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Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness

A Reflective Essay

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An essay submitted to the School of Literature and Language Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Creative Writing (Research).

Johannesburg, June 2012

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Declaration

I declare that this essay and the novel, *Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness*, are my own unaided work. They are submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Creative Writing (Research) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Neither has been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

…….

Vanessa Herman, June 2012

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(1) Introduction: Intention, Motivation and Challenges

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word ‘unspeakable’. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory and fragmented manner that undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognised, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom.

The psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect attention from it. This is most apparent in the way traumatised people alternate between feeling numb and reliving the event. The dialectic of trauma gives rise to complicated, sometimes uncanny, alterations of consciousness. George Orwell, one of the committed truth-tellers of our century, called this ‘doublethink’. Mental health professionals, searching

for calm, precise language, call it ‘dissociation’. (Herman, 1991, Introduction to *Trauma and Recovery)*

The above except taken from the Introduction to Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* illustrates the three issues that I struggled most with in writing this novel: the conflict between staying silent and speaking out; the “highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner” in which I initially wrote the book that undermined its credibility; and the ‘alterations of consciousness’, dissociation and reliving of the events that often rendered me totally paralysed and unable to write a word.

I soon learned that just writing the book became not only a journey but an odyssey, which I had not anticipated. I wanted to be the one incest survivor who didn’t write the typical, expected rendition of the horrors she underwent as a child: the type-cast memoir with the antiseptic white jacket depicting a toddler with a big teardrop falling from her eye while she clutches an errant, tattered teddy bear close to her grubby, neglected and abused body. Such memoirs have titles like *Behind Closed Doors*, *Daddy Loves Me* and *Evil Unspoken*.

On the one hand I wanted to write my story as a factual report, almost like a news reporter does when reporting from the front lines. On the other hand I wanted to literally get under my own skin and describe the experience from deep within my heart and psyche. In my proposal I explain that, *Swallowing Thunder* (which is now *Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness*) will be primarily “a journey from beneath the skin, a

travelogue of the subconscious that winds its way through the deep ravines of the emotional body, in an attempt to excavate the mechanism of memory."

This double position became demanding and confusing when the internal and external voices began appearing in the narrative. It was like being in the tube of a wave and being blinded by the wall of water and deafened by the thunderous volume while at the same time trying to stay dry and report of the experience from under an umbrella on the beach.

My motivation for writing this novel is best expressed by Terri Jentz author of, *A Strange Piece of Paradise*. She explains why she had to write her book:

> Some shadowy part of me had choked off the pipeline to the fertile unconscious so that only this story could sluice through. Maybe I could never tell another story until I had told this one. Unless I could purge this one impelling piece of psychic business, my own guts, my heart, would be locked away forever. This story, one that only I could tell, was the only story that could … what? Rescue, redeem, resurrect, and restore me? Mining the past for what it might yield, I hoped, could be a recipe for repair. This journey would traverse the earth as well as the mind, and in so doing, would stitch my past into my present life. (Jenz, 2006, P. 22)

In trying to find a way to my own story, there was always the danger of reading too much. I devoured novels when beginning to write this book. I read *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *Fugitive Piec*es by Ann Michaels, *The Cement Garden* by

Ian McEwan, and most of Jeanette Winterson's books. The problem with this voracious reading was that I loved something specific about each author and I wanted to emulate that special quality. I had read some novels on incest years before: Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Sylvia Fraser's *My Father's House*. *A Thousand Acres* affected me most because of its focus on domestic realism. I became aware how the minutiae of daily living could literally reveal worlds. I wanted to achieve that attention to detail.

The **main themes** I intended to cover in the novel were: Father-Daughter Incest, Memory and the Mechanisms of Memory.

The **sub-themes** (many of them psychoanalytic in nature) that emerged from these main themes were: Toxic Shame, Emotional Masochism, Parental Narcissism, Disassociation and the Techniques of Distraction, The Nature of Violence (in its passive and active forms).

(2) Genre: Stylistic and Structural Manipulