then he tasted blood – lots of blood, for his throat had been slashed as well. You would think pain would be your last memory but for George Dainty it was simply the embarrassment of knowing he had just pissed himself.

*

Done to Death

Sheriff Demmins was the one who found Dainty's rotting body a week later after Joe raised concerns, his friend never contacted him after their last meeting. The rancid smell from outside Dainty's house was enough of a signal for Joe to ring the police. The odor was definitely - death. Demmins walked outside and shook his head to Joe, no words needed to be said again.

"I'm sorry, Joe." And that was it, Dainty was gone.

Forensics took over as Demmins and Joe were faced with Penny's in your face camera and questioning, while Demmins was removing his latex gloves.

"So, Sheriff Demmins, can you confirm that this is now clearly a murder scene?"

"Penny, you know how this works! I will release an official statement as soon ..." Tony turned away from the camera grabbing Joe by the arm to follow, "... as we know more."

Demmins ignored Penny's persisting questions as her cameraman did the quickstep shuffle behind her doing his best to keep it rolling.

"Sheriff, did you find the letter, and has this got anything to do with the missing children murders from years ago?" Penny now had Demmin's full attention as he stopped dead in the tracks and turned to her. He put his hand over the camera and signal the cut-throat signal to stop filming – NOW!

"Penny ... what letter and why would you bring that up? What do you know? Are you saying Mr. Dainty was involved?" Demmins was now in her face and she was the one leaning back. Joe stepped in for the rescue,

"Tony, it's me you need to speak to ... we have a hunch, I wrote the letter to Penny," Joe nodded in Penny's direction and continued, "We think my William might have had something to do the unsolved cases!" There, he had said it and said it out aloud and the blanket of weight seemed to lift a fraction from his ever-so tired shoulders ... it was now Tony's problem. Demmins looked at Joe and looked at Penny, then turned to Randy the cameraman,

"You ... take a hike!" His order was direct and Randy nodded and exited towards the camera van. "You two know something ... start talking, but first what has Dainty's murder got to do with this?"

"Dainty was supposed to give that letter to Penny, for me" Joe looked at the dirt with his guilt. Demmins lit a previous home-made rollie and offered one to Joe and Penny who both declined. Penny took the reins and started from the top but Demmins asked the next question,

"What was in that letter?"

Penny's report on Dainty's murder had the town talking and Demmins' statement was the usual cop shit that you always hear with nothing of any substance, except they were expecting

to make an arrest soon so until then stay at home, don't walk the streets alone at night, and lock your doors which now made sense to Joe as his best friend was murdered in his own home by not keeping his front door locked!

*

Hunch

Dainty's cremation was a small one with a dozen or so of his bingo friends turning up to pay their respects. Joe and Ethyl had organized it all as George had no family of such. Sheriff Demmins and Penny Stapleton had been the only two from outside of Dainty's tiny circle to attend. The wake was held at Joe and Ethyl's house where Ethyl's scones were demolished way before the sandwiches were. With all the official pleasantries out of the way and Ethyl consumed of placing even more food on the tables, Joe, Penny, and Demmins were able to talk while the Sheriff was having a cigarette outside on the front porch.

"So Sheriff, did you find anything?" Penny's reporting impatience was as big as her eyes as they bugged at Demmins.

"I have a hunch but I can't tell you yet ... sorry. I need to check something first." Demmins smiled and shrugged his shoulders but the unspoken words between them are where they would stay for now. The three joined the others and it wasn't long before Demmins and Penny made their farewells and left.

Georgina and Nino were last to leave after Georgina and Ethyl cleaned up. Ethyl and her best friend had worked their butts off today and Joe could see his wife struggling through the pain of death once more as this was too close to William's anniversary. But the sickening feeling that Dainty's murderer was still out there and the burning question if William had a partner in crime, ate away at Joe. Ethyl went straight to bed while Joe sat on the porch in the gentle breeze with a glass from William's bottle of Chivas, this time with ice. It hadn't been touched since the last time, yet Joe had a feeling he needed to finish it ... and finish it all!

*

Demmins

There were seven case files laid out on Demmins' kitchen table next to the freshly made coffee and the cigarette burning slowly in the ashtray. He reopened the first case file and it was like yesterday to see little Cathy Roundtree was still a schoolgirl in these photos – a dead schoolgirl! He touched his own face and he could feel time had touched him for he hardly ever needed to shave when he was a young man (and during her investigation) but the stubble reminded him that he was no longer the same man. Years of police work and their walls of protection had been built over time to protect his sanity and they were now rock solid. But little Cathy was his first painful brick laid and for fuck's sake, she was only a child! Nothing is worse and he still admitted - nothing ever could be.

All he needed was one piece of evidence and surely he had missed something in his youth, something that was right there under his nose? And there it was! And it was little Cathy Roundtree who gave it to him. It was so obvious and how could he miss it?

Demmins stood up pulled his uniform jacket from the back of his chair and put it on. He downed the rest of his lukewarm coffee and stubbed his dying rollie. He must get to Joe now! The truth was here!

The ax was sharp and split the Sheriff's skull like a blade through an apple. Blood spurted all over the case files on the table, as his body fell forward and downward. It was all too quick and Demmins' wall of protection had come crashing down to reality.

*

Black

“Joe, Demmins is dead ... murdered! His head was split in two with an ax!” Penny’s voice was very shaky on the end of the line as Joe was silent as a mouse. “I think we might be next, Joe?” There was more silence between them. “Someone knows about us, Joe ... what we’re doing, who we’re looking for ... and it’s not William!” Penny sounded terrified as Joe’s brain felt like exploding with inner questions of how, who, and why?

“Penny, calm down ... we need to stay calm.” And as Joe was still holding the faded green wall phone in the kitchen, Ethyl walked by smiling,

“Who’s that dear? Everything alright? He didn’t want to alarm her.” Then it dawned on him like a roadtrain crashing into him - someone had done this to stop the truth and protect William’s good name. Unfortunately, Ethyl’s name topped the suspect list, and where was she last week, when this happened – church bingo?

“I’ve got to go, Penny, something’s come up ... ring you later.” Joe hung up immediately for there was something he needed to check.

“Do you want bacon and eggs or French toast?” Ethyl smiled again at him like she didn’t know a thing. “So who was on the phone, this early?”

“Tell ya later, French toast please.” Joe left her standing in the kitchen with a frying pan in her hand as he slammed the screen door on his exit.

The shed door had been jimmed open and that was for sure. Joe had locked it daily ever since a drunk sixteen-year-old - Andy Peters had decided on his midnight walk home that Joe’s prize-winning roses needed his special pruning and had gone to Joe’s unlocked shed, found some secateurs and began his creative touch. It was Joe who found him asleep on the porch next morning with an empty bottle of jack at his feet, and the weapon of destruction next to it. Joe looked out to his front lawn only to see young Andy had cut off all the buds to all his near-blooming precious roses and they were scattered all around the now bare stems. Joe was about to relive the arse-kicking of Andy Peters when he brought himself back to the moment. The lock was still intact but the hinge had been pried from the shed. He opened the door and his worst suspicion was confirmed ... his ax was gone!

Joe fell to his knees and cried as his head throbbed with the reluctant admission that his wife was the killer. How could she? His thoughts swirled as he was sickened with the thoughts that she had murdered two very good friends and worse ... the Sheriff of Tallis! The murder weapon came from here! He must tell Penny ... and then his world went black.

*

Run rabbit run

Joe awoke in his bed with his blue-striped pajamas on and it was dark, he went to sit up but his head hurt and he swirled, so lay back down as the fear rose from deep inside. He looked around the room and he was alone! The curtain dancers were back as the half-moon was sneering through the open window, down at him. His head hurt and he felt the back of his skull and it was bleeding, he had been hit with something. Joe's fear escalated as Ethyl had done this and she was going to kill him; he knew she would! He must escape ... get to Penny and get to the police!

The window escape route made the most commonsense even if the fall was a little too high. His head still swirled but he fought the dizziness to stand and he was weak, he knew that. Joe pushed through the mosquito screen and it made a big enough hole for him to squeeze through. But he could hear something, someone was coming! Panic was taking over his disorientated body as he hurried to pull himself through the hole with the fear that it would be Ethyl and another garden tool to finish him off. Joe hit the ground landing on his side and it winded him.

The noises were rising and it was the scratching sound - that sound of death again and coming for him! Was this the sound the reaper makes when he claims you? His thoughts scared him as he gasped for air? It cut through his soul as he lay frozen and waited for the pain to happen. But it never did! Joe's lungs refilled with oxygen and he was able to stand or at least hunch so shuffled as fast as he could in his blood and now dirt-stained pajamas toward town and away from this terrifying nightmare.

He had banged like a madman on the front door of their only neighbor's house - the Johnson's but no one was home. Joe couldn't chance to stay here as he knew she would find him sooner than later. It was inevitable to just keep moving away from here.

Joe was weak and he knew it! Ethyl would catch him easily so he must hide until morning and then get to Penny ... she would know what to do ... well he prayed she did. He was far enough from the scratching and Ethyl to rest. He needed to rest before moving on.

Sleep from physical and mental exhaustion did come, as he lay in a fetal position underneath the Post Office's front steps, he knew he was safe here ... for at least now.

*

Run rabbits run

“Come on Joe, answer!” Penny’s third attempt at ringing him had her worried. Joe hadn’t called her back as he said and now it was after 11:00 pm she had tried at 7:00 then 9:00 and now she was worried why had not either Joe or Ethyl answered? Her mind played cruel games and she imagined the worst and then it went deeper ... had the killer finished Joe and Ethyl and now she was next? Penny grabbed her car keys and her leather shoulder bag as she ruffled through it confirming her pepper spray was in there. She descended the three flights of stairs in a near jog and ran to her parked red 1990 beat-up Toyota hatchback. The car refused to start on first click and even the second as Penny checked the mirrors as fear of the impending flooded in, whispering, “*C’mon, c’mon.*” The Corolla started and she reversed and sped out of the fluorescent-lit car park into the dead of night. She headed along the moonlit street, and headed for the Tallis Police Station; it was time to end this insanity!

*

Fate

Joe awoke to the sound of an owl hooting in the tree out front of Tallis Post Office. It was still pitch black besides the filtered rays from Mr. Moon and his devilish grin. The moon was high so it was still the middle of the night. His head was throbbing and weeping. Joe had rested and calmed enough to know he needed medical attention and before morning.

After checking to see if all was clear, he exited his safe hide-away and recommenced his zombie shuffle towards Tallis Hospital and then it happened, and just like a horror movie always plays out, a car stops dead in front of him, with the headlights trapping its victim within (him). Joe accepted Ethyl had found him and now he would accept his fate for he was too tired and weak to fight.

“Joe ... is that you?” Penny’s voice filled his ears and the tears of thankfulness flowed freely. “Are you alright? What the fuck happened?” She jumped out and grabbed the old man who was close to collapse.

“Eth ... Ethyl.” It was all Joe could get out. Penny helped maneuver Joe to her passenger seat where he slumped against the door after Penny closed it.

“I’ll get you to the hospital ... everything will be okay, Joe!” She was lying but mostly to herself. But for now, Joe’s health was her foremost priority. Again the lights went dim for Joe, but as he drifted, he knew that he was safe for now in Penny’s care just as his last vision before another blackout, was her car clock flashing 11:45 pm.

*

Wake up

Joe awoke and it was daylight and the sun was blinding as much as the pain! This was not a hospital bed under his back but dirt and rocks. Joe managed enough to turn his head and view the sight of Penny's car crash with the old oak on Jefferson Drive. Penny, he must get to Penny! He turned himself sideways and then was able to sit up. Joe crawled to the car wreck and the passenger door was wide open. With all his might Joe pulled himself up and dry-called her name for a response,

“Pen ... Penny are you ...?” But she was clearly not, as he saw her dead body slumped over the steering wheel, facing toward him with one of the wipers protruding from her left eye socket, “Oh no ... no no no!”

Joe slumped as his world of hope caved in ... then a car – a stranger's car, pulled up as he closed his eyes.

*

Relevant chaos

Sometimes the unpredictability of life is all relevant chaos. We all believe that things are meant to happen for a reason, it is a part of human nature to do so, just as denial is! It won't happen to me! But, poor little Johnny, did you hear about him? Yet as Joe awoke, it was the irrelevant chaos that had somehow taken place for he did not awake in a hospital but back in his bed, and at night with the broken screen flapping, next to the dancing curtains that now resembled black flames. Ethyl had found him; it was Ethyl! And now she was torturing him!

Joe's instinct was to survive; death would not claim him yet! He was weak but couldn't feel any broken bones from the car accident so he must defend himself, and quickly. He managed to stand to hold the bed as he felt the pain in his left ankle and the memory of slight spraining of it from the previous jump but now it was worse. Joe needed a weapon to defend himself and from his murdering wife's forthcoming attack - a kitchen blade would do.

It was quiet and only Joe's heartbeat could be heard as the fluttering screen flapped in the wind. One step at a time, Joe did his best to ignore the pain and slithered his way from the bedroom to the kitchen. He could not hear her and the house was dark so he prayed to his God that she wasn't here at all. The kitchen was dark yet the moon shone enough for Joe to find his way to the benchtop knife block. He couldn't help himself rushing because he knew he had made it. Joe, reached for the knife but it was gone – all the knives were gone! Then he saw her!

*

Cold Ethyl

Her body had bled out as she lay on the kitchen floor, face down, with all the knives protruding from her back except the bread knife, as it accepted its role as solely the bread cutter not a murder weapon. Joe cried as he held his wife's greyed Riga mortis hand that was still clutching the bloodied meat tenderizer. Ethyl had been dead for a while and now he wondered if she was dead yesterday when he judged and crucified her for the current killings. But to make this worse, Joe reminded himself that this meant the killer was still alive and he would be next! But who was left? And how did he get back here? No one unless ... Georgina or Nino? Randy the cameraman? What about Father Gormon? That shithead kid - Andy the rose killer? What about the parents ... of course it was one of the murdered kid's parents looking for revenge! Then he heard the scratching sound and it was coming from William's room.

Joe removed a knife from Ethyl's torso and stood up ... it was now time to face the Devil whoever he/she was! He dragged his way as he cried revenge for Ethyl, Tony, Penny, Dainty, and all the children that had been innocently taken. He would accept his world would most probably end tonight and he would join them all, except for one thing ... his fear. Now Joe had killed his fear!

*

The Prodigal Son

He swung the bedroom door open and there he stood, the Devil himself and it was William, looking out the window in his full dress military uniform. William was slightly see-through as he turned and Joe raised his knife and screamed to him.

“You can kill me, son, just like the others but I am NOT scared of you! You fucking monster!” Joe spat on William’s bedroom floor from his lying position. William’s ghost turned to his father and shook his head in a no-no movement as Joe forced his broken body to stand and did his best to rush him, thrusting the knife into his chest, but he fell straight through William’s vision and hit the wall making his already beaten body fall to the ground in a slumped position. The ghost was now standing and facing Joe from the doorway and still shaking his head. Joe regained his unsteady stance and screamed, “Well kill me then, son or go the fuck to Hell!” William’s ghost raised his hands in a magician’s sort of hand gesture and Joe’s feet left the ground, he was dangling mid-air, weightless, and frozen against the wall. Then Joe’s body floated towards his son’s ghost and he again fought the rising fear that was returning as the scratching started and it grew louder and louder and etched scars deep within Joe’s soul! William’s ghost placed his hand on Joe’s forehead; it would be over soon! The scratching and the anger disappeared to a distant place.

*

Show me

It all made sense to Joe now, it was William who had shown him from the other side. His son was no monster as was his wife either ... they were both there for him, always. The only crime William had committed was cleaning up and his protection for what he believed was his father's one misguided indiscretion – the murder of little Jackie Thompson! Yes, William did know and the pictures filled Joe's repressed memory spaces as William lowered his hands and Joe to the ground where he slumped and remembered even more of this forgotten nightmare.

The scratching sound of death had originally started when he just a very young boy, locked in his father's old trunk for hours on end as his punishment for nearly anything, he had spent too many hours locked in there scratching his nails to bleeding point and screaming to his father's deaf ears. William had shown him the scratching had now become the reason for his way of punishing the world for the pain endured and all the naughty children it now owed.

Little Cathy Roundtree's murder was first to return (as her sexual attack) and Joe vomited. One by one, the children returned as did the ghosts appear in William's bedroom standing behind William, as if for security or protection from - Joe the Monster. He could see their faces just looking at him, little Cathy, Jackie and it was him who picked up Billy, not his son in the family Land-Rover, for it wasn't William's voice he heard but his own terrifying predatory one.

Joe was howling out loud when he relived the murders of his friends and Ethyl. He had stabbed Dainty, slashed his throat, and watched him die ... just as Demmins and poor, poor, Penny Stapleton who had tried her best to help Joe, only to end up with her own pepper-spray in her eyes as Joe turned the wheel towards the tree before jumping. Penny was crushed but still very alive when he finished her with the windscreen wiper into the brain. Ethyl, his beautiful trusting Ethyl, knowing her husband had weird short blackouts every now, never really concerned her as there so very random and harmless; years could pass between episodes! It was that day she found him passed out in the garden shed that she started to worry as when he awoke quite angry, he had scared and worried her. She helped him to bed and to put on his pajamas thinking she would ring the doctor again as this could be the first sign of Dementia. Ethyl didn't get to worry for long his 'Scratcher' was here now and followed her unsuspectingly to the kitchen, where he stabbed her to death. She did her best to fight him off with the meat tenderizer only getting one good hit into Joe's skull, before he stabbed every kitchen knife into her, then returned to his bed to rest and bleed.

Joe cried as their ghosts appeared one at a time as he remembered the pain he had caused and it hurt more when they all smiled at him as if to say,

“It's okay, Joe, we understand you were very sick, very sick, and we forgive you!”

Father Gormon's ghost was here now and then Joe saw it all. Father Gormon was the mystery car at Penny's accident before his black-out released 'The Scratcher'. The injured Joe had accepted the priest's help as Father Gormon helped him to his car after ringing the police and would drive him to the hospital. Joe glanced out the bedroom window and he could see Father's Gormon's car parked in the front yard and his deceased body decaying in the front seat

where Joe had strangled him almost immediately at the accident scene. Strangling him from behind with his very own rosary beads, until no oxygen left or entered the priest's body.

The sickness had returned to him fully now and he could feel the anger and emptiness inside but this time it was mixed and not separated from his good emotions; 'The Scratcher' and Joe were now one!

It was remorse he could feel and he had never felt that down in his darkness before and the truth was in his face – he belonged to the Devil!

*

Acceptance

William's ghost was changing form. His uniform faded and his face thinned, as his hair lengthened and his facial hair grew. The uniform had been exchanged for crimson robes as his ghost was clearly not William anymore, but the Son of God or the vision we all know as our - Lord Jesus. Joe cried for forgiveness to him as he saw the children huddle to their savior. Ethyl reached out to touch Joe's outstretched hand but he could not feel her. Then they all seemed to fade off to a whitish distance and Joe screamed,

"No, please don't leave me, please don't leave me!" Joe cried as they disappeared and he knew they were all going to Heaven.

The last ghost to fade away was William's or now Jesus ... and Joe was alone as his pain returned.

The room was dark and dead quiet as he sat against the wall crying. Then the scratching started up again but it was louder this time, much louder than he had ever heard before, it was almost unbearable, hi-pitched close to screaming and then he saw it ... and it wasn't William this time! It was the faceless Reaper of Death himself and yet fear didn't come with him; it was death alone! The Reaper floated towards Joe, picked up the knife, and placed it at Joe's feet. Joe nodded and accepted the knife, he understood it was his time. So Joe thrust the knife as hard as he could into his own heart as the pain confirmed his action.

Joe slumped to the floor as the Reaper seemed to now have eyes – red eyes amongst the blackness, looking at him, flashing ... but they were not eyes, they were the numbers 11 and 51. Joe felt his body weaken, as the scratching quieted, as the pain lifted from his dying body. The Reaper reached out with his skeletal pointer finger and touched Joe's heart for his final breath, as his eye's flashed - 11:52.

Crying Eyes

Climb your way to the ceiling

Christ, this'll take some healing!

No lights work, still, you went and crossed anyway

Power of mind, power of will

Simply believing that truth does kill

Swing like a man, send burden back where it came

I never said that this'd be easy

I never said that this would be fun

Cry, cry, and cry with your crying eyes

I never said pain would be leaving

I never said that this would be fun

Cry, cry, and cry with your crying eyes

Never forget what's within your soul

The blood that runs leaves you cold

Time will heal us as every dog still has his day

So place your trust in a place

Hide your face within your face

Keep faith believing as keys always open new gates

I never said that this'd be easy

I never said that this would be fun

Cry, cry, and cry with your crying eyes

I never said pain would be leaving

I never said that this would be fun

So cry, cry, and cry with your crying eyes

Second Chance

Part 1

Just a stupid old bastard

I tried to find the right words but they just refused to come out so as usual, I swore!

“Fuck!” *There, that felt much better.*

“Fuck you too!” Casper turned to walk out and I grabbed his right shoulder and he came to an abrupt halt. “Dad ... let me the fuck go!” Casper wasn’t that small anymore and he was warning me ... *don’t make this physical!*

“Look ... look, we need to sort this shit out.” I pleaded as Casper pulled away from my grip and I saw the death arrows release from his brown eyes ... and hit their target - me. I let him leave, we would resolve this later. And as he slammed the front door, I heard,

“Later Dad, you stupid old bastard!”

*

The plan

It only seemed like yesterday, me picking up this tiny baby and from the moment he breathed oxygen, he changed my life or at least the meaning and purpose of it. I was never a religious man but I always had faith – faith in being a good person and followed by faith in being a good father. Yet, somehow I had derailed and my son's brown eyes told me so. Where I actually went wrong wasn't quite as clear as the outcome, but at least I could admit that this was the fucking truth.

I think it started when Casper was only 13 and almost overnight. One day he was this beautiful rugby playing boy with above-average grades, then the next moment he was an emotionless demanding kid who believed he was owed the world (except schooling) ... and I would be paying on demand.

By the time he was 16, it was all too late for me as I had already lost him. It started with pot and the constant smoking (who knows what other drugs as well) and was way above what I did at that age. I'm not a prude by far, for fuck's sake! I admit I'd partaken in my fair share of pass-the-spiffs behind H block after school, bought the odd ounce or two in my time, made too many Orchy-bottle bongos, even tried mushies once. But these days Casper's eyes were constantly stoned and the aftermath of coming down was so hard to handle ... so fuck it! And that is where the silence started.

Casper turned 18 a few months back and no partying with Dear Ol' Dad happened. He came home after drinking (officially) 3 days later smelling like the B.O. and the Vomit Stained King of Australia.

I suppose you are wondering what or where is his mother? Julie and I were married in September of '82 as the two young lovers we once were. It was a wonderful marriage for the first 10 years, right up to the time I cheated on her and our rock-solid relationship. I pretended I never saw it coming but the truth is ... it always was! What is that saying? *'Once a cheater ... always a cheater!'* Maybe I don't like to think about it or the guilt that comes afterward but I do admit it ended something quite special. Casper was only 9 at the time when the only woman I truly loved, disappeared from my life.

Julie was diagnosed with cervical cancer when Casper was 12 and after 2 long years of pain and torture in chemo, she went and died anyway. It was hard for me to watch her die from a distance and all I wanted, was her forgiveness. Did I deserve to see it? No! But that didn't mean that I didn't want it ... of course I did! This was my fault and another wall soon to be placed between my son and me.

But life goes on and we both live with each other day to day waiting for change – any change. I love him so deep inside and if only we could turn back time to correct our mistakes or better still show them who we really were? Not just the shell of the person they believe we are now. If I had one wish that would be it! I would grab him by the scruff of the neck and drag him back through time in a time machine with my ghosts of past. I would say 2 weeks would

be sufficient, surely he would see where my foundation was built from ... just maybe I would come out of it all being seen as a better father and human being. But simply dreaming is not the solution here so I cracked open my first stubbie, as I lit myself a rollie on the back deck to the far-off sounds of somebody having a way worse day than I was – sirens. I blew out the first lungful of smoke as I toasted to myself,

“Cheers Big Ears!”

And then I knew it was now or never.

*

Fix it NOW!

I loaded my shotgun as I heard Casper slam the door shut not even attempting to give a fuck whether he woke me or not. I glanced over at the time as I flick clicked the barrels shut. I looked at the time and it was 4.13 am, I lowered the gun to my right side as I leaned over and drained the last of my warm can of beer – yep, it was time!

Casper turned on the lounge room light as I raised the shotgun point-blank to his chest. Almost reflex-like Casper threw his arms upwards in an *'I surrender'* stance.

“What-wha the fuck Dad? What the f...?”

“Sit down, Son,” I ordered in a deep lowered voice as I pushed the double barrels and guided him to the chair I'd placed especially for our little journey together. Casper teared up with fear as my frown only confirmed to him – *I wasn't to be fucked with!* “Pick up the duct tape and tape your ankles to the legs of the chair!” Casper was shaking and his eyes were red but I couldn't establish if it was fear or drugs ... most probably drug-infused fear! “Now place your hands around the back of the chair and through the loose zip-tie I have there already.”

“But Dad ... why?” Now Casper was sobbing.

“Just fucking do it, Casper, or I'll blow your fucking brains all over the fucking TV behind ya!” I re-aimed the barrels to place them straight between his eyebrows. “Do it, Son ... 'cause I fucking will!”

Casper's hands found the out-stretched zip-tie and I reached around and tightened it as his hands clasped each other in a locked finger grip.

“Right, Casper now's time for you to listen to me ... and I mean LISTEN CLOSELY! Me and you ain't been spending a lot of time together lately ... so we will be for the next few days, just like father and son ... and doing it all Dad's way!” As Casper was now restrained, I lowered and placed the shotgun against my chair as I opened a bottle of water and hand gestured a *'do you want some?'* tilt towards him, “I suggest you take a sip or two as you're gonna get thirsty!”

“Dad,” Casper whispered or more like whimpered, “... why? What the Hell? This has gotta be a joke ... hasn't it?”

Then I poured some water into his mouth and he swallowed two or three gulps. I placed the bottle down and picked up the duct tape at his feet and tore a piece off, big enough to cover his mouth ... and it fit perfectly.

“Good night, Casper ... we'll be talking more in the morning.” I grabbed his hair forcefully pulling his head back as I leaned in and whispered, “Sleep tight ... don't let the bed bugs bite!” Then I bit his ear. I turned the lights out as I heard Casper whimper again. My bed had never felt better and I drifted off quite easily and quickly for the best night's sleep I'd had in years; I was in total control for the first time in an eternity!

New day

“Good morning, Son.” I smiled as he slumped in the chair he had been restrained to for coming on 5 hours. It was obvious he had not slept and he was crying but I was unaffected by his suffering, just as he had been re mine for how many years now? I made my way to the kitchen and put the jug on and went for my morning piss.

I knew Casper’s bladder would be bursting by about now so I grabbed a blue plastic bucket from the laundry and returned to the holding area. I placed the bucket underneath Casper’s chair and said,

“There you go, piss your pants, but I’m not letting you out!” The jug boiled so I exited and made myself a brew ... a fucking strong one to accompany my first durrie of the day.

On returning to the lounge room, it was obvious that Casper’s eyes were pleading with me. I could read them clear as day, *‘Let me go please.’* But the journey had only just begun and we had such a long way to travel.

*

Cards on the table

After my breakfast of bacon and eggs, I thought best to start this ... he had waited long enough. I placed the wooden laminate coffee table between his chair and mine (which were face to face). I pulled out the tattered old Monopoly game that was in the buffet and set up the board game.

“I’m the boot ... you know I’m always the boot! You wanna be the car ... remember? You’re always the car.” Casper’s eyes darted left and right as tears trickled down his face. “Suppose I’ll roll for you then Bud as you’re a little tied up! Ha!” He didn’t laugh at my crappy Dad joke but I thought it was fucking hilarious! “Go to jail ... do not pass go! You’re fucked me ol’ fruit gum!” I knew my teasing was giving him the shits but I was doing this to let him truly know who was truly in control ... yeah, the stupid old bastard was! We played (or more like I did) for about 2 hours before I announced my win,

“Dad wins again, eh!”

I had left him there on the chair for a fair few hours now to reflect on the situation. Casper was exhausted I could see, so I tore off his duct-taped mouthpiece and he gulped the water that I poured into it. I made him a vegemite and cheese sandwich and fed it to him but he did not say a word. After his replenishments, I retaped his mouth shut and Casper tried to put up a fight by twisting and turning, but it was futile. I turned on the tele and maneuvered Casper’s chair so he could watch it too.

“Scooby-Doo! Fuck, I love Scooby ... you do too ... remember?” I slapped him hard on the back as he jerked forward by surprise. We watched together as Scooby and the gang solved another ghostly mystery. I flicked through the channels and fuck all else was on except some kiddie’s arvo show or Ridge deciding whether to fuck Taylor or Brooke? So I turned it off. “Shit mate ... all shit!” I turned his chair to face my position and asked, “Do you wanna beer?” Casper nodded and I stood up and made my way to the kitchen lighting a previously rolled smoke. I ventured back in with two coldies and cracked one and it frothed a bit, so I sucked the bugger to avoid the carpet spill (even though it was already freshly piss-stained). The beer was icy cold and it was quite humid, probably about 33 degrees today, I guessed. Casper’s eyes were pleading and focusing on the second beer. His Adam’s apple was bobbing up and down as it knew it was coming and to quench his thirst ... but was it?

I skulled the first beer can and crushed it followed by throwing it at Casper’s feet. On cracking the second, I could see his despair, as reality was smashing him in the balls for he knew it – no icy cold beer for him as I drank it.

“If you behave yourself, Son ... tomorrow ... understand?” The boy was infuriated and bouncing his anger up and down on the chair as I slowly sipped on his beer and dragging on a fag. His temper was escalating so I sat in front of him and grabbed his throat, “Now settle down, Casper ... SETTLE THE FUCK DOWN!” My raised voice got his attention and then he did rather smartly, “Good boy,” I patted his shoulder, “... good boy, good boy.” I tore off the tape from his mouth and gave him a sip of beer ... he gulped it down. After a drag on my cig and another final

sip, I then replaced the used tape back over his mouth. “Now that’s better, ain’t it, mate? Much better!”

Yeh I know, I’m a big softie!

Casper’s eyes lowered as he nodded so I had a feeling and asked,

“You probably need to shit ... right?” His head was nodding and again he was sobbing under the duct. I let the boy piss his pants but that was punishment enough (besides I didn’t want to smell his shitty pants) so I grabbed my shotgun and placed it at the back of his skull where he couldn’t see that I had let go of my grip with the stock between my legs, resting tightly in my crotch, while I blindfolded him. I cut the tape from his ankles with a sharpened kitchen knife and lifted him upwards so his arms made their way over the top of the chair. He was standing with me right behind him with the gun back in my hands and at his back. “Now don’t be a fool, Casper ... I don’t want to kill you mate.” I walked him to the loo and he knew the way blindfolded ... made me think that he’d done this many a time, either drunk or stoned amongst the darkness, late at night. I dropped his trousers and he sat leaning slightly forward as his arms were still restrained behind his back, where he pissed and shit ... as you would if you had to go, wouldn’t you?. “Bend over, Son.” But he didn’t want to and I could hear him mumble a ‘No’, “Do you really think I can’t wipe your arse for you? C’mon, I’ve done this a few times before mate, especially when you were only a young whippersnapper, and I’ve been wiping mine for nearly 50 fucking years, think I know how to do it!” So I forced him over and wiped it, backward not forward!

The night came around and I was hungry so I knew he must’ve been starving. Pie and mushy peas topped with Worchester sounded good to me ... perfect footy food and the footy was coming on soon.

“Do you wanna watch some footy mate,” I knew he would agree and he did.

The pies were ready at kick-off so I let them cool a bit. I didn’t want to burn the poor fucker’s mouth! The microwave dinged and the mushy peas were ready for the pour-over; I cut Casper’s into small mouthfuls!

I fed my son as we watched the Broncos flog the Sea Eagles together. I was getting into the spirit of it, yelling at the tele, fist-pumping, but Casper was just sitting there quiet as a mouse. This is where it all went wrong. For the last thing I saw, just before the lights went out, was that Casper had his hands free and the wooden stock of the shot-gun swinging through the air as it took me down ... and quickly!

*

Part 2

Down and out

I quickly ripped the grey plastic tape that held my legs to the chair. The old bastard was down and out – thank fuck! What the fuck was he thinking? I had to be quick as Dad was already stirring. I grabbed the open packet of zip ties that he'd left on the sideboard and my hands were shaking but I managed to get one around the middle of the curved leg of the old Chesterfield lounge which was way too heavy for him to lift by himself. I looked around the room for something that I could zip tie his outstretched left leg to ... it had to be the TV cabinet! I hastily removed all the drawers, which left me the framework so I was able to zippie one around the frame and one around his leg. Dad's leg was raised a bit from the floor but I had no choice ... he was going to be pissed when awakes ... but then again so the fuck am I!

*

Tables turned

I checked the load of the shot-gun and I had it aimed at the stupid prick as he came back to the real world. My heart was pumping so fast and the adrenalin was making my head feel like exploding.

“Welcome back you miserable old fuck!” My voice was shaky but my tone was authoritative. His eyelids were fluttering as the glow of the tele streamed into them and the questions were about to fill his confused mind, just as mine had gone through over the past day.

“Oh Fuck!” The old bastard was back and understood the situation or more simply the depth of the shit he was now up to his neck in. I greeted him with,

“Yeah, Fuckhead! Time for YOU to do some listening ... and not flapping your gums!”

“What you gonna do ... shoot me? No, you won’t, you gutless little cunt!” And the stupid fuck took a swing at me with his free arm, so I shot one into the ceiling, as he yelled, “Shit!” Now the old fuck decided to give me the respect I so deserved, as the plaster from the ceiling covered his face with white dust and plaster particles. Living out here on a property, 30 k’s or so south from Logan Central assured me I could fire away all I wanted – no one would hear it or even care!

“I’m in charge Dad ... you are gonna answer some fucking questions ... before I make you suffer!” The room was silent ... you could’ve heard a pin drop, “So start the fuck talking ... first ... why?” He looked up to me and his eyes welled up,

“Because you’re a fucking cunt of a son!”

You had to give it the decrepit old fucker ... he had balls - BIG balls! A loaded shotgun in his face and he still didn’t pull any punches!

“Elaborate?” As I sat down with both barrels still aimed his way.

“What’s not clear? I haven’t seen my son in fucking years ... just some drug-fucked grunting zombie that reminds me of him.”

“And that gives you the right to take me ... hostage?” My question was feasible.

“Fucking oaf it does! I brought you into this world from the jizz of my ballsack and I’ll take you out ... if it comes down to it!” I lost my temper and fired another shot at the ceiling before reloading then screamed,

“You stupid fucking asshole ... I’ll fucking take you out!” I leaned in and king-hit him with the shotgun stock again and his arrogance went fucking down as the claret poured from his nose ... I’d possibly broken it. Then the cunt started chuckling and that infuriated me even more! “I should SHOOT YOU for what YOU did to ME!” I screamed at him then I started pacing as my heartbeat raced to a new unheard of speed, without the good stuff helping to kick it up!

“Put the gun down, Casper,” Dad’s voice was calm, “Just put it down mate ... we’ll talk.”

“I don’t think YOU tell me what to do OLD MAN!”

So I left him there to rot in Hell as I decided to have a shower to wash the piss smell off and put some clean clothes on ... but first I headed for the fridge and skulled one his precious beers ... in front of him.

*

Part 3

Dad's dilemma

I wasn't sure how pissed off Casper actually was? I heard him grumbling in the kitchen and then the magical hiss of the can of beer being opened so I asked anyway,

"I wouldn't mind one, Son, go ahead you have one too, my shout!" Yeah, I knew the bastard would just ignore me but it was worth a try. The little prick had fucking got me good 'n' proper and totally by surprise, so I needed to get to him from under his skin. How the fuck did he get his hands out of the zip tie, fuck? He must've puffed up his hands a bit when I zipped them tight, but not tight enough obviously! It didn't matter really, the tables had been turned except one major thing ... I was still in charge and unbeknown to Casper. "Oi, Cunthead, get me a fucking beer or I'll get up and kick your fucking arse!" I knew that'd get a reaction. Casper came running back in and pegged a full tinnie, connecting with my face and a nice little reminder that my nose was already broken, *see I'm in charge ... he still comes running*, and then the pain intensified and was so intense my mind went dizzy and started swirling ... just before I passed ou-u-u...

*

Kick it out

I came to and it was dark and quiet; hours had passed! I could see the toilet light was on so I could just make out silhouettes of the various furnishings. I pulled at the sideboard to try and free my upright leg that was already well heading into the excruciating pins and needles, but it was useless.

“Casper! Casper!” It was obvious he was gone ... and so was the shotgun. My face was itchy from the dried blood and the little bastard had zip tied my other hand to my thigh while I was out cold ... I didn't realize until I went to scratch my bloodied and plaster-covered face that I couldn't move it! My left leg was still free though, so started kicking the framework of the TV unit that my other leg was restrained to. I kicked and kicked and kicked, even fucking harder than I thought humanly possible. After half an hour I was truly fucked and about to give up, *teach me a lesson not to buy decent furniture like this, and next time, it'll be straight to Ikea - chipboard crap only.* Suddenly, I heard the sweet sound of the Baltic reinforced pine frame ... crack! My energy was renewed and within 5 more minutes it was broken and my foot was free so I rested the tired leg. The pins and needles were so bad I had to keep it moving until it finally disappeared. I turned my body to face downwards then pulled my body up into a kneeling position. One arm still tied to my thigh, while the other still to the curved sofa leg. My thigh's position had changed and the muscles tightened so now my left arm had been given a slight degree of movement and I was able to slip it through and out only ripping the skin off all my knuckles – small sacrifice. I pushed as hard as I could with all my strength from the kneeling position to flip the couch and the fucker was heavy, but I did it easily with the assistance of adrenalin. The leg I was tied to was curved ball type and the zippie was tight around the smaller circumference. I had bought the thickest zip ties available, so I knew they weren't going to break anytime soon. With my free hand, I slowly began unscrewing the leg from the lounge. It was slow work but in the end, I got there.

After popping three pain-killers (my head had taken a pounding - twice) I knew my nose needed attention so I made my way to the medical box in the bathroom under the sink. There was fuck all in it (for years, I'd been meaning to top it with fresh shit) but I found some elastic tape and some cotton wool which was better than nothing. I stood up and faced the bathroom mirror and looked at my face covered in dried blood mixed with white plaster dust (as my new plaster hairstyle) and the crooked position of my nose ... *Ah FUCK, There goes my good looks!*

After plugging my swollen nose and cleaning up, it was time to get back to business; I had to be prepared! The little prick had taken my shotgun and this left me weaponless! Searching the house, I found what I needed – Casper's cricket bat. I test swung the fucker through the air and making my imaginary connection - SIX!

Yeah, this would suffice and get me out the shit.

*

Let's dance

For sure Casper had gone over to one of his drug-fucked mate's place to get a hit of something. So I wasn't sure how long he'd already been gone or even if he was coming back ... and alone? But I had to wait there in the silent darkness with a six-pack of XXXX tinnies and a couple of vegemite sandwiches, as well as a far few rollies, keeping me company. I don't know why but I kept hearing that Bowie song from the '80s – 'Let's Dance'? It stuck in my throbbing head as my mind played it over and fucking over!

*

The Prodigal Son returns

I heard my Harley rumble in - *the fucking little cunt took my fucking Harley ... FUCK!* So I waited behind the front door, crouching down like a panther ready to strike.

I swung hard and it would've made Boonie proud as I screamed,

“Welcome the fuck home, Son!” I hit the prick across the back of the head as he walked through the entrance doorway ... and he went down like a sack of potatoes. Instinctually he dropped his shotgun stance to grab and protect his skull from the beating and the suffocating pain, for where I would NOT miss my one chance to regain the gun by hitting his gun arm with the bat. I was way too quick for the little cunt and he looked up at my eyes in the moonlight as he was kneeling, holding his bloody head.

“Oh, f-f-u-u-c-ck!” Casper’s pain and frustration were obvious as I threw the cricket bat over the porch rail to free both my hands for the shottie, as he screamed, “Dad ... c’mon this has gone far enough ... too fucking far ... please!” He was 100% correct of course, but all I could see was - my beautiful son’s eyes in the moonlight and the size and brightness of his pupils from the drugs ... fucking drugs! I couldn’t smell any pot on him so he was taking that evil chemical shit, most probably – Ice, isn’t that what they all do these days? “Dad! Can’t we just talk ... like men,” he pleaded, “... just like fucking men?” I was silent. The upward motion of the barrels was enough for Casper to stay still, caressing the split in the back of his head. With the gun in his face, we stood slowly then made our way back to the lounge room ... and Casper’s favorite chair.

“Sit the fuck down, mate.” My tone was deep and volume low but it conveyed to him – I didn’t have far to be pushed before I would - end it ... and end it all for us both!

There was no restraining this time as I faced my chair towards his, with the shotgun connecting our two bodies,

“Okay, Son, let’s talk, let’s really fucking talk!”

*

Part 4

Truth

The old bastard had balls the size of watermelons, as I said. I just never could deny that fact. How the fuck he did it (escaped) just amazed me! I could see the sideboard broken and the lounge tipped over ... and the chair's leg still zipped to his now free wrist, like an oversized watch. If there was any time to talk my way out of something, then it was the present!

"Dad put the gun down," I glanced down to the remaining four beers still in their plastic six-pack ring, "... let's have a beer instead ... please." My tone was sincere and I could see a teardrop appear in his left eyeball.

"I don't think so, mate."

"But Dad, enough is enough ... we need to fix this ... make it right!" I hesitated then whispered, "I don't want to die, Dad!" Dad's single teardrop was joined by one more in his right and that was it - I was winning!

"Why do you wanna live ... tell me?" His voice was cold and unmoving and he tightened his finger on the trigger, "I wanna know, Casper ... I really wanna fucking know!" But he never let me get a word in ... not just yet. "If you want to live, then why the fuck, do you poison your body with that shit?" And the old bastard pointed to the sores on my arms, "Doesn't add up to me." He wasn't finished, "I lost you years ago ... lost you for good, didn't I?"

"I was angry!" It was a start as Dad was at least listening.

"And I have been too, you stupid little self-righteous prick!" The gun was pushed harder into my chest.

"But Dad ... I lost ... Mum!"

"And I lost both of you!" Now the eyes were watery ... but unfortunately, they were mine. He continued, "I don't understand why you take that Ice crap? It's no good for you, Casper ... you fucking know that!" There was only one answer - 'Yes!'

"So why do you do it?" Dad's eyes were bloodshot red.

"Makes me feel good, blocks out the shit ... helps me function! And why do you drink that all the time? You're always pissed!" I pointed to the beers. "One man's poison is another's ... you know what I mean. Don't we both escape ... reality?"

"To escape reality? Why would you want to do that ... it's all we fucking have, you fucking idiot!" Dad just didn't understand the way I felt - the burning anger, the hopelessness, the not wanting to be me, or simply just dealing with things - my way, and to feel normal, so who's the fucking idiot here?

“When Mum died ... so did I ... and I fucking miss her!” I was starting to get a little choky. Then the old fart lowered the gun to the floor and grabbed the remaining beers and offered me one. I accepted with a nod and a small smile of hope as we both cracked them simultaneously. For the next 5 minutes, we sat and drank cold beer each, and in cold silence.

But I had defeated him with what he wanted to hear and with this stand-off. I never missed my opportunity and I stabbed him in the leg with the kitchen knife that he left sitting on the floor from my toilet break. The blade went in deep and his reaction was the same as my cricket batted head – nothing but pain and grab.

The shotgun was back in my control!

“Now it’s time for you to die, you miserable old cunt! That’s why I came back ... to kill you! That’s it ... you are already DEAD to me!” He never said a word, just lowered his head and grabbed the barrel and placed it on his cranium while the knife protruded from his leg. I stiffened my stance and stated, “I will fucking pull the trigger!” And then the fuckhead decided to speak,

“Go ahead ... I’ll be gone for good ... no more of your emotional punishment to be subjected to.” The old fart knew his mind-game words made me hesitate for a sec or two so he continued, “The cops’ll catch you, that’s for sure ... won’t have to look too far, will they?” I strengthened my stance as I listened, “I s’pose at least in jail you won’t have to think about me. You’ll be too busy trying to keep the cock out of your sweet little arse! Ooh! Nice ‘n’ tight too ... I’d just seen it, remember!” The FUCKHEAD! But he was right (to a degree) as I didn’t want to go to jail! I pulled my aim from his skull to the ceiling and fired one off again! Another perfect plaster hit covering him again. So I yelled,

“You fucking shit me!” The old cunt was smirking ... he had won!

“Now ... do you wanna talk,” Dad cocked his head with that stupid mouth curl and eyebrow raise, “... properly?”

*

Winners and losers

We both sat there crying together as we watched a video of Mum on their wedding day; she was so young! Dad was a fucking mess and bawling like a baby and I had never seen him cry ever before, not even at Grandpa's (his father) funeral yet here he was watching her (as I was) - VERY alive and in love, and it was him she was in love with.

"God, she was beautiful ... the most beautiful girl in the world!" Dad was sobbing as he wiped his red eyes above his plastered nose. My eyes weren't much better but it was the cold hard truth as Mum, was just stunning! The old bastard then went ahead and at least acknowledged what I already knew. "I let her down mate ... I let you both down!"

The home movie flickered and the scene changed ... I was a baby. Grandpa was still alive and was hugging Mum as she held me. I had just come home from the hospital and I was their first grandchild. I hadn't seen this old movie since I was a kid; it made me smile!

"Man ... have a look at how small you fucking were ... unbelievable." Dad's eyes were now smiling as his face was and I couldn't remember seeing him look at me this way ... ever. "Your Mum wanted to call you Aspen ... fucking Aspen!" His eyes looked upwards and continued, "That's when I reached into to my 'No fucking way' bucket and pulled out Casper as a name," he laughed, "... you were nearly named after a fucking mountain!" Did he honestly not realize he named me after a fucking cartoon ghost instead?

My mouth was getting dry from the home movies and the emotions they were stirring deep down. Suddenly I was 10 years old and happy ... so fucking happy, playing rugby with Dad at the park while Mum filmed us both ... truly happy, and I could hear her joyful laughter as she filmed. I broke down as sad emotions overtook my anger and I looked at the old bastard and even though he was way wrinklier and balding ... I could still see the real him as I now remembered.

"Why Dad? Why did this end up like shit?" I questioned but we both knew the answer ... and it was Mum, without Mum - we were both lost souls!

"Casper ... she would've kicked our balls!" Yeah, it was a statement of the truth and I never doubted it for a single moment. She would kick mine for the drugs and just being an angry bitter little fuck, and him for being a cunt of a father ... let alone this whole stupid fucking ordeal called - the present situation.

"She wouldn't be happy about this shit, would she?" I asked him and for once, Dad was silent and just nodded. "Why did she have to die? I still don't get it ... Mum didn't deserve that!"

"Yes mate, you're fucking well right ... it should've been me." Then he looked at me and knocked me for six. "I love you!"

I was at first shocked but then reality kicked me back to Earth ... and he had no right to love me, not one single drop.

“You love me? What a crock of shit! Fuck your love!” I spat at his feet as I lifted the shotgun and placed it on his forehead before finally speaking out loud what I felt inside for years, “I fucking hate you!”

Then Dad just lowered his head and opened his hands in a ‘that’s all I got ... I’m done’ gesture.

“Mate ... my leg is bleeding pretty bad.” Dad’s voice was of a beaten man and I lowered the firearm. He was holding his leg with the knife still in it ... he knew from doing first aid not to remove it (even I learned that at school) but still, the blood was pissing out.

“Fuck!” I screamed and ran to find the first aid kit and returned with the cotton wool and tape that was on the bathroom sink. I threw it to him and he did his best to pad around the protruding knife and wound the elastic tape around his leg – top and bottom.

The video was still playing without us watching and then I noticed it had changed to Mum’s funeral and I had never seen this and it was Dad on the screen and he was a fucking mess. I was watching it as if I wasn’t even there, yes, I was, but I was numb on that day and a young boy, yet today I wasn’t that boy and I could view it all painfully as a man. I watched as the much healthier looking Dad with hair needed to be assisted from his eulogy by his best friend - Jimmy. Then Dad could see my attention was fixated on the tele ... so then was his.

“That was the worst day of my life mate ... just the fucking worst!” He sobbed open and unashamedly then he thanked me, “Thank you for letting me show this mate ... I appreciate it ... truth!” I nodded as what else could I do? There were no words that would suffice – even slightly.

My anger disappeared as quickly as it had come ... this was insane! My emotions were up and down like a jack-rabbit. My hands were shaking badly, as I held the shotgun. It was hard to swallow as my mouth was dry. Then the video played the coffin being lowered into the ground and the dirt, the fucking dirt ... and the memory of that nightmare returned. I threw the shottie across the room, as Dad sat in the chair holding his face (not his leg) just crying.

Why fucking why ... how long has it been? But still, we were both so lost in life and all we could manage - was hating each other’s guts!

We were pathetic!

*

Part 5

My son

My leg was throbbing like a mother fucker, but it was a dull throb and when I saw the coffin scene again, the pain just disappeared; I was back there again! I turned and glanced at Casper's face ... it was my son's true face. I raised my hands to cover mine as for the second time in my life, I watched the one person's face I'd give my life for ... die yet again (and it wasn't my wife's). It wasn't fair and was all too hard and I broke down.

*

Part 6

Forgiveness

The burial was just too much and my head was about to explode. So I blocked it out and looked at Dad. My dad was a mess and not just emotionally but also physically. He had lost a lot of blood from the knife wound and his broken nose was the icing on his cake. I had never seen the old bugger this broken and raw before and I admitted – I didn't hate him at all ... I fucking loved him! I stood up and helped him from the wooden hostage chair to the over-turned lounge.

“Help me flip it.” Dad did as best as he could and I made him lay down and gently raised his knifed leg to a raised position, resting on the cushions before I spoke, “Dad ... you need to go to hospital ... you're pretty fucked up!” He shook his head as he frowned,

“Not just yet mate ... not yet.”

“But Dad ... the blood!” I pointed to the knife still sticking upwards, “You'll bleed to death if we don't!” And then he grabbed my wrist with his wrist still zip-tied to the removed chair leg. I sensed something was wrong, so I asked, “What is it, tell me?”

“I want to give you something.” Dad's eyes were welling again.

“Give me what?” I asked. He pointed to the sideboard and the side glass cabinet piece, so I asked again, “What is it?”

“Up there, top shelf, in the shoebox,” he summoned me to go get it, so I did. I opened it while I was making my way back to the lounge and I saw it ... a DVD with ‘For Casper love Mum’ inked on it ... in Mum's handwriting. Dad's voice was dry, “I wasn't sure when I was supposed to give this to you ... so I guess it must be now.”

My eyes were fixated on it, my only memories of Mum were ones that I had already lived before but here was something from beyond the grave ... a whole untouched, soon to become new memory. Dad spoke,

“Mum left it for you, she said I was to watch it with you ... when we were ready.” I was silenced and confused so I questioned,

“So why now?”

“Because it's now or never ... this is both our crossroads mate, the only one we'll most probably get.”

The old bastard was correct. We had fought, we had hated, we had cried and tasted each other's blood and the ridiculous thing was that none of it mattered to either of us ... we just wanted to see Mum again – alive!

*

The message

Looking at Dad, he was still nodding for me to put it on, so I did. The television flickered as the home video dubbed down to DVD was apparent. I watched with bated breath to see her ... and there she was, sitting up in her hospital bed, smiling at me with her dark cancer eyes, her skin pale but she was alive! She was holding a picture of me when I was still 8 or so. Dad was the cameraman as I could hear him mumbling something muffled like – ‘Are you ready to do this?’ plus his shaking of the camera was typical him and annoying – *Hold it still, Fuckhead!*

Mum opened the video with,

“Casper, my little Caspie Waspie.” And she pointed to my picture of me at the beach in the surf, I must’ve been 8. Tears automatically flowed as I hadn’t heard that moniker in years – I had forgotten so fucking much! “Casper ... if you are watching this, then I guess a few years have flown by ... since my passing.” Mum was smiling but the word ‘passing’ even made her eyes well – for it was her facing a cold hard truth and her immortality. Then she drew a breath and continued, “I can’t imagine how you got through all of this ... but I pray it was with your dad?” Dad spins the camera and there he is and he was crying but doing that stupid grin of his that I now hate ... but use to love once. Mum’s voice was haunting, “We both love you, Casper ... that is the one thing that has or will NEVER change ... we love you to death!” It was obvious Dad was crying as he filmed, the hand-held camera was shaking more. Then my mum told Dad what to do and he did. I instantly realized – without her in his life he had lost her directions, no wonder he was so fucked up after they split! “Stuart, just put the camera on the bed table facing me – flip the screen so we can see it and ... oh, just let me,” she reached toward the lens filling the screen and the recording cut there. The movie flickered its grey wobbles and they were back, this time Dad was sitting next to Mum on the edge off her bed (the side without all the drips and hospital shit) and so she resumed, “Sorry honey ... Dad stuffed up! Didn’t you?” Mum whacked him hard on the arm in joyful banter and he pretended to jump; this was the last time they would together, she looked very sick and her time was short. “Anyway, I’m guessing you’ve grown up and I hope Dad has done his best to bring you up as the bright young and respectful man, I always hoped you would be?” My head lowered as I glanced at Dad with his beaten face covered in cotton wool but he wasn’t watching - as he was as ashamed as I. “Casper ... you are alone, we know! Your father is only human ... and he is alone, please remember that!” The words were soul-drilling and I felt heartache deep inside ... if only I had my pipe! Then Mum started the nightmare.

“Casper ... my only son, my beautiful son ... we have a problem, don’t we?” *What the fuck?* So I listened, “If you are watching this then there’s a real problem ... you!” My heart sank into my mouth. “Your Dad must be worried sick about you ... I would be too!” Mum paused and took a sip of water while Dad was lowering his eyes in the movie and doing exactly the same in unison back here in reality. “It’s the drugs isn’t it, Casper?” Mum eyeballed the lens and her honest eyes drilled me yet again, I mumbled back, “Yes!” Dad was silent and hadn’t moved a muscle and was hanging on to every word he already knew.

“Honey, I hope you haven’t hurt your Dad too bad?” Mum smiled as my eyes bulged and my tongue filled my throat – *Fuck off!* And my head was starting to spin as she continued her message from the darkness. “Dad and I, (she paused and glanced at him) had made a joint

decision to save you ... and now! If you think we would both let you ruin your life without trying everything ... then you have forgotten us both.” My fucking head was exploding in a mixture of emotions and pain ... and confusion. Then she announced the killer of all statements! “The whole hostage idea was mine!”

Silence followed from the video and here at home until it sunk in and I stood up and kicked my chair over, as Dad looked at me raising his eyebrows in a ‘sorry mate, had to be done’ look! I did my block!

“This is total bullshit ... FUCK!” I screamed as I picked up the chair and smashed it to smithereens, just as Mum started again ... so I stopped dead in my tracks and watched her.

“Out of your system, Honey? Just calm down ... it’s normal to be angry and confused.” I was sobbing and I wasn’t sure I could take much more. “Casper, listen to me ... this was NOT your father’s idea ... it was mine alone! I made him promise me he would go through with it ... if he ever felt he lost you.” Dad just looked upwards to me and nodded before he croakily whispered and wiped his crying eyes,

“I would do anything for you and her mate ... including dying!” I fell to the carpet in a ball as Mum just sat silently looking ahead on the tele as if she knew I would need time to take this all in. “It’s the truth mate.” Dad spoke and I accepted his words when Mum’s voice got both our attention, “You taking drugs, we don’t mean smoking a bit of pot – we both are quite guilty of that!” Dad in the movie was smirking and nodding as he interrupted her speech about drugs,

“Remember how bent we were when we saw the Angels at Festival Hall?” Mum shook her head, raised her blackened eyes and resumed,

“We’re both concerned it’s an addiction to hard drugs, Casper ... we know it’ll be the taking of harder drugs ... ones that will ruin your life ... or worse ...” Mum stopped there for a breather; she didn’t need to finish the dreaded D-word.

Now I cried as it was the truth ... I was a junkie and I couldn’t control the monkey on my back. Mum spoke, “Dad loves you with all his heart, he will help you ... talk to him. We both knew if you have this problem then you would more than not, lash out and hurt him in denial ... he will be ready for this - mentally.” I looked at my old man and what I had done to him physically – broken nose, concussion, and a knife wound and the only thing he had really had done to me physically in return was in self-defense when I came back to shoot him dead ... and I was coming back! His torture to me was all mind-games and emotion wakening.

“I think we need to get you to hospital, Dad,” I asked as the old bastard wasn’t looking too good now and I could see pain wearing him down, “... but what are we gonna say?”

“Wait mate ... Mum’s nearly finished.” Dad pointed to her face and she was crying,

“Casper ... this is the last time you will hear me ask anything of you!” So I listened intently, “Forgive Dad ... it wasn’t his plan so if you need to be angry, be angry at me! He loves you and misses you ... you two only have each other now! Dad will help you get off the drugs, he will take you to the clinic and help you ... he promised me. Casper, please do this and I promise you,

your life will change for the better.” I could never let Mum down ever, just as Dad couldn’t and we both had! So I nodded and went to my Dad to help him up as he spoke softly,

“I fucking love you mate ... you are my world. If you leave me too, then I’m fucked!” He patted my chest to watch Mum’s last words,

“Casper and Stuart, this stops here ... so promise me, you will fix this together ... for me,” Dad got off the bed in movieland, to turn off the camera, Mum blew me a kiss with her final farewell, “... I love you, Casper, become a good man for me.” As the four of us all were in tears (Mum, me, and my two versions of Dad).

*

Part 7

The fix

Casper pulled the Holden ute up in the hospital emergency car-park and he asked,

“You ready to do this, Dad?” Yeah, I was and I knew it was gonna fucking hurt! We had already redressed the various wounds it was down to getting rid of the evidence. So before we got out, Casper grabbed the kitchen knife still embedded in my leg as I grabbed the UBD manual from the glove box to bite down on. With one enormous reef ... it was out but so was ...

*

Awake

I awoke in a hospital emergency room spinning with Casper's face directly over me,

"Thank fuck!" I heard him whisper. I glanced around the room. We were alone as the staff bustled in the background. Casper stood up and closed the curtain then grabbed the water bottle and plastic cup. I swallowed some water he offered to me for my dry throat before I questioned,

"How'd it go? Did they believe you?" Casper was on his own through this significant part so he reconfirmed our plan,

"All good! You were plastering, lost your balance - most probably 'cause you were drinking, fell off scaffolding, and fell on a sharp edge and then broke your nose on landing, before knocking yourself out! I came home found you and here we are!" But I still had to ask the obvious,

"Did they quiz you about why you didn't call an ambulance?"

"Told 'em I thought I could get you here quicker, coming from home ... they were more concerned with your injuries." *Yeah, that'd do* ... even if they didn't believe us, so fucking what! He isn't gonna blab nor me ... it was time to put this all behind us.

*

Epilogue

Rebirth

13 months have passed and yes we are both alive and well. Casper has beaten his drug problem (for now anyway) and I agreed and started to go to A.A. as well as giving up the cancer sticks. So we are both sober and clean ... better still – best of mates!

The trip to America was our reward and target to reach the 12-month mark and it worked a treat and what a fucking treat!

To take my boy to Disneyland at 20 years of age, was just as good as if he was 12 ... no, it is better ... and as we walk around Fantasyland together, we are both reminded of how wonderful the gift of life truly is ... don't waste it!

I knew his mum would be proud now as we had succeeded in her bizarre rescue plan. Did I ever truly think it would come down to it? *Nah! No way!* But in my life, I remembered the one person I could trust wasn't me - but her! So I put my trust in her words and expectations for the very last time.

She was on the money once again.

This story also features in Jonny's 'When Darkness Shimmers' – the full anthology collection of his favorite short stories available at all good eBook retailers.

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Message from the Devil

Welcome to my hot little palace
Soon your blisters turn to callous
Feel the anger of your blackened soul
Your name was etched upon my role

Regrets mean nothing in my world
I pick up pieces of aftermath spilled
Now you're mine, cry all you like
Hold out your hands, here comes the spike

Welcome to my heated world
Some people like to call it Hell
Feel your heart burn to a cinder
'Til nothing's left but ash & splinters

Did you expect the pearly gates?
The life you led sealed your fate
Now it's time to pay back my bill
Eternity's mine and gives me a thrill

Welcome to my heated world
Some people like to call it Hell

Feel your heart burn to a cinder
'Til nothing's left but burning winters

Don't tell me you really believed,
of innocence and being deceived
The truth was right before your face,
still blinded by a lack of faith
See evil has a cunning way,
to wind you up and make you play
But I could not do what I do,
if disciples never wore new shoes
So scream out loud it doesn't matter,
no one hears a heart that splatters
Pain is music to my flaming ears,
get used to living amongst your fears

Too late for your pathetic regrets
No one listens so best to forget
My punishment that I dish out to you
Makes me smile while you burn bright blue

Welcome to my heated world
Some people like to call it Hell
Feel your heart burn to a cinder
'Til nothing's left but dying sinners

Welcome to my heated world

Trapped inside your own mind's shell

Toxic Twins

The news

Kelvin Bentley sipped his morning cappuccino as the early morning TV news reporter assisted his still numb brain into his full wake-up routine, whilst his wife Jamee buttered two bits of toast for the 13-year-old twins - Tyler and Stevey.

“Do you want some, Babe?” Jamee smiled as she had already pre-empted his response and the plate with toast, was under his nose.

“Ta muchly.” Kelvin accepted the toast.

“Can’t we watch cartoons, Mum?” Jamee glanced over at Kelvin and then glanced back to the boys. “Dad’s still watching the news ... aren’t you?” Jamee glanced toward Kelvin to make eye contact to recheck that he actually was. Kelvin was still half asleep as he was spreading Jamee’s homemade marmalade.

“Yeah sorry, Ty, but I am! Now shush, pal.” Kelvin refocused back to the LCD mounted above the microwave hutch. The announcer returned from the ad break and some breaking news was coming in.

A young girl had been reported missing. The camera crew was already there with live footage live-streaming from the Jacobs mariner. The reporters were interviewing the father and he was distraught. Kelvin’s attention was brought to its fullest when the father pleaded for anyone with any information to help find his missing twin daughter. Kelvin’s heart sank as the twin offspring connection brought the situation close to home. Her body hadn’t been found at this stage but reports were flowing in from the police requesting any information on a metallic blue pulsar seen in the area. An interview with the police stressed they were following up leads on suspicious phone calls prior to the girl’s disappearance and the possibility that this was a hostage situation here. The father was distraught as she had gone for her morning swim and now she was gone but he was desperately hanging on to hope and this put Kelvin off his toast ... but the reality was she was most probably already dead - drowned.

“Oh, Kelvin, that is terrible!” Jamee was watching as intently as Kelvin was, as both Tyler and Stevey were too busy fighting over the bonus novelty animal that came in the cereal.

“Shit! Makes you realize just how fortunate we are eh?” Jamee nodded as she walked over to the ascending novelty feud and removed it from the clutches of both boys.

“That’s it! If you two can’t behave like normal human beings ... then I’ll decide who gets it – no one!” Jamee handed the plastic dolphin to Kelvin and he placed it in his top pocket while his eyes were still glued to the news at hand.

*

Business as usual

Kelvin's day seemed normal as any. As usual, someone didn't show up for work so as the project manager, he would call in someone from his back-up crew. Fiberglass pool shells weren't actually that hard to put in the ground but it always depended on the right person for the right job and of course, good weather. And if one element goes a little haywire, then his day would not be such a normal one. But today Bobby Kinan (his favorite and most trusted crane driver) was here and with his #1 digger - Phil Sykes. All was going well as the sun beamed its happiest of rays.

"Did you see the news this morning?" Bobby asked Kelvin as he guided the shell directly and effortlessly and straight over the Johnson's two-story to Phil's now perfect hole.

"Yes, pretty fucked-up alright. Poor buggers, she was a twin." Kelvin felt the need to add the one detail that had affected him personally a little harder.

"Poor fucking family ... real fucking shame. Haven't found a body yet, I reckon she was taken so I hope they get the bastard ... castrate him if she was and if he did anything. You know what I mean!" Bobby lowered the shell to Phil's guiding hand and as usual, his once only drop record was spot on and remained intact.

*

Avon calling?

Kelvin was on the way home when his mobile rang and with a blocked number, so he decided not to answer it, they could leave a voice message. He turned the mobile onto silent as he just wanted to get home. The day was a hot one so a cold beer and a swim with the boys was now his main focus.

“Hi, Sexy Legs!” Kelvin squeezed Jamee’s tight little arse while she was bending over and feeding Mr. T (their three-legged Jack Russell), “Grab us a beer, gonna get outta these and I’m in the pool with the boys.”

Kelvin made his way to the bedroom and to grab his budgie smugglers. While getting undressed he threw his mobile on the bed, realizing he had three missed calls now. Thinking nothing of it, Kelvin was in the pool with the boys as Jamee brought him his well-deserved (well he believed) first after-work beer. It was still hitting the usual Queensland summer of thirty-five degrees Celsius at 5:00 pm. They played water volleyball until Kelvin gave in to the twins’ flogging.

*

Blocked

Jamee was fixing them all some snacks while the males of the house were swimming. She made her way to the bedroom to put on her bikini when she saw Kelvin's mobile flashing his missed calls, so she went and grabbed it.

"Kelvin, did you know you've got over ten missed calls on your mobile?" Jamee handed Kelvin the phone as he finished drying off his hair sitting beside the pool, as the kids splashed, and she placed the plate on the outdoor barbecue table.

"How many?" Kelvin's voice sounded a little shocked, "Shit! Must be something wrong at work, is it Bobby or Phil?"

"Number's blocked," as Jamee handed the mobile over to him, "... no idea, could be?" Kelvin stood up and walked away from the noise as he rang to check his messages. The first message was an ear-piercing frequency that made him pull the phone instantly away from his near bleeding ear.

"Fuck!" complained Kelvin as he stuck his finger in his right ear, to relieve the pain. Mr. T was going ballistic while the message was playing; the frequency annoyed him as well!

"Fuck off!" as he pressed to the next message ... it was the same just like the rest. "Shut up, Mr. T!" But as the dog whimpered down, Kelvin was complaining, "This is fucking ridiculous! Either someone's phone is fucked or ... ?"

"Or what?" Jamee asked as she threw a towel each to the twins who just jumped out of the pool, to eat the crackers and dip set out in the pool's entertainment area. But Kelvin couldn't answer as he had no answers.

*

Glow

The ringing of Kelvin's mobile woke Jamee before Kelvin, so she sat up in bed reached over to it from his bedside table ... the number was blocked so she answered it! The squeal was too loud and exactly the same as the previous ones Kelvin had made her listen to in his messages before he had deleted them, she threw the phone on the bed.

"Kelvin, wake up!" Jamee shook him hard until he started to rise from the dark silent world of sleep. Mr. T came from nowhere and was on their bed, snarling and barking at the window.

"Wha-what's wrong?" Kelvin rubbed his puffed eyes as Jamee flicks on the lamp on her side of the room and his eyes complain by squinting.

"It was that sound again ... that squeal!" Jamee's eyes were teary and she looked scared.

"Gotta be a prank, Honey ... T ... lay down!" Kelvin tried his best to reassure her it was nothing. Suddenly their bedroom was filled with the sound of pain and as they went to cover their ears, the light that accompanied was blinding – and it was everywhere! Mr. T was now under the bed and whining.

"The boys!" Jamee screamed as Kelvin was already scrambling past the door and in the hallway.

"Mum, Dad!" Tyler was first out of his bedroom with Stevey close behind.

"Quick boys, to our room!" ordered their father as they all ran hunched (army style) to join Jamee in a four-way hug on the bed as the light and sound increased.

It was Tyler who spoke the words they were all thinking,

"I'm scared!"

Darkness hit as quick as it had been taken and they were all left in the now only light of the bedside lamp.

"Kelvin, what was that?" Jamee was crying as the boys were while Kelvin's stomach churned. He just shook his head as he questioned what or even if that had just really happened. Jamee spoke, "We should ring the police." It was the obvious thing to do. Kelvin grabbed his mobile but its screen was dead.

"Phone's been fried ... I think?" Kelvin stood up from the bed and went to the bedroom window. Glancing outside he could see there was no one there in the backyard, nothing in the sky but the moon except one thing – the pool was glowing aqua blue.

"Do you see that? I'm gonna ring from the kitchen!" Kelvin stated, "I think we should get the cops ... this is bloody crazy!"

Kelvin made his way downstairs after grabbing his number one iron for protection. He treads lightly and quietly through the darkness with the golf club in a baseball swing position. He was just about there when all of a sudden he heard,

“You okay Hon?” It was Jamee’s voice from the top of the stairs that made him jump and nearly drop the golf club as he felt his heartbeat push his eyeballs outwards!

“Fuck, you scared the absolute shit out of me!” He bellowed back, “It’s all clear!” Kelvin switched on the kitchen light with a final glance around the open area before dropping his defensive stance. Kelvin picked up the phone from the wall mount and hit the button for a dial tone ... it too was dead!

“This phone’s cactus too!” Then he screamed in frustration as the three joined him and huddled in – Mum and her two fledglings under the safety of mother bird’s wings with Mr. T at her feet.

“What do we do now?” Jamee asked.

“All looks normal, except the phones ... I’ll check around, anything sus and we’ll wake Ryan next door!” It dawned on him then that Ryan must have seen or heard it too!

“I think you should get him now!” Jamee pleaded.

“I’ll just check out back first ... wanna come?” Jamee reluctantly nodded; she didn’t want to be alone with the kids.

The three huddled close behind Kelvin who was back in his striking stance as he swung open the back door. He stepped out first with a double-take sideways perusal; the coast was clear!

“All good, let’s go,” Kelvin whispering his commands, “... stay close!” They all slowly ventured along the stone path to the lighted pool – it was glowing all right!

“It’s blue, Dad!” Stevey looked puzzled as Kelvin just nodded in agreement. A frightened Kelvin made it to the pool first and took a glance in to see what lay at the bottom that made it glow! Jamee was next to look in the pool, with the boys tucked in behind her as Mr. T scampered behind, and then she saw what Kelvin already had.

Nothing!

*

Dr. Bell

Kelvin left for work as usual as the glow of the pool disappeared at sunrise. There was no evidence of anything being wrong or even to the fact about the light or the sound, even the phones had started working again. They were all wide awake and it all had happened at around 5:00 am, so the first thing Kelvin did was speak to Ryan next door just as he was leaving for work at 6:00. But Ryan had just laughed and joked,

“Save me a bag of what you’re smoking mate!” Ryan had heard or seen nothing.

Jamee kept the boys home from school as they woke with a slight fever. Somehow, the light had done this to them, she was sure, or was it the glow from the pool? Doctor Bell, would hopefully answer this one. At first radiation poisoning popped into her head (for no apparent reason) but why wasn’t Kelvin or her sick? They all would be if that was the case, surely.

“Mum!” Tyler complained as Doctor Bell’s nurse extracted blood from his arm while Stevey was already finger-pressing his band-aided needle-mark. Doctor Bell, had organized the blood test and an appointment was made for the following day for the results but he believed it was just common cold symptoms and nothing for Jamee to even worry about. But since she insisted, he would do the tests.

Of course, the boys told Bell about the excitement of the glowing pool but he looked over at Jamee, who just raised her eyebrows and shrugged it off.

At work, Kelvin wasn’t winning with his explanation of the night’s events either.

“Bullshit!” Bobby laughed at the ridiculous story as Kelvin did his best to convince him and Phil of his early morning ordeal but they weren’t biting – only into their way too hot smoko pies.

“I’m telling you! The pool was fucking glowing, pulsating a brightish aqua!” Kelvin bugged his eyes to give the story more believability as he bit into his cheese ‘n’ bacon.

“Fuck off! You probably just got a phosphate problem and it was the moonlight!” Phil agreed with Bobby’s answer as it made more sense!

*

Red or blue?

Only the light (not the frequency) returned twenty-four hours later, exactly as the night before but this time it was different for they all slept through it! Jamee hit the alarm at 5:30 am and noticed the pool was glowing again but this time it was pulsating between reddish-purple and aqua.

“Honey, wake up!” Jamee shook Kelvin’s arm hard until he opened one eye and frowned at her, “It’s been here again!” Kelvin rubbed his hair, staggered to the window arching his back, and glanced out the window; Jamee wasn’t lying!

“It’s fucking red!”

“Just keep watching!” Jamee ordered.

“It’s fucking blue?” Kelvin rubbed his head as the Sun rose above the horizon and the first rays hit the pool water and the glowing stopped – instantly!

“What is it, Kelvin?” Jamee held her mouth as he turned with his puffy eyes open and looks straight into her blues as he spoke,

“Whatever it is ... I don’t want to know?”

They both held each other looking through the window at the steam emanating from pool water, as the morning sun merged with it and evidence of the glowing vanished.

*

Sickness

“Mum ... I feel sick!” Stevey threw up a puddle of vomit on the kitchen floor. Kelvin came to an instantaneous halt of eating his porridge as the visual comparison was just a little too similar.

“Oh, Darl, quick!” Jamee the mother rushed her son to the bathroom where she held Stevey, as he vomited once more, this time reaching the target. The next minute, Tyler walks into the kitchen and his face is white as a ghost. Kelvin puts his coffee-only brekkie down on the breakfast bar as Tyler sways a bit before his eyes roll back and he faints straight to the wooden floor.

“Shit!” Kelvin jumps off his barstool and runs to pick up his fallen child as he starts to awake. “Ty ... you okay?” Soon followed by the second pool of vomit at his feet.

“Jamee! Tyler’s just thrown up too!” Kelvin bellowed as he helps his son to the bathroom where Jamee was now washing off Stevey.

“I told you something was wrong!” Jamee whispered to Kelvin as he passed her redirecting Tyler to take his turn at the toilet bowl. Kelvin just raised his eyebrows,

“Could be food poisoning? Didn’t they eat left-over pizza for dinner?” Kelvin questioned the more sensible reasoning, it just couldn’t be the other, and then - Jamee the mother spoke up,

“The results of the test will be back today but I’m not waiting that long ... let’s take them to St. Peter’s!” Kelvin rarely ever heard Jamee’s ‘just do it!’ voice but it was here and they were going to the hospital ... and now!

*

Motherly concern

“Just a little case of food poisoning, I’d say!” The intern disposed of Stevey’s tongue depressor, before getting a fresh one for Tyler, “You boys scaring mum, eh?” Jamee glanced over to Kelvin as she grabbed his arm in a ‘thank God’ hold as the two identical boys sat side by side smiling at the on-duty medic – Roger.

“I think you two better stay home, no school you both today ... just in case!” Roger shot the boys a secret wink that Mum and Dad didn’t see.

Jamee kept looking over her shoulder on the way home, in case the boys deteriorated but they were fine. Kelvin could see his wife’s motherly concern so reached across and touched her beautiful blonde mane.

“They’ll be fine!” A relieved Kelvin turned his head back to draw his attention away from her and back to the road.

The day wasn’t lost so Kelvin left for work at 10. It was just after lunch when Jamee rang Kelvin’s mobile and demanded he gets home – NOW!

*

Rash

“Look!” Jamee pointed to the marks that were appearing on both boy’s backs. Kelvin scratched his head; it was a rash but not just any rash! Several small circular rashes covered both the twins’ backs, symmetrically reversed on the boys – exactly like looking into a mirror.

“What the heck,” Kelvin questioned, “... what is that?”

“Their fever and vomiting have gone ... but now this?” Jamee pulled the shirts down as the boys turned and faced their parents and as twins always do ... spoke in unison,

“Are we going to die?”

“No-No!” Jamee pulled them into her hugging zone and did her best to convince them it was simply nothing, “Just a silly rash ... will probably be gone by tomorrow!” She glared her panic at Kelvin while reaffirming this lie to the boys.

“Just a rash, boys ... probably from the pizza ... allergic to something?” Kelvin did his best.

“We’ve got to leave soon to see Doctor Bell, for your blood test results ... he’ll look your spots over then, okay?” Mum’s words were comforting, even to Dad.

*

Birthmark

By the time they got to the doctor's surgery, the Bentley boys' rashes had gone opposite ways. Tyler's had half disappeared and Stevey's had all disappeared bar one, that was now a saucer plate size raised circle, outlining his birthmark that sat dead center.

"I've never seen anything like this?" Doctor Bell ruffled his head as he placed the twin boys side by side. It was obvious the boys weren't in any discomfort and yesterday's slight cold symptoms had completely disappeared. He was quite concerned re the morning's vomiting but here they were both healthy as.

Bell prodded Stevey's raised rash and announced,

"Truly weird, I think antihistamines should take care of it but if it's not gone by tomorrow, I will have to refer you to a skin specialist ... I don't know what it is?" Doctor Bell sat back at his desk tapping his pen on his cheek after telling the boys to put their shirts back on. He handed Jamee the prescription and finished with, "If there are any changes please let me know straight away, phone me on this number!" He directed Jamee's eyes to the handwritten number on the back of the prescription envelope, "Okay boys, you're both outta here!" Then Dr. Bell directed his attention to their mother as he started scribbling, "Jamee, I'm writing you a doctor's certificate to keep the twins home for the next two days. No school, just in case it's contagious, so ring me immediately if something changes, okay." Jamee nodded and turned to the boys whose four eyes had suddenly lit up as their one day off had grown into three!

The boys grabbed their traditional lollipop on the way out! And again in perfect twin unison, "Thank you, Doctor Bell." How could he not smile?

One hour later, Tyler's rashes had completely disappeared just as Stevey's was down to just a faint outline of a circle around his shoulder's birthmark; Jamee was finally able to relax!

*

Hot Tottie

Kelvin couldn't sleep so he lay awake watching the clock; it was 2.25 am. He seriously thought about putting the TV on but he didn't want to wake Jamee. He very well knew she'd had a big day and her darkened eyes hadn't lied; she needed the rest more he did!

An hour passed and he was still tossing and his old back was getting uncomfortable, so gave up for the night and accepted it was morning. Kelvin went downstairs, made himself a hot chocolate while he carried a half-chewed Tim-Tam biscuit in his mouth between the fridge and the boiled jug. Curiosity got the better of him so he took a stroll around the backyard sipping his hot chocolate amongst the darkness, until the glow of the sensor light clicked on and broke it, as he walked the pool coping. What had happened here? It still baffled him. The hairs on the back of his neck rose, as he took a glance deep into the pool. What was in there? Something was in there! Kelvin gave himself the hee-bee gee-bees so he made his way back into the kitchen.

Jamee came down the staircase as he was leaning against the breakfast bar finishing his chocolate beverage.

“Bugger! Didn't wake you, did I?” Kelvin smirked and cocked his head in an ‘I'm sorry’ way and Jamee did a gay-like limp wristed hand wave to reassure him ‘All okay Honey!’

“No ... just worried about the boys!”

“Want a hot tottie then?” Kelvin asked as he was already reaching for her favorite Aerosmith mug.

“Sure.” Jamee tightened her robe belt and she shuffled towards him in her fluffy pink slippers. Kelvin wasn't going to say anything then he decided to speak up,

“This whole thing is freaking me the fuck out!” He poured the microwaved milk into the cup while stirring, “Do you think it's,” Kelvin hesitated as he couldn't believe he was going to say it out loud, “... aliens?” He was expecting Jamee to laugh at him but instead, she nodded and there was silence – they both were silent as the night!

*

Taken

At 5:09 am while the conversation in the kitchen was about the ridiculous possibility of aliens in the pool, the pool itself had started again without either of them realizing. The colors glowed aqua first, then purple to red, and that was when Kelvin's attention was drawn to the twins sleep-walking side by side, making their way down the stairs and toward the back door, heading straight to the reddish glow that was reflecting upon their faces through the windows.

"Steven, Tyler!" He placed his empty cup (that he was still holding onto) on the breakfast bar, as Jamee did the same with her near-empty one. They ran over and grabbed the boys (one each) as they both attempted to shake their respective child from the sleep/trance state and bring them back to the real world while guiding them back to the safety of the kitchen area.

"Tyler, open your eyes! Tyler!" Jamee was shaking him when his eyes slowly began to open. Kelvin was still shaking Stevey when the boy tried to push away his father's hand and did with the force of a man; he wanted to get to the now blood-red water of the pool!

"Stevey, wake up! Wake up! Wake up, Stevey!" Kelvin yelled but the boy was dead to the world and that was when the extreme brightness of the white lights stupified both him and his wife to a crouching position, as the hi-pitched squeal began and it was already crippling enough to force them to cover their ears. Kelvin had to let go of Stevey – the pain was sickening and piercing. Stevey was unaffected by it and opened the door just to keep walking towards the pool. Kelvin tried his best to get to his tranced son, but it was impossible. Jamee held Tyler as tight as she could and he was fully awake now and scared stiff – crying and holding his ears, as Mr. T howled from the bedroom. Kelvin forced himself to scramble his way towards the doorway. The blinding lights and the soul-piercing sounds were ten times louder and brighter than they had heard before but he had to get to Stevey ... but it was too late. Tears rolled down his face as he watched his son fall face-first into the glowing water of their in-ground pool.

Kelvin fought the pain and dragged himself like a snail across the grass to reach the closed pool fence that left the father trapped outside. He must stand up and save Stevey – his son, he was drowning and he knew in his heart, he would only get one chance to save him. He pulled his weight upwards by holding the poles of the pool's metal gate and clicked the gate open. He again fell to the ground and the paving, as he crawled as fast as he could, his ears were now bleeding and he had a knitting needle pain fill his ears and it was telling him that his eardrums had most probably burst.

Kelvin dragged himself quickly to the edge and looked into the red glowing water, he could see the bottom clearly from the intense light and to his horror, Stevey wasn't in there – Stevey was nowhere to be seen, he was gone. Fear engulfed his whole being as he wasn't dreaming when he saw Stevey fall in only forty-five seconds prior and without thinking about it, he dragged his paining body into the glowing blood-colored water and as soon as he hit the water, the color started to change back to aqua but it was happening from the top to bottom and seem to be chasing him. Instinct made him swim hard to the bottom as the pain of sound was blocked by the water and with complete peaceful silence, not even a long-distance muffled water-filled bass sound could be heard. Kelvin's eyes were open as he looked everywhere for Stevey, he was down here – he just knew. Then the coolness of the aqua was engulfing him into tranquility

where everything stopped and it didn't matter anymore. But his son's face filled his mind and he forced himself deeper to the red and away from the solace of the aqua.

In the kitchen, Jamee was still holding Tyler when the lights and the sounds stopped instantly, quickly regaining her thoughts; she had to get outside to help!

“Stay here Tyler ... if something should happen ... run, run to Ryan's house okay!” She stood up and grabbed a knife from the parquetry block on the kitchen bench and ran outside.

The pool was aqua and the sun was rising, but where was her husband or her son and it hit home – the pool! Jamee ran to the pool area clumsily opening the pool gate while preparing herself for the worst.

She looked into the pool and it was empty as the Sun's rays filtered the last of the aqua off.

Jamee fell to her knees and dropped the knife, she started crying for she knew in her heart, Stevey was gone and her husband was with him.

*

Operator

The aqua was soft here and there was no hardness, only the pain within his ears. Kelvin's fear was evident and the visitors could sense it – they must calm him. Kelvin looked at them and counted, there were seven visitors in total and to him, and they all looked the same, except for one that had a much larger cranium. Their enormous emerald teardrop eyes were haunting and lifeless and very one dimensional. They had dragged him from the red room where he arrived and carried him to this aqua room. He was surrounded by the whitish-grey creatures and he couldn't see his Stevey anywhere. As Kelvin knelt with both hands flat on the soft aqua his wet clothes were dripping and dispersing amongst the swirling aqua floor, but Kelvin couldn't stop looking at them as they drew closer.

The Operator outstretched his hands towards Kelvin as the workers obeyed instructions and carefully helped him into a standing position. They were gentle with their frog-like fingers and they were soothing – he could feel them. But Kelvin fought the calmness and searched inside for his anger, he needed to find his anger and his son.

“Fuck off! Leave me alone!” Kelvin yells and pushes away their hands making them all take a step backward from their encompassing circle. The Operator raises his right arm, outstretching his longest finger to touch the head of the closest and in turn, touches the next and the cycle repeats until the circle is whole and complete as one, and circled Kelvin. But as scared as he is, Kelvin thrusts outwards but he cannot touch them as the intense awful death sound returns. He cowers to the ground in a ball yelling,

“Stop! Please stop it!” And his right ear begins to bleed again as the aqua that surrounds him turns purple with anger and now he knew where the sound had come from – them!

The Operator breaks the circle and the silence returns as does the aqua. It steps and leans forward and places its finger on top of Kelvin's head, as he was still crouching. Kelvin understands, he doesn't like it but he understands. If he wants to live then he must learn to understand and obey the Operator.

*

Liquid

Breaking their circle, the visitors now step forward and close in on Kelvin but he could sense they weren't going to harm him (just yet anyway). One of them bends down and scoops up some of the liquid aqua floor and places the liquid on his bleeding ear and the pain disappears, almost instantaneously.

Kelvin looks up at the expressionless visitor as its frog eyes blink twice; it was a female of the species, he knew that for sure! Another one of them steps closer and the two visitors help Kelvin to his feet to regain his stance upon the aqua. He looks at the second one and it also is a female, now he could tell their eyes were different and softer and their light grey skin color was much paler than the males.

The Operator gestured Kelvin to follow him with a slow finger movement as the others parted the way for him. Turning towards what seemed like a solid silver wall, the Operator touched it and an opening appeared in front of him as if the wall wasn't actually there at all and just an illusion. Kelvin followed him as his two female visitors were either side of him both holding one of his arms each. The more the females touched him, the calmer he seemed to get; they were soothing! His anger had dissipated to a near-nothing and he sensed he would see his Stevey soon.

*

Google it!

Jamee sat in the middle of the kitchen floor holding Tyler and Mr. T as tight as she could, rocking back and forth. Her mind swirled and swayed with mixed emotions and random thoughts, “*What was she to do next?*” She had always been the problem-solver in the household but this wasn’t as simple as chasing a possum out of the lounge-room or cleaning up the dog’s accident or being first aid mum – this was total insanity! It was aliens and she knew that for sure and all the craziness of those reported abductions she’d laughed at on TV, now weren’t quite as funny. Jamee knew if she rang the police they would only laugh at her and commit her or worse accuse her of foul play. Tyler remembered nothing of the events which she thanked God for, but she had soon realized – she was on her own!

Standing up and grabbing the phone book from its home (on the breakfast bar under the wall phone) she flicked through the A section but it was useless they just don’t list Aliens in there! “*Think Jamee, fucking think!*” Demanding herself and her brain to move faster than her heartbeat.

“Tyler, Honey, I want you to go and take a shower ... take Mr. T with you!” Tyler stood up as Mr. T hobbled upwards on three legs and bounced along behind Tyler’s exit.

Jamee raced into Kelvin’s office/study and flipped open his laptop. After the seeming to take forever load up, she clicked on Google and searched *Aliens* but there was too much to look at. Pages upon pages of everything and it was total overload! She must refine her search so she entered - *Australian Alien Abductions*.

The first site she entered showed her information and cases leading back to the fifties. Jamee scanned through them, so she narrowed down her reading to Queensland cases.

Jamee was getting frustrated and emotional and she started to cry, feeling so scared and alone. A lot of the cases were further north and mostly driving trips but one local one, in particular, caught her attention. It was a case of a twin being taken ... and it was in 2000. There was a link to another webpage so Jamee clicked into it. The page loaded and it had been created by the missing twin’s father – Roy Buckingham. At first, Jamee just clicked through the attached low-quality images of various family photos. A daughter only 13 years old (exactly the same age as Stevey and Tyler were now). His daughter Kylie had been taken. Jamee started reading and chills ran up her spine as Kylie was taken early morning and through their above-ground pool ... water! Jamee clicked on another clearer school photograph of the twins and her hand went to her cover her open mouth immediately, as she was looking at a female version of Stevey, only with blonde hair; the similar features were a little too coincidental. Her brain thumped as she continued reading. The father’s page stated that it was here for all to see now and to hopefully find the answers to his on-going nightmare.

As Jamee read the page, he had reported several similar cases which paralleled hers to a degree – all similar-looking twins (to her own), all contracted a fever, and weird rashes yet, the most important detail was - water! Taken from either pools, lakes, rivers, even the sea. Most reported cases were here in Australia but some were cases from New Zealand, some Canada even one odd case from New Guinea.

Jamee clicked into Roy's blog page and read the comments good and bad from both believers and non-believers. Roy was the only real connection she had to her own crazy story so it was imperative to get his attention. Immediately she started blogging that she may have vital information in regards to his daughter's disappearance, it felt like her only chance!

Jamee sat back in Kelvin's leather desk chair and lifted her legs to place her feet on the seat as she placed her praying hands over her knees, touching her chin with tears in her eyes ... and now she would wait. Fortunately, she didn't have to for long.

A whole fifteen minutes to be exact.

*

Eat

The visitors guided Kelvin to an eating place where against one of the silver walls, protruded an aqua floating tabletop covered with various fruits. Everything that Kelvin could recognize plus a few he did not; they weren't from Earth! The females walked him to the fruit and cocked their heads in unison as for him to eat. Kelvin wasn't hungry but did not want the angry sound to return so he picked up some grapes and placed one in his mouth as he smiled and nodded 'thank you' in return.

The Operator stood a fair distance away as he summoned the remaining three through a new exit he had created. Kelvin offered a grape to the females but they just blinked twice in succession and slowly shook their enlarged heads. The Operator moved closer to Kelvin and placed his hand on his head. Now Kelvin could hear him – no ... feel him!

“Food! Eat food, you must eat food!”

Kelvin responded by placing another seedless grape into his mouth as he eye-balled the alien in charge. They were connected but there was no trust between the two and they both acknowledged that. The females were harmless but this male leader wasn't!

*

Blog

Jamee was tired but she had covered her tracks enough (during the waiting game) to keep everyone that didn't need to know at bay and to buy her twenty-four-hour leeway, such as ringing in sick for the twins and advising Bob that Kelvin wasn't coming into work because of migraine. After Tyler showered, he returned to his bed and slept for most of the morning as he seemed to be extra drained from the night's events but again, with no memory of any of it.

Jamee had responded quickly after checking the blog and getting the reply she had been waiting for and started reading,

"Who are you? What do you know?" She had quickly sat down and started typing,

"My name is Jamee Bentley (pause) I believe you (pause) my twin son and husband have been abducted (pause) today exactly as your daughter was (enter) ... through our pool that glowed (enter).

The reply was quick, *"Ring me (pause) no I will ring you!"*

Jamee quickly typed and entered her phone number and within one minute the phone rang.

*

Stevey

A chair was created for Kelvin from the silver wall and the two females guided Kelvin to sit on it. Kelvin sat on the liquid chair as the females blinked at him twice again and then left as well; it was only him and the Operator now! The calming of the females left with them and replaced them with fear. It pointed at Kelvin to remain seated as it blinked and nodded. It was clear that he was being ordered to stay put, then the Operator left and the exit closed.

Kelvin sat there for the next ten minutes just looking at the alien structure that he was trapped in. It was amazing and that he could not deny, for the floor was liquid and as he leaned down and scooped up some of it in his hand, it ran off to rejoin the floor. How was this possible? It was liquid yet, it was solid and related to the sound somehow. Kelvin tried to push his foot through it but it was hard as concrete when pressure was applied to it. He then touched the silver walls which looked a lot more like a metal, which was a smoother consistency than the floor, yet the visitors could manipulate it to form shapes and doorways and it was warmer - lifelike.

After the ten minutes of the room examination, Kelvin's mind returned to the one true issue at hand – Stevey. They had taken him and now only by persistence and chance, he was here as well. Kelvin feared that his son would now be alone and terrified. His thoughts cleared and it was all he could think off – Stevey and escape, but how? Calmness was his essential answer for the present, so he must be ready.

*

Roy B

“Two sugars and black thank you.” Jamee obliged and stirred the cups before she handed Roy Buckingham his before she sat side by side at the breakfast bar. Tyler was awake now and had asked a lot of questions of his brother’s whereabouts which were answered by his mother saying his brother was up extra early so Dad took him to work and they would be back later; she lied! Tyler was ordered to play X-box in his room – no questions were asked after that, as this never happens on a school day!

Jamee replayed the events from the beginning to Roy as he sat quietly drinking his coffee, listening. But before Jamee got to finish he interrupted,

“Then the day after the boys got that weird rash ... the pool water turned red as the sound was something you have never heard before and never want to again as the brightness!” Jamee just nodded as now she was silent. Roy continued,

“I believe it is the twins they want ... but only one! This is the last photo I took of Kylie.” He dropped his eyes as he handed Jamee the aged and curved white-bordered photograph, then a single tear ran down his left cheek. Roy eye-balled Jamee, “They want the firstborn, I believe, the bigger and healthier twin!” Jamee covered her mouth again as she looked at Kylie’s image and it was Stevey to a tee but with long blonde straight hair.

“Why do they look the same?” Jamee questioned. Roy just raised his eyebrows and added,

“They all do ... every taken child, especially the older twins. I bet Stevey was the firstborn and was always healthier than Tyler, also being the little more dominant one of the two, with stronger individual features.” After a brief pause, Roy added, “Kylie was my firstborn.”

“Stevey has a stronger personality than Tyler ... and my Stevey was delivered 13 minutes before Ty.” Jamee’s eyes now leaked and it was then Roy floored her as he did himself with his words,

“My Kylie was 13 minutes earlier, exactly!”

*

Examination

Kelvin raced back to the chair when he saw the wall starting to shift into its doorway opening. This time two males were first in and he sensed that these were the warriors of the visitors – the henchmen, bodyguards ... or most likely - the executioners. They were slightly taller and their body frames were more masculine and they had what appeared to be dark grey leopard spots on their backs so he assumed this was their identification to all – the scare factor; it worked! The Operator followed as he turned and hand gestured to bring him in; it was Stevey ... or was it? It looked like Stevey but something was different!

“What have you fucking done to him?”

Two more spotted warriors walked Stevey in as they held an arm each. Kelvin stood and went to run to his naked son but the first two warriors grabbed and restrained him as The Operator blinked twice and shook his head in a ‘No-no – do not touch!’, so Kelvin complied.

“Stevey! Wake up, Stevey!” Kelvin yelled but his son was still in a trance and naked. Why was he naked? The Operator ordered the two to take Stevey away and then they were gone. Kelvin tried his best to break the grips of the warriors but they were too strong so he screamed,

“Let him go you Freddo Frog-faced fucks! Let my son fucking go!”

The Operator then summoned the two females to re-enter and they undressed him as the warriors ensured there would be no resistance with a blade at his throat and there was none.

Kelvin stood naked, just as they were. The females gathered his clothes and exited as the Operator turned and the warriors held his arms as they followed him through the make-shift doorway before it closed. They were now in what seemed like a corridor or the backbone of the ship. Kelvin looked upwards and it was an enormous black backbone he was now sure, with ribcages running off of it, housed by the silver walls and the liquid floor. Kelvin dropped his glance to look straight ahead to where they were heading but it all looked the same – ribcage after ribcage; the ship was some sort of lifeform! The Operator stopped and faced one of the ribcage sections and as he placed his hand upon the silver frame, a doorway appeared and the warriors guided Kelvin through it. He could see another two smaller visitors – one male and one female he had not seen before, standing either side of what made Kelvin fight and scream instantly - an operating table made from the silver; it was the medical examination room!

“Fuck off, you fucking freaks!” Kelvin did his best to retaliate their hold on him as he twisted and turned in the grips of the two warriors but they dragged him easily toward the table. “Leave me the fuck alone!”

The male stepped forward and held what looked like a piece of turquoise asparagus. He lifted it towards Kelvin and by twisting and turning the head of it, made the end glow white. The examiner touched Kelvin’s forehead with the glow and the fight was over. Kelvin’s body was paralyzed, yet he could feel his own weight within the warrior's grasp. They raised and placed him face down on the table, as he saw his and their reflections on the aqua floor before

he felt the pain. Snake-like three-inch needles created from the silver lowered from the ship's ceiling and entered his back, as he felt the anal probe enter as well. To only scream, but there was no sound or action, only feeling and it was silent and terrifying.

*

A plan

“So what do we do now?”

Roy stood up and paced the kitchen before he answered Jamee’s question,

“They don’t want your husband! They don’t want any adults at all! No adult case has ever been reported ... and I’m sure they only keep the oldest twin!” He paced some more and added, “We must be prepared for Stevey’s rescue, they will return tonight,” he paused, “... if they haven’t already killed ...” and Roy stopped.

“So we just sit and wait ... for how long?” Jamee asked.

“We need to get our children back ... both our children!” Roy paused before unveiling one more detail, “Tonight, it will be tonight,” Jamee was silent as Roy continued, “... they will return, and I know for sure they will return,” Roy hesitated and walked around the kitchen unsettled and gripping his chin before continuing, “... only one other adult has ever returned that I know of! The other adult ... was me!” Roy hung his head downwards and cried as Jamee stood frozen, clutching her empty cup. “The truth is my wife ran off with my other daughter - Karen, I think she believed I was guilty somehow or some sort of monster. Jamee, I was gone for 13 years! My Kylie was abducted in 1986 ... I returned in 2000!” Roy placed the empty coffee cup on the breakfast bar, as Jamee was shaking her head in disbelief, crying, Roy continued, “She saw what happened too; she was there when I jumped in the pool to save my daughter! But unlike your Tyler ... I believe my daughter’s memory wasn’t wiped of the events ... Karen was simply terrified of everything after we were gone. So here I am, in 2000 appearing out of nowhere, the same age so can you understand their fear? I do! I’ve never heard from either of them since my return.” Jamee touched Roy’s arm as he sobbed a little, sucking the snot back before she asked the obvious question,

“What about Kylie?” Roy answered,

“I had no choice but to leave, lose the battle ... win the war! Tonight is the war!”

Roy explained to Jamee of his very vague memories of the living ship’s enormous size and the terror of the examination room, the reptile-type aliens themselves, and of the variety of workers much like an ant world, but with a leader or as he called it ... the *Operator!*

“We must be prepared; I need to get on that ship!” Roy then announced, “I have brought weapons!”

*

Scream to live

Kelvin's body control slowly returned during the examination as he lay still on his stomach on the silver substance table. He could see that he was now alone with the two so-called scientists and they both were leaning over some sort of work area, examining the various liquid and solid samples from his body. He could see that they had surgical tools of an alien description on a table between him and them. It was apparent they were of alien metal and primarily to cut and slice and by the blood on that particular instrument, it was the one they used to slice the strip from his thigh and the pain was intense.

The needle snakes were still inserted in his back as the probe but Kelvin could feel slight movement, so he practiced clenching and releasing a fist with both hands. To lay still was a must, not to draw any attention to his body's controlled awakening.

The male scientist turned and Kelvin glared at the incisor tool as he stepped towards him. It was now or never and Kelvin reached out with his left arm and grabbed the hand of the male examiner as his regained strength was too much for the small alien and the incisor was stabbed into the male's brain with his other hand. Kelvin ripped out the probe instantly (which made him scream and could be heard now) as the female dropped her samples and backed towards the silver wall. Kelvin sat up with the needles still lodged in his back as the dead male oozed a dark green, nearly black blood as it was dissipating amongst the aqua floor. The female was weak and Kelvin sensed that, as she blinked twice and looked towards where the closed exit should be. Kelvin stood and as he did, three of the six needles pulled out from his back. He screamed again in pain but this was his fight to win and he refused to lose. Kelvin pulled against the remaining three needles and they left his body; he was free! The female was scared and made a futile attempt to get to the exit. She had made it and opened the exit by placing her hand sideways and softly against the silver. Her body fell to the aqua when the same alien incisor pierced her enormous soft brain from behind; Kelvin had escaped!

*

The Library

'Protection from the death sound' was the first thing that came into Kelvin's thoughts so he rummaged through the table of instruments and found what he believed were earplugs or at least would suffice. Remembering the healing powers of the liquid floor Kelvin dipped them in before placing them into his ears and the soothing was instantaneous. So he again drew his attention to the table of contents and decided to leave it all but keep the blade that had already saved him.

Kelvin duplicated the visitor's hand movement from outside the examination room and on his third and much softer attempt he succeeded, by lifting his middle finger to leave three only; the exit closed. His first thoughts were to hide, but where? He was naked, standing in the craft's hallway and holding the larger of the alien's knife-like instruments; it was hooked and made of a metal similar to stainless with a fingerstyle grip which suited the visitor's three elongated fingers but when he sliced it through the air, he accepted it would serve its now given duty as his deadly weapon.

The corridor was long and empty but Kelvin was exposed and vulnerable here so he needed desperately to find a room or better still, Stevey. Counting the ribcages as he ran gave Kelvin some sort of mind map of the ship. It was imperative if he wanted to get out of here that he must take note. He began touching the walls next to the ribcages as he believed they were the walls between the rooms. A doorway opened and the liquid floor glowed red, he recognized it immediately; this was the doorway in and out! He closed it and recounted the ribs from the end - it was 13 ... he must remember 13. Kelvin counted another 13 (and now he would use 13's as his memory reference), He moved from room to room then decided to try his luck again. Placing his hand in the correct position worked as a second opening emerged out of nowhere, as Kelvin stood in an attack position but the room was empty. He quickly entered and closed the opening behind him. He was in some sort of library and yet there no books here ... only the Devil's work.

The walls were all holding tanks of various sizes but Kelvin's stomach felt sick when he could see they were all holding dissections of humanlike life forms. They weren't all from Earth but it was evident there were heads, arms, legs, hearts, and brains ... it was all here. But what was most disturbing was ... they all appeared to be parts from ... children ... and the heads of the boys and girls were way too similar to Stevey. The remorse for killing the small aliens was soon gone.

*

Stevey?

Noticing a blank wall between the storage tanks rang 'doorway' in Kelvin's mind so he started the sideways hand placement at various spots until he found it and it was a touch warmer, now he knew; the locks were warmer!

The opening had led him to another medical room exactly as the one he was nearly butchered in, except this one was larger. Quickly glancing around the room Kelvin took in that there was only one alien and Kelvin had startled him. As it turned and blinked its eyes twice, it made a run for possibly an alarm spot on the silver alien wall. Kelvin's adrenalin and instinct took over as he thrust the weapon deep into the sole alien's soft jelly-brain that only one minute earlier was leaning over Stevey. His son was the one lying nude on the alien table.

In super-fast movements, Kelvin began removing the probes and the needles from Stevey's back. Trying to wake Stevey seemed fruitless as the boy was dead to the world from the sleeping substance he had been administered. Kelvin lifted his naked son and threw him over his shoulder; it was time to go home!

Kelvin felt all around another blank wall praying he wasn't going to open it into an army of warriors instead of a doorway. An operating table appeared from the floor and seemed to rise out of nothing. Kelvin removed his hand from the wall and the table stopped, he replaced his hand and once again it rose, he pressed the wall twice and the table returned to the floor and disappeared. Just at that moment a doorway opened and it was another one of them ... and it was armed!

The alien moved alarming fast and stabbed Kelvin with the incisor in his right side as the pain took both him and Stevey down. Quickly regaining his stance, Kelvin grabbed the weaker and smaller alien by the leg and tripped him up to force the male down on his own back. Kelvin had dropped his incisor when he was stabbed so he reached out, regained it and thrust it deep and straight through the alien's leg, impaling the blade at least 4 inches deep within the aqua, suddenly the floor surrounded itself over the blade and it was like super-set concrete; the aqua had its own inbuilt self-protection system! Kelvin took the advantage to think quickly! The Alien male squealed as Kelvin hit the wall and the table rose again from nowhere and lifted the impaled alien attacker on top of it. This time Kelvin didn't release his touch and kept the table rising. As the table rose the alien's embedded and impaled leg was torn from its tiny body. The alien squealed and thrashed fruitlessly as the table reached the targeted ceiling, squashing and popping him like a bug on a windscreen. Black blood splattered and Kelvin turned from it to shield himself but the hot liquid still hit his back and splattered Stevey's still limp body. His wound was bleeding so he scooped the aqua from the floor and rubbed it in, soothing the pain immediately. He now understood that the floor contained some sort of antiseptic based pain-killer that puts ours to shame; if only he could bottle this baby!

Kelvin moved quickly lifting Stevey to the shoulder position and searched the wall for the warm exit until he found it! The next room was equipped with a dozen or so alien medical tables and there lay at least a dozen fair-skinned children, all naked, lying face down with those medical needles in their backs (as well as those horrifying anal probes). He lowered Stevey to the aqua as he went to check on the other children. The closest to him were two girls both about

Stevey's age, he looked at their faces and they looked identical; they were twins and his heart raced as they looked a little too much like Stevey as well! He felt for a pulse: they were alive! Kelvin ripped out the alien examination equipment as fast as he could and moved over to the other side of the examination room where two boys were facing away from him. Kelvin stopped immediately when he recognized the circular birthmark on the back of the first male, he turned to see Stevey's back as he lay amongst the moving aqua where he had placed him – he did not have one! Turning the boy on the table over it was Stevey's face then he could see the face of the next male – it was Stevey's face as well ... yet it wasn't; there were no freckles!

“You Freddo Frog-faced Fucks! What the fuck are you doing?” Kelvin yelled out in anger as he stood amongst the sleeping children, “What the fuck is going on here?”

The opening appeared as the crippling sound took Kelvin down, forcing him to drop and cower in pain. The last thing he remembered was the hair grab and being dragged up the ship's corridor from the spotted warriors, just before one of them threw him into the holding cell and punched him to unconscious land.

*

The bait

The Operator was the first vision Kelvin filtered as he returned from the grogginess.

This time he was restrained to the table and was fully dressed, but why? Then it occurred to him, they were taking him home ... possibly (or execution for murdering)? He felt it inside like a sixth sense – he was too much trouble! Kelvin could see that the two females were here as the warriors so he assumed they had dressed him while he was out.

“What the fuck are you doing to them, you grey little cunts? They’re just fucking children!” Kelvin glared at the Operator but he just stood blinking those teardrop lifeless eyes as always. Then he turned and mentally instructed the warriors to leave, before he ordered the same to the females ... and then they were alone after the opening closed. Kelvin was biting his lip and doing his best to break free from the silver wall restraints but they would not budge as the alien walked around the table just shaking his enlarged skull - emotionless.

“You fucking freak, what are you fucking doing to my son? Why are there copies of him and the girls?” Kelvin demanded it for answers. The opening appeared and the warriors brought in one of the Steveys and he was dressed too!

“Dad, Dad!” A freckled Stevey was awake.

“Stevey! Let him go you fucking pieces of shit! Don’t hurt him!” Kelvin yelled as he thrashed fruitlessly while the warriors stood perfectly still as all good soldiers should! and still restraining Stevey was restrained from breaking free to run to his father’s strong arms and protection. Kelvin asked his son, “Are you all right mate?”

“Yes, Dad ... but I’m so scared! What are they gonna do to us?” The boy was crying now and Kelvin cried as well as he couldn’t get to Stevey to just hold and cover his obvious pain.

“Sending us home mate ... I hope they’re sending us home!”

*

Son of surrealism

Roy had ordered Jamee to take Tyler and Mr. T to her mother's house for the night, so she did. On her return, Roy unveiled his plan of attack,

"Jamee, I need you to listen to me ... listen before any questions please, for what I am about to tell you ... and about to show you, will seem surreal ... and not possible in this world we know, our world ... but it is the truth!" Roy finger-pointed for her to sit, so she obeyed.

"What are you talking abo..." Roy interrupted her.

"Sssh, Listen first!" So he sat beside her and held her hand as he started.

"I lost my Kylie exactly 26 years ago today ... and when I was 33-years-old; a young strong man." He paused again and sipped his coffee before continuing, "I was strong, just like Kelvin is now!" Jamee sat silently as she listened with intent. "Something else happened on that night, something I haven't revealed to you." Roy paused again as if to give her time to take it all in and process every word, before unveiling the next piece of the jigsaw. "I didn't just lose Kylie that night," he went to speak and he coughed a little to clear his throat, "... I, I ... I returned ... with someone!"

"You what?" Jamee had been silent but it was a natural instinctual retort!

"I returned with a child ... who was on the ship! A 13-year-old boy," then he floored her, "... his name was ... and is, Stevey!"

Just as she was listening there was a knock from the front door and as the screen door opened, she saw him! The young man walked in, not smiling and with his eyes downwards, then he looked up at her and their gaze met, it was him – Stevey, her Stevey ... and he spoke,

"Mum."

Whether it was anxiety or shock but the blood rushed from Jamee's head a little way too quickly and as she stood up from her stool, she fell to the ground.

"Mum ... it is me, Mum." A 26-year-old Stevey patted his mother's hand as she regained her composure and she looked up at the grown man with Stevey's eyes and stubble upon his face. He continued, "Mum, we have been waiting for today ... for you or Dad to make contact ... I couldn't remember." Stevey started to cry.

"Impossible!" Only one word exited his mother's mouth as she changed her questioning to view Roy's eyes, then asked as her brain was exploding, "How is this possible?" So Roy did his best to explain,

"It' some sort of time fluctuation they have ... a black hole or possibly simply a time-related glitch, who knows? I only remember pieces, Jamee. But I do remember Kelvin's name and face ... and now I can!" Roy pointed to the family portrait hanging above the LCD screen in the lounge room. He added, "I couldn't remember hardly anything, I tried so hard I

remembered the man's actions ... it's like memories get scattered in the porthole tunnel somehow."

"No!" Jamee sat on the floor in a huddled ball crying. Big Stevey spoke,

"I couldn't remember my last name or where I came from ... only fleeting images of all your faces that came and went ... Dad's, yours, and my brother's name that I still have a recollection of. Roy explained to me I was taken, abducted ... from the future, in the forthcoming year – 2013 yes, this year! Roy then told me it was only the year 2000 when we returned! It was the future for Roy and the past for me ... and I had returned in my very own birth year! Because of this, we had to wait as nothing had happened yet, no history of any Steven's being taken or being born. You would think to find twin boys with one named Steven born in 2000 would be easy, but no one was." Roy butted in,

"We believed we may have interfered with our timeline ... changed the future?" Big Stevey started again,

"But Roy never gave up for Kylie and me; he is a good man!" Roy looked downwards and wiped his eye. Stevey added, "And I have searched and found nothing so waited patiently for you, Mum ... I knew you would ... and here you are ... only a mere five hours from our home. You were that close all the time, but you found me, thank God!"

Jamee reached out and grabbed Stevey's hand as any mother would. She cried when she told them, "You would never find a twin called Steven ... because it's your nickname ... you are legally Bradley John but we just started calling you - Stevey when you were a baby ... you looked like a Stevey ... I am so sorry!" Big Stevey leaned over and thumb-wiped the single tear from Jamee's left cheek while smiling and saying,

"Mum, it's all good ... I'm here now!" Roy broke the mother-son moment,

"Jamee ... we believe they will be back tonight, we both believe that ... and that my Kylie is still up there alive. Somehow time for us is that – time, but for them ... they can come and go, back and forth in blink of an Alien eye." Then Stevey added,

"It is something to do with thirteen ... the number - 13? Like a cycle maybe? Mum, Roy can be trusted ... he saved me, cared for me," he hesitated, "... trained me ... and he thinks he knows where Dad is! He believes that he's still alive!" Roy handed Jamee a glass of water as she sat on the floor with the two kneeling beside her, and as she sipped Roy spoke,

"Somehow, I remember inside the ship and of all things ... the porthole or tunnel whatever it is! I have waited for today ... and for thirteen years! Kelvin knows where Kylie is and I need to get on that ship to find her, I owe it to her ... to find her and bring my daughter home!"

Jamee sat in silence as her nightmare had truly begun and the questions that exploded within her mind such as; would she ever see her teenage Stevey again or was this fully grown man now her son and be moving in? What about the girls and partying all hours? What will Tyler say and how do they explain this to him? Her thoughts were random and sporadic but it was all she could grasp on to at that particular moment in Big Stevey's present time.

*

Not alone

The Operator touched the walls and the ship's metal restraints removed themselves from Kelvin as the warriors let go of Stevey and he ran to his father. They embraced and held each other as Kelvin raised his eyes to the leader and frowned his eyebrows before threatening,

"I will kill you ... you fucking monster!"

Touching the adjacent wall, The Operator opened what appeared to be another sort of holding cell and the warriors grabbed Stevey from Kelvin's grip and handed him to the Operator before they both grabbed Kelvin and threw him into the cell, before pushing Stevey in as well. The opening closed and they were alone.

"Are you okay Stevey? Turn around mate." Kelvin ordered.

"Why Dad?" Kelvin lifted Stevey's shirt up to find the birthmark ... it was the real him ... or so he had to believe. Just as he was tucking Stevey's shirt back in, another opening appeared from the opposite wall and a human was thrown in before the opening closed.

"Holy fuck ... I'm not alone, Shit sorry, mate." The human was male and Australian, as he apologized for swearing, "Roy, Roy Buckingham." Kelvin's mind was exploding with the crazy similarities, for not only was he here but being an Australian too! Were there more? Roy outstretched his hand as the human father's hands shook in their world or bizarre.

"Name's Kelvin, and my son, Stevey." Kelvin nodded while shaking as Stevey just clutched on to his father. Roy's eyes widened as he knelt to look at Stevey's face which was a male photocopy of Kylie's; he didn't understand or did he? He looked up at Kelvin and his eyes confirmed Roy's confusion.

"Kill any of those grey monsters?" Roy asked.

"Yeah, three ... doctors I think? Only the smaller ones ... and you?" Kelvin replied and asked Roy.

"One of the big spotted fuckers ... their brains are soft as melons! Then they took my daughter, Kylie ... haven't seen her since." Roy's tone changed and his confidence disappeared and he was choky, "Fucking animals!"

"Does she have blonde hair ... shoulder length?" Kelvin asked.

"Yes ... have you seen her?" Now Roy's eyes were fully open.

"Five rooms from here ... but," Kelvin hesitated and then said out loud what he didn't want to believe himself, "but I think they have cloned or somehow are copying her! I saw girls ... with exactly the same features!" There he had said it! "My son was copied!"

"What the fuck! So is that your real son?" A direct question had to be asked.

“Look for birthmarks ... I think the copies don't have birthmarks or freckles!” Roy looked down at Stevey as his eyes swore angrily as this was the first he knew any of this.

“Kylie has a birthmark under her left shoulder-blade ... it is full moon-shaped,” Roy stated as Kelvin curiously asked,

“What, like this?” He lifted Stevey's shirt to reveal a birthmark in the exact same place?”

“What the f...?” Roy's eyes glared back at Kelvin's, “Do you think they did this somehow?” Kelvin shrugged his shoulders and held Stevey tight before he nodded and spoke,

“My wife and I were told we could never have children ... we thought we were blessed, a gift from God. We got to get the fuck off this ship ... before they kill us! At first, I thought they were sending us home but I'm sensing that's not true, another one of their mind games! I'm sure they'll kill us all when they're finished with examining us.”

*

Ready, Set ...

The Sun had long gone as the three ate and went over and over the plan for they knew they only would get one chance. Jamee was first to rest as she lay on the couch with her head on her grown son's lap while Roy wrapped the guns, ammo, with the container of industrial earplugs in plastic. He taped them up watertight before he placed the box knife in his trouser pocket. It was just crazy that her son was only eight years younger than her but it was his smell she recognized and that had finally made her accept him, so she lay there with her eyes closed as she held his manly hand tight.

Roy was nervous and it was obvious, as Stevey just sat beside his mother with whom he had missed for too long. To her it was yesterday but to Stevey, it was half his lifetime, yet he could never forget the events of the return? It had been the reoccurring nightmare that had played over and over for the last 13 years. So he sat and relived for what he prayed would be played in his mind for the last time as tonight history will be rewritten.

*

Go!

“Dad, I don’t want to go? Don’t make me?” Stevey pleaded as the now full-bearded Roy grabbed the boy. A month or so had passed since he had arrived in this jail cell without Kylie and it was now or never.

“Stevey ... listen to me! Roy has a way to get you out of here ... take you back to Mum!” Kelvin pleaded with his son to accept his words and instructions as it was the only chance they had. Roy spoke,

“We will come back and get your Dad ... and Kylie ... I promise mate ... but we’ve got to get you home.”

Stevy nodded and then cried as the two exited the opening while Kelvin lay bleeding from the puncture wounds in his chest from the dead alien’s talons; it didn’t look good! The opening started to close as the two men of similar age silently nodded goodbye and wished each other good luck before Kelvin jokingly yelled,

“May the Force be with you!”

Roy ran down the empty corridor as Stevey was close behind and holding his hand,

“This way mate!” Roy placed his hand sideways on the silver wall just as Kelvin had described and the opening appeared with its the bright light streaming in, “Don’t be scared Stevey, your dad said this is the way!”

Roy started to count in the ribs as they ran by, Kelvin had instructed him in his 13 memory layout: $13 \times 2 + 13 - 2$ and it would be the portal room. Roy had asked, yet about the 13’s, yet Kelvin couldn’t give him a direct answer as it was simply like he knew the 13 math table inside out and back to front, it always sat at the top of his mind but only since he was on this ship; it like riding a bike!

They both stopped and Roy placed his hand where he hoped the lock would be but nothing happened, nothing at all! Searching for the warm spot, Roy started to worry. The ear-piercing sound filled the ship and Roy’s ears could hardly let his body function anything but pain, Luckily Kelvin’s alien earplugs had at least softened the pain to a bearable level. Stevey was in a crouch position and holding his ears. And they were coming! Hastily, Roy continued to search for the warm area of the lock randomly but now, their luck was running thin. Roy could see them now. The warrior aliens running down the ship’s ever-so-long corridor and there was at least a dozen or so, holding spear-like weapons high in the air. He needed a plan so what would he do but he couldn’t think straight? He had to save the boy! With one last try, he placed his hand a lot gentler on the original area that Kelvin had described and he felt the warmth, this time an opening appeared.

Kelvin could never forget this room and its whereabouts and described it perfectly to Roy which matched his own. And as they stepped onto the red waves (that was the transportation floor), they fell straight through it. It seemed like they fell for minutes, through the winding

waterslide type funnel, winding and spinning out of control but Roy held Stevey's hand tight as if it was his own Kylie's. The tunnel abruptly ended and they felt the cold splash of the pool's cold water.

The water was red and they were both on the bottom of the pool, they had made an entrance from the bottom, not the top just as they had been taken. Now their lungs reminded them that they required oxygen to breathe in this world, so they would make their way through the redness and through the aqua water to reach the air. Even with their disorientation, they both sensed to head towards the bright light. As they swam upwards they both saw the two men diving down towards the red and they looked at each other as passing and recognized the faces, it was them! But they were both so much older!

Air filled their lungs as they both coughed and spluttered but they were both alive, as Jamee grabbed teenage Stevey and dragged him from the pool. Roy pulled himself out of the water as the aqua and bright lights disappeared.

"Hi, Roy ... I'm Jamee, I'll explain all!" Jamee outstretched her hand to offer a handshake as she knelt on one knee holding her wet 13-year-old son, who was still coughing, as Roy answered her,

"Jamee ... your husband ... he's hurt but he's alive!"

*

Crossover

After a change into dry clothes, Jamee made them both some toasted ham and cheese sandwiches and a fresh pot of coffee and a hot tottie for the young Stevey who was sitting on the couch in silence, looking at all the pictures of his lost childhood that he was missing in. Stevey was quiet and both adults would understand and not speak about the events until he was resting.

Stevy fell asleep on the couch through exhaustion, with his head upon his mother's lap holding her hand just as she had done just a few hours before.

The boy was in a deep sleep when the two made their way to the backyard for a cigarette and a stiff drink, but it was Roy that started.

"That was us in the pool wasn't it?" He asked but he already knew the answer.

"Yes, it was," Jamee started to cry as she kept going, "... you brought back my Stevey 13 years ago ... you both have been waiting ... for tonight to return."

"They're going to get Kelvin and Kylie ... I mean we are!" It sounded absurd but this was all insane anyway, so he asked, "This is 2013 isn't it? He was right ... Kelvin was right!" He slammed his closed fist on the verandah rail as he dragged on his ciggie, "Goddamit! The fucker was spot on!"

Jamee nodded before she turned her head towards him breaking her frozen stare at tonight's full moon,

"You told me this was going to happen ... today, Roy." Jamee blew out the smoke and clicked her coffee against Roy's, as they both returned their eyes to the glowing moon before Roy asked,

"So what the fuck happens now?"

*

No time to explain

“This way!” Roy ran down the ship’s corridor with Big Stevey close behind. Their hearts pumped adrenaline as they unwrapped the guns from the plastic and placed the earplugs in.

“She’s dry!” Steven confirmed the guns were unaffected by the trip as a doorway opened and they came face to face with two armed warriors as he threw Roy the loaded revolver.

“Fuck!” Roy screamed and aimed at the first warrior’s head. The alien raised his spiked weapon into a throwing position when Big Stevey aimed and pulled the trigger exploding its brain into a black bloodied mess covering the face of his warrior partner, temporarily blinding him. Roy now fired and took #2 down as he was regaining his composure from the surprise shooting.

“Quick, the fuckers will be sending an army now! I think we might have their attention?” Roy smiled at Big Stevey as they ran and jumped over the dead aliens. Roy pointed to the blank wall, “he was back and some memories returned, “I remember it was here!” Roy was sure!

After counting the 13 layouts, Roy placed his hand sideways and the doorway appeared revealing the fresh body of the alien that Kelvin had killed a mere 13 years prior when they both had waited patiently to act out their plan.

It was so important to wait for the day he would return, as per Kelvin’s plan so they had waited for nearly three months together, it worked except one small detail – Kelvin was the one to leave ... but his sustained injuries had changed that! They had killed the alien as it was alone ... and it was the Operator.

There was Kelvin slumped in a corner with the wound still weeping badly as if it was moments the Operator’s dead body lying in front of him, just as he had left him to save Stevey.

Roy remembered it was he who had moved first from sitting position and grabbed the alien by both arms as Kelvin used the torn strip of his shirt to strangle the lifeblood from this demon. The Operator had managed to protrude his talons and get a good swing into Kelvin, tearing his ribcage wide open. The alien started to gasp for the ship’s oxygen but it was all too late and it was done and the sound wailed – death!

“Holy Shit! What happened to you? You’re fucking ancient!” Kelvin’s pale face smirked as he couldn’t stop staring at Roy’s now greyed hair and no beard ... then he saw Stevey’s fully-grown face, “What the fuck?”

“No time to explain, mate, but it’s time to get you home!” The two helped Kelvin to his feet and exited the holding room.

“You said Kylie was in here close by?” Roy’s eyes stared into Kelvin’s as he pointed to the wall where he had seen them. Roy opened the room and it was the alien library.

“That wall!” pointed Kelvin.

They placed Kelvin in a sitting position against the wall as the other two entered the second room. Roy took off his back-pack and pulled out a new dress for Kylie he had bought especially to dress her in for her return. Big Stevey turned the other way to keep guard as Roy examined the naked girls one by one until he found her birthmark ... this was her, he was adamant! He went to wake her and dress her but it would never be ... they were here!

It was all over as the many warriors took them all down.

*

Take 2

Just as the two were finishing their smokes in the backyard, the moon started its descent as the very first sun rays filtered over the horizon and they heard voices coming from seemingly nowhere.

“Look,” whispered Jamee, “... this can’t be good!” The two stood and watched as the sky brightened and the pool glowed red again. The portal had been opened and two beings were climbing out of the pool so Jamee uneasily joked,

“Mulder and Scully maybe?”

Roy just looked at her and questioned,

“Who are they?”

Jamee forgot Roy was fresh out of the late '80s and had no idea who she was talking about or that the world he was about to be exposed to - the conspiracy files of the letter X. He had quite a bit of catching up in TV land and the whole world.

“Hide!” Roy bellowed as they both took their place behind two large palm trees.

The first climbing out was an older, long grey-haired, and bearded human (not alien – thank God!) followed by a buxom young woman with very long wet tousled hair, they were both dripping wet and near-naked, wearing what was only shreds of ripped and torn clothing strips, mainly covering their privates. *‘Not Scully and Mulder more like Tarzan and Jane!’* thought Jamee after seeing them stand. As the light was only starting to filter in, they watched as the two made their way towards them as the red water disappeared and the portal was closed. It too hard to see them in the morning dark and it was just enough light for the sensor light to refuse to work.

Roy stood in striking position holding Kelvin’s golf club that had been left in the backyard, hiding behind a tree.

“Jamee ... I’m home!” The older man spoke as Jamee waved her hidden arm from her hiding tree for Roy to lower his strike just as the woman clearly in her thirties spoke from behind,

“Dad, are you here too?” She was looking around the yard for Roy, “Dad ... it’s Kylie, I’ve made it!” Both Jamee and Roy stepped into their vision from behind the backyard trees with their mouths aghast. Kylie turned and unveiled her birthmark to them then said,

“You did it! You both did it!”

“Kelvin?” Jamee grasped her mouth as it was her husband but he was in his early fifties and his hair was long but so much thinner and his body was scarred from several battles, he answered,

“Yes, Sweetie ... it’s really me ... I’m so sorry, I took so long.” Jamee grabbed him.

“What the fucking be-Jesus?” Roy was still in shock as his daughter steps to hug her father. He hugs her so tight and it was her ... but with full-sized breasts and an hourglass figure! Roy then turns to look Kelvin eye to eye, as Jamee was squeezing the shit out of him.

“Nice to see you, old friend,” Kelvin reaches out and grabs Roy’s now out-stretched hand and speaks, “... only took us twenty-six years to get it right ... but we did it, mate!” Roy was shaking his friend’s hand but he was in shock as Jamee was, so Roy asked,

“But, but how?”

“Timeshifts ... those simple timeshifts! It’s how they travel. To them it’s minutes but to us, it’s 13-year cycles ... you already knew that but they always return ... for more twins ... we have learned, it is their cycle. We have learned a lot in our time. Since the original Operator’s death, they have been lost and frightened with no real leadership or not for long. Many have tried from the warriors to the smaller ones to take on the Operator role but they all fail ... we’ve killed them all! They are not as smart as the world makes out they are ... so now it’s simply about survival! You returned 13 years ago and started the cycle but tonight it all becomes real – the windows are fully open!” Kelvin paused and coughed a little, “Are you gonna make an old man stand here cold and in his birthday suit ... with this arthritis? I’d kill an alien fuck for one of them!” Kelvin pointed to the scotch bottle that stood half full (awaiting to be emptied) between the deck chairs from the last barbecue.

Jamee kissed her aged husband and raced inside and upstairs before returning with towels and dressing gowns for them both, as Roy just held tight his near Thirty-something-year-old daughter.

They all went to the kitchen (with the bottle) where they passed a sleeping 13-year-old Stevey on the couch. Elderly Kelvin went straight to him and kissed his forehead as he whispered,

“We did it mate ... we fucking did it!”

*

Twinnners

“So you’re telling me in 13 years’ time someone else will contact us and this could all change again? It could be any of us from a different time?” Roy questioned.

“Yep, weird isn’t it! But,” Kelvin looked into his wife’s eyes and added, “... it has too, Roy ... it will be my only chance to go back and get back to today ... a younger me!” He looked at Jamee who teared up as Kylie spoke,

“But Dad, between you and Kelvin the more you experience the more you pass on to which-ever one of you that is up there! It ricochets, back and forth, and suddenly we are where we are ... and we are here ... home. There are many of us now and we call ourselves – Twinnners. We have started the war against them we call – The Takers. We have found many of their weaknesses and continue to learn day by day about the complexity and the wonders of the living ship and the powers of the force 13,” Kylie nods to Kelvin before continuing, “... they are scared of us and we know this. We control the whole back section while the Takers are safe in the front! We are not the only ones that escaped ... very few but some have as well but they are from other entry points, other times future, past, who knows? Hopefully, they made it out alive and are fine too? But some of us will stay as leaders, trainers, and carers of the Twinnners to free more taken children ... and there are many, many more to save until it is their time to fight for their own freedom and to destroy their experiments.” Kelvin was nodding in agreement as he sipped his scotch on the rocks – a taste he had forgotten so long ago. Jamee had to ask as the tears rolled down her face,

“What about my Stevey, I mean Big Stevey?” It was Kelvin who answered,

“Sweetheart, he is okay and a fine warrior but he believes (as he points to teenage Stevey sleeping) he belongs here and he belongs there (as he points to the sky). He loves us and it is the one thing that will never fade ... and the reason he fights for all twins. He refound his lost memories of early childhood, us, and the love we shared when he was here last night and he believes that was his blessing.” Kelvin hugged Jamee as she wept like a baby.

“So what do the aliens want with the twins ... children ... and the experiments?” begged Roy for the answers. Kylie answered,

“They created us - twins! We are all from them ... they made us in the very beginning, planted the biological sequences millions of years ago within our human DNA ... somehow their ancestors did it! But with the alternative motives to claim us back, to examine and modify, with no remorse or care for human life! So they return time after time for God knows how many centuries, possibly thousands! They search for us sonically – the phone squeals! Our advances in technology in the 20th century have made it easier for them to find us!” She turned and raised her blouse again to expose her birthmark on her back, “It is only us ... the circular birthmarked ones that are reclaimed! One day we will know exactly why, but we believe we are the chosen ones, the most alien twin. We now know they have DNA flaws, we’ve seen many sick and dying ... and believe the reason for their medical research ... is to save their species. They have visited us all many times!”

Jamee looked at her husband and remembered the feeling of the miracle pregnancy and the tiny fingernail circular scar on her left side that had appeared from nowhere. Kelvin nodded his understanding.

“They are our children ... not theirs!”

Stevey awoke from all the commotion and ventured into the kitchen rubbing his sleepy eyes,

“Dad ... is that you? Why are you so old? And you need a haircut and a shave ... you look like Grandpa!” Kelvin ruffled his son’s hair, then cuddled the shit out of him as he raised him to leave his feet dangle in the air.

“I missed you, buddy ... been a long time for me.” Kelvin then leaned over and whispered in Jamee’s ear, “You would be proud, Stevey is a fine man ... a good son ... a good warrior!”

Kylie joined into the three-way hug to make it four-way, as she hugged little Stevey especially before she said just two words,

“Thank you.”

Then the four became five as the group hugged the next minute in complete silence.

*

Love at first fight

Life, for now, would never be the same but they did have another 13 years to prepare for the next visit and hopefully, her name would be - a very pretty Candy-Rose, who had been on the run in the visitor's ship since she was a mere fourteen years old, way back when after awaking alone and unassisted, escaped. And yes! She was a Twinner! She had killed many Takers over the following years.

A twenty-something-year-old Candy-Rose met her soon-to-be partner - adult Stevey when she freed him from the clutches of the warriors on his return with Elder Roy. It was love at first fight and something neither had ever considered finding amongst a life full of anger and survival but their life was here and love always carves its way through blood and death. They were the ones that freed child Kylie after they beheaded the alien warrior that killed middle-aged Roy. Candy-Rose and Steven had become 13-year-old Kylie's surrogate parents and the first teachers of the Earth's survivors.

The Twinners Army on the ship had grown over time and now consisted of over 100 (including copies), but Kylie and Kelvin were now back on Earth where they both at least could plan the next phase of defense against the Takers next return (and possibly theirs). The teachings would continue without them as there were more than enough that had aged quickly and learned the human way already.

Kylie knew her ship-mother (Candy-Rose) would return to her one day if she could only survive and Kylie sensed she would.

*

Here we go!

“God you’re looking fucking ancient!” Bob stood up straight as he stood beside the fiberglass pool.

“And how does, go get fucked, sound?” Kelvin punched Bob’s arm in jest, “See what an alien probe up the clacker can do? I wouldn’t advise it!”

Bob just flicked his hand at Kelvin but he surely wasn’t buying into that alien bullshit, but whatever drugs he was taking were surely working way too good! Jamee now looked like his fucking daughter, and his kids now had two grandfathers ... he was so skinny, he prayed it wasn’t cancer. Kelvin had aged ridiculously quick, seemingly overnight, and still seemed to be aging. It was private, none of his business, but no matter what, you couldn’t deny that it was still Kelvin and his wicked tongue, so - ‘Fuck it!

The new guy (Jamee’s cousin) – Roy, had learned a lot about the business in the last year and was soon ready to take over from Kelvin on the management side of things, he was younger and stronger with only a few weeks to go before Kelvin’s premature retirement started. Bob understood that Kelvin wanted to spend this time with his family while he still was able.

“So, England eh? Will be fucking cold!” Bob raised his eyebrows for emphasis!

“Yes, I know! It’s called snow!” Kelvin laughed as Roy overheard and finished marking the grass for Phil to start the dig just as the news headlines came over the radio.

Last year’s Jacob’s Mariner missing twin daughter believed drowned, kidnapped, or murdered had been miraculously found swimming in the bay near where their boat had been moored, exactly 13 months to the day after her disappearance! No one seemed to know where or how she had got there yet she was unharmed. Somehow she was a little older than the fourteen years she should have been, possibly sixteen or seventeen, possibly eighteen? But it was her, it had to be! The authorities were claiming the kidnappers had returned her and they were hailing the police work. She was found naked, scared, scarred but very alive! Candy-Rose Rivers was now safe and in her family’s loving care. The T.V. cameras were in her face and she was yelling at them as her parents did their best to get her out of the firing line, but she was yelling,

“They are coming ... they are coming, coming to take your children ... be warned!” The men listened to the replayed interview on their work radio. Bob spoke,

“Sounds like someone’s been on the drugs after all!” Roy stared at Kelvin and mouthed words silently as he shook his head,

“Not 13 years ... only 13 months?” Kelvin wide-eyed nodded, placing his shovel against the excavator’s tracks and looks straight at Roy before whispering,

“Do you want to ring Kylie, tell her Mum’s here ... or me?”

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Hiding in the Shadows

Gravity pulls me downwards while he fights against its will

Sunshine turns to darkness as the wind becomes the still

The answer has just surfaced and I'm scared to face this demon

His potion takes me to the edge, balancing a life of treason

I'm shaking from inside myself and I cannot fully understand

I've turned myself inside out, sick of feeling like I'm damned

I try with all my good intentions to turn around this feeling bad

No longer will I let him survive in between sanity and mad

Hiding in the shadows

I see you, Mr. Hide

Hiding in the shadows

Time for your very last goodbye

Hiding in the shadows

Goodbye to Mr. Hide

Miss Fortune

The fog lifts

The darkness lifts once again as I find myself lying at the base of the old oak tree amongst the frosty fog. It was early morning so I reached and extracted my mobile from my handbag; it was 5:55 am and the Sun's first rays beamed their way into the new day.

My husband would be worried, yet again, and I started to text him immediately after seeing there were at least twenty missed calls and texts from him.

'Hi hon all good don't worry be home soon xox.'

Glen would be pissed but would accept my disappearance just as he always had. He had tried many a time to stop me drinking but he knew I never would ... or should I say never could; alcohol was my downfall! If I could've deleted that broken ingredient of my fucked-up life, then even I would admit ... I would've been the perfect catch. But the error has always been there since it surfaced as a teenaged girl and I discovered that alcohol was the one thing that quelled it. Having Glen in my life and loving me unconditionally was my savior towards my affliction. For heaven's sake, it was how we met, Glen finding me lost and awakening in his parent's front yard from a drunken binge. Sometimes things are just meant to be and one look into his baby blues and I was his - forever.

Life was extremely good for the first two years together especially being married after only a mere 13 months (lucky for me) together. I no longer had to be Miss Raquel Waters but Mrs. Glen Jackson.

His parents weren't that keen on me at first re our drunken introduction but they soon saw I was a nice person and the love we shared, so accepted us as us – the perfect couple (especially as the alcohol had taken a hiatus back then).

My drinking problem resurfaced after my Mother died ... not that I was ever that close to her but something seemed to snap inside re her death and here was my emptiness, back engulfing everything inside to fill again.

Glen left me after three terrible years of a downward spiral into the bottom of a bottle but it did us both no good. I just drank more to exit the world and he lost the spark of life without love; separation made us both feel dead! Five months passed and we refound each other and the 'unconditional' vow became real for us both. Unfortunately for my husband, the 'unconditional' leaned heavier on his side.

The blanks were sporadic at first, years even, which soon escalated to months but lately the months are now weeks. And I bet you question if I have tried to do anything about this? Of course, I/we have – everything from A.A. to being together always, starting various new

activities such as fitness training but they all eventually fail as it's quite simple and we both admit – I am an alcoholic!

*

Home sweet home

“Thank fuck!” Glen hugged me as I closed the front door behind me, “You got to stop this Honey ... you got to stop ...” But it was Glen who stopped – stopped lecturing me. My eyes had demanded it.

“Lost another bloody shoe!” I pointed to the one remaining red stiletto that I was carrying not wearing. “I loved these!” I kissed Glen as he hugged me and he removed a twig from my ruffled blonde hair.

“The Oak Tree Inn again, huh? Coffee’s made ... the usual?” Glen smiled and asked.

The usual was always a strong coffee, two Nurofen, a Vitamin B, followed by bacon and eggs on toast just before four hours catch up in my warm bed, usually, after I’d showered and let Glen roger or lick me silly to my Saturday morning sleep.

*

Trust

Life always returns to normal. We continue until the next blank spot would arise but the good always outweighs the bad by far. Glen trusted my heart with all of his, for it was the one thing that he was sure he could count on ... I would NEVER cheat on him, as he on me.

*

George

“Hi, nice shoes!” It was a pick-up line and not a very original one but it was the truth! Charlotte Olympia red four-inch stilettos Raquel got for a song at only 675 euro online.

“Thanks, I love them.” I smiled at him as I studied his face and general look and could easily tell he was going for the ‘George Clooney’ ... I did say going for but not quite reaching.

“Can I buy you a drink?” George asked as he pointed to my nearly finished glass of Vodka.

“Thanks, but I’m here with my friend,” I pointed to the ‘Ladies’ amenities, “... we’ll be leaving after this one.” It was bullshit but he kept pushing,

“Please let me buy you both a round then ... so what’s your poison ... and your friend’s?”

If only he knew!

*

Home James

Thank God, I was back! The George look-a-like named Tyrone opened the cab door in a gentlemanly way.

“Your chariot my lady.” Yes, I smiled; he was amusing! “So Pamela ... my place or yours?” Tyrone shuffled in the backseat after me and instantly reached for my freshly shaven pussy as the cabbie requested an address as I whispered,

“Yours.”

“Drop us off on the corner of Bentley,” Tyrone bellowed from the back as he played with my clit as I had half expected. So taking off my panties before we left, wasn't a complete waste of time. I grabbed his hand and removed his finger and placed it within my freshly lip-sticked mouth. I sucked off my sweet nectar as I placed my left hand on his penis and even through his suit pants, it was throbbing.

The sex was good, not great but good. I only came once before I used my special trick and sucked his cock dry. Did we fuck? No! I never fuck! Sex yes, but no man sticks his dick in me! Only one man ever has and that was my step-father when I was only twelve years old, the same year I got my first period. The blood always reminds me of this – always!

*

Showtime

I left his place around 1:30 am on Saturday; the deed was done! It was time to get a drink after walking the streets for a while, I hailed a cab and sat in the back reliving the last hours of my life.

His body wasn't the worst or the best but for his age (middle forties I guessed) he looked good. My body, on the other hand, was tight for my age and my breasts were as perky as they were when I was a younger woman in my twenties (a bonus of having smaller ones and no kids, I suppose). I loved to parade it in front of them and you know that's just what they love too – their cocks never lie when you do your best stripper moves!

"Fuck! Suck it, Baby! Suck it!" Tyrone lay back as I worked my magic upon him. It always made me feel like I was in control when they laid back and my teeth slightly clamped upon their manhood, the feel of their warm cock in my mouth thrilled me as my juices flowed. It is always about timing and I would make them wait impatiently and hold off as long as they could until their male hormones overtake all and as they are just about to explode, I reach downwards to my strategically placed handbag (at the end of the bed) and as the female praying mantis does – strike! I once again, revenge my anger towards my lover at the moment of ejaculation. One adrenalin-filled slice across the throat and a final thrust in the heart, to bury the knife deep, deep toward their bloodied end. It was always the same – quick, messy, and very satisfying.

Showering the fresh blood from my dark hair and body straight afterward, was my cleansing, cleansing of the soul. Washing away guilt has never had a place within me as I wash away only revenge, for it was a disgusting man that did this to me in my innocence in the first place.

I knew within my heart it is the anger towards my step-father's year of raping me that I take out on all these so-called innocent males but something inside is empty and this always seems to fill that hole. It is imperative as my only survival.

The taxi pulled up outside 'Everstone Nightclub' and I paid the driver with a fifty and tipped him the change. I needed a drink badly as I straightened my mini skirt over my G-string and waved the cabbie a thank you farewell as he left. I walked up to the bouncer at the club's entrance, straight by the queue of the waiting would-be patrons.

"Miss Pamela ... looking good." Ralphie, the oversized bouncer unclipped the chain to let me in.

"Ralphie ... if only you weren't a married man!" I pecked him on the cheek as I passed to the sounds of complaining would-bes.

"You smell nice, Miss Pamela ... what perfume is that?"

I could've said, '*Essence of Dead lover*' but instead of saying the obvious, I pointed to my pussy. Ralphie smiled in his big black usual way and re-clipped the chain after my entry before he opened the door to reveal the pounding beats from inside.

“Have a great night, Miss Pamela.”

I ran my fingers through my long darkened mane and pouted my lips as I entered –
SHOWTIME!

*

Light's out

It was time to sleep; I was dead tired! The vodkas had done their job and I was smashed! The club was still pounding but so was my head when it was time to leave. I had danced, flirted, and drank the night to its death – it soon would be morning. I bid Ralphie his drunken goodbye and just as the last time, staggered my way to Ashgrove Park. It was hard to walk in these stupid fucking shoes that bitch loved so much so I stopped and slipped them off and it felt good. Why did I subject myself to this pain, just for cosmetics of looking sexy? I raised the left one to my face and spoke to it,

“Fuck you! I hate you ... you stupid fucking shoe, you!” I threw the shoe as far as I could into the lake which scared a floating duck into flight. “Goodbye Shoe! Duck, duck!” I fell to the grass laughing and it was wet from the early morning dew and I laughed hard and oblivious to the world. I felt good and then I vomited. I wiped the spew from my mouth and I needed to rest even for just minute and I could see my old favorite old tree – ahh bed!

I knew soon it would be time, I was much better at this than before. I knew it wouldn't be long before I kill again, though if I slept, I knew she would return, the one I detest! She was weak and soft and she loved him! So pathetic, a man of all things! But I am so tired and exhausted, so as I lean against the old oak tree I close my eyes and say goodbye to me - for now.

*

Take me

It has been three whole months and I haven't needed to drink. It is like something inside is fulfilled? Glen and I are going away for an impromptu dirty weekend in Riverston National Park as my reward, yet somehow I believe, it'll be his reward! A couple of nights alone in the country will be perfect, our secret secluded campsite, toasting marshmallows as we cuddle by a campfire under the stars with a whole park to fuck in!

"Have you packed enough?" Glen scratched and shook his head and questioned why there were two bags so I explained,

"You know me, be prepared! What if it's cold? What if it's hot? What if?" I smirked as he raised his eyebrows in a surrender glance.

"How long you gonna be?" Glen asked and I could see he was itching to leave and get this five-hour road trip on its way.

"Just got to pack the food ... you take these," I zipped the out-stretched bag, "... to the car and don't forget the portable barbie ... got enough gas?"

"Yes, boss ... on it!" Glen saluted me standing to attention and I playfully kicked him.

I went to the kitchen where I already had started packing the groceries to take. My brain was thinking, *'C'mon Raquel think baby, think!'* So I went through my mind's checklist, and then it dawned on me – beans, with no opener was a problem! I opened the drawer and shuffled through until I found the can opener but next to it was another opener ... the corkscrew bottle opener. I packed the can opener but something twinged inside. I had been good and my drinking was well under control so I turned and knelt and opened the under-sink cupboard door. Reaching in, I found what I had hidden in there a long, long time ago, just in case – emergency! I moved the dishwashing tablets to reveal a bottle of Shiraz and a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka. I hesitated and nearly put them back but if there was ever a time to have a toast then it would be tonight, alone and away from the cares of the real world. So I packed them both in the grocery box we were to take.

*

Silence is golden

My stomach was in pain, I couldn't take it anymore! Glen's out-of-tune unison singing along to Elvis on the car's cd player was painful. The tears were streaming down my face from laughter.

"Stop! Stop! Please, Honey!" I knew he was doing it on purpose but it was hilarious and he sounded wrong, all wrong especially with the gay eye movements!

I loved him deeply, he was my soul mate that made me laugh, cry, and just love. I did not doubt it, as my darkest blank was when he was out of my life for those months. I just escaped the real world and replaced it with oblivion. To have a second chance meant I would never leave him ever ... if I did, I would die inside ... he was my true heart.

We reached the Riverston at about 4:00 pm and it was only us – it was empty just as we had hoped. The first thing you notice is the silence. To hear total silence is the most wonderful experience and then only to have it broken by the sound of a singing bird in the distance before the silence returns. We both just leaned against the car for the next ten minutes holding each other without breaking it.

By 6:00 the campfire was lit and the tent was pitched. Taking the bean bags was an awesome idea Glen had thought of as we snuggled (me across his lap on his) toasting our very first marshmallows of the weekend.

*

The doorway to home

“I brought these, Honey.” I held the alcohol toward him and cocked my head into ‘only if you want to?’ way. Glen’s eyes immediately reacted as I assumed they would, so I went into damage control, “It’s only us, Honey ... out here ... just us!”

“I’m n-not s...” And as usual, Glen accepted my word and gave in his fight. I uncorked the Shiraz and poured two plastic cups of red.

“Here’s to us, Honey.” I toasted as the first sip was down before Glen’s had even reached his mouth. The warmth crossed my tongue and the familiar taste of my alcoholic home opened the door. I sipped three more times before mouthfuls were swallowed to empty the cup and I tingled. I reached over and grabbed the bottom of Glen’s plastic cup for him to catch up ... he responded by downing the half-full cup in one gulp; he dribbled and we laughed! I kissed his cheek and picked up the bottle and poured us both another with my finger in the air ... just one more.

My head spun from the vodka, well I had drunk most of it straight and double of what Glen had and I was home, not just walking through the door ... but home!

We fucked hard in front of the fire. Glen doggy-styled me and shoved his cock as deep into me as he possibly could! We rarely ever get rough, but tonight was one of those nights, like two animals in the wilderness so he pulled my hair and bit my shoulder, as I dug my nails into his thighs before he whipped his cock from my dripping pussy and stuck it where the sun don’t shine!

I was excited being butt-fucked for the very first time as he took me or I took him in between pleasure and pain! I was in control not him as the forcefulness escalated and I fucked harder and he fucked harder! I made him come inside me ... I loved that! I felt him shoot his warm load as I backed hard and took him as far as possible as or his pressed balls possibly could.

We both were drunkenly exhausted and fell asleep naked together in front of the fire to the smell of fresh sex but as I drifted downwards to sleep, I saw what I hadn’t seen in such a long time ... she was here watching and waiting!

*

Wake up

“Wake up!” I held the knife at his balls as he stirred, “Wake up!”

At last little Miss Fortune was gone and she had taken me away for way too long but not anymore!

“What the fuck!!” Her man opened his eyes from his drunken sleep state in the midnight moonlight, and to the realization that he was now restrained by the tent rope - hands and feet.

“You’re tied up!” Now he knew!

“Honey, Raquel what?” Glen was confused.

“My name is Pamela ... not your sweet little helpless Raquel.” Now he knew even more!

“Raquel, please stop this!” Begging wasn’t going to fix this.

“Raquel has gone ... I am here ... Pamela!” And to reiterate the situation, I nicked his abdomen right above his right testicle.

“AAAHH! I don’t understand ... please don’t? You haven’t used your first name ... ever! You’ve always been Raquel!” I loved hearing him/them beg, confused, and lost, just like little boys and sometimes I did it just for the control need.

“I am Pamela and I am your wife’s emptiness ... I am the blank!” I finally had said it out aloud and told someone the actual truth that had been suppressed for too long. I pulled the knife away and stood up as he lay back naked in the middle of the bean bag, tied and helpless as the fire danced to Lucifer’s flame. And the words had made me real ... alive and kicking!

“She never told you about me ... did she?” He shook his head silently. “You know nothing of her childhood pain do you?” I started my little stripper dance around the fire with the knife like a slow-motion banshee. “Remember your little Raquel never drank until Mummy died?” This time he nodded. “Mummy knew ... she knew what her husband did to me! Father knows best ... Well, Mummy knew all! The fucking Cunt!”

“What do you mean,” Glen asked, “... was she ... you abused?”

“Men ... fucking men and their dangly dicks!” I angered and my teeth grit and my dance ended. “You are no better! Didn’t you abuse your wife’s body tonight ... as well as mine!” I pointed to the bite mark that had bled on my shoulder then I leaned over and placed the knife at his throat as I touched my burning arsehole, “Y-You disgust me!” I withdrew the knife as her man teared up and whimpered,

“I didn’t know? I’m sorry.” Glen’s face told me he was scared! I felt empowered in my nakedness and stood behind the flames for him to see the real me ... and what he had abused!

“You fucking raped me ... filthy animal ... just like he did!”

“I never did ... I made love to you ... to her ... my wife! You’re fucking crazy ... I think you’re sick, Raquel ... Pamela! We can get you help!”

The court was now in session.

“It’s Pamela ... Fuck! What gives you the right to think that was making love? I was there ... you hurt her and me!”

“I want to speak to Raquel ... where is she?”

“She has gone, that is all you need to know ... you have a bigger problem now ... me!”

I held the blade to my neck as I drew it slowly left to right in the cut-your-throat movement.

“It was you, wasn’t it ... that killed those men ... after sex? The one in the papers ... and on the news!” Now the boy was thinking! Putting 2 and 2 together as both suppression and denial finally surface from the depths. “I knew the times were too coincidental ... but Raq ... could never ... she could never hurt a fly!”

“Maybe it was ... maybe it wasn’t me?” I chuckled and walked around the fire before I stopped directly in front of him on the bean bag, crouched over and pissed on his feet. Her man wriggled like my piss was acid. “How does abuse feel, pervert?” I wiped my vagina with my hand and then wiped his face with it. His face cringed, reacting by thrashing side to side. “Ahh, poor baby, don’t like wee-wee on his face!” I found the Vodka bottle and drained the last few drops from it.

“Your teenie-weenie looks a little limp,” I said as I bent over and lifted the tiny shriveled penis upwards with my left pointer finger and my thumb. He went to break my grip with his bound hands and the knife returned to his nicely shaved balls ... he settled. I knelt on the dirt and began to suck his cock, as it was time to work my magic.

I could taste Raquel’s juices on him and it repelled me as well as making my body tingle in excited disgust. He cried as his cock got hard against his will and I was in control. I have sucked a lot of cock to be this good and club Evertson’s unisex toilets had been a great practice ground. I knew he was close, I could feel it, but it was not his time just yet, so I stopped. I took his cock out from my mouth and stated, “You come when I say come ... pig!”

I stood up and walked around to his face as he lay across the beanie bag with his hands and feet still tied by the tent rope. I squatted down on his face and my wet pussy covered his nose and mouth as the blade’s tip touched his neck.

“Lick it! If you want to live? Then lick me ... make me come!” He did, deep and hard, as if his life depended upon it! His tightened body language loosened and he wasn’t scared of me now - just horny! I came quickly as I was already halfway there from the adrenalin rush. I screamed into the wilderness as I relived my step-father doing this disgusting act when I was only a scared little girl, except this time I enjoyed it! I reached down and pulled his cock like dear Daddy had taught me too. At this age, there was no shame or fear to deal with (not like

back then), only the torture of disgust that followed but I had accustomed myself to that long ago and now enhance that repulsion. It was time to suck. Leaning over him I sucked him as he continued to lick me. He blew into my mouth and for the first time I swallowed the seed, it nauseated and thrilled me and I could taste him – he was Raquel's. I had saved this treat especially for her man ... and before her. She never gave oral ... how could she after what had happened to us?

“So did you like that Pamela? Do you want to go again?”

Was he sounding just a little too cocky? I stood up and pointed the knife into his jugular.

“Does Raquel ever give head ... she doesn't ever, does she?” Her man's eyes widened and he shook his head; she always refused!

“Of course not! But you fucking love it ... right?” He nodded this time. “As all you filthy men do!” I hesitated as I felt Raquel's single tear well from the deep and leave my left eye and so I withdrew the knife. I paced back and forth as I quelled her sadness before screaming, “Fuck!”

I had enough of this pointless game ... it was time for him to die!

*

Dead silence

The pain streamed into my eyes - *Oh shit! I'd done it again!*

But why was there dried blood on my hands and up my arms? I screamed as I remembered seeing Pamela ... no-no please not her! I remembered she was watching Glen. Even with my drunken disorientation, I managed to sit up from the back of the Land Cruiser where I had been sleeping. The Sun's rays were strong and it must've been close to 10 o'clock – had I been out that long?

Panic replaced pain as I realized I was covered in dried blood and not just on my hands but my whole body – *Oh no, Glen!* So I screamed,

“Glen – Glen, please no! Not Glen.” But there was only silence ... nothing else ... just dead silence.

I ran to the campfire as I pulled on my t-shirt and fell to my knees as Glen's bloodied naked body was lifeless on the bean bag. My head was exploding as my hands shook uncontrollably and my stomach expelled the remains of any alcohol. Pamela had cut Glen's throat and then stabbed him in the heart, leaving the murder weapon (our kitchen knife) protruding from his chest. She had let him die naked and scared; I vomited again – this time dry retching.

Why? Why? She left me alone and I left her to do the horrible things she does, it was the unspoken rule! I knew she killed her step-father on her 13th birthday and we both spent years back and forth in mental institutions for it! It was where I flourished from – the good side of us as she hid in the shadows – away from life! So why now ... after all these years of separation? And it dawned on me – she wanted her life back! I have spent the last fifteen years with her locked away from my soul but now I feel her grinning and laughing at me, making me feel weak and pathetic just because I have something she doesn't - the ability to love! I have always let her take her time within my blanks and she caused absolute havoc (killing three men) during my break-up period with Glen and I accepted it, then it was locked away from me for years. I never harmed anyone and the only thing I am guilty of is blanking her out. And now I am faced with her memories, retribution, and murder as my beautiful husband's dead body rots in the morning sun, as flies dance in and out of his open mouth and over his open dry eyes.

The silence was unbearable! My tears flowed as I dragged my dead husband towards the bushes. His body was heavy but I had to be quick as if someone would do what we did and come, then I – not her, would be arrested. My life sentence had already begun and I refused to be indicted for her crimes, just as her memories had invaded mine and her cruel sex killings became a part of me, rising and consuming, feeling satisfied by reaching double figures. I could feel she carried no guilt and laughed from the depths about it all and laughed at mine.

I dug a shallow grave while I cried amongst the silence. Rolling Glen's unclothed body in, so he landed face first. After replacing the dirt, I did my best to cover the grave with foliage and debris, rocks, and anything I could find. I took off my wedding ring, kissed it, and placed it down on the ground as his headstone. Yes, if it was ever found it possibly would lead the authorities straight to me (and her) but I have had time to think now. Another hole was dug further away from where I buried all the bloodied clothes and quilt from the car.

I packed up the tent site and dust-brushed away as much blood as I could, spreading the campfire ashes amongst the dirt as the sorrow inside escalated.

As I drove away covered in dust and Glen's dried blood, the sadness seemed to click upwards as the speedometer reading did the same ... I knew it was time to end this - forever!

*

Goodbye

One thing I am not is – stupid! My previous visits were always limited but I made the most of them, no matter how short they were, (i.e. withdrawing a nest egg from their funds, stealing and hiding her passport, stashing clothes, knives, etc) and by always having a get-away plan ready, locker key well hidden and a suitcase of a brand new life if ever need be - but this was like winning the lottery. I may not be stupid but Raquel certainly was! She was always dogged by her demons – alcohol, and love ... and now they were her downfall. It was the two things that finally took her down, but not me! Love is simply impossible when you refuse to believe and alcohol just thrives and rebirths me, I control it and never let it me; it is only fuel! After returning home Raquel drank herself to oblivion for the last time. Two bottles of O.P. rum straight, which she had bought at the drive-through on her return.

Her plan of choking on her own vomit, strategically placing her body between the pillows on the bed nearly worked ... but I had heard her inner voice cry beforehand.

So now I shower and wash down the drain - her pathetic soul and the ghost of her husband's blood, mixed amongst her final hang-over.

*

Warning

Today I awaken from my first full night's sleep to leave this godforsaken shithole of a city (and country) with my passport intact. I am finally ready to start my revenge against the rest of the world's sexual pigs (males only) that created me and I do NOT discriminate ... just choose!

I will be in Australia tomorrow ... mate, and before anyone even realizes Glen is dead or that Raquel is even missing. My bloody adventure is about to begin! I am the control, and I am the power! So when you offer to buy the next pretty girl you just met at the bar with her cute Canadian accent a drink, think first, like whats-her-name – Pamela, maybe Tracy, or what about Sexy Suzy, possibly even ... Raquel, simply BEWARE! As if it's a one night stand you're looking for, then your luck is about to change for the worse, as it might just be me with her lipstick lips around your precious manhood's misfortune!

Don't you ever say, you haven't been warned!

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13 Emerald Drive

“13 Emerald Drive ... we’re on our way.” Sidney put the Ambulance into drive and Sharon hopped in the passenger seat, shut the door, and loaded the address into the GPS.

“It’s a full moon tonight.” Sharon pointed to the moon that was glowing red behind a small cloud, “Is that a blood moon?”

Sid looked up and nodded as he pulled out of the Emergency driveway and onto Waterford Road,

“I think so, did you hear anything about one ... as I didn’t?”

“N-u-u...nothing.” Sharon just shrugged her shoulders and thought nothing more of it as she refocused on the details of the call. “Sounds like a stroke, they said the caller wasn’t clear and very garbled.”

“We’ll be there in three,” Sid stated to her as he checked the rear vision mirrors while the traffic moved to the left to let him through.

The Ambulance pulled up outside the house and Sid cut the sirens but left the lights flashing. The house was dark and silent, except the rustle of the front yard trees in the breeze.

“Got a funny feeling about this one, Shaz ... something’s just not right.”

“I think you’re getting old and senile.” Sharon grabbed the torch from its place whacked him with it before she flicked it on and began shining it at the darkened house. She opened the ambulance door, exited and made her way to the back of the Ambo and grabbed the paramedic first aid kit,

“Are you coming to, Mr. Scardee Cat ... or are you gonna stay here and make me go by myself?”

“Wel-l-l-l ... maybe we should get the cops to check it out first? I’ll call ‘em now!” As soon as he spoke he knew it sounded even more pathetic out than it did in his mind. “Okay ... wait up!”

After the fourth loud knock and no answer, Sidney turned to Sharon,

“I’m telling you something’s wrong with this one!”

“You’re losing it, Big Boy!” Sharon was already at the window and shining the torch in when the ginger cat sprung out of nowhere and was in the window sill, hissing at her; she jumped ... but not as high as Sid!

“Fuck off!” Sidney yelled and they looked at each other and started laughing through their fear. Sharon regained her composure and redirected her torch past the now settled cat.

“There’s someone in there ... on the floor ... looks male!” Now her heart was racing as her adrenalin kicked into paramedic mode. “We need to get in there, Sid, NOW!”

Without hesitation he did and the door swung open as it was ajar and he thought to himself, *‘That was way too easy!’* - the front door was unlocked! His alarm bells were ringing and he knew inside something was very wrong.

“Shaz, we have to call the cops ... something’s just not fucking right here ... believe me ... I’m telling you, trust me!”

“Fuck, Sid, ring them then!” Sharon screamed in frustration as she gritted her teeth and pushed him aside to make her way in, yelling, “Hello, ambulance, here to help ... is anyone here?”

The world seemed to cave in on Sidney as he turned and sat down on the front step with his face in his hands ... he just couldn’t walk inside for some insane reason ... and it was freaking him out! The light flickered on and then he heard the anguished cry of Sharon’s voice.

“Oh, no-no - NO!” Sid heard Sharon’s sobbing. She was soon outside and throwing up beside Sid who was still frozen with fear before he could even speak, but her eyes told it all ... the Devil was here today ... the Devil himself, had been here!

“F-F-Four dead ... I think murder-suicide ... and there are fucking kids!” Sharon was doing her best to spit it out to Sid before he rang as the cops turned up.

The police entered and exited pretty quickly so Sid knew it was no pretty picture inside, just when the last cop ran out screaming,

“He’s alive... he’s fucking well alive!”

Sid jumped to his feet and like a reflex movement, the kit was in his hand and he was following the officer in. But the hairs on his neck raised as the vomit seemed to arise from nowhere and then he saw the two butchered boys lying on the floor in the living room as their presumed mother swung lifeless from the rope around the ceiling fan.

Sid doubled over and vomited as the cat seemed to appear magically from the depths of Hell, hissed at him before running off and disappearing into the darkness.

“Holy fucken’ Mother of Jesus!” Officer Bell was startled by the cat as well. He pointed through the doorway to the father who was lying on his side with his dead mobile in front of him. “This way ... through the kitchen!” Bell waved ‘coast is clear’ for Sid to follow.

It was obvious the male in his forties had suffered a stroke and a bad one at that, but he was alive! The man’s eyes were blurry but barely alive as he glared at Sid and if to plead to him. Sid regained his composure as he forced himself to glance around the open door-way at the boy’s hand-tied torsos and it was like the smell of rotting flesh was a part of this gruesome image and he guessed they had been there for at least three days.

Sid had seen many a dead body before but this was haunting – kids? Both boys’ eyes were open and cadaver but as if they were reaching out to him to help them. Their necks had been torn open and the bloodied box blade was there in front of them. The female was blonde and in her late thirties and way to pretty for this, he thought. She had hung herself as the chair was kicked over. She had blood on her arms and torso, it was the boy’s blood – she had killed them!

Sid regained himself again and knelt beside the presumed father in his forties. His pulse was weak and Sid did his usual response checks but the man was at his end as the ginger cat returned and sat beside him and meowed. The cat’s name was ‘Wilbur’; it was engraved on his collar’s tag!

“What happened here, Wilbur?” Sid asked as if the cat would reply.

“Is he gonna live?” The African-American cop whose name was already forgotten by Sidney was standing well back as if something was going to change in here real quick. Sid rested his hand on the male’s head and spoke,

“I know you can hear me ... blink if you can.” The man blinked or half blinked his blue eyes ... he was weak. “What happened here mate? You saw ALL this?” The man’s eyes shifted to the left twice and Sid looked over his shoulder and a letter was lying in front of him. And with a final breath, the man was gone as if he had waited for Sid’s question.

The smell of death and feces was overpowering and Sid had reached his limit so he grabbed the letter and ran outside where Officer Black Cop was already.

Tampering with a crime scene was the furthest thing from his mind ... he just wanted to know - *Why?* So he sat on the front step where Sharon was still crying and being asked rapid-fire questions by Officer White Cop as the Detectives and Forensics turned up.

Sid unfolded the scrunched letter that contained a small torn-in-half photo of the father and some buxom redhead kissing him in an obvious affair-type way, as Wilbur came and rubbed up against his back.

It read – “No Love then just death! WE ARE ALL DEAD NOW!”

It was written in dried blood! He guessed the family blood. What did that mean? That made no fucking sense! He looked across at Sharon ... his wife ... his best friend ... his lover ... his co-worker ... his everything and then he got it ... well, sort of ... but why the kids? Why always the fucking kids? Then Sgt. Hard-Arse (who just arrived) reeled the letter from Sid’s hands before giving him his new name!

“Idiot, evidence!” Wilbur meowed and jumped on his Sid’s lap, as the Detective turned and walked off bagging the letter. Sid stroked Wilbur as the cat lifted to every stroke as if to say, *‘Stroke me!’*

“What the fuck did you see, buddy?” Sid looked at Wilbur’s face and he could’ve sworn the bugger was smirking like the Devil’s Cheshire, but that was just fucking ridiculous! Wasn’t it?

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*** The End of *Thirteen****

But wait ... now there’s more

Keep reading

Thirteen

Revived edition added stories

Condemned

Death, the word that strikes fear in all. Some people fear sharks, some heights, and some spiders. But for me as a simple man, it is all of them, but death is the only one that cannot be overcome. As a child, we grow and memories are made. Wonderful memories of fun and excitement then we learn to love, hate, and finally to control emotions (well most). I remember being a boy and the simplicity of play, the carefree life, and the caress of my mother and father. How life changes when you mature and manhood releases the testosterone to steal away your childhood innocence. Life decisions are made, some well thought out and planned while others are spontaneous and just as important in your journey towards the final destination.

Am I a religious man? No! I would love to be but believe in the Almighty, I don't unfortunately. I would love nothing more than to be proved wrong at death's door and awake amongst my friends and family or a place I call home. Yet, while I don't believe in so-called Heaven, I do fear ... Hell! What is Hell? For me one of the possibilities simply could be our final memory that appears before the electricity of life-blood is cut off to the brain. Could Hell have any chance of actually being real, as in the bible? What if they're right! Imagine spending eternity trapped as a non-believing soul in something you spent your whole life never believing in. How does anyone truly know? It is only faith that gives us hope, and I have none! For death is the only way to answer all these questions, with no guarantees we will ever be given any? People come back from the dead time and time again (with many amazing afterlife stories), yet to me, if they do awaken, then life must still be in there hiding and awaiting its return. So what can we do to ensure death (whatever the fuck death is), looks after us properly? My guess is - be honest, be kind, and be compassionate to fellow mankind. But for me and many like me ... it is too late!

I never meant to take his life; it was an accident! Oh, I am guilty of his death that I accept but the one punch that was struck on that drunken night has condemned me to some sort of Hell. Is alcohol to blame? No, it contributed but violence is the killer ... just as the man with no self-control. I watched another angry man fall and die before my very eyes and from my anger that dissipated instantly into regret. Still to this day, fighting is relished in teenage youth, and makes a bully feel like a bigger man than the mouse they truly are. Tough boys are all just that - heartless bravado and all bullshit ... I should know, for that was me!

Repenting your sins after the fact isn't enough when you remember that a life taken is etched in your memories; you can never forget! Oh, I remember my days of youth beating up poor souls for the adulation and just for being weaker than I. Thinking at the time of how tough I was, yet now it makes me sick!

So as I sit within this jail cell writing, it makes no difference to my pleading, for forgiveness will never come. But to the poor family of the victim, who I stole their son/brother/uncle from, my suffering will never be enough, and penance surely will! For now, I am responsible for opening the doors to Hell to all of them, just as their unwilling revenge and anger toward me. No words from their sibling's murderer will ever appease their pain.

In 3 years I will be eligible for parole for good behavior and I will return to the world outside, but I will never be truly free; free from the burden, free from the guilt, and free from my forthcoming judgment day! If only I could go back and change history and instead of punching, simply laugh and calm the escalating situation by buying him a drink instead. A simple drink together could have changed our lives and destinies. I wonder about this daily and if we had, could the irony be that we could have ended up friends instead of enemies?

So a spontaneous reaction defined us both and I regularly think that if the situation had reversed, then it would be he sitting here in purgatory, while I would've been the deceased victim; if only! But no amount of wishing will change anything. I am sorry now but why now and not back then? Simply fear, fear of not being a real man, isn't the joke on me! For now, I see I was delusional in knowing what a real man was. So I accept I'm dying with guilt tattooed on my soul with no rubbing out or erasing the path I'd carelessly walked down in a drunken state.

Death will come just like yours will too, but are you scared as I ... or are you happy with your life and the roads you've chosen, and to accept death as final peace? Some desire notoriety in life, while others a simple and happy one without ever rocking the boat of torture, just being happy to what matters – being alive and living. Unfortunately for me, death has already consumed me and my soul, and steals a little bit more every day and will continue to do so, until my final breath – death's one-way journey!

My advice is, go hold your loved ones, hug them, kiss them, and tell them how much you love them today, do not put this off for tomorrow a simple mistake can condemn you down a darkened path to a cell called misery, and straight through the doors of Hell to a true fear like mine, for death is very real!

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Black Sun, Black Sun

Color red bleeds on through

Darkness stirs the witch's brew

Bloodied lips sting like a bee

Smiles vanish towards the sea

Head explodes like a bomb

Pain controls all that's wrong

Take a walk under the moon

Remember not all doom and gloom

Black Sun shines down on me

(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun please set me free

(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun won't you let me see

(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun has blinded me

(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Aimless bumping into walls
Blows cushioned a loser's fall
Tears stream inside my heart
Game is over, back at the start

Shoot, kill, bury and burn
Words cut and make a turn
Love, hate, hurt and cry
Miss the point, learn not to die

Black Sun shines down on me
(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun please set me free
(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun won't you let me see
(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun has blinded me
(Black Sun, Black Sun)

Black Sun

Unlucky for Some

In my youth I never believed that life was ever laid out for us but now I'm a true believer, what else can I say? It was like a repetitive dream that just refused to go away until I accepted it; it was my destiny and my 'Black Sun'! You see, that's my darkness, my light, and my protector all rolled into one. Some people are destined for love, happiness, and the whole fucking dream while for me? Every time it looked prosperous in this area, my fate would pay me a nice little visit with darkness tightly tucked under its arm to take everything away. But unlike all of you, I had my Black Sun to follow close by and help me through with its shining guidance.

I was just your average single child growing up, not great at anything really, not bad at anything either, just your average blue-eyed boy. I was always a bit of a loner though and wasn't the athletic type but more the arty type, so drawing and making model planes in the security of my bedroom was more my cup of tea.

My best and only true friend was Lucky my black cat; he was my cat and my cat alone! I fed and groomed him and he was shy of other people and scampered at the sound of anybody's voice but mine. Yet, I could do whatever I liked without him even flinching a muscle; he trusted me completely! Lucky slept on the end of my bed and yes, I loved him dearly as any child's first memorable pet.

We lived in the quietest of neighborhoods – Ashfield, the perfect suburb. Everybody knew everybody and our house sat on the back corner block of Barr Crescent, a pretty white clad house, two stories high, roses blooming in the front's perfectly weeded garden but no picket fence here! Our house was surrounded by a 5 foot imposing black iron wrought fence, complete with arrow-tipped spikes which gave me the creeps as if death was waiting outside. Some days Lucky and I spent hours just looking out the window at the goings-on of nothing, bored out of our fucking skulls and it's these tiniest of diminutive memories that's stirs a pot inside reminding me of what my life could've been.

Mum and Dad loved me in their own way, I suppose, but you wouldn't call us a close-knit family. They left me alone to do my own thing which was the way I liked it. I wasn't the real affectionate type either but Mum always insisted on inflicting her good morning kiss on my cheek, gross! Fuck, that used to freak me out something frigging badly! Fishing with my Dad about once a month was our boy only time together, floating around in his second-hand tinnie. We never really caught much as we both were the shittiest fishermen ever but it wasn't about that, it was more about quality time for father and son, enjoying each other's company by never really saying much at all; the way I liked it! I look back at this as the best father-son time I would ever be blessed with and I truly do treasure these times. Besides this, as a family, we all

had what you would call a pretty well non-existent relationship.

Darkness first tore my sheltered life to shreds when I was only 12-years-old and the sadness crept in or more like steamrolled its way in. Both my parents were burnt to death, trapped upstairs by fire in our family home. I was fortunate enough (if you call it that) to escape the fire but the flames engulfed them, and to this day I can still turn on their agonizing screams with a flick of the mind's switch as if this tragedy was etched in there only yesterday. That night was very dreamlike and you have to experience something like that to truly understand. I know I went into shock in the ambulance on the way to the hospital and a fireman virtually had to pry a dead Lucky from my arms beforehand. I remember how I never cried ... I never cried! The counselors tried their very best but that night did burn several tormented scars deep within my ever-so-young soul such as the slightest smell of burning wood or the haunting sound of sirens from a distant fire engine or an ambulance. For years these reminders would take me back to a place I called – Hell!

After the initial sorrow of burying both your parents, I think the reality of loss starts settling in on you. Oh how I had loved them both and missed them so much, yet I just wanted to die and be with them. Suicide was appealing but at the same time, it was the coward's way out to me. So how the fuck could I face that big scary, dark, saddened world without them? How could I survive? I didn't even have Lucky there to comfort me. Months passed and I was all alone but my constant pain was soon softened by my awakening of what I call my - Black Sun. I couldn't exactly explain what it actually was or did but when it came to visiting, the pain subsided like a black security blanket around me. When I was cold, it would warm me, and if it was hot, the dark would cover enough to shield pain's rays from ever streaming in, blinding, or hurting me ... or so I believed. It clouded my foresight by being there right in front of me, sitting just behind my vision, like a third eye breaking through. It always appeared as a blackened burning circle like an eclipse of the Sun, but if I was lost, a message from within its nucleus appeared in the middle of my Black Sun's image, one letter by one letter to form words and instructions, flickering and dancing like the Devil amongst the burning flames of yellow and red until completion.

Be strong

Time will heal

And it was right! I did to some extent.

*

Why Me

I moved in with my Aunt Angela who was Mum's younger sister by 10 years and lived in - 'Petersberg', which was an hour from my hometown of Ashfield. She was very understanding of my solitude as she had her own loss to deal with losing a sister and she let me keep to myself. A new family, a new town, a new school and a new life, yet I lived dead; I was just so emotionally dead!

My grades weren't the best at school but even the teachers knew me as the lonely kid from the fire with no parents, so they left me alone to wallow in my dark little solitary place ... or so they thought. I had no friends really, a few hellos here and there. Kids weren't that unkind, rude, or bullying, just distant and I was nicknamed Loner Boy; I accepted that!

Everyone who remotely cared, felt sorry for me, except Black Sun, it would never let me, with its encouraging messages of hope and refusal of my wallowing in depression. It always got me out, dragging me back by my teeth if it had to. I think I decided back then that the fewer people knew about me the better off I'd be. So I let them all believe, I was alone.

A year dragged by and I decided to join a drama group at school, much to my Auntie's surprise. She was so happy to see me at long last start to smile a little, even if it was for short periods participating in this funny thing 'life' and I even made my first true friend ... a girl, a pretty girl. Aunt Angela's discernible happiness towards my emotional movement made me realize that there could be light at the end of this ground-hog tunnel after all, and I'd been lost in there for far too long. My Black Sun had come through as he had promised, showed me the light and now he was gone.

My first love at 13 was innocent enough, French kissing and holding hands; we were best buddies! We understood each other too. Her mother died of cancer when she was only 7 so we had an instantaneous connection of damage and Sharon Stine was so goddam pretty! I had relearnt how to find my smile gradually and here we were best of friends but something more, much more, I would marry her when we grew up; I was so sure!

Darkness soon paid me its second untimely little visit. A cruel little social call this time, by taking away Sharon Stine on the operating table after her appendix ruptured and exploded. The infection took her away and I was devastated. And after a fucking minuscule 6 months of knowing her, now she was gone too. So as before, my Black Sun's immediacy was soon there to comfort me in my need of mourning with its soul burning words. I was so young amongst pain's burning heart and yet Black Sun was screaming loud and clear,

You will Be OKAY

As I aM WaTchING Over You

Black Sun reassured me,

YOU aRe NOT ALONE

I had no option yet to shut down to the outside world once again and resume my life of death. The world turned while I stood still, trapped in time. How could I ever get back on the ride? So I hid in the lost tunnel of nowhere. Once again, my smile disappeared down into the darkness while Black Sun's messages were daily (if not more) repeating itself over and over until I would accept its words and take a solitary step towards the exit.

I left school and Auntie's at 15, moved towns, and started working at a local supermarket doing all your average duties such as packing groceries and filling shelves. My life was finally for the better, mundane but better. I liked being known as the weird kid over there in the background not drawing any special attention, everything was face value, a pleasant 'Good morning' to all, a fake smile, or an untrusting handshake.

I was earning enough to pay for my lodgings, a 1-bedroom granny flat at the back of this average suburban family home - the Kennedys (nice people). They liked me and treated me as a normal human being for the first time in my adolescent life; I was just your average young polite boy here! No baggage, no pity, no nothing, they knew minimal about my childhood – good.

Aunt Angela and I kept in contact at first but I admit my years of darkness as well as her own, had changed us for the worse and I believed she'd paid her dues as the good sister/auntie, so I set her free of me before she wasted any more precious time. I stopped all contact with her when I hit 21 (beside the usual greeting cards). It was her time to live, live without my misery, and resume a life of some half-decent description that she once had lived prior to our tragic situation and I hoped she would find love and marry.

I took years to recover over my childhood losses and shielded myself from any further pain by heeding Black Sun's advice - keep to myself! As a young man, I refused to be drawn into relationships of any description. How many 25-year-old male virgins have you heard of? Even friendships were an unnecessary life requirement. I had my Black Sun to visit and guide me through the pain of life; he protected me! I worked, I ate, and I slept. I attempted to resurrect my life to my best ability and believed I had won.

For that decade of my life was pretty uneventful, I seemed to be protected from any major losses or stress and I was almost half-human. I had been promoted to Assistant Manager of 'Priceco' and even bought my own place in Battersby Lane, a small modest two-bedroom unit. It wasn't anything special yet it was private, cold, and dark, but best of all, it was mine.

I kept to myself, I never socialized out of work (bar the yearly Christmas luncheon or lunchtime birthday cake celebrations). I was soon promoted to Manager, and I was a good manager being very fair to my staff but I knew they all thought I was a bit weird and I liked it that way, so I never had to join in on any of life's persistent bullshit! I knew some of these people longer than anyone in my life but at face value only, that was fine for me, and once again, it was the tracks God had laid out for me ... until I met Georgia.

I met sweet Georgia Browne (just like the song) at the work Christmas barbecue and it hit me like a brick! I understood that there was a slight chance I was sitting on the brink of healing as I was more than willing to attempt to participate in life and after so long! I had to converse, I had too; she was mesmerizing! Her smile, her deep blue eyes that you got lost in, her chestnut shoulder-length hair ... her everything!

I'd been blessed with her usual 'Good morning' smile to me every Wednesday at 9.00 am for the previous 6 months on the way to balance the company books. She worked for an accounting firm that 'Priceco' contracted 25 smiles ago and being the shy, quiet-spoken type I'd just abruptly wave back, get embarrassed, turn red, and look downward. It was weird how she was the only one that ever seemed to bring a real emotion out of me. We had never spoken more than hello and goodbye gestures until that day; was that destiny? For it was like she got what I was about as soon as she spoke to me, a familiar feeling of knowing, the way her baby blues searched my chocolate browns and found me ... and I just felt it! A conversation was so easy with her, and we talked about everything (well nearly). I believed she partly understood who I was on the inside; we just connected!

We dated for 17 months and it was still trying for me; I was the problem! Trust issues from a broken man always are and get in the way, but Georgia just drove her steamroller straight over them all, crushing their blocking doubts and worry walls to a flattened place where I could never find them. It was soon followed by a very contented timeframe for me or us, at long last, I was comfortable and free. The future glistened brightly through my shadows. This was the longest period in my life that I never required or ever called upon Black Sun. It was gone, for good this time ... or so I thought. It had served its purpose and repaired me to some form of a man.

Georgia was the first person in my adult life to ever come close to understanding, accepting, and analyzing any of my childhood damage, but I still couldn't trust Georgia completely. I wasn't ready enough to explain to her about Black Sun or what it had been to me. She would have thought I was just totally out of my fucking mind, wouldn't anyone? So I kept this inside, just our little secret between Black Sun and myself - 'ssshh!' and in reality, if anyone else knew the truth then it wouldn't be a secret ... would it now? It was gone so no one needed to know.

Years had passed with a finger-click and Georgia never raised a bad word to me, as I did her. How could I? I worshipped the ground she walked upon; she was so perfect. Georgia and

I were inseparable, she was my soul mate, my best friend, and my lover (oh boy, did I learn a lot about the joys of sex and what I was missing out on). Inane things were exciting such as shopping for groceries or simply watching television at her tiny 1-bedroom flat together. My half-smile had morphed itself into a full one and I was too happy in euphoria to ever look over my shoulder and see the misery that shadowed me everywhere.

Life was finally worth the attempt to live again. I trusted her completely and wanted Georgia to be with me, live with me, and be with me always. I decided Valentine's Day would be it, the day I would ask Georgia Browne to marry me.

I had the day planned perfectly, the ring, the flowers, and the restaurant booked. It would be the perfect proposal for the perfect partner!

Was it fate that had me in its eye again? Or did pain catch me up while I was strolling peacefully? Possibly it was simply jealous? Some drunken fool who now pays his daily penance for not taking a cab home ripped the lifeblood away from sweet Georgia (my one and only soul mate) in a car crash just one day too early on February the 13th ... and it was a Friday, a very black Friday indeed.

I was 7 minutes too late to say goodbye to her, only 7 fucking minutes! But it might as well have been 7 fucking years! I was just too late, she was gone forever.

Anger is always your first reaction, just wanting to retaliate, to get revenge against this tortured soul who made my beautiful Georgia bleed to death, after 4 excruciating hours of agony trapped in the scrambled desecrated ruins of what was left of her tiny, tiny car, while Emergency Services attempted their futile best to cut her out and save her. Would revenge bring her back? The answer was simple – No!

I flew Georgia home to be buried in her hometown of Summerston and meeting her family face to face for the first time during this ordeal seemed a little too much like a cruel punishment on me but I kept it together enough and carried on (for sweet Georgia). I had no tears left now. I cried openly for the very last time in my life when she died. But then, I had nothing left inside, nothing but emptiness and as her body lowered to her grave while her parent's favorite song (as she had told me) resonated and echoed deep within and I heard Ray sing ... and she was definitely on my mind.

I was lost in sorrow and self-pity for weeks just lying around stagnating into a void. But then for the first time in over 13 years, Black Sun emerged from out of the darkness pointing me in its shimmering path of its black-beams to forgive, heal, and be happy, for life was not over ... not just yet! So for Georgia's sake, I did my best and listened to Black Sun; my destiny was not yet complete!

With no other choice left, but to shut out life and the entire outside world's little weaknesses as you know them, I carried on, despite my emptiness. Black Sun caught all my inner tears and turned them into darkshine with its blackness comforting me back to a place where I at least appeared half-human ... on the outside.

The passing of the years gave me time to interpret what my Black Sun possibly was? It was my nemesis, it was my happiness, and it was my darkness! I believed it had the power to take away my unhappiness in the blink of its solitary eye, so it was the only thing in my life that mattered or made any fucking sense.

It started to scare me a little though and I realized I had no control of it at all. It was always there, awaiting the next call and probably the obvious reason why I willingly became a total recluse, not in the sense of life, just love and emotions. Well, it was meant to start that way.

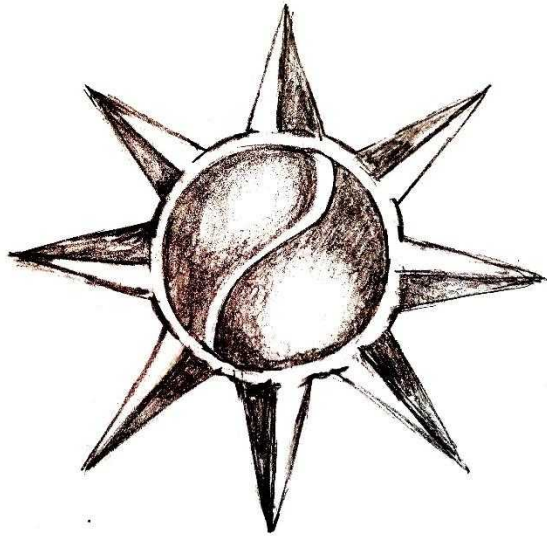
My Black Sun consumed all my thoughts I had nothing else to fill me and the darkness started to take over, it was like it owned me now. It was there frequently, watching my every move and so much more demanding in my acceptance of its statements, for example, I remember these fuckers clear as day!

Do not Feel Sorry for Yourself Loner Boy

Your destiny has Not Yet Started

OUR Time Will be soon

Even if I tried to ignore he, she or it, it was simply pointless as it would be there in my mind over and over and over, forcing me to watch its burning flames dancing away until once again I would find my acceptance of the words. I had several art books filled with interpretations of what I believed it looked like, changing shapes and colors from blackened red flames to the brightest of golds and oranges. I had interpreted the colors as its mood swings as the deeper the color the more it was pushing its ultimatums on me. It was all I had now. I could talk, yell or curse, and it and never once yelled or argued back, its love was unconditional, yet its words ruled over my life; I was powerless!



BLACK SUN

Maybe insanity comes from this place or simply just goes there? How much torture and pain can one individual take in one's miserable fucking life? Surely I was destined for insanity? The easy way out or was it simply schizophrenia? But Black Sun waved its flame at me with its 'you're a naughty boy' finger and its common sense as the life I was or we were about to embark upon together, was way better than that! It was time to honor my Black Sun ... our time had come, for 'Death' was calling on the three of us to get reacquainted.

*

Until Death Do US Part

We killed our first victim, a young 18-year-old female - Katie Wilson, at the back of Bunbury train station on Friday the 13th of July (Black Friday for Georgia, or so Black Sun said). Strangulation by bounded wire with two wooden handles crudely attached was way too easy, clinical, and clean.

We had contemplated and planned this first kill to the letter, over a whole 3 months before it did matter to Black Sun when, where, and whom. We stalked her for 4 weeks before this magical night, following her movements as if our own. And then we were ready; it was time! We never knew her name then but we knew she worked late every Friday night and departed the 9.40 pm train, virtually by herself. We even knew that she had her medium length blondish hair cut 2 weeks prior her shaggy bob style, dyed red, which we both liked and thought suited her plump pimply face, or that she always waited at least an easy 15 minutes in the car park for her ride home (whom we presumed was none other than Daddy in a white Ford F1 truck). The station car park was always dark and unattended to at night, with no cameras at this station and very secluded. It just seemed all too easy and our doorway had been left wide open while hers was closing quickly.

I can't explain how the rush felt when the pressure of the wire forced her helpless body back against ours. We cruelly adored all those other little unpredictable moments, like her handbag hitting the ground, spilling all its contents over the ground, or the feel of her body's final twitch on its surrendering death rattle just before I'd feel her piss cover my shoes. At long last I could feel something ... and it was - death ... and it was fucking glorious!

Black Sun replayed our kill afterward and I could tell by his changing flame colors that even it was excited as much as I, with its final comment in cold blue metallic flames,

Blood

Next Time

More BLOOD

I realized then that a much messier death was more of Black Sun's nauseating desire and I could taste its craving bloodlust, so a slashed, bloodied gurgling throat, would soon become one of our calling cards.

Katie Wilson's naked body was found the next day and my Black Sun calmed my nerves by confirming that the police had no idea at all who the killer was. We listened to the reports

on the radio at work and read all the papers. We watched all news broadcasts and Black Sun was right as usual; they had no fucking idea! We were meticulously clean and careful not to leave any traces of uncalculated evidence behind, except our soon to be - trademark, a homage to Black Sun itself! A simple 2 inch circled Sun cut into their stomach area, with the circle of skin removed and wavy lines grooved out as its flaming rays.

Our second victim was a lot messier than Katie, a pretty brunette only 16-years-old whose name we found on her textbooks and confirmed by the following day's morning paper as Sandy Dawson. She was a pretty little thing alright, in her school uniform ... until we finished with her!

We grabbed her after netball practice just on the darkened outskirts of 'Lightning Park' courts, we knew she always had a sneaky smoke on the way home. We had watched her routinely do this for 5 Wednesdays in a row. It always astounded me why a pretty little thing like this was left to walk home in the dark of night by herself? Where were her fucking parents? Did they even fucking care? Where were those fucking cunts, all of them, her family and her supposedly called friends too? I bet you we'd all be watching their sorrowful remorse and tears tomorrow night on the 6 o'clock news, *'We just don't understand! How could anybody do this to her? Everybody loved her!'* Yeah, well explain that to pretty little Sandy Dawson now!

As I said Black Sun had demanded a bold kill so I respected its wishes and ripped her nubilec throat virtually from her nubilec neck. I did nearly puke when her pulsating jugular blood squirts invaded my open mouth and I accidentally swallowed half a mouthful of her warm nectar. But Black Sun demanded I keep it together enough to finish the job and put her out of her misery. I admitted Black Sun was on the mark once again, this kill was much more satisfying for both of us, the hunt, the attack, and the final kill, so much so I was able to masturbate after the event in bed on Black Sun's naughty suggestion.

As before the police were way off track and our cleanliness left us undeniably safe, no one suspected us, how could they? I'd never been in trouble with the law; I kept to myself and was polite to all! Black Sun and I were completely untraceable.

'All' so-called evidence was stored in a locked trunk in my spare room hidden under the bed, bloodied clothing, her English book, her lipstick, and my death gloves were placed in an airtight clip seal bag, which was now my first addition to my prized collection ... and I placed Sandy on top of Katie.

We loved the satisfied feeling inside of all the limelight and like an addict wanting more and more of a hit every time and in reality, it was as a comparable addiction, except, we would never have any desire to ever go - cold turkey!

Black Sun was imposing its greed upon me, its voice inside my head was sounding more

demanding and more insane and I was helpless!

*

You'll be the Death of US

Blood

Blood

BL000dd

The killings were not-so spaced apart like that at the beginning, now it had me killing every 1 to 3 months instead of 6 to 9. The more gruesome the killing, the happier it was, and it never mattered whether this carnage of Hell made me puke when I got home, as I picked bits of their bloodied guts off myself! It was happy and felt extremely satisfied knowing all too well it wouldn't be long before I'd give in to its crushing demands and agree to do it all again. But Black Sun knew the adrenalin rush of hearing their very last gurgle between life and death was worth all of my temporary guilt and regrets for touching their girlie bits ... before they were cold.

We'd murdered 7 girls when Black Sun acknowledged there was no challenge left; this was getting all too easy! Clues were purposely left for the incompetent police investigations to at least get a start on us as they truthfully were running around in circles like headless chooks. We weren't silly though and left them very little to sink their teeth into, just little frustrating clues - a smudged handprint, a few strategically placed hairs and we even purposely wore non-related items, such as a stranger's second-hand over-sized boots to leave footprints with the left foot heal worn down but nothing with any real substance. Let's face it; we were the perfect killing machine! A great white shark let loose in a human ocean; Black Sun was meticulous!

Being a recluse did have its advantages. I'd never shown my drawings of my Black Sun or ever even mentioned Black Sun to anyone and I never had visitors. We had each other, no friends, no family and that was our solace.

We kept a scrapbook with newspaper cut-outs and they had a nickname for us, which amused us immensely - 'The Sun Stalker'. I believed (even if it wasn't) that it was a play on words from a B grade horror TV series from the 70's - 'The Night Stalker', this tickled us both even though we knew there was no B grade in our work.

My freezer was getting a little full of our bodily trophies of left eyeballs in individually marked seal bags with names, dates, etc. Had investigations even realized they were all blue? How could they miss this, my homage to Georgia? It was never announced on the news they were getting closer to catching us but Black Sun reassured me ... they hadn't!

We loved it, how at work people would raise conversations re the latest 'Sun Stalker' murder and how I'd speak for the both of us in reply, retorting shit like,

“If I got my hands on that bastard, I’d cut his fucking balls off, dig out both his eyes and shove them in his empty eye sockets!” This amused us enormously, how the dumbness and naivety of others blinded them completely of any truths, thinking they know someone and in reality, they didn’t have a single fucking clue!

Then it had to happen ... didn’t it! A new girl started at work – Denise Halliwell, and she reminded me so much of Georgia with those cheekbones and especially her sky blue eyes. Oh God, did I miss my Georgia and those eyes (my frozen blues were just not up to her standard). It had been 4 years since her passing but it was the one thing Black Sun could only numb for short periods but never take away completely, my memory of my sweet dearest Georgia.

*

Kill Her

KILL HER NOW

Black Sun was adamant!

I agreed when the stuck-up bitch rejected my nervous proposal for a dinner date. Did she even realize I had puked my fucking insides out from an anxiety attack beforehand? Did she even care or comprehend any of the agonizing torture I'd been through just to ask her out? Black Sun hated her immediately! Especially when she looked me up and down like I was some sort of sick perverted animal, then I remembered ... we bloody well were! We laughed inside, that was a fucking good one and boy was she going to find out the hard way!

She would be easy pickings for Christ's sake! We'd grab her in the empty car park after work, 2 hours after my shift, and the shop's closing time. Being a night shelf-stacker, guaranteed she always stayed back later finishing the stacking by herself as the rest of the floor staff finished half an hour earlier and she would be alone, closing up and always exiting from the backfire escape where there were no cameras or security. A perfect plan or so we thought. We'd been following her routine for 3 weeks and we agreed Tuesdays made the grade, so we based our decision on this as the golden window of opportunity.

Denise never stood a hair's breadth of a chance against our razor-sharp meat cleaver embedded in her chest cavity but she was the first one I let look straight into our blood-crazed eyes. I wanted her to see the face of true evil, while she bathed in her blood, no balaclava this time, just our adrenalin filled facial expression and her realization of whom we really were – 'Death'! Her blood flowed freely from her mouth covering her face with her own crimson-colored fluid while I was hoping she was regretful for knocking me back on our date, *'Oh the future could've been so wonderful. Denise!'* But she chose her fate with us like this and now she was just another number, just another fucking number - #13

*

Aftermath

Stay calm

Act Normal

Black Sun's fiery instructions had me prepared for work the next day as we both knew this was the closet killing to home and we had taken a huge risk. We both knew the police were going to investigate all staff thoroughly after her shredded desecrated body was found dripping out of the bottom of the dumpster. Detective Sgt. Willis was quite polite for a pig and even placed his hand on my left shoulder, when I (a concerned co-working manager), shed a little crocodile tear for her; what a fuckwit! This was just too easy!

We were a little concerned when all staff was requested to give DNA samples but I wasn't worried, what evidence did they have? I wasn't worried at all but Black Sun surely was ... and it was pissed and screaming at me!

You DID NOT

Heed my Warning

Yep, they got us! We'd got sloppy or should I say, I did! One of my lousy fucking grey hairs was found on her naked, butchered torso which had matched the intentionally placed ones of bodies 5 and 6.

It was enough to ring the alarm bells to look into my history and I fit the suit so to speak; why wouldn't I? A search warrant was issued and they ransacked my unit and found the obvious hiding place of my collection. I did get a chuckle when I imagined the look on some stupid naive copper's face when he opened my freezer only to find our perfect dozen (eyeballs) all sitting upright, looking at them from an egg carton. Ha, now THAT would've been a credit card moment for sure – Priceless!

Black Sun had warned me not to rape her without a condom (as I had done with previous victims) but did I listen? No! It was the closest I'd ever get to making love and to feel my Georgia ever again. Denise had begged me not to kill her while I was entering her body so I told her we'd talk about it after I came ... and I would! But Black Sun had reminded and insisted that she was already dead and long gone before this love-making session even started and it was just my imagination playing silly buggers with me.

But was I worried or remorseful? No! I had Black Sun to get me out of this one as always ... didn't I?

Unfortunately for me, the concrete evidence was my semen (DNA again)!

We loved the dumbfounded expressions of all the shocked faces of my staff, co-workers,

and colleagues, as I was handcuffed and put in the back of the police car to be escorted away for rape and murder, by no less than 6 squad cars, TV crews from 5 different news teams, and caused the biggest single event at my workplace in the whole 18 years I'd fucking well, was employed there! Was I scared? Naaa! How could I be? Together we felt like a Martyr!

*

Epilogue Part 1

The Final Curtain Falls

Jail suited us just fine; inmates left us alone after I was put in solitary, (the so-called hole) in maximum security for ripping the ear off some Jerk who tried his best to stick his cock up my virginal arse! But little did they know I had Black Sun with me always, calming my temper; I was never alone! We had pleaded guilty to all 13 counts in the first degree plus a shitload of secondary 3rds and 4ths! Who gives a fuck? And we both knew what dark dead-end road we were about to walk along; it was inevitable! Legal counsel suggested I plead insanity but we refused, for fuck's sake we didn't want to be remembered as - crazy! Death by lethal injection was our one-way ticket out of this fucking shithole. Bring it on fuckers!

At least this way the world was safe from our total disregard and desecration of life. The families of all our victims tried so hard to make us feel guilty during the court case, while I would just shoot and return their pitiless death arrows straight back to them all. The press had a field day with the surfeit of headline stories re our blow-by-blow admission and gruesome recounts of each murder; I told it all! No matter if it was a closed courtroom; it got out! Social media is the Devil's loudspeaker in God's new pretend-to-be, quiet, and politically correct misguided world; we were bigger than Charlie!

So now we sit in my shadowed cell, awaiting fate once more reflecting on my life and the tracks that were laid out because of this so-called - 'destiny' and as of those poor innocents whose life journeys were destroyed by unfortunately crossing head-on into the white line of our hurtling 18-wheeled murder machine! Do we feel remorse for ripping lifeblood from the beautiful, the young, and totally innocent? Like FUCK we do, of course not! We all have to die someday. You're gonna die! I'm gonna die, and most probably sooner than later! I never believed that I was a bad person at all. Why would I? Armed forces and Police kill every day! And in return, receive payment to clear their conscience and the immature disbelief of any penance. It forges them a career. Go figure? Oh, they are going to Hell, be sure of that! But I accept my destiny, do they? I just did it all for my own force, a big black sick force called - bitterness!

Fuck, man was born a primitive carnivore (well I still am)! At least slashed our way into the history books out of pure perfection and they all were a work of art except Denise, I admit; she was our one fucked-up sloppy mistake!

*

Epilogue Part 2

The Final Curtain Lifts

So every morning is one less to my final day to awake in this life I call - Hell. And one less I have to witness Black Sun's transcendent rise into this miserable existence. If only things were different for me, no Black Sun to blind my vision, would this have changed everything and guaranteed me to love instead of fermenting death inside? Would God have spared Georgia or Sharon?

Was this Black Sun a blessing or a curse? Whatever it was, it was with me now to my dying day and dies along with me and I accept its brutal honesty and unconditional love, as I, it; we are one!

But in reality, my subconscious always suspected that deep-down I had given Black Sun its birth myself, so it could be the face of my sickening self-punishment for starting that house fire all those years ago teaching my careless parents a serious lesson for backing over Lucky in our driveway! Those fucking iron gates from Hell trapped his escape. I held him there in our driveway, as Mum was holding her mouth when Dad returned with a baseball bat to put Lucky out of his misery but it was too late, my best friend was beginning to die. I watched him suffer from a dilapidated backbone, moaning in excruciating pain amongst my nurturing arms, until his very last gurgled breath.

But it was their nonchalant attitude that followed almost immediately after his death of appearing to not give a fuck! *'Sorry, we run over your Lucky! Oh well, that's animals for you, we'll just get you a new cat!'* My brain imploded with the embedded memory of him lying there, broken and twisted and I thought to myself, *'Hey fuckheads, it's not that fucking simple, is it!'* And so it was simple - someone had to die for this! So that very night, the simple decision was made, we all would together!

If you enjoyed this story, a sequel - 'Under a Black Sun 2' also appears along with - 'Black Sun' in Jonny's full anthology collection - 'When Darkness Shimmers'. Jonny has plans to extend these stories into a full novel containing various owners of the Black Sun and its effect so please stay tuned for that future release.

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I can never tell a lie

Crafted from a piece of wood with love and understanding
But I must sit and wait, this boy without a branding

If only I could be quite real made up of flesh and blood
Completeness to surely seal my mixed-up world that floods

I can never tell a lie
My punishment is me
How can I not despise
The hardness of a tree

To live a life of loneliness will break this solid heart
I gaze into the outside world a place I'm not a part
If I'm a real good boy, fortune will shine its light on me
Hope it doesn't discriminate and love would set me free

I can never tell a lie
My punishment is me
How can I not despise
The hardness of a tree

Here I wait, I've cut the strings that pull me left and right
My wish is for reality to sleep through every night
This lonely boy who's lost alone and searches for a life
Cuts within this heart don't bleed, to me is not quite right

I can never tell a lie
My punishment is me
How can I not despise
The hardness of a tree

I can never tell a lie
The tree is all of me

Alleandro

Eyes wide open

He awoke to sounds of an old man's voice dancing and singing and he recognized it immediately; it was his father's! He looks around at his surroundings, woodblocks, woodworking tools, and balls of string as he realizes he is hanging in his father's workshop. His memory was vague or more of an unknown, lost in a distant place. He sees the black twine that restrains him from falling as his strings are attached to two pieces of wood on a hook above his head. Those pieces of wood stirred something inside as he remembers his father's hands holding them high above him and the smallest memory returns and remembers hanging there and waiting to be used He remembers he is a puppet and his name is - Alleandro.

"I can move my arms and legs!" Alleandro spoke out loud for the first time and startled himself and then his face smiled and he felt it, he'd heard his voice and it was real. The puppet was so excited that he must get down and tell Father he is alive. He lifts his right leg and undoes the knotted twine that went through his foot revealing a small needle-like hole that the candlelight glistens through. One by one, he undoes his strings until his body drops upside-down hanging only by his left foot string. Alleandro's wooden torso was now lying on the floor and with one last knot untied; he was free!

A wooden boy stands for the first time on his two painted black shoes and he is wobbly ... very, very wobbly! He does a little one-legged circular hop with the other off the ground, doing his best to balance this new feeling of heaviness. Alleandro grabs the worktable's leg to correct his balance and he sees a dusty cracked mirror leaning against a wall so heads toward it. He sees his reflection and it is disjointed by the dust and a crack. He moves slowly within the mirror's reflection and wipes away the dust to reveal his reflection to his eager eyes. His wood is that of blackwood and he could see that he wasn't attractive at all, even to himself this didn't look appealing, for his face is odd-shaped, like it was carved straight from a left-over piece of shitty log. His left eye protruded way further than his right did. He could see his nose is not centered and slightly to the right and resembled a broken branch. He was naked and could see a small split in his body and he asks himself aloud as he pokes it, "Why is my body cracked? Is this where my heart belongs?" Alleandro turns from the sadness of his reflection as he hears his Father's laughter and he was so excited and must find him now to tell him the good news.

The steps at first were hard, clumsy, and clunky but they become easier, as he steadies himself and he reaches the just-opened doorway and sees the flames of the fireplace burning brightly with two silhouetted bodies, dancing amongst their flickering light.

'Father ... is that my beloved Father?' His thoughts are joyous as he hears his father's deep voice and laughter very clear now, but who is that with him, a boy ... another boy?

Alleandro hides behind the door peering around it and watches in silence. He can see both their faces and his father's shiny balding head with his snow-white beard while wearing those small round glasses on the end of his chubby nose. Another memory returns, and it is of his father's delicate hands, painting his eyes to enable him to view his father's heartwarming face.

The other boy's face was made of wood and like him, the boy was string-less and moving freely. He too, was a puppet, yet, made of a pale lighter wood, his face looked almost perfect, sanded smooth. His head was the shape of a perfect ball with red-painted cheeks, wearing a hat. Alleandro touches his own disfigured eye and the roughness of his unpainted bark skin and a feeling overcomes him, a strange feeling of extreme sadness; he knows he is - ugly! Sadness is within his eyes yet it remains there for his tears are dry within his wood.

"I love you! I love you! I am so happy!" Alleandro listens and watches closely to his father's happy words through the partly opened door and they were loud and clear to the dancing wooden boy, whom Father had just lifted high in the air. He continues to listen to hear the words that will take away any traces of leftover happiness and replace them with this new feeling - sadness.

"My son ... you are my son now!" Father danced with joy and the puppet was perfect in every way. They hold each other in a tightened embrace while Alleandro backs away from the doorway slowly, to leave them as he had found them - in a silhouette of flames.

*

Questions & Answers

He was sad and now angry and had to leave this place ... the place he did not belong to!

There were too many questions, too many questions! They were coming thick and fast within his newly awakened and confused mind. *'Who is the boy? Why do I feel alone? Is he my true father?'* He had to answer these and the many questions that would follow, but it was the one burning one he must find the answer to first, *'Where do I belong?'* He will travel and find a home for he knew it was surely waiting out there, somewhere had to be - home. So Alleandro would make his exit, silently through the back door to venture on a quest to find the answers.

Alleandro stops at the doorway and looks back at the worktable; he has a feeling he would need protection in the dangers of the outside world and must find some sort of weapon to take with him. He quickly reaches his maker's worktable and feels around blindly as a sharpened blade splinters his hand. He pulls the blade to the ground where he picks it up, it is nearly half his size. He looks around the workshop to see two discarded pieces of black ribbon in front of the leaning mirror. He ties the first ribbon around his waist as he swings the blade - and somehow the movement of the knife creates a sound of slicing the air and this chills his little wooden bones. He then places the blade through the ribbon so it hangs like a sword against his hip. Alleandro picks up the remaining piece of the black ribbon then ties it around his head like a warrior would, off to fight and never to return. And with one last look at himself, he drops his head to his chest to pull his uneven eyes away from this sad image as he glances back and asks his reflection in a whispering voice,

“Why are you alive ... ugly puppet?”

*

Three's Company

Alleandro had been walking the river bank track for a whole day with his crazy thoughts as his only company. Memories of his short life were limited, so the ones that did venture in were repeating themselves over and over, jumbled amongst his questions. One new feeling had emerged and it was one of hunger and he needed to suppress it. It was now consuming everything else he knew. A trap! He would set a trap and kill a small animal, he scratched his wooden head as he did not know how to build a trap but he did know that he wanted meat, fresh bloody meat.

Bluebirds were singing their love songs in the trees as he looked up to see they had made a nest and their offspring were chirping their songs like his hunger was in his empty belly. Alleandro then watched and waited as the fledgling's parents took turns to leave the nest and return with freshly caught bugs and worms for their chanting babies. But the babies looked delicious and Alleandro set about to eat them.

One of the adult bluebirds left the nest so it would be now or never. The tree was rickety but quite easy to climb and he reached the branch within minutes. It was out of his reach but he could see the baby birds jumping up and down, as the remaining parent saw Alleandro's leering eyes heading their way.

The mother bird tried her best to protect her young as she attacked him pecking and scratching his wooden face as he raised his arm, she tore into his bark face and a small piece had fallen off from his cheek revealing a must softer, smoother bark and what was this new feeling? Then he knew it was – pain! The puppet's anger rose. Yes, he now was very angry as well as being in pain. He burned inside as his head heated up and he withdrew his blade and with one swoop, removed the mother bird's tiny head. Both the head and body fell to the ground as he watched. His focus promptly returned to the now unprotected babies and he noticed a speck of blood, wet upon his blade, it was minimal but when he licked it, a new sensation he liked, flowed through his starving wooden body – taste.

He ate the fledglings and they were delicious! Their little featherless bodies were juicy and sweet but he was still hungry and he remembered the mother's dead body at the bottom of the tree, awaiting his return.

Alleandro was climbing down when he heard the munching and crunching sound!

“Hey, it's mine!” Alleandro yelled at the hairy boy who had the half-eaten carcass and feathers all around his mouth with blood dripping from his pointed teeth. “Hey, that was mine!” Alleandro was furious as he took his final jump to the ground from the rickety tree running at the child who was covered in hair and looked like a dog. This made him stop dead in his tracks questioning how he knew what a dog looked like; he had never seen one! The dog-like child snarled at him glaring his wild untamed eyes yelling,

“I’ll kill you ... I’ll kill you!” Alleandro was about to draw his sword when a mysterious crooked tailed black cat that stunk to high heaven appeared from behind the tree and it spoke,

“Settle down, settle down children! There’s plenty to go ‘round!” And the cat pointed to the frantic father bird who had returned to an empty nest.

“Are you a talking cat?” Alleandro was puzzled, and then the cat spoke again.

“Listen kiddo, yeh-yeh, I know fucking amazing, eh, I’m a real never-to-be-seen-before talking cat! So I gather from your reaction you’ve never seen a talking cat before, whoopee fucking diddly-doodly. I’m a witch’s cat actually and he’s a hungry werewolf child ... and I see you can talk to ... living puppet boy! So we all talk ... so what’s the big fucking deal?” The cat continued while Alleandro was wide-eyed and speechless. “His name is Wolfie and mine is Stinky ... yes, Stinky so accept it, pal, it is what it is and I do! It was given to me by one of those - Wicked Witches, the one from the South-West. Witch Lily was her name, bless her blackened, twisted soul!” The cat was continually talking while Wolfie was still feeding (not sharing), “So what’s your moniker ... puppet boy?”

“Moniker?” Alleandro widened his eyes wondering if he had a Moniker and he looked around his surroundings for it and couldn’t see it. The cat shook his head, turned to the werewolf kid,

“Dumb-fuck alert!” Stinky turned back to the puppet, “I meant your name, kiddo!”

“Ooh, it’s A-A-A ... Alleandro.” The puppet scratched his wooden head and was confused as this was all getting a little past crazy, but at least he’d got it out.

“Well, Alleandro ... I’m calling you, Puppet Boy! It’s a better fucking name for you than that shit one!” Stinky farted and the smell was Alleandro’s worst experience in his short life,

“POO! That’s burning my nose!”

“Sorry!” The cat just raised an eyebrow.

“Oh boy, that stinks ... bad!” Alleandro fell to the ground still holding his nose so no extra smell would get in, he closed his eyes as well, just to be safe. The dog-like child seemed unaffected and kept eating the dead bird.

The smell did pass and Alleandro could breathe fresh air again. Stinky made the wolf-boy share the little of what was left of the dead bird, so they sat, ate, and talked. Stinky was the talker and he sussed out the strange-looking puppet as he was just like them – alone. They all were loners on personal quests - Stinky was to find a new witch (with no sense of smell) after Lily died, to side with as he missed flying the night skies sitting on the back of a broomstick, while Wolfie’s father was a werewolf as well and his mother was a gypsy who had left them to face their curse alone. Stinky had found the frightened child lost and crying in the dark woods, so he took the werewolf child under his wing and set about to find the boy’s gypsy mother together.

Somehow fate had brought these three strangers together so it was decided (soon after they finished eating the father bird that returned to join his fate and family in death) that they would all travel together to – ‘The Kingdom’.

Stinky talked and talked as they walked and told many enchanting stories of the magical place it was. It was a place where you could drink a bitter brown liquid that would make you numb, laugh, and fight like a champion! He had heard tales of ladies who provided a service and that it was such a heavenly experience it would be worth paying every cent for in gold. And gold, lots and lots of precious gold, and all this were there just begging to be either enjoyed or stolen.

The strange two taught Alleandro some new words he had never spoken before.

“Fuck-fuck-fuck!” Alleandro cursed and smiled at Stinky’s approval,

“And another Puppet Boy?”

“Cunt!” Alleandro turned to the cat and added, “I don’t really like that one! Sounds like an ax wound!” Alleandro covered his split as Stinky whipped around, wide-eyed to Dog-boy who was chuckling before he spoke,

“Hey, Puppet Boy, that one is especially good to use when you’re angry, I’d scream that one out!” Next minute Alleandro was,

“CUNT-T-T!” He looked at the cat and smiled and nodded, getting it with a downward ‘well-done son’ smile.

Stinky’s stories were delightful to him and he had so many! They all laughed wholeheartedly while they walked and walked following the road made of yellow cobblestones and the only thing that would stop their laughter would be Stinky’s surprise farts.

“Sorry!”

*

Joseph and the Gypsies

After traveling along the bricked yellow road for 3 days when they came upon the gypsy caravans. There were 4 wagons in total and they were camped beside the river. A fire burned and the smell of meat cooking was too much for their hungry bellies. Wolfie was anxious at the slightest of chances she may be here - his mother. The gypsies distant laughter reminded Alleandro of his father's and the boy's laughter. He counted 21 gypsies in total, all the men seemed to be sitting down and talking while children were tending to the draft horses. The women were the busy ones, while a dark-haired woman wearing a green scarf who was tending to the meal stirring was the one that caught his attention. She had heard a stick crack close by, Alleandro looked down, *'Whoops!'*

"Who goes there?" She looked left and right cautiously as she waved an arm behind her for the other gypsies to come, and they seemed to come ... from nowhere. Her voice repeated, "I said, who goes there? Show your face stranger!" Wolfie could see the woman's face clearly but had no idea at all if this was his mother or not for he was only a baby when she left, leaving him alone with his werewolf-cursed father.

"Is that your mother?" Stinky whispered curiously. But Wolfie just shook his head, not knowing. The Gypsy men now had knives and logs in their hands, heading in their direction. Alleandro felt unsettled and funny inside as he nibbled on his wooden fingertips. Wolfie crawled out of the bushes on his hands and knees and in the quietest of growl-like voices, spoke up to the terrified gypsy woman.

"Mumma ... are you my Mumma?" One of the other gypsy men screamed,

"It's the wolf child, the curse has returned!" The woman dropped the wooden spoon and fell to a kneeling position near the pot holding her hands to her open mouth, she was shaking her head in disbelief and crying while the gypsy men drew their weapons at Wolfie.

"Mumma?" And that was all he said, one measly word as the gypsy men commenced their fruitless attack on him as the woman just moaned with her right hand outstretched to him,

"Joseph ... my little Joseph."

The men hit Wolfie hard with wooden sticks and logs as both Stinky and Alleandro watched from behind the bushes. Alleandro was shaking his head, as the woman was dragged away by the other women. He whispered a suggestion to Stinky,

"We should help him." Stinky turned and laughed,

"Yeah, then keep watching, Puppet Boy!" So he did.

The blood was everywhere as Wolfie ripped out the throats of the first two gypsy men who went to attack him with a sword. Alleandro's eyes widened as this killing wasn't anything like the bluebirds, it was ... terrifying! Wolfie seemed to fly through the air from throat to throat killing the first one instantly by biting it clean out, leaving his first kill drop to his back with blood squirting high in the air from the gaping hole where his neck had been located a mere 2 seconds before. Then he quickly and ferociously attacked the other gypsy assailants, who had just witnessed the elderly father die a bloody death. The other two remaining gypsy men had fled back to the caravans and were screaming frantically to all the remaining gypsies to save themselves and escape the wrath of the – *Wolf Beast!* They screamed instructions at the women and ordered the children to harness the horses – “*Now!*”

Wolfie was eating one of the 6 dead gypsies, as his mother's face disappeared from his view after being dragged away screaming out his name, his real name - Joseph! But his wolf-like hunger consumed all of his body and emotions at that very moment, more so than his need to find her or even care about his mother who abandoned him; it seemed irrelevant, but his thirst for food certainly was!

The gypsies fled within minutes in a flurry of tears and screams as they heard the clamoring sound from the horses' hoofs. They were all holding crosses and praying to their God, crossing their chests looking upwards, leaving behind a perfectly intact campsite.

“Let's go, Puppet Boy.” Stinky exited the bushes, stopped, and turned back at Alleandro, “Do you need an invitation, your majesty?” Alleandro shook his head and stepped out and followed the cat.

The meat was still boiling away on the open fire, hidden amongst the smoke in a blackened burnt pot, just as it was exactly when the three vagabonds had arrived, and only such a short time ago. But now it was quiet, so quiet, with just the sound of Wolfie crunching on the gypsy's bones.

“Told you to watch, didn't I!” Stinky whacked Alleandro across the back of his head knocking his ribbon headband upward as he made his way, heading straight to boiling pot. He turned, “Hurry up, dickhead!” Alleandro stepped up his pace, replacing his headband as his over-sized wooden shoes clumped behind.

Looking around at the blood, Alleandro was disturbed and uneasy as he edged passed the desecrated bodies from Wolfie's frenzied killing spree. He stared at the openness and crudeness of this bloody carnage and could see insides, lots of insides, all the bodies were torn open; he covered his crack!

Stinky rummaged through the pockets of the dead and found a bag of gold, jingling his lucky find in front of them both, he proudly announced,

“Kingdom, here we come! Look who's lucky day it is!” But Alleandro could not take his eyes off the murdered gypsies, and thinks to himself, *'Not theirs!'*

The meal was hearty and hunger was once again at bay but soon after Alleandro felt very strange, very, very strange and something was happening to his eyes as everything was looking brighter! The greens, the reds, and even the dead bodies appeared to be vivid colors and he could have sworn one of them moved! He looked across at Stinky and his eyes were huge, bigger and greener, they seemed to be pulsating and he was laughing as Wolfie was howling at the full moon.

“I feel funny, Stinky.” Alleandro attempted to stand up and fell back down again. He was numb all over!

“It’s just the magic, Puppet Boy,” answered the cat still laughing, “... it’s the fucking magic of the mushrooms. An old spell Lily had shown me long ago.” Stinky pointed to the brightest golden-colored mushrooms poking out of the ever-so-green glowing grass. “I put a few in the pot and ... abracadabra, hey presto, the magic begins!” Wolfie was nodding in agreement rapidly, while he too was laughing and out of nowhere so did Alleandro. He couldn’t help himself. They all laughed uncontrollably.

The dark place of bad dreams invaded Alleandro that very night and it was a very bad place. A land where everything was black with no color at all, only shades of grey. There was no happiness here, just loneliness and emptiness. He heard screams from below, deep below and they were wrong, like a knife cutting into his wood, deeper and deeper. It was the feeling of flames he did not like the most, black flames from a black fire forever dancing on his body, burning him to ash. He moaned in his sleep as he did his best to escape them. So he ran, ran but the flames would follow him. The faster he ran the faster they would catch him, surround him, tease and scold his body ... then he awoke – screaming! Even Stinky’s scraggly fur stood to attention at the sound of Alleandro’s fear.

Another week had passed and the gypsy murders and memories were starting to fade to the back of Alleandro’s mind. They would reach – ‘The Kingdom’ in a few days and the knowledge of this raised a level of excitement which was so new to him.

Wolfie had accepted Stinky’s words that he was an orphan now and told to – “Man Up!” by the cat. For now, this would be his life as a quest seeker and to accept he would never know the truth of his birth, being torn away from his mother at childbirth by his grandparents. On the realization that he, (the baby Joseph - the grandson they had waited so patiently for), was none other than the son of the town’s murderous slayer! The cursed beast that attacked and killed 13 town’s people, tearing them to bloodied and severed carcasses.

Joseph’s grandfather found his daughter’s husband in the forest naked, with his face covered in blood. The secret was now revealed, but only to them, and because of this fear, they left the town immediately.

Grandfather knew the baby was now tainted with death and he must be either destroyed or abandoned! So they ran, taking baby Joseph's mother against her will, leaving the cursed to fend for themselves. They'd raced to catch up and join the traveling gypsies that had recently passed through their village and smelt the death that visited so had moved on quickly.

They did not reveal his father's secret to anyone before they left, simply because of the baby and they could not kill him, the werewolf baby; it was still their daughter's flesh and blood and it would need to eat! For now, his cursed father was forced to bundle baby Joseph off to the woods and live in exile together, alone for 5 long and lonely years. Only ever returning to the village to kill and return with fresh meat for the boy.

The years passed, yet the stories did return to the village by other traveling gypsies who had heard stories of the beast's whereabouts and where he was hiding his werewolf son. The villagers knew if they did not act promptly then their children would be facing the wrath of the monster's offspring, as well as the father; they had already lost too many!

Wolfie's father was hunted down and killed as Joseph ran away as fast he possibly could through the dark woods, away from his only known home. He remembered his father's words to run to the hiding stump and stay hidden until his father would come and get him ... but he never came.

Joseph's grandparents had taken a vow never to return to the village or ever face the two monsters ever again. But fate was that they did face one! And now Joseph's grandfather was dead at the first bite of his only grandson.

*

The Moat Guard

The three reached the top of the hill that unveiled – ‘The Kingdom’ to their tired and traveled eyes.

‘The Kingdom’ and its sheer size overwhelmed Alleandro. He could see the grey stone walls that protected it from the rest of the forests, surrounded by water, and the banks of a moat; it was huge! They could see the entrance in the distance and it was a drawbridge guarded by one of the King’s armored soldiers, holding an upright pole with – ‘The Kingdom’s’ flag fluttering wildly in the wind.

Alleandro’s new feeling of excitement returned, as this place was something he had never dreamed of ever seeing, let alone travel through. He knew he would find his answers in here, and to him, this looked like - home!

“Let’s go fuckers, let me do the talking, okay!” Stinky ordered and as if the other two would ever get a word in. They casually strolled down the grassy hill, heading straight toward the enormous wooden gates to the city. So down the hill and toward the guard, they tramped.

“Greetings, good fellow.” Stinky smiled at the guard. He was stern and looked straight over them and bluntly demanded,

“State your business.”

“We are but mere travelers from afar, and have heard stories of the many wonders of your worldly kingdom!” Stinky pointed to the closed draw bridge. The guard’s voice then turned to stone,

“You are not welcome here! Leave now ... do not return!”

“Hey-hey!” Stinky complained as Alleandro piped up also,

“Listen ... CUNT!” Stinky cringed at Alleandro’s bad timing to unveil that new vocabulary he’d mastered, as well as the emphasis attached to it! The puppet kept going, “We have to get in there, dickhead! We have a right to be in there!” He pointed, “If not, then I need answers!” Alleandro was slamming his right index finger into his own timber chest as the stern guard dropped his nowhere gaze to eyeball them all individually. Stinky raised an eyelid turning his head to Wolfie wondering, *‘Where the fuck did that come from? Go for it, Puppet Boy!’* The guard’s face tightened and he finished off with an authoritative tone,

“The King refuses entry to strangers ... especially weird dark stinky strangers,” he sniffed the bad smell that accompanied them, before adding, “... we don’t trust darkens in here!” As his pointer finger was poking Alleandro’s black colored wooden forehead, then he said, “Trouble makers,” he points straight to Wolfie, “... and sly thieves!” Now pointing directly at Stinky, before finishing with, “You two have been here before, I remember you both ... and the trouble you caused last time! Now leave, and take the loud-mouthed weirdo puppet with you.

You were told never to come back!” The moat guard reverted his glance back to his previous stance of stillness, looking straight over their heads. Stinky was shattered! How on earth did the guard know about their successes of pillaging in the gold department as well as that one-off unfortunate arse sniffing incident?

“C’mon, let’s get the fuck out of here!” Stinky was pissed but Alleandro was angrier, so fucking angry that it rose within ... and out of the pits of his rage, he felt something rise. Rage was down there, deep down and he spat straight at the guard leaving a green drooling gob running down his perfectly polished chest plate ... using his new, favorite word as he walked off the drawbridge,

“Cunt!”

They returned to the hilltop and while Wolfie cocked his leg on the nearest tree, Stinky unveiled his plan to Alleandro.

“We have a secret weapon, you know!” Alleandro shook his head, so asked himself, ‘*What secret weapon? My blade?*’ Stinky turned around and stuck his arsehole straight into Alleandro’s face ... and the puppet instantly ducked for cover! Then Alleandro got it and grinned. Stinky was laughing so hard that he fell on the ground and they both rolled around belly-aching with laughter as Wolfie returned from peeing against a tree.

“You two are fucking nuts!” Wolfie stated, then jumped on them joining in on the playful wrestle as the golden sunset on the three best of friends, the new best friends of chance, and they rolled in joyful laughter.

*

To Kingdom come

“Now when I say run, you fucking numb-nuts run, understand?” Stinky had them hiding in the bushes near the drawbridge entrance.

All they would have to do now was but sit and wait, wait for someone to arrive and as soon as the drawbridge was lowered they would be able to sneak in unnoticed. Easy-peasy, or so it sounded, running by the heavily built guard and his big shiny silver sword!

It was just an hour later when a gold and white carriage with two white horses were pulling up on the drawbridge; it was the beautiful Princess! Alleandro caught the beauty of her face, her milky white skin, her long blonde platted hair as she had leaned out of the carriage window and spoke to the guard. She was so beautiful, he had never seen such beauty before, and because she was so captivatingly beautiful, he spoke without realizing,

“She’s so fucking beautiful!”

“Hey, Puppet Boy, keep it in your pants. Now focus ... fucking focus!” Stinky brought Alleandro back to the crucial moment as the drawbridge was being lowered,

“About fuckin’ time!” Wolfie complained as he was scratching his flea-bitten balls, just as Stinky started the countdown,

“3 – 2 – 1 ... run you fuckers! Run! Run as fast as you fucking well can!”

They were off and heading quickly towards the Princess’ carriage. Stinky made it first under the carriage, soon followed by Wolfie sliding in the dirt haze, grazing his butt cheeks on the gravel path. But Alleandro had never run this fast before (only in his dream) so he trailed pathetically behind with his gangly limbs totally out of time, flailing like a scarecrow in a storm or that his strings were still attached, and he was dancing with his strings being pulled. This distant memory filled his wooden head as he wondered, what it meant. As the drawbridge gate reached the top of its lift, it locked its final click into place. The guard caught it out the corner of his eye - Alleandro’s piss-weak attempt to sneakily run straight by him. With one foul swoop, the guard had him around the throat lifting him to his eye level, as his little puppet legs kept running aimlessly in mid-air.

“Where are your smelly friends? I will rip your wooden head off if ... (*cough cough*)” and his threat was interrupted by a choking smell that dropped him to his knees. The guard released his grip on Alleandro to hold and block his nose from this putrid odor that had erupted from the bowels of Hell! Stinky and Wolfie were running full speed ahead and made it through the open drawbridge gate while Alleandro was way behind and Stinky was screaming back at him.

“Run! Just fucking run ... run you cockhead!” So he did. Alleandro took a super-quick glance over his shoulder while his legs gained a striding ungainly momentum just as the

beautiful princess quickly followed by her coach driver, had joined the guard all on knees dry-reaching into the moat in unison; good ol' Stinky had really come through with a lethal one!

'The Kingdom' was jaw-dropping to a wide-eyed Alleandro. There were so many people here, so many people and no one was taking any notice of the three drifters; they simply blended amongst them all! Wolfie wasn't being cool at all, as his nose was sniffing every arse that came within an arm's distance and he looked like he was in Heaven.

"Be cool Wolfie, just be cool ... remember last time?" Wolfie grasped his balls in a lightning flash, clutching with knees inwards, cringing as he remembered the pain. How could he forget what he felt when they have kicked him so hard for sniffing and inhaling that Viking's shit-flavored buttocks; he limped for a whole week afterward! Alleandro had no idea what they were talking about but his eyes were wide open with amazement at all the goings-on in this wonderful city.

The many people of all ages and sizes were bustling around him just doing their daily business, some were screaming, some were laughing. He could see children in the street playing skip-rope and the children stirred something deep inside but he could not remember what or why. He could see the row of King's guards riding white stallions escorting the (now recovered) Princess's carriage to the castle. Town's people were greeting each other with the shaking of hands so the three mimicked this with their own toffy greetings toward each other. Alleandro started,

"How do you do sir ... very nice day, isn't it?"

"Oh yes ... it's a chipper day!" replied a chirpy aristocratic sounding werewolf.

"Good day, kind sir," Alleandro shook hands with Stinky as he spoke while taking a slight bow as the puppet asked,

"Well, sir, what would you be doing today?" The cat smirked, nodded and answered,

"Well, it's such a chipper day sir ... I think I might just take a crap!" Alleandro slumped his shoulders as Stinky's toilet mouth had just tarnished the game – as usual!

His attention was quickly diverted away from the silly game to the sounds of trumpets and horns being blown, the bright colors of the flapping flags, and all the wonders of this glorious place – 'The Kingdom'. Now he could see how being alive was so wonderful.

"We need a fucking drink!" Stinky stated as he jerked Alleandro around the neck and pointed to a sign – 'Ye Ole Ale House'. The sign hung proudly out front of a wooden trashed-up building, a place full of rowdy revelers drinking and spilling what Alleandro assumed was the magic brown liquid that he'd been told about and so desired as the wanting to feel numb that Stinky had convinced him felt so good.

“Three magic brown liquids please and three of your best smoking sticks, kind sir?” Stinky placed one of his gypsies’ stolen gold coins on the bar while Alleandro checked out – ‘Ye Ole Ale House’.

The room was smoky and smelt like sweat. The loudness of voices made Alleandro hold his ears as it sounded like everyone was trying to talk over each other, in an - ‘I’m louder than you!’ game. He witnessed two men so numb they were attempting to fight but were just swinging through the thin air missing each other, while others were watching and laughing; it was hilarious! Another table had a game of cards being played, when Alleandro saw one the players jump up, tip the table over, and punch one of the other players who had just dropped 5 of the similar-looking cards on the floor - 3 red ones, plus 2 black, and all with an A on them. The old beat-up piano in the corner was being played by a midget as his chained spider monkey danced back and forth on top of the honky-tonk piano. The monkey was holding a tin cup that an occasional reveler would stumble up to and place a gold coin in. He looked at Stinky with excitement and Stinky nodded, so he raced up and placed the coin Stinky had just given him into the cup, and the monkey danced. As he was smiling, he turned to walk back and then instinctively jumped high in the air when the monkey poked his bum from behind; Wolfie was on the floor belly-aching! Alleandro returned to the others and was embarrassed by his untimely jump while the two fuckwits were still laughing. But he felt at home; this place was truly magical!

Then he saw her, standing at another table flirting with a patron, stuffing gold coins in her busty cleavage as she shook them in his face. Her face was grubby, her dress was a dusty pink, unruly and ruffled, her hair was scraggly ... but she was beautiful! She turned and Alleandro saw her blind eye but it made no difference to him, as it reminded him of his out of place eye, as his hand was compelled to touch his.

“That’s Mandalina,” Stinky slipped in as he handed Alleandro his brown liquid in a silver tankard, nudging him as he stuck a dark brown smoking stick into the puppet’s gob and lit it, “... she’s just a whore!” Stinky turned and handed Wolfie his tankard and stick when Alleandro questioned,

“What’s a whore?” Alleandro then inhaled the lit smoking stick and choked like never before and it was fucking disgusting! He reeled the smoking stick out of his mouth grabbing his throat and coughing out as much smoke as he possibly could! “Fucking yuck!” Alleandro complained with his screwed up face as he stubbed it out on the bar.

“Oi, fuckhead ... I paid good money for that!” Whined the cat as he lit Wolfie’s smoking stick, before his adding, “Pissweak prick!”

Stinky explained the finer details of a whore’s services to Alleandro and Alleandro’s jaw dropped to the floor again,

“Bullshit! You’re bullshitting me!” Then he looked down to his naked wooden body and he realized he did not have one of them where Stinky said it should be, all he had was a solitary crack; he was confused! Wasn’t his crack for a missing heart?

“No, it fucking isn’t!” Stinky, answered that question to the innocent puppet as he drew on his smoking stick, explaining to him that’s a completely different story to his about a man made of tin before pointing to Wolfie’s package, and then to his own. Alleandro didn’t have one dangly thing like them, just a hole where it should have been. He complained,

“But I don’t have a baby-maker, Stinky.” Stinky listened to Alleandro’s concerning problem knowing only too well he would have to help his new companion to get one. For he understood the desperation within his friend’s wanting and lustful eyes toward Mandalina as he remembered Miss Tush and the first time he had seen and smelt her rustling tail around in the alley; he had to be with her and was! Stinky understood clearly - Alleandro needed a baby maker so he could be with Mandalina.

“Where can I buy a baby-maker?” Alleandro quizzed Stinky, as the cat raised his finger to his lips and whispered,

“*Shush*, not in front of the fucking kid!” They both looked down at Wolfie who was sculling his amber magic liquid, burping and sniffing the air for freshly wiped bottoms holding his smoking stick. They both turned away and Stinky whispered,

“I know a sorcerer ... he will get you one but it will cost you ... or me. But this could ... could cost you ... your soul!”

“What’s a soul?” Now Stinky really had Alleandro dazed and confused.

The three drank and drank ‘til they were completely numb, they had been laughing and enjoying themselves all night even when Stinky let one rip on purpose, clearing the room in seconds. But, closing time came too fast and they were asked to leave. Alleandro could hardly walk and Stinky’s speech was blurred,

“So, Pruppet Broy ... when re rake up (*hic*), re rill goanne see a Sorrterra, kay.” Stinky fell over in the street, flat on his side and he was dead numb, out like a light, snoring. Both Alleandro and Wolfie sat down (alongside their passed out cat friend) on the dusty footpath while the moon’s oblong face leered and grinned its evil cheesy look over them. Alleandro blinked when he believed he saw a cow jump over it and thought, ‘*One too many magic liquids!*’ But they were too occupied with Stinky, laughing at him, prodding him now and then just to make him kick, squirm, and grumble (but not fart, they didn’t want that). Suddenly a strange feeling, a brand new sensation was erupting in Alleandro’s belly ... and he threw up all over Wolfie.

“Oi! Wake up Puppet Boy, time to rise and shine.” Alleandro awoke to see the two standing over him before he was blinded by the morning Sun. The pain had returned and invaded his head,

“*Oowuuuccchhh!*” It felt like his head was expanding and shrinking or a blacksmith’s hammer banging on his anvil from inside his head, and that weird feeling in his belly was still there. He could see Wolfie’s eyes now and they were exactly as Stinky’s - blood red and puffy! And as Wolfie scratched his hairy back, Stinky made the suggestion of the morning, thought Alleandro.

“We need some fuckin’ breakfast!” Stinky burped while the other two quickly grabbed their noses in case another bit of wind would make its presence from the opposite end as he staggered off beckoning the two to follow.

The markets were frantic and people pushed Alleandro from side to side which didn’t help his sickness at all. The villagers were exchanging gold coins for foods yelling and screaming at the stall sellers, it was so loud and louder than the alehouse, he tried to put his fingers in his ears but he was fucked, as he had no earholes! So he did his best to cover the spot instead. He found it hard to keep up with Stinky and Wolfie as they pushed their way through the town people’s legs. The smell of food hit him and his hungry sickened belly, it was screaming for something, anything! Stinky pointed to a fishmonger displaying all kinds of delicious seafood - fish, crabs, squids, and even pieces of a chopped up white whale.

“Now Alleandro, I want you to make up some story and ask the fucker some questions, distract him ... tell him you’re lost or something!” Stinky then pushed Alleandro towards the monger’s table; he hit it with a bang!

“Excuse me sir, excuse me ... I’m lost and I can’t find my father.” His eyes were darting left and right, he had never lied before and it felt strange but he could do it, wasn’t that hard, not as hard as watching gypsies die! Stinky slipped a whole fish off the table and passed it down to Wolfie who was hiding underneath. The fishmonger replied with his back turned to Alleandro,

“Sorry boy, I am too busy to ...” he turned his body and drew his attention to the funny looking puppet and pointed, “I’ve seen you before ... where have I seen you? You look familiar.” Alleandro froze as suddenly he was a someone, an actual someone that this man thought he had recognized, so he asked,

“Do you know me? I am Alleandro.” The puppet’s sickened belly stirred inside.

“I think you were a puppet here once ... you did a show, a very long time ago. What was his name ... err the puppeteer? Was it G-G-Gibby? Ah, can’t remember but a very nice man! Sorry, I can’t remember but my sons were only little and liked it very much!” The monger turned away to take gold from the waiting villagers who were holding and waving pieces of

white whale blubber in his face. Alleandro was still frozen solid when Wolfie grabbed his waist ribbon from the front and reefed him under the table.

The three vagabonds crawled on their hands and knees hurriedly through and under the market tables, with their stolen prize gripped firmly under Wolfie's arm. Alleandro's wooden heart pumped faster and faster in his chest, (and now he knew that a heart belongs up there and a baby maker down there). He glanced left and right at the legs of the town's people either side of the tables, waiting for someone's arm to reach down and grab one of them. Wolfie pointed to a nearby deserted alley and they scrambled quickly and quietly toward it.

The left-over fishbone lay discarded and clean in front of them as they leaned against the dirty cobblestone alley wall, looking and laughing at each other's expanded stomachs. All three clasped their fish-flavored hands behind their heads taking turns to burp, one by one. Closing his eyes helped Alleandro to drift off to dreamland while Stinky bragged about being the only cat with 10 lives.

"I love this place, I just fuckin' love it!" Alleandro closed his wooden eyes and drifted into slumberland, as he recognized this feeling and it was one of warmth, the same one of hearing his father's voice singing from when he first awoke; he accepted it was – contentment!

*

A deal to die for

“Today, we get you a baby-maker, hey,” Stinky slapped Alleandro hard on the back, “... you haven’t changed your mind, I hope?” After an hour or two of sleeping off the digested fish, they made their way to the Sorcerer’s tower within the boundaries of ‘The Kingdom’. It was situated amongst the ‘Darkened Forest’ on the outskirts.

The dark and foreboding stone structure seemed to erupt from nowhere when they reached it. It shadowed the tiny visitors, way above them, casting its evil darkness over them all. A frightened Alleandro could feel his bark creep as its eerie shadow cast a revolting penetration through him. He stood close behind the other two as Stinky knocked on the huge hardwood doors with evil-looking skulls carved from bone, door knockers. The sound was a deep murky thud and seemed to echo. The doors creaked open by themselves and Alleandro was scared, scared shitless! Yes, another recognized feeling, the one from the dream and it was – fear, and he could feel it alright.

The three ascended the spiraling black iron stairwell that seemed to go forever, circling upward and around, around, and around. They finally reached the top where another door opened magically by itself, as the front doors did. They entered the dark stone room with Alleandro at the rear cowering behind Wolfie.

“Who goes there?” The deepest of voices had come from behind a deep purple velvet chair with its back the only view. It was the size of three, wide, and foreboding as it faced a burning fireplace; it made them all do a little nervous dance! The frightened travelers embraced each other in a huddle as the only clear view, was the hand of Sorcerer grasping the arm of the huge imposing chair as Stinky answered shakily,

“Oh, Great Sorcerer of the Kingdom ... it is I, Witch Lily’s black cat - Stinky with and my two questing companions, Wolfie the werewolf child, and Alleandro the puppet boy.”

The Sorcerer stood immediately and Alleandro nearly pissed himself when he realized the Sorcerer was 8 feet tall. He turned and slowly walked towards them dragging his gold and black robe along the floor. The Sorcerer was holding his magic shaft which was as high as him and made of a twisted white ghostly tree branch, and then he yelled,

“Alleandro the puppet, you are alive?” His pupils were glowing red flames. Was it just the reflection from the fire or were they real fire, Alleandro couldn’t tell? It terrified them anyway as he continued, “This was not meant to be. Come here puppet!”

Alleandro was pushed forward by a shaking Wolfie who then accidentally emptied his bowels on the cold stone floor to Stinky’s horror. Taking one slow step at a time, Alleandro finally stood at the bearded wizard’s feet.

The Sorcerer bent over and touched Alleandro's roughened face, and then he laughed! His laugh echoed loud and evil throughout his castle, sounding like it bounced off every wall. Stinky and Wolfie were just looking at each other scared out of their fucking wits. Then suddenly the Sorcerer cut his laughter to dead silence and his smile disappeared, unveiling his gritted yellowed decaying teeth or what was left of them.

"What do you want, cat?" The Sorcerer stood straight up and glared at Stinky banging his wooden shaft on the stone floor, scaring them all even more. Stinky and Wolfie grabbed each other again as Alleandro stood motionless with his two wooden shoes chattering on the cold stone floor.

"It is not me your Great Evilness ... but, but Alleandro." Stinky reluctantly pointed to him again. The Sorcerer's gaze was slow and steady as he redirected his glowing red eyes to meet with a terrified Alleandro.

"What is it you want puppet ... to be a real boy?" Alleandro answered in a choky voice,

"N-n-no, sir ... I need a baby-maker!" Alleandro pointed to the crack where it should have been. The Sorcerer's left eyebrow raised as he again bent down to directly stand face to face with Alleandro, looking directly at the crevice within his blackwood's torso before he spoke in a much softer tone,

"It will cost you your brand new soul, puppet." Alleandro was nodding frantically as he turned to see the other two, who were also nodding in fear and in time with him. "Very well puppet!" he laughed again adding, "... then a baby-maker it shall be!" His laughter came from a dark place, an evil place, and it terrified Alleandro.

The arms of the Sorcerer were high above his head as he held his head up to the roof of the Tower just looking, looking at what they could not see. He then knelt down and placed his hand on top of Alleandro's shaking head, whispering an incantation. With a swift movement, the evil wizard broke one of the branch pieces off of this magic wooden staff and thrust the small branch straight into Alleandro's crack! It stood straight outwards as Alleandro looked downwards at it and thought to himself, *'That's pretty fucking small!'*

"It is done, puppet ... your soul is mine!" The wizard regained his stance and went to turn quickly towards the burning fire when he saw and smelt Wolfie's steaming shit on the floor. His disgusting teeth gritted and ground as he just made a 'grrrr' sound, shaking his head. He turned and with his back towards them, summoned them away by pointing to the exit door,

"Now go ... and pick up that dog shit on the way out!" His order echoed and echoed, chilling them all to the bones. The door reopened and Wolfie scooped up his two lumps of fresh poo and they all scrambled down the spiral stairwell, running for their lives, straight out the Tower's doors and through the 'Darkened Woods', never looking back once.

All for Mandalina

“Are you sure this is alright?” Alleandro flicked his new wooden baby-maker making a *boing* sound. Stinky did his best to reassure him,

“Hey! You know what they say?” Alleandro didn’t but he was listening. “It’s not how big it is but what you do with it!” Stinky pointed to his own tiny baby-maker and stated, “This has seen a LOT of action, Puppet Boy! Never let me down and the bitches love it!” Alleandro just nodded and raised a small unconvincing smile as Stinky slapped him on the back, “Now let’s get you some gold.”

Alleandro sat in silence back in the alley while they were killing the nice old man whom they had seen carrying a bag of gold coins, leaving the market place. Wolfie had pretended to cry in the abandoned alley and when the kind old man approached to help the crying boy, Stinky ordered Alleandro to pounce and slit his throat with the blade. Yet Alleandro had just stood there dumb-founded, doing nothing. He had questioned whether this was right or wrong and Stinky shook his head in total disgust; it was no time to feel guilt!

“Fuck it, Puppet Boy!” Stinky lurched at their chosen victim slashing his throat with all his razor-sharp claws. The old man fell to a heap begging for mercy as Wolfie finished him off with his trademark tear of what little Stinky had already left of a throat. Alleandro watched the old man gurgle his way to death (as the gypsies), choking on his warm crimson nectar while his teary kind eyes fixed on Alleandro pleading, ‘*Why?*’

Stinky threw the bloodied bag of gold coins to Alleandro as he angrily spoke,

“She’d better be worth it? She’d just better be fuckin’ worth it!” Alleandro caught the bag with Stinky’s paw print embodied in blood upon it and nodded with his eyes down, thinking of her face and not of the old man’s ... and then he smiled; he could live with this!

*

Mandalina's mistake

'Ye Ole Ale House' was as busy as the night before when the companions busted through the swinging doors. Smoke filled their lungs instantly, as the sweet smell of the magic brown liquid engulfed them. Alleandro looked around the bar and it was as if the previous night had replayed itself, it was all the same, the same faces, same going-ons. But he could not see her anywhere and then, cutting through the volume of speech, he heard her sweet-sounding voice in a soft song. She was next to the piano and he glanced down at his baby-maker and the bag of gold in his hand; it was time!

Mandalina was singing a drinking song while the midget played the sing-along tune on his piano as the monkey danced out of time. Alleandro was mesmerized by her voice and his heart ached to be with her. Stinky pushed him her way and Alleandro stood directly in front of her speechless and wide-eyed, while the other two went off to the bar. Mandalina broke her song before tilting her head so her only good eye could get a better look at this strange little puppet. Alleandro was nervous and slowly pointed her gaze to his brand spanking new baby-maker.

"I have gold Miss and I ... I would like to buy some baby-making time with you." And he could hear the cheers from his two friends supporting his bravery from the bar, as he turned to them to see the four thumbs up approval, smoke sticks in their mouths. Alleandro returned his awkwardness to Mandalina and jingled his bag of gold in front of her. Her hand instantly covered her mouth as she stepped backward and spoke in a disgusted tone,

"Little puppet boy ... sorry, I don't do boys ... or puppets!"

"But I have a brand new baby-maker ... and it's ready for some action ... baby!" Alleandro grabbed it tightly bending it upward toward her, and then to his horror, the baby-maker stick snapped off at his trunk! He felt his black face-bark turn into a glowing red one. Mandalina fell to the ground in hysterical laughter.

"Oh my Lord ... that is the funniest thing I've ever seen ... you broke your tiny stick willie, aha haha!" Alleandro's anger raised like an erupting volcano and it took over his whole wooden body as he picked up his broken body part,

"That's not a stick willie ... that's my baby-maker!" He was shaking it firmly in her face but she just rolled around laughing, as the midget did as well, while the monkey jumped up and down. Laughter was filling the room as those whose attention had overheard the weird puppet's request (except Stinky and Wolfie of course) were in fits. Alleandro tried desperately to replace it in his crack but it kept falling out, only to make Mandalina laugh even louder. He kept thrusting it in his crack as he angered but the stick refused and kept dropping to the floor ... and then it snapped! But it wasn't the stick that did.

For what happened next would even shock the ever-so-worldly Stinky. Alleandro lunged at Mandalina, ramming the broken baby-maker into her good eye socket, deep and hard, while the monkey squealed and the midget fell off the piano stool. Mandalina screamed as her only good eye was blinded by the blood and she could not see her tiny attacker, only feel his raging anger. Alleandro was on top of her as she tried her best to blindly push him off. He reeled his blade from within its ribbon belt and stabbed her in her heart, again and again, and again! Alleandro was stabbing her in a feverish frenzy. She had broken his place where his heart should be and now he would break hers! They both rolled around on the ground as her squirting blood blinded his vision. Anger had erupted alright, shooting its lava and covering, disintegrating, and melting anything in its destructive path. It consumed him to blindly stab her and it was still here so he stabbed her continuously until the burning fire would recede.

Stinky turned and looked around the bar and it was filled with dead silence as every punter's attention was glued on Mandalina's murderer and he whispered to Wolfie,

"Oh fuck ... we gotta get out of here, man!" Stinky grabbed Wolfie by the collar and backed off slowly to the front doors ... then they heard it.

"Grab him, he's a murdered Mandalina! Grab his fucking asshole friends too!" The lynch mob all stood up simultaneously drawing their respective weapons - spears, lances, swords, axes, and bludgeoners. Stinky wondered where they all had come from. The spokesmen screamed his order again,

"Grab the wolf boy, grab the cat ... and grab that fucking puppet!"

Stinky and Wolfie were out of there, running as fast as they could as the mob rushed towards the murder scene. Reality reverted Alleandro's anger to its simmering core and replaced it with his new-found fear, as he threw himself through a nearby closed window behind the piano to escape the clutches, landing in a ball of dust and shattered glass.

The angry drinkers were yelling and screaming while exiting 'Ye Ole Ale House' and they wanted blood! Alleandro gathered himself enough to run as fast as his little wooden legs could possibly go. He could see the other two way up ahead and he was catching them quickly, (he had learned to run in time now and did his best to focus on his legs, not them) but the lynch mob was gaining ground; they were close behind!

"Wait up you fuckers ... wait!" He was pleading as he was running to his friends and he was so scared! What had he done? Mandalina, his beautiful Mandalina, and on top of all that, he had lost his new baby-maker!

*

Penance for a puppet

“Quick Puppet Boy ... here!” It was Stinky’s sweet-sounding scraggly cat voice as Wolfie reefed Alleandro into another abandoned laneway as they hid under empty water barrels. “Now stay fucking put and stay quiet! Don’t panic ... okay.” Stinky did the *sshhh* finger sign and they quietly retreated to their respective empty barrel. They heard the lynch-mob run past the alley and no one stopped at all.

It felt like they had been hiding for an hour but it was only minutes in actual time when silence was broken by Stinky’s whispering,

“We need to get out of here, we’ll hide out in the Darkened Woods ‘til all this shit dies down, then get the fuck out of - The Kingdom.” The cat hesitated, “Listen!” They waited for further instructions as they listened to complete silence. Stinky whispered, “I think it’s clear.”

But curiosity did kill this cat as Stinky was a little too eager to test the safety of silence, by lifting up and moving his stationary barrel, just to get a look-see to check if the coast was clear. Unfortunately, the first image he would see was the shiny golden dancing reflections, from the two shiny armored soldier boots, standing motionless in front of his hiding place. Fear, was Stinky’s last emotion as one of the King’s soldiers ripped off his barrel leaving poor Stinky defenseless and shaking in his boots. It was the moat guard himself that just stood there glaring downwards in the glow of the burning street oil lamps, smirking at him. And with one deft blow, relieved Stinky of his tenth life and his head, decapitating it clean from his body. There was no sound from Stinky at all ... only one final disgusting smell.

Wolfie howled hauntingly for Stinky when he heard the swish of the guard’s sword and the bounce of Stinky’s head on the dirt so he decided to take his chance and make a run for it. But the werewolf child was met by the guard’s sword as well, straight through the back of his tiny brain with the blade poking out the other side, protruding through his right eye socket.

Alleandro was crying, crying hard as he understood that his only friends had met their fate, and the puppet now feared for his life. He was shaking with fear so much so he begged for forgiveness (a new emotion he pleaded for) from beneath his barrel,

“Don’t kill me, please ... I give up, please, I want to live, please!” The lynch mob had found their hiding place and now joined the guard screaming for revenge, all standing behind him as he loomed over the last unturned barrel. With no forgiveness, the moat guard lifted the barrel to unveil Mandalina’s killer. With fear freezing his actions, Alleandro just huddled into a ball and waited for the knife. The guard reached out, grabbed the puppet by the scruff of the neck, lifting him high as Alleandro cried. Alleandro was too scared to look at him or the mob, so he just kept his eyes closed. The guard turned and wavered his catch to the lynch mob as they all screamed their anger.

“Tear the puppet to pieces ... better still burn him ... burn the little shit!” The mob screamed and the rest chanted it over and over, demanding his death. They cheered in sickened agreement as the guard grappled Alleandro one-handed by the neck carrying him from the failed hiding place saying nothing, just shaking his head in disgust as if to say, ‘*I warned you silly puppet!*’ He placed his bloodied sword back in its sheath while swinging Alleandro around with his tightening grip beckoning his prize catch again to the mob, teasing them, and do his best to insight their revenge.

Alleandro was petrified, he’d felt fear before, but this was the fear he had felt in his bad dream - the chilling scream one! The armored guard turned Alleandro so they were eye to eye (Alleandro’s good eye) and grinned before saying two words,

“Goodbye ... Cunt!” He turned, faced the lynch mob that wanted, and demanded bloody curdling revenge! Unannounced, the moat guard took a bow to the angry crowd’s chanting, then thrust Alleandro high into the air before landing him into their path in a cloud of sprawling dust, now just a pile of broken wooden arms and legs.

Alleandro lifted his smashed body by his good arm was only to be knocked back to the ground by the angry blood-lusting villagers. They hit and beat him over and over until nearly all of his roughened bark from his body was splintered or gone, exposing his body’s new softer lighter brown bark. His arms and legs were snapped and hanging, he could not move them and the new bark underneath was raw and way more sensitive and painful - and it was weeping sap, weeping a red sap. Alleandro could taste the sap in his mouth and the taste was blood, warm blood, he was bleeding, for it was a boy’s blood. A boy’s blood? But he was a puppet! And he let out a heart-rendering cry as he accepted he had been a real boy after all, like a butterfly from a caterpillar trapped inside a cocoon waiting for his time to break out into a beautiful world and his subconscious cruelly spoke to him, as this was the true wish he had always suppressed.

He had protected his face as best as he could from the insufferable pain of the beating and only half of the roughened bark of his face remained. They had beaten off most of his hardened protective coating from his old body only to torture his new soft delicate one and it pained like never before until the black-out took the excruciating pain away!

Alleandro awoke in the grinning moon’s face lighting the night to agonizing grogginess, realizing he was tied to an upright pole. The smoke and smell of the burning logs and twigs surrounding his feet filled his crushed lungs; they were burning him alive! He could see the angry faces of – ‘The Kingdom’s’ villagers, chanting and cheering for his forthcoming death. He saw the beautiful blonde princess in the background holding the hand of her father - The King, watching but not smiling ... but where was his father, he needed his father, so he made one more dying wish,

“Save me, Father, please save me.” And soothing wetness rolled down the throbbing exposed side of the puppet boy’s bruised and swollen face, running water from his half-closed bloodied eye and they were tears, real tears of sadness and he felt himself crying for the first and last time.

The boy wept openly as the flames started to engulf his smooth brown flesh and it hurt as the bubbles burst upon his frail body. Alleandro remembered all the emotions he had learned in his short life. He did his best to think of only the good ones, the fun times with his only friends, and their laughter. He did his best to think of his father – the maker. Had he answered the burning questions of his mind? For now, he realized the answers were always there in front of him, and he knew them all along. The maker was his father, his real father and that was his home with him! But he had refused to accept the truth just as his own disgusting face. He had walked away from – home, like the foolish child he was, never believing he was good enough to be loved! Yet, none of this mattered anymore.

The flames rose higher as the agony engulfed Alleandro as he cried for forgiveness, he cried for murdering Mandalina, the gypsies, the old man, and he cried for himself, but mostly for wasting this beautiful gift of life, he had been blessed with.

The last thing to enter his mind's dimming light wasn't the Sorcerer's leering face to collect his wasted soul but to feel the warmth of his father's gentle touch, such gentle caring hands, lovingly creating him from a simple piece of blackwood and with these final thoughts the pain was gone and it was over ... all over.

*

Epilogue part 1 - The truth

Ruffling through the ashes the puppet maker finds what is left of Alleandro's charred wooden bark face and his unique looking eye. It was him; he knew now! He strokes what is left of the rough protruding bark of his eldest and knows it is the most beautiful face he has ever made. He had heard from the gypsies, the story of a living puppet boy with a cat and a wolf child seen heading towards 'The Kingdom' and he knew it would be his missing son.

The puppet maker was so excited to introduce Alleandro to his new baby brother that magical night they both were born to him ... but he was gone ... and only his strings remained. The puppet maker held faith that his son Alleandro would find his path home and one day return but the stories had told him differently; his son had lost his way! He had heard the gypsy woman tell of all the evil that surrounded this cat and his wolf child friend and he knew that they had misled Alleandro's path to the wrong side, the dark side and so this journey was to find his son, bring him home and show him love and understanding and show him - forgiveness.

*

Epilogue part 2 - The secret

The puppet maker holds his son's face to his chest and wails loudly. If only he had got to Alleandro sooner, to make him understand that his only wish was for a family, not just a lone son, but a real family – two sons! Now he must wear the burden of pain and loss and mourn his eldest.

Alleandro was the first puppet the maker had ever made and kept - the special one! Oh, he made many after Alleandro but none compared. And the laughter he brought to the children of 'The Kingdom' was the only true reason he decided to make him a brother, so Alleandro would never be a lonely child, lost and alone, as he had been for far too long. But he had failed Alleandro ... and he was sorry.

The road to take his son home was long and tiring for the puppet maker, he was weary and his tears had cried achingly dry. He placed his heart alongside Alleandro's charred face and buried them together amongst regret and sadness, at the bottom of a similar Blackwood tree, deep in the magic forest where the puppet's wood had originally come from.

Now his world must center around his new son's well-being and he had to protect his youngest from all this darkness, emptiness, and heartache he was feeling. So he swore to the heavens as he crossed his heart never to tell him the story and the loss of his only brother - Alleandro.

This story was originally written for his Jonny's first anthology (unpublished) - 'Broken' and a revised version now appears in his - 'Darkness' series

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Dead Inside

I am so dead inside
All I see dried up and died

I am so dead inside
All this death by my side

Once had what I called love
Sent to me from up above
Then the Devil took it away
Replaced it with my apathy

Big bad world tests the faith
Hold on to all your plates
Blessed with a glimpse of hope
Look ahead and see your fate

I am so dead inside
All I see dried up and died

I am so dead inside
All this death by my side

Once I had what I call all
Nothing's left just this fool
If it's just lessons in life
Bolt the doors on all that's right

I am so dead inside
All this death by my side

See me smile know it's fake
Can I live life as a snake?

Find me, help me, save me
I'm not a bad person
I'm not a bad person
I'm not a bad person
I'm not a bad person
I'm not a bad person

The Dead Inside

Prologue - Happy Birthday

“Well Mum, I made it to 18! Happy Birthday to me.” But Mum never answered, how could she? She was dead! So I ate my chocolate bar and swigged the straight scotch next to her rotting skeleton as she lay in her queen-sized bed next to Dad’s body. I had plans for my birthday and I would take a trip to the mall and pick myself a nice present. I was thinking of a new pair of jeans and matching bag, that would be nice or what about one of those makeup kits, then come home, decorate with streamers and then get drunk as a skunk by myself at my party for one. I sat and talked to my parents, telling them of my excitement about my 18th party. I knew Mum would’ve loved to see me in my new clothes, partying with Cassie and my friends, celebrating my womanhood but there was no point in dwelling about it. I had got over that a long time ago.

*

The lucky one

I was 11 nearly 12 when it happened, and what happened, I still have no idea but only knowing I awoke to a new day of death. Everyone was dead, and I mean everyone, even my pet hamster - Tiffy. You can well imagine the distress of that initial day, finding my family not waking with me. I thought they were simply sleeping in but they weren't! I waited until 8:30 and believed they had just slept in enough, being a beautiful day outside.

I was alerted when I turned on the TV to watch music video clips but the screen was just snow! After switching channels and still no reception, I turned it off and would ask Dad to fix it later, but he couldn't, he was dead too!

I finally gave in at 9:00 and went to check on them with a fresh cup of tea each that I'd made to surprise them (along with the two slices of buttered toast). Mum's opened mouth and the fear in her dead eyes made me drop the tray, and I burnt my foot with the scalding liquid. I ran and shook her for her to wake but she was dead, dead as a doorpost, and Dad was as dead as she was. I stood there frozen looking at them wondering what had happened, before my senses returned and I ran downstairs and would get help from Mr. Heckles next-door. I was banging hard on his front door when I saw him, lying there in his rose garden, with his mouth open like Mum's. It was then I looked around and no one was on the streets. And I mean no one! I saw a car crashed into a lamp post and a body was slumped over the steering wheel so I ran as fast as I could to see if they were alright, but they weren't! The family of four were all dead. I fell to my knees as the fear filled my tiny body, consuming my questions of why. I then saw Butch (my friend Cassie's dog) dead in the front yard. My mouth was dry as I was starting to believe she was dead too!

I ran to get help away from my street but the further I ran, the more the dead accumulated. Cars were everywhere, none moving, some crashed, and some simply parked. I couldn't find anyone to help me; they were all lifeless and gasping for something! I rounded the block to see 'Johnson's Mall' and there were a lot of cars parked in the car park so I kept running to the shopping center. I pushed the doors open and I could hear the music they always played as the place was lit up, so I held onto the thought, I wasn't alone. Bodies were lying everywhere. I froze and looked and screamed out for help as it echoed in the voiceless chamber of death. I am embarrassed to say, I wet myself when the power cut off and everything went silent and darkened; I couldn't help it! I was frightened then for whatever had killed them, had killed them all and at the exact same moment in time. I sat in my wet panties and skirt at the water fountain and splashed my face, staring at the dead. I was questioning then, why me? What had I done to be saved and not them as Mum and Dad? My mouth was dry and I needed a drink so I went to the Supermarket and took bottled water from the now-dead fridge. I've never stolen anything in my life, ever before, but I accepted that no longer mattered.

I walked home crying and not understanding any of this insanity. I showered and changed my clothes as the power flickered back on before being cut off completely. I knew this because I tried to turn the TV back on to its snow picture, just in case an emergency broadcast would be televised but there was no electricity. So here I was all alone in a powerless house with a dead family and no idea of what to do next. I made myself a peanut butter sandwich and still can't believe I was even hungry, but I was. I sat on the front steps pondering for hours. Darkness

came and then I could see my friend Cassie's house was one of a few that had solar panels on its roof so it was lit up in one room, hers! It took me a good hour to brave up but I had to, there was no choice left other than sitting here in my misery.

I knocked knowing it was pointless before I smashed the door's glass panel and let myself in. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Weston were dead beneath the breakfast bar in the dark (I found Dad's torch in the garage). Cassie wasn't here though. I followed the glow from upstairs and it was from Cassie's room, not even thinking I could've turned all the lights! I cried again as I found her slumped at her writing desk, where she was writing in her diary. I lifted her body to the floor but she was too heavy for me so she virtually fell there. My friend's face was the same as the rest as if oxygen had been stolen and she was gasping like a dead fish out of water. I dragged her body to her parent's room and shut the door. I returned to her lit room and laid on her bed and thought of how many times we had shared this single bed on sleep-overs; it made me smile for the first time today! I was exhausted but the silence clouded my ears and my body struggled to sleep. Mind games as well, and the worst one was that maybe I was destined to die just like them tonight, never awakening ever again.

*

Move on Sister

I did wake, refreshed, and I accepted it was no dream; I was alone! After going home, I made myself some breakfast cereal but the fridge had been off for nearly a day and then I realized, I would never taste fresh milk after today. I made my way back to the mall just for the hope some poor soul was just like me, lost and alone. I waited for hours but nothing. So I got my head together and loaded a shopping trolley with what I believed would help me survive, canned food, bottled water, and fresh fruit. The dead were already stinking and I cringed as I pushed my trolley down the aisles, passing them all, even moving some of the bodies to get through but I had no choice to do so. I stopped at the toy section and stared at the doll, so I placed that in as well. I pushed the trolley home and carried in the loaded shopping bags and filled our pantry and unboxed my new doll.

Loneliness was starting to take a hold of me, not having anyone to talk to, except my doll, I named – Betty, copped all my crazy rantings because solar kicking in helped me escape the darkness of the night and she never complained once! I was soon living at home and sleeping and spending nights in Cassie's room. I had to drag her parent's bodies outside to the backyard, where the flies found them straight away! Oh yeh, no cats, dogs, birds but the insects survived as I had and I laughed as Mum always had called me a pest, and here we all were together!

The wind was the only noise you could hear and was driving me insane so I went back to the mall, found the electrical shop and claimed a new mobile phone and as many batteries as I could find. I scratched my head then, at how I was supposed to get songs onto them. I took them home and then went from house to house, searching for any phones or any solar-powered items I could find. It was still hard to see all the faces I'd said hello to daily, rotting away with flies and maggots crawling all over them. It made me realize I had to protect Mum and Dad from these pesky critters.

I had found an iPhone full of songs so at least now I had music to keep me company. I had to spray Mum and Dad with surface spray to kill the bugs that had already found them. I covered their bodies with clear plastic and only ever removed the sheet when I wanted to visit.

The phone batteries never lasted long and I was lucky to find a solar charger for them. I spent most days pottering around with earplug headphones in, blasting out my now dead heroes, such as Katy, Ariana, and Taylor. The smell of the dead at the mall was making me dry-retch now so something had to be done. I found the hardware store and found a flatbed trolley and some straps, that at first were hard to master, but I'm a quick learner. I decided the alcohol shop could wait until I would turn 18 before I venture in (oh, how I was wrong).

It took me months to complete the task, moving a few bodies a day, working aisle to aisle, shop to shop. I then mopped the shops out that I frequented the most and yet the smell of mass death took a long time to pass, years actually! But I was freed from looking at the mass grave it previously was. I started to enjoy being in the mall now, shopping for items that I could never afford (or my parents). My wardrobe was amazing and rarely wore the same outfit twice in a month if at all.

As the years passed, I realized I'd never been sick, not a single cold, not a fever, nothing, until the cramps hit my stomach and back, I then knew I was becoming a woman at 15! Lucky for me Cassie got hers early so she told me all about them and my mouth looked like their dead ones when she told me you had to shove that up there! Holding the tampon by its mouse's tail, I cringed. I was so lucky I hit Mum up back then as I was freaked out by Cassie's words, so she explained 'the curse' to me and all about our female anatomy and how different we were to males and their testosterone. I complained of how easy they got it just putting up with the extra dangly bits down there. I was glad to wait ... but here it finally was. It made me sad as I laid on Cassie's bed, I don't know why but I was extra emotional and remembered Mum telling me this side effect, so I cried myself to sleep listening to my 'sad' playlist I had made.

How does one survive alone and for this many years, yet I had. But I had survived and life moves in only one direction – toward death.

*

Bored to death

I felt I was a woman at 16, no longer a scared little girl and I was fucking bored out of my fucking brains! I craved for new tunes, new books, and a new life. I decided I needed a holiday, anywhere away from this limbo. So I loaded up my backpack with water bottles, supplies, and tools, turned up my iPod (loaded with my music), and rode off on my brand new racing bike, earbuds blaring.

I rode for 5 hours straight when I reached the town of 'Bentley', it was deserted except for the now skeletal remains of the dead (including animals). I found a hotel and the keys so I went to claim room 13 (lucky for me) for the night. I cleaned it and changed the linen to be fresh and emptied the dead fridge of its rotten milk. I was happy the heating system was gas so I had a hot shower and washed my now bum-length straight dark hair. Darkness came and my LED lantern lit up the room, while I ate my can of beans and meatballs, cold. I cracked the scotch bottle and swigged enough until my loneliness disappeared amongst the dizziness.

I woke to the sun blinding through so I found a fresh apple (from Cassie's Dad's tree) and munched on it with two headache pills and lemonade for the headache. I found a pamphlet for the local area and there was fuck all around here so I simply left and rode for another 6 or so hours before I hit 'Western Rivers'. I stopped on a deserted bridge and checked out the glorious view of the river (which I assumed was Western River). It was magnificent and I had forgotten the beauty of Mother Nature working in her glory; she lived! Then I saw it ... a bird! One solitary bird flew overhead screeching and I believe it was a parrot! I wasn't the last living creature on Earth, there was more life out there!

I rode around for the next week staying wherever I wanted and doing what I pleased, but all I wanted was to see the bird again, but I never!

After a month I decided to return home to Mum and Dad and my solace. The trip was good; I was refreshed!

Life returned to normal boredom so I started drinking more and more. At first, it was only at night to help me sleep, then it was breakfast! I was becoming an alcoholic but I never really gave a fuck, why should I? I was destined to die here alone so it made no matter what I did or became.

So there I was drunk as a skunk and 18-years-old, celebrating with Mum and Dad's skin-covered skeletons, drinking and dancing myself to oblivion ... when I saw the lights.

*

Belong

I ran outside and the lights were blinding, as the wind was blowing a gale, and leaves were circling in a whirlwind. The white light engulfed our house and as my heart raced I looked up to see that it was true; I was not alone! The ship simply hovered over the house, silent, and then with a bang the wind stopped and the light turned off, leaving me in total blackness. I squinted and rubbed my eyes still looking upward to see the immense size and outline of the UFO; it was as big as this street! The next minute a hollow of light beamed downwards and it was the colors of the rainbow and looked 3D to me. Why wasn't I scared? But I wasn't, I'm telling you, I wasn't! The beam just pulsated and I walked into it praying they would take me anywhere with them, anywhere where I was not alone. And within a moment they were gone and I awoke around midday in the middle of the street, sunburnt!

I was physically drained as I crawled back inside and then sat in the shower with the cold water pouring over me as I was still fully dressed. I regained some energy after 30 minutes of soaking. After rubbing my sunburnt skin with fresh aloe vera from the garden (Mum's old trick), I made my way outside with my bottle of scotch to finish yesterday's celebrations. I went to take a swig and my body refused! My mouth rejected the taste, I tried again but the taste was like dirt so I placed the bottle down and looked into the stars wondering just what they had done to me?

I waited out there every night for months on end, waiting for their return to come back to claim me, but they never did.

*

Decision or death

Three more years passed and my 21st was fast approaching and I had made my decision; I was leaving! I had nothing but to dwell on but the days and nights of this endless groove. But what it did give me, was a desire to live, not death, and was the chosen direction I was to head toward.

I finally buried Mum and Dad in the backyard under Dad's favorite tree and said a little prayer for them, better late than never! I had buried Cassie's remains yesterday.

I stood outside our house and reflected at my growing up in there for half my life alone. But there would be no tears today, only memories, good and bad! And they were family memories ... and totally belonged to me.

*

Epilogue – The end of the road

It is Christmas day tomorrow (well I believe it is) and again I spend it alone as I travel across this beautiful country of this beautiful planet, that God gave us to inhabit. As I ride from town to town, city to city, I visit all the wonders that mankind has left behind. Oh, nothing much works anymore, with rust and corrosion ceasing most of man's creations, as Mother Nature slowly reclaims the Earth piece by piece, as she had at the very beginning. But beauty has been left behind, imprinted forever by humanity such as art, movies, music, and libraries. It is the history of our time here as her final caretakers so I visit them all and will continue to do so until I literally cannot ride.

I still wait patiently for the visitors to return and find me, but I take solace in knowing, they are watching me closely.

So as I sit here on my Christmas Eve, with my diary and pen, I open my tin of peaches and celebrate this blessing under the sparkling stars, that I was given solely and accept it was given to me because, I am, and always will be – a good person!

This story was specially written for Jonny's opening story to his 'Darkness' series which is currently available in eBook form and can be purchased through most good eBook retailers

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Seasons

Seasons come, seasons go

Time don't stop, I'm telling you so

Sunshine in, sunshine out

Blinding sun, night blacks doubt

Love's comes in, out it goes

Broken heart, part of the show

Daytime in, daytime out

Life's a spin, what's it all about?

Tell me please that this isn't true

All this Hell you've put me through

As all my love is all I have

Take that away, makes me mad

Heartache comes, heartache goes

Love's a pain, when it comes to you

Better to win or better to lose?

All this hurt, I send back to you

Tell me please that this isn't true

All this Hell you've put me through

As all my love is all I have

Take that away, leaves me sad

Don't go - don't go - don't go ... please don't go!

The Miracle of Millie

Introduction

It all started when I was in grade 6 at Queenstown Primary at the beginning of 2006. I was nominated as one of the big brother's to the new grade oners, and this is where I met Millie. She had the whitest sun-bleached hair with the biggest and brightest baby blues that were simply unforgettable. Her dimples accentuated her friendly smile with her one front tooth missing. Millie was talkative and asked lots of questions about me ... it was obvious we liked each other and my big brother job was too easy!

Within weeks we were inseparable and she was a joy to talk to with her inquisitive mind and caring nature for such a very young and innocent child. I was never one to mingle in the boy zone area, as I was a bit of a loner yet, so was Millie; we connected! She would always find me in breaks, before me her. I never once missed collecting her at the bus stop from her arrivals and departures, as well as our then ritual lunchtimes together. I know now it was my duty to look after her and I was a strident taskmaster (still to this day) especially when it comes to set tasks for myself. But this one was pure joy.

There was a magic about Millie that I couldn't explain, she just had something special and you were affected by it but only if she wanted it to. She never played with the other girls in her class (like most do) even though she liked them all. She was her own soul and when she smiled at you, you smiled back. It was uncanny, she had some sort of magic inside and I believed in her magic! It worked on all, teachers, parents, and kids.

Millie talked a lot but in questions more than statements, and now as a man I remember her always doing this. She knew all about me and I knew fuck all about her. Now I realize it was all a part of it – the BIGGER picture!

The first time it happened I didn't comprehend that it just had, but it did!

Millie and I were sitting under G block eating our bananas and yogurts when a fight broke out between two grade 7 boys – Jimmy Bolden and Wes Trent. Jimmy was the school bully and an oversized kid who was destined to be in jail by the time he was 25, a bit of an unpredictable bully when I think back. One day he was quiet as a mouse and I remember seeing him sitting alone supporting a black eye. At first, my joy was exuberant to see him suffering, before my feelings progressively started to change toward him as that black eye had come from home; he was being flogged by someone! The next week he was his usual show-off boisterous self, stealing lunches from other kids and my sympathy was soon forgotten.

We heard the commotion and the crowd of onlookers were gathering at a rapid pace. I looked around and not a single teacher was in sight. Where the fuck was the lunchtime patrol to stop this shit? Millie stood to attention and her half-eaten banana returned to her Power Puff Girls lunchbox. Her head turned to me and her face was emotionless, with no dimples, no smile but her pupils were jet black not blue. Millie reached out for my hand and to follow, so I did as she wished with the second half of my banana in my mouth not to be wasted. I tried to ask but too much banana quelled my voice (or any understandable vocabulary) and I nearly choked. She was dragging me behind her or more like pulling me towards the gathering and pushed her way through to see the fight. I was shocked and in disbelief that she would even want to watch this but she did.

Jimmy equipped with his adrenalin rushes was pulverizing poor Wes. The crowd of kids was chanting the usual *'Fight! Fight!'* in unison to egg them on ... or more like Jimmy. It was the blood and tears that were my concern, pouring from Wes's nose and straight onto his white school shirt and his red eyes dripped like leaking taps. Jimmy's hands were covered with Wes' blood and he kept turning to the kids and raising his fists demanding glory, before turning his attention back to poor Wes, and then he'd smash him one more time. I looked down at Millie and she was looking straight ahead at them and I tried to pull her back and away from witnessing her first disturbing fight. I was appalled and had enough but no matter how hard I tried, she could not be moved and I mean literally ... she had the strength of a man!

Millie's hand turned red hot and I let go; it felt like it was on fire! I was about to demand her to walk away when it happened. Out of nowhere a pelican (yes, a fucking pelican) swooped down and attacked Jimmy as Wes cowered to the ground in submission. The kids were all screaming now and breaking the circle. I was aghast and frozen stiff watching this frantic pelican scratch and bite Jimmy to the ground. The pelican was in a frenzy and its sheer size was too much for Jimmy to handle. Feathers and Jimmy's screams filled the air. I glanced at Wes who was now watching Jimmy get his comeuppance and was in a state of shock, just like me as all. Over half the kids had exited, fleeing to safety and I could hear Mr. Wilson screaming his lungs out from a distance at what was going on. He was running over to us ... and just like that, the pelican flew off! Jimmy lay there with his scratched-up face and torn shirt and he was now a crying bloodied mess ... just like Wes. Millie's hand that I was previously holding had cooled, so I grabbed it and she turned her head and looked up at me. Her dimples, blue eyes, and her infectious smile had returned before she spoke,

"Did you see the pelican, Joel?" Millie took the lead and we ventured back to our lunch boxes whilst Mr. Wilson took care of the aftermath, demanding explanations from both boys. My Millie finished her half-eaten banana so I asked,

“Are you okay Millie?” Millie nodded with her grin ear to ear,

“Did you see the pelican? An actual pelican ... here at our school!” Millie’s eyes were huge and excited.

Well, Jimmy got expelled for breaking Wes’s nose. So this was a biggie but I was glad he was gone for a while at least ... he was - Trouble with a capital T!

I never thought much more of the weirdness of that day, well not until a lot later, about 5 years to be truthful, and we’ll get to that soon. But my life journey was about to be thrown into disarray.

Millie was my best friend! We were an unlikely match an 11-year-old boy and a 5-year-old girl, but we just clicked ... it is true to say, I loved her like a little sister. I was an only child as she, so we had each other and I was her BIG brother. But all good things come to an end and it was on her instruction or more like - demand.

Millie sat me down just before the end of term 3. Her face looked serious, as we sat together under C block awaiting the first bell. School hadn’t started for the day, yet I saw worry upon her tiny face as she stared into my soul, looking me in the eye, face to face. Once again her dimples had been disappeared, with her blues replaced by those haunting black soulless eyes.

“Joel,” Millie said, “I have never asked you to do anything, have I?” I shook my head in silence as she continued, “So you must do this for me, please.” I raised my eyebrows and felt them virtually touch in the middle questioning, ‘*Why?*’

“Joel, now listen and promise, tomorrow something bad is going to happen.” Her face was even stonier, so I listened. “I need you to be sick tomorrow ... do you understand that you must stay home!” Millie’s dark stare was hypnotizing and it was as if I had no choice; I would stay home!

After school, I stepped Millie’s tiny legs up to the bottom step of the school bus and she turned and glared at me and repeated, “Promise me.” So I complied,

“I promise!”

That was the last time I ever saw my little Millie for the very next day she was shot dead by none other than Jimmy Bolden, that had decided my ‘Go to jail and do NOT pass Go’ and all

by my age 25 prediction, wasn't going to be his life journey after all. Jimmy stole his dad's semi-automatic pistol after one too many beatings, came to school with nothing but vengeance on his mind. While I was sick in bed with pretend stomach cramps, a full bottle of Mylanta, and an empty bucket ... the bullets were flying. The even sadder thing for me was, only Millie was shot dead by Jimmy (yes, his only victim, not that I wanted anyone else to be), no one else!

They told me later that he was randomly shooting to kill, venturing from classroom to classroom firing away. Teachers did their best to hide and protect all the terrified students as Jimmy continued on his shooting rampage. He wasn't laughing insanely but all in silence, except for his bullet after bullet spray. It was then I heard that out of nowhere my Millie appeared and stood directly in front of him and he halted as she asked him,

"Stop, Jimmy please stop, you don't want to kill anyone, do you?" I heard later from many that were in hiding, her exact words, "Put the gun down Jimmy ... save yourself, before it's ..." Jimmy then smirked, raised the pistol and said calmly and quietly,

"Pelican girl ... it was you, wasn't it?" Jimmy shot Millie straight through the heart; she had no chance of survival! Yet, as my little Millie took her final blood-filled breath, they say Jimmy instantly fell to his knees in remorse, begging forgiveness, begging the Lord Almighty to forgive and save him, before turning the pistol on himself ... and that was that; It was all over!

How could a mere kid ever forget a conversation like this with his father and the enormity of it all? I sat there on the end of my bed as Dad explained the truth in what he had been told, as my Mum just held me tight as humanly possible, as her tears flowed freely too. I had used the sick bucket now, and then I just cried and cried, and cried! My Millie was gone ... but why? My beautiful Millie, who was my little sister and had told me to stay home as she had the foresight and knew this was all going down. And she had protected me from this terrifying day and event! Of course, I questioned if she did know at all, especially her own death and if so, then why did she have to die? It was all so senseless! She could've avoided it if she truly knew. So I accepted she was like a cat or a dog with a special gift of intuition and that was simply it.

But Millie loved me, and I, her and we had both known that this, was God's honest truth.

*

To say I was an awkward 16-year-old at the beginning of Senior, was an understatement! My face was covered in bursting pimples and not complemented by a gangly body that had not yet proportioned itself. I was a good student, not a great one, just your above average one and as I said before, I had always set myself tasks to achieve, so I had. I aimed to please my parents with good enough grades to get me through to Uni. As with all kids, I was right into video games and DVDs (especially anything Star Wars ... games, movies, and figurines); I was a pimple-faced nerd!

I was home alone on a Sunday when Dad took Mum out to see Gran so I harnessed the opportunity to stay home alone (and out of this pouring rain) and play games on Dad's new big 42-inch television. It was this very day that my life journey took a right turn, once again!

After 4 hours of games my skinny stomach was yelling at me to put something edible in there, so I stopped the games and put on the tele to watch cartoons while I ate. I got up went to the pantry cupboard found a packet of salt 'n' vinegar crisps, then straight to the fridge, rummaged through to find two beer sticks, a few left-over slices of Devon, some cheese cubes, and a can of Coke ... aaah, a meal fit for a king! I carried my plate of yumminess back to the lounge room, sat on the couch (with my legs crossed, plate resting in the folds of the knees), and began watching the remainder of the Ren and Stimpy that was playing on cable. I'd seen that rerun episode too many times, so I flicked through the channels as my entrée of crisps was being devoured. I saw an old western on channel 11 and as soon as I saw a bar fight was about to happen, I stopped clicking and shoved a slice of Devon in my gob.

I reflect back constantly and wonder how this random nothing day could turn out to be so significant? I still don't know how it all works but, destiny is destiny!

A breaking news story interrupted the unknown western and the reporter was telling us about the rising floods in nearby 'Mitchelton'. I sat up straight as Mum and Dad had to drive through 'Mitchelton' to get to Gran in 'Westlake'. Video footage played as the lady reporter spoke of fallen trees and flooded waters everywhere. My heart raced as I thought of Mum and Dad but that was not it! I listened intently as I watched with my now-to-be-devoured beer stick in one hand and the Coke in the other, and I was in suspended animation.

The reporter – *“Not all bad news though, as two little girls were found hanging onto a tree ... in what we could only guess was a terrifying ordeal!”*

I watched as someone's crappy video footage showed two little girls clinging to a submerged tree in a strong flowing current from the overflowed drainage system. They were being rescued as they screamed for their lives, clinging together ... and one was ... Millie!

I was frozen for a good second or 2 until I raced to the TV and looked closer. It was but it wasn't! I don't know how to explain it, but it was Millie I was sure ... just with black hair and no missing teeth! She was crying as she hugged her rescuer, I could see closer that she was somehow different but those dimples and her eyes were definitely blue. The update report

finished and I paced the house, questioning whether I was insane or not? Millie died 5 years ago ... yes, I was insane! I waited with bated breath for the next update that first told us all that the floods were finally receding, just as Mum and Dad walked in.

“Gran says hi,” Dad yelled as he took off his raincoat as he continued to yell at me, “... and you’re lucky you stayed home ... the weather’s shit out there!” But I never really heard him as the blonde reporter – Jackie Raymond told us that both rescued girls were doing fine, in hospital, and were with their parents’ care. She then went on about the mystery of how the young girls had gotten there in the first place. They replayed the video footage so I dragged a very wet Mum to watch with me as I pointed and stated what I already knew,

“Millie ... it’s Millie!” Mum squeezed her eyes to get a better look then stood back up straight and just hugged me so now I was wet too!

“Oh, Honey, we both know you miss her ... we understand but ...” I interrupted,

“Mum, it is Millie ... with black hair!” Then just as mothers do, she pointed out the obvious!

“Joel ... how old would Millie be today?” And it hit me like a ton of bricks! Millie would be 10 and that little look-a-like was only 5. I admitted defeat as Dad walked in with a beer asking what the commotion was all about, so Mum told him and I got embarrassed.

I resumed eating my left-over Devon and the final cheese cubes and as the bar fight finished what seemed like an hour ago. I watched Cowboy John scull a glass of Texas’s finest shit whiskey, as he was arrested by the town’s sheriff.

Yet, the more I watched the report, the more I never accepted Mum’s law of reality ... as deep down I knew she was wrong!

*

Term 2 had begun and I was back at school when I decided that my curiosity cat need to be silenced, so I was going to 'Mitchelton'. So that day I never paid any attention to Mr. Drowser's boring evolution theories, instead of planning my very first day of 'wagging it' or 'truancy' if you must be so particular.

I awoke early and packed my backpack with a few essentials like my hoodie and sneakers, some hidden in the drawer munchies - chips, cheese dips, crackers, and two cans of Coke. I could've just pulled a sickie and stayed home but I'd thought about the possibility of it being a very long day and so I had already got Mum's permission to go straight to Peter Ridgeway's house to study (then play games) or so she believed.

I got dressed in my formal uniform (tie and hat which I hated as everyone), went downstairs, sat at the breakfast bar, and ate my 'Just like a chocolate milkshake' breakfast cereal. My heart was beating like a bass drum as Mum and Dad flustered around as usual. Dad kissed Mum and then gave me the middle finger, as I shook my head and chuckled as he left.

I left for school and made my way straight to Queenstown station and bought a return ticket to Mitchelton. As it was still early, I had no time to change clothes so I just pulled my hoodie over my shirt (with tie removed), and carefully placed my overly expensive hat in my backpack. My mouth was already dry so I cracked a Coke on the platform and downed it! Err, not such a great move with a belly full of Coco-pops and milk ... I felt quite ill!

By the time the train reached Mitchelton Station, my stomach had recovered and the queasiness was all over. I pulled out my map of Mitchelton and studied my circled areas. I looked around as I'd never been here before and my sense of bearings was underdeveloped and useless. I saw a bus stop across the road so ran across and read the sign which also had a map and it was going straight to - 'Mitchelton Primary', my first school of three choices.

I boarded the bus as if I was an outlaw in a western – Cowboy Joel, feeling eyes tear holes into my soul, yet in fact, no one gave a rat's arse! Paranoia - what a wonderful thing. I sat in the empty front seat as the bus was filled with mostly noisy Mitchelton Primary kids. I looked back but her face was not on this bus, so I turned back and studied my map.

I departed the bus, first stop after the school and walked back toward it so I could watch arrivals safely from a distance, and to not draw any attention to myself. I hid behind a tree like a stalker would (or so I presumed one would) and watched all the young kids arrive one by one, but my guess was she would be on this school bus, so I waited. The bus did arrive and my heart sank when she didn't get off ... she wasn't a student here.

So plan B was now in place and I had a 50/50 chance of success now with two schools left to view. I decided to walk to St. Peters College for girls, as I had hours to kill before big lunch and playtime. I made it about an hour before the bell finally rang and the girls ventured out to eat and play. I sat across the road at the bus stop with my map open pretending to read, as I perused with an eagle's eye for anyone that looked remotely like Millie ... but none did.

I started to doubt my suspicions now and started to believe Mum was right after all. So I folded up my map and jumped on the number 32 to – ‘Johnson Elementary’ on the other side of town.

I waited again but this time my excitement was a little deflated and again I watched as before, no Millie. I had been here all afternoon and I kept watching as the last of the students vacated the school grounds. I slumped down under the big oak tree in failure with my head down, face in hands, and admitted ... I was finally beaten!

“Are you okay?” I heard a voice, looked up and the dark-haired Millie was looking straight at me with frowned eyebrows, “Are you lost?” Millie asked.

“M-Millie?” It was all I could get out in my shaky dry-throated voice.

“Millie? My name is Lenny ... what’s your name?” Her smile was the same, her eyes were the same. Lenny was Millie but yes, different in ways ... but she had found me as she always could!

*

“So tell me, Joel ... why did you call me, Millie?” Lenny’s blue eyes drilled me as we sat side by side at the play park that we had just walked together to.

“You remind me of my friend ... no ... she was more like my sister. I saw you on TV ... in that flood, I thought you were Millie.”

“Ooooh, when I got rescued with Jane.” Lenny’s smile was exactly as Millie’s and the gleam in her eyes was there but I admit this wasn’t my Millie.

We talked for half an hour about my family and I asked about the rescue, yet, just the same as Millie used to do – she danced around the actual details. I then remembered that Millie was an expert at doing this and those dimples caught you off-guard every time.

We were about to say our farewells when we both heard the screams from the other kids just as the screech of tires followed. We whipped around to see a small boy had run out into the road to fetch his soccer ball and low and behold, a van was braking hard! It would all be over in a matter of seconds ... but it wasn’t; then it happened!

It was as if time hit slow motion and I was able to witness it all. I turned to look at Lenny who was looking straight ahead at the oncoming catastrophe and her face was solemn and focused. Lenny’s eyes were black as the ace of spades and I could see that her black hair was moving or wavering in the ever so slightest way as if the wind around her had touched it. Then I understood ... it was heat waves! I turned my slow motioned head back to view the kid and the blue van that was skidding in slow-motion to impact. But then it happened just like an action movie scene and I know I saw it! The blue van seemed to veer off its natural course and went in a 45-degree projection, away from the startled boy. I can’t explain how, but it did, as if a ramp had been placed under the front wheels of the van, sending it flying on a different route ... or was it a force field? The Van elevated (still in slow motion) straight into the empty bus stop which I and a lot of school children had been sitting in today. I watched the van crumple with the bus shelter as the boy fell to the road and had realized what was finally happening, then it was over! Time reverted from slow to normal and I was smacked in the face with it; I fell over! I looked up at Lenny and her black eyes were turning blue and her dimples came out of nowhere. The driver climbed out of the wreck and the boy was back with his friends crying, just as his Mum got to him. Lenny looked down at me and spoke,

“I missed you, Joel! Got to go home now, bye.” Lenny waved me goodbye and ran off as I stood in shock as I placed all the pieces of my muddled mind to form some sort of cohesion.

But I heard Lenny’s last words clearly ... *‘she missed me’* ... so now I had no doubt ... it was Millie!

I returned home beaming that some magic or a miracle had entered into my life when I was only 11 and here it was again at 16 and I got to see an encore. I was so happy and I did my best acting to not raise any suspicion to Mum and Dad as they wouldn't understand, only see it as me wagging school.

I missed Millie even more now and the wonderful memories we shared, come flooding back like a rollercoaster. I tried hard now to think of any other little incidences that might have happened ... but none came to mind except one!

I vaguely remembered back at school, we were watching a hyped-up game of volleyball between the boys and the girls, with the 'who were the better sex' title up for grabs for the year (they did this every year); the boys had always won! As usual, bananas in our mouths, yogurts in our hands as the whole school cheered them on. The boys were flogging the girls and they were bragging and teasing the girls. Stacy, the girl's captain was upset and complaining to Mr. Withers about Ben Holsen (Boy's captain) for calling her a - "*Slut!*" Yeah, I heard it loud and clear and looked down at Millie who looked up at me and to my horror asked,

"What's a slut, Joel?" Oh boy! I was always truthful with Millie ... but how did I answer this one (did I really know)?

"Err ... a girl who kisses too many boys ALL the time ... and worse things, Millie." I glanced away to break her eye contact. I saw out the corner of her eye that her confused eyebrows meant she was processing the explanation. Millie turned back to watch the game and stated with a screwed up facial expression,

"Stacy's not a slut ... I like Stacy, she's always nice to me ... I've never seen her kiss any boy!" I thought it best to add,

"Yeah, Ben's just saying that to make her get mad ... and mess up!" I pushed my final banana chunk in my gob to stop talking before Millie added,

"But that's not fair, that's cheating!"

And then it flooded back into my memory bank that her hair seemed to move in the wind, even though that day was hot with no breeze at all. Millie was looking straight ahead and I never saw if her eyes were black, but I did watch Ben Holsen throw a hoop shot as it connected with the ring and bounced straight back into his nose. The blood poured instantly and the game was stopped as the teachers were helping Ben. I noticed Millie's attention was on the girls and their rest time, while Stacy's silent encouragement speech was in full force to her team, complete with fist slams. Millie looked up at me as she restarted to spoon her tub of Yoplait. She was smirking and then winked at me. What the f...? A wink ... from a 5-year-old ... that somehow knows how to wink, perfectly?

So the game recommenced and the boys (without Captain Ben) were going down quickly; the girls had evened the score! Ben was on the sideline watching with an ice-pack on his swollen nose. He was quite irate that the girls had caught up and there was only just over 1 minute left on the clock and no score either way from in the last 5 from either team. Ben threw the ice-pack on the ground, stood up, and demanded to get back on the court, so Mr. Withers let him on.

“Now it’s fair.” Millie’s smile was excited as the whistle was blown and the finale began. You know who won fair and square ... no cheating ... no slurring! You know who threw the winning shot!

Stacy was raised in the air by all the other girls of her team cheering just as Miss Stevens was. And now my Millie was jumping up and down too (as every girl in this school) clapping with her smile beaming (with her new tooth poking through). Ben was sitting down, hands on knees, head slumped, as the other boys were patting his back in condolences and for his last ditched effort, but just as most of the boys in the school, he was fuming at the result – sore losers!

2006 - The year the GIRLS became the volleyball champions for the very first time!

It was clear to me now that Millie had evened the score (literally) that day. But I tried harder to think of any other coincidences or events in my childhood, but none came to mind.

*

Another 2 weeks passed and I wanted to visit Lenny again as I felt something inside that was nagging the shit out of me; I knew something was wrong! I had to see her so as before, I waggged it. But this time my parents found out when I returned home in tears and I admitted all. I went to her school but it was closed. A fire had broken out the day before. I stood at the front gate aghast until a parent and a school friend of Lenny's turned up and who were there to place flowers at the front gate (with the many that were already there) in her honor. They told me the whole of E block was burnt to the ground. I knew in my heart she was gone and the father confirmed that only one little girl died and she was a hero. She had helped all the other children (with his daughter Penny) escape through the classroom window single-handedly and to direct them through the thick smoke, to the safe hands of the awaiting teachers. But unfortunately, that last little girl was taken down by the now smoke-filled room and she never made it out alive ... and her name was Lenny!

Lenny was gone just as Millie and all the misery I felt back in '06 was here in '11!

I cried all the way home on the bus and train as onlookers kept asking me if I was okay. I'd be brave and smile and nod. My heart ached sadness again.

A week passed and my parents were concerned I was losing it re my upset over someone I never even knew, and believed was a reincarnation of Millie. But now at least it started to make some sense that Millie or Lenny was a simple miracle and only to be here to save others (children, I questioned) ... not herself.

Things got easier with this knowledge and by the end of the year the painful memories filtered to the distant and I just held on to the good ones I loved.

*

Life moves on and time flies, any single adult will confirm that. But, as a kid, all you want to do is grow up and with a click of the fingers you suddenly have ... and then you start to want to go back. I'm only 24 now but one thing I wasn't prepared for, was meeting my Bec Davidson at - 'Elston University'.

Bec was in my art class and we were both tops of it and both destined for life within it. Mine would be architecture while Bec was way more creative and destined to be quite successful for her graphic abilities. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen in my life! Her chocolate brown hair with those baby blue eyes surrounded by her black-rimmed glasses which accentuated them. We became friends before lovers, and before - life partners!

So here I was at 22, a fully qualified architect by 2016 (and working as a junior) with a beautiful girl whom I'd plan to marry when the time was right, so what could go wrong?

Bec fell pregnant to my horror! I (we) hadn't even thought of this little life curve-ball and we always used protection ... but sometimes, things are just meant to be. After getting the guts to tell both sets of parents (mixed reactions here), Mum was ecstatic ... her dad - Big Eddie ... not so! We were finally able to plan (a little) of our unknown future. I would work and provide while she would continue her studies until the baby comes along and then take a year off to be a mum. It sounded like a plan.

I must admit once we got our heads around the initial shock we were both enjoying and watching the adult rise in us as forthcoming parents. We loved the baby and soon it was nicknamed - 'Wally', as that was the game we used to play - Where's Wally? Not the actual book game but the Bec's tummy game. As soon as the baby would move, it was simply the first who'd see it (Mum did have an advantage here) then you would point at the leg or arm we'd just seen move and yell, "Found him!"

I loved Bec with all my heart and a life without her would not be worth living; she was my world!

Nine months pass quickly and the panic stations arrive when her Niagara Falls finally break. We were living at Big Eddie's house and her Mum - Kay, was racing here and there grabbing and packing shit, while Big Eddie was already outside starting his Jeep, ready for a quick take-off!

"Breath, Sweetie ... Breath." Kay was doing her best and I answered,

"I'm okay, Kay."

"Not you, idiot!" Her attention was meant for Bec as I held Bec's hand as I felt like I was about to hit cardiac arrest mode or faint.

“I’m okay, Mum, truly ... only little ones ... just want this out!” Bec looked at me and smiled before adding, “You’d better book a room for this one too.” We all laughed, even Big Eddie from the front; it lightened my anxiety!

We pulled up at the hospital and I jumped out and ran in and back with a wheelchair but Bec was already walking in unassisted holding her fat tummy. We checked Bec into her room and the labor pains were still only mild and we were all ordered out of the room while she was examined by the midwife.

It was about to happen ... but not the baby!

*

I decided to go outside, grab a bottled water and some fresh air, before refocusing and doing so meant I walked through the children's ward. I could see all the children in there and the reality of their frailness hit home hard. Soon I would be a parent and I already felt the fragility of being a parent; that is the scariest feeling I ever felt!

As I walked past the last doorway before exiting the ward, I glanced in to see a small girl sleeping in the last bed. I rubbed my eyes in case I was seeing things ... as it was Millie! I froze and stared, she was bald and looked sickly. Her eyes opened slowly until they met mine, then she smiled and showed me her dimples. She waved to me and I looked around and it was me she was waving at. I couldn't help myself, I walked in and to her bed and asked,

"Millie?" The little girl asked back,

"Who's Millie?" She pointed to her name above the bed and it was a 5-year-old's hand-drawn colored picture with flowers all around the name – Emma! "Call me Emm ... what's your name?"

"Joel ... don't you remember me ... Mi-i- ... Emm?" My Millie's smile returned in this sick little girl's body and she shook her head in a no motion as she coughed in pain. So I asked, "Why are you in here?" Her smile disappeared as she slowly and painfully sat up and in a frail voice,

"I have leukemia... but the doctor's say, I'm a strong girl!" Emma's smile returned as an angry nurse walked in and grabbed my shoulder stating firmly,

"Why are you in here? Please leave ... Emm needs to rest!" The nurse pointed to the exit and Emma waved me a farewell, as I reluctantly walked away and my mind spun in circles until Bec and the baby surfaced. I wanted to ask the nurse where her parents were but she was gone as soon as I was expelled from her classroom! I quickly found a drink machine, bought two bottles of spring water, just as my parents walked in and grabbed me in a three-way embrace. Mum was beaming as Dad hugged and said,

"C'mon, Grandad's ready to welcome his first grandchild!"

As we walked by the children's ward, I glanced back to see my new bald Millie, sleeping on her back as the drips and monitor did their thing; my heart sank!

What happened over the next 13 hours was nothing but a nightmare; Wally had complications! Bec's labor was intense and an epidural was inserted. Midwives were running frantically everywhere before our chosen obstetrician - Doc Bob Davies demanded an emergency cesarean. Bec was rushed and prepped for surgery as we all waited outside impatiently. Both mums were holding hands and crying. We were told there was a 50/50 chance of both surviving and the baby's heartbeat was very weak. The horrible question raised in my mind that I may have to choose only one to save, which one? I will never tell anyone! After 30 minutes a nurse ventured out and instructed me to scrub up; it was soon!

I was in a gown and mask as I stood beside my frail-looking Bec. Her eyes were sunken and she was out of this world on drugs but managed to smile at me and whispered,

"It'll be alright, Joel ... it'll be alright!" A tear ran down my face as I watched Doc do his thing over her stomach. It was an eternity of only minutes but our baby was out of her belly and in the midwife's hands when Doc yelled,

"She's not breathing!" And my nightmare filled the room. Bec looked at me and spoke,

"It's a girl!" She was so exhausted then her eyes drifted. I refocused back on the situation and the medical team went to work administering CPR on our newborn. I had a bad feeling ... then I saw her! In the corner of the room, was my Millie ... I mean Emma. I questioned how she got in here but she was smiling at me and nodding. No one else took any notice of her standing there barefooted and in her hospital gown.

I heard Doc scream after 7 minutes of panic,

"It's too late! It's useless!" I looked over at my daughter, the tiniest little blood-covered gift I was about to lose forever when I heard Emma's voice in my head, *'It'll be okay, Joel ... It'll be okay!'* As Bec echoed the same words aloud with her in unison. I looked over at Emma/Millie and her eyes were black as the ace of spades and there was an aura glowing around her or more like a mini cyclone of heatwaves. Emma's dimples were gone completely and no longer did she look 5 years old but more like 35! Her missing eyebrows from the chemo accentuated that she was frowning. She raised her hands and the whirlwind she had created was directed and slowly moving to our Wally. I glanced around the room but no one else could see this ... only me! The mini cyclone suddenly jumped like an electricity bolt straight into our dying baby ... and then the aura was gone. I looked at the 5-year-old Emma whose eyes had returned to blue and she smiled with her cute dimples before she spoke,

"See, Joel ... I told you. One day you'll understand ... one day you'll understand all!" Emma was waving me goodbye and she was fading away right in front of me. I rubbed my eyes in case I was delusional but she was see-through.

Next minute I heard crying and I turned back from looking at Emma to Bec and to see my baby move in Doc's hands as he turned and let out his breath in relief; Wally was alive! Bec grabbed my hand and squeezed it as the assistant surgeon redrew her attention to Bec's open

stomach. I spun to find Emma but she was gone completely now and as mysteriously as she had arrived, so I asked,

“Where did the little girl go?” Doc just looked at me and frowned before he asked,

“What little girl?” The medical team all looked at each other as if to say, *‘He’s finally lost it!’*

I was asked to leave the surgery so they could finish up putting my wife back together, but after we both had a glance at our offspring and Mum got her first touch of her beautiful breathing daughter for the briefest of moments. They rushed Wally off to ICB regarding her breathing difficulties and I exited to our waiting and nervous parents. Their faces looked terrified as they had been told of what was going on and knew the situation was dicey. I pulled down my mask, nodded with a thumbs up, and simply smiled, as the two dads were now jumping like jackrabbits. I was bombarded by the mums and kissed on both cheeks before Mum demanded,

“So ... boy or girl?”

“Girl ... and she’s beautiful!” My legs were weak so they escorted me to the chair and I sat as Dad handed me one of my still unopened waters, I added,

“It’s not over yet ... but looking better, we nearly lost her, Dad. Well, we di...” Millie/Emma/Lenny I had to find her! I stood to attention as the adrenaline flowed through my veins as they all flinched in surprise. “I have to do something ... I’ll be back soon.”

I ran to the children’s ward still with my gown on and mask drawn down. I found Emma’s room and her bed was empty. I looked around she was nowhere to be seen. The same nurse saw me and raced in as I looked like a demon-possessed to her!

“Where’s Emma?” I demanded to her, “Where the fuck is she?” The nurse grabbed my arms and looked me in the eyes, as she answered in a calmed voice,

“Emma went peacefully in her sleep about an hour ago.” The nurse was telling me the truth but I saw her in the surgery and it wasn’t an hour ago ... or was it?

“No!” I refused to believe it but the nurse had tears before she said,

“Emm was a beautiful tiny soul ... but no more suffering now, she is at peace.”

I cried in sorrow again. How many times could I lose her? The nurse guided me back to the labor ward and asked me if I had a son or daughter to change my mind’s focus; she was sweet!

The nurse – Kate, found my parents, as they all stood in concern at my erratic behavior. Kate farewelled me after congratulating the new Grandparents. But I was still in shock of losing Millie again, so I sat and reflected all the good and bad emotions that sat within me. My mind

soon returned to my Bec and Wally, just as Doc exited and came and congratulated us all; we were all in the clear now! Bec was sleeping and our baby was breathing, what else could you ask for? But my heart cried for just one more miracle ... but I knew it would never happen!

*

While Bec slept we made our way to the ICB ward to get a glimpse of little Wally. The pain disappeared when the nurse pointed through the window to the ICB enclosed crib she was in. We could see her as she was fully awake and moving. Wally was so tiny yet so alive and I already loved her with all my heart and soul.

It was well after 2:00 pm and we were all shattered so we left to go and catch some shut-eye, while Bec and Wally rested too.

I never slept, just drank copious amounts of coffee, thinking about all that had just transpired and I was back at the hospital by 7:30 in the morning, just as Bec was sitting up and breastfeeding. To watch this for the first time was amazingly beautiful and my glowing Bec was being helped under the close watchful eye of a nurse. I grabbed my Samsung from my jeans pocket and popped a few shots off (after being scolded by the nurse for the first shot with the flash on). My Bec was beaming, exhausted but beaming! I asked a zillion questions as she was feeding and both the nurse and Bec were laughing at me. The nurse instructed the brand new mother how to burp Wally properly and I got to hear that beautiful first belch. It was obvious Bec was still very sore from surgery but you can't keep her down that's for sure! The nurse looked at Bec and nodded as she held our daughter and then winked at me before asking,

“Would you officially like to meet, Wally?” My eyes popped and I was nervous as fuck but I was there within a second. I was terrified I would crush her tiny frame and then Bec asked the most important question, as the nurse placed my daughter within my arms,

“So what shall we call her? Can't be Wally now!” I took one look at this fragile gift in my caress and answered,

“Welcome to the world ... Millie Lenny Emma Andrews!” I looked into Bec's beautiful blue eyes and she smiled before simply nodding, wondering where that had all come from. She expected Millie after stories but the middle names was a surprise.

*

Epilogue

Today it is our Millie's second birthday and the grandparents plus great-grandparents are here spoiling her. I make the coffee and look out the kitchen window of our new home, as I see the eight grown adults, all of them fussing over their treasured little grand and great-grandchild. Bec is flustering around pulling the potato bake from the oven as I glance at our beautiful Millie. Where did that white blonde hair come from? Her blue eyes were definitely her mum's and the clumsiness from me! A child makes you realize why we are here and I'm sure it's personal and different for all!

We nearly lost Millie that night but now I choose to believe it was the reason I found sick little Emma on that very night when death and birth crossed paths. It took me a long time to see the obvious in front of my eyes, but it was always there! All three girls were just one and I knew that from the very beginning. It's why that kept repeating itself in my head, to keep me believing - I was right.

Millie, Lenny & Emma; it was all in her name! I met Millie in 2006 when she was only 5 years old so that meant she was born in ... now do you see it? The year 2000 ... the Mil-Lenny-Emm. I researched after our Millie's birth and all I could find out was that all three girls were foster children from being abandoned. So was Millie simply the Millennium Bug? No one knew what the bug actually was, so could she be it ... a virus? A virus from where, God?

But the more I thought about it, the more I accepted and realized she was no virus, possibly a glitch of my time but I simply saw her as an angel from Heaven.

We were visiting Mum and Dad at their place a few weeks ago and showing Millie old photo albums (not that she was paying any attention) when I saw a Christmas photo of me standing there with one of those old gigantic Stackhat helmets on, holding a bright blue skateboard I'd just got for Christmas. It dawned on me that I crashed the bloody thing! I asked Mum if she remembered what year it was when I fell off of it, as my memories were very vague. Then Mum went into a rant about me not wearing my helmet after being told too! I forgot to put in on (yes, no helmet ... hey, I was a kid, give me a break) then I ended up falling off hard and hitting the outside concrete gutter, splitting my skull open like an egg. I ended up with 13 stitches in the head, severe concussion, and my only ever ambulance trip, before a bonus 2 day stay in hospital! Mum told me then it was January the 4th in the year 2000 and that she would never forget that, as it was the worst day of her life and it was to begin the noughties (as she always called it) crying in the hospital. She also had never told me ... that I died for a whole minute in - Emergency! It wasn't looking good for me and if it was not for the excellent work of the on-duty paramedics and medical team, I would be no more than a memory. Mum says it was a miracle I survived and I was only 5. Dad was nodding in agreement and I saw a tear in his eye. Bec touched my arm and I closed the album. A chill ran down my back as if someone had just touched me. Was it Millie? I knew then in my thoughts and heart that this was the first moment Millie had somehow connected with me, as I lay there floating in a child's limbo while

my parents faced their nightmare. I wish I could remember something but I was too young (and unconscious) so I accept that this was about Mum's miracle.

Millie/Lenny/Emma (whatever name you choose) was destined to be my guardian angel all along (and many others it seems, even my mum's) for that I am sure. I thank my lucky stars that I was blessed with Millie's intervention, just as destiny had somehow decided; I was to live a wonderful life!

So now I wait and hope as, in 3 years, I will find out if she will possibly return and so now I hold on to the faith that she will be our Millie's destiny as well.

This story also features in Jonny's 'When Darkness Shimmers' – the full anthology collection of his favorite new and old short stories available at all good eBook retailers.

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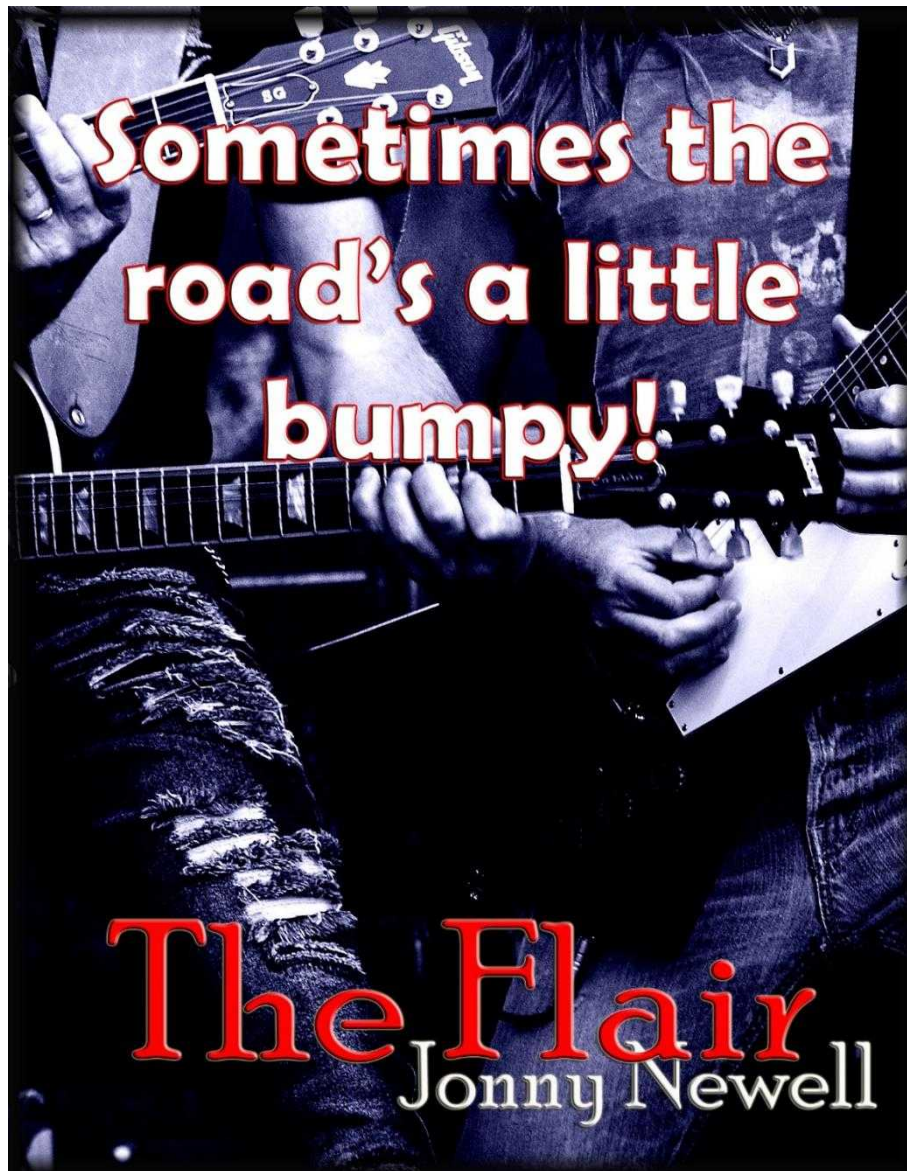
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About the author

Jonny Newell's creative imagination inspired him to become a story writer. A working musician for over 35 years, Jonny currently lives in Queensland Australia with his wife Vickie surrounded by the love of their families. When Jonny's not rocking in his various bands you'll most probably find him either recording music in his music room, renovating the house ... or just maybe ... he's swirling something weird and wonderful for his very next story.



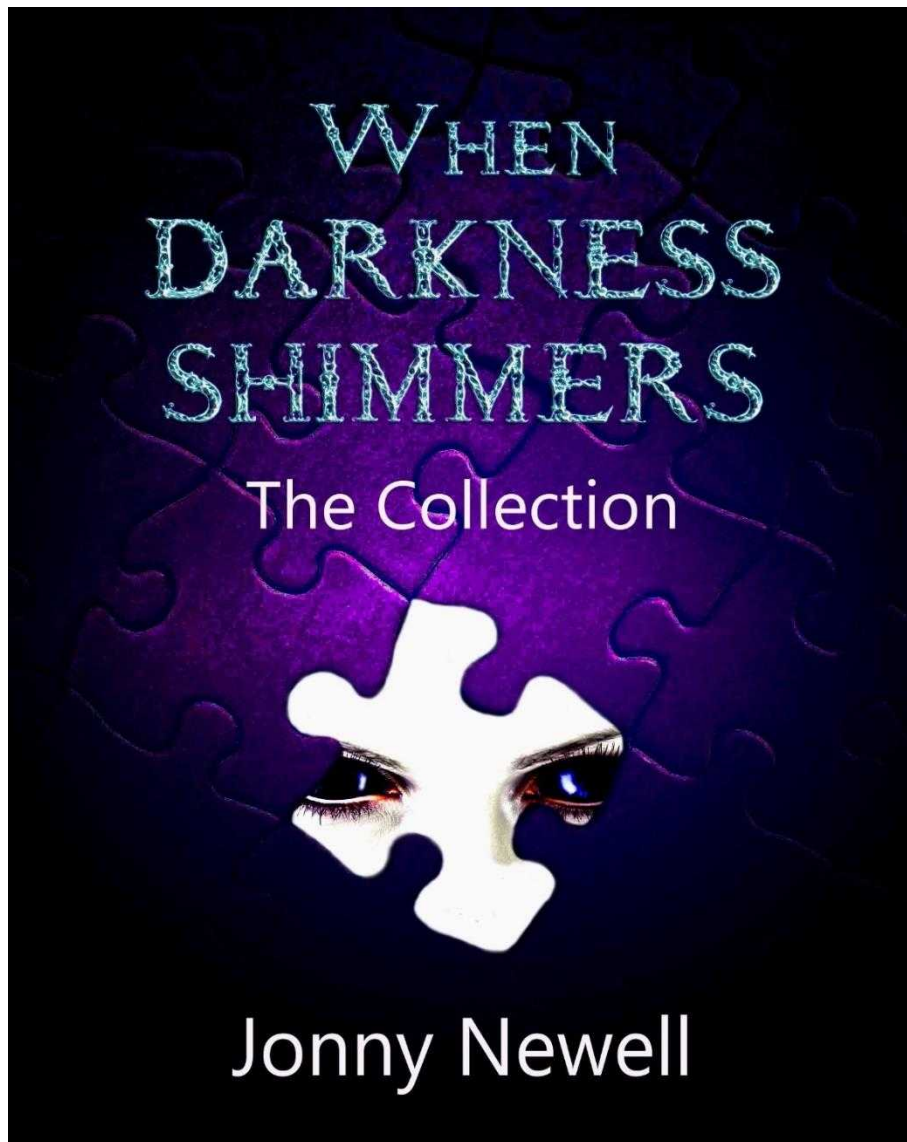
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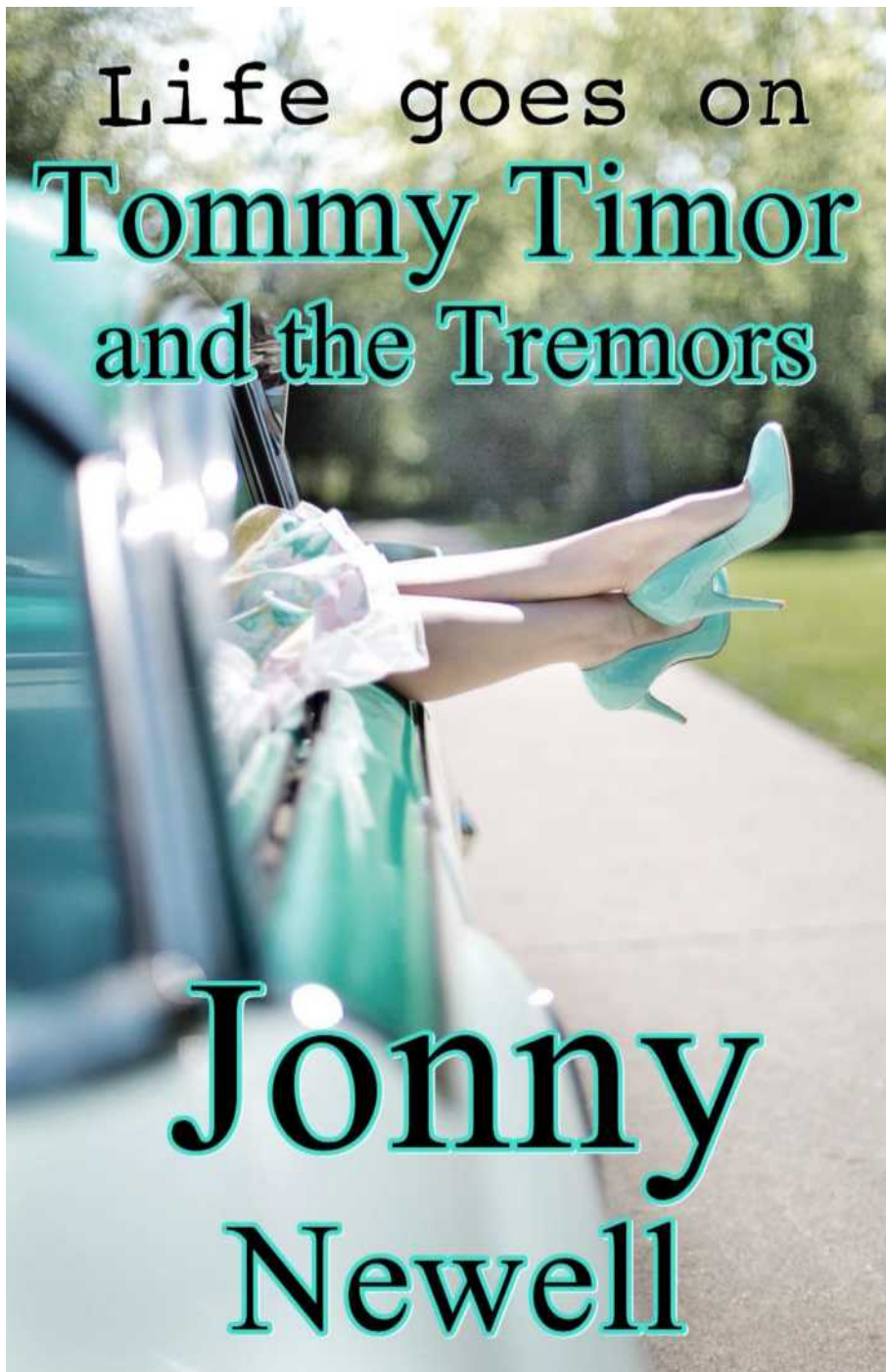
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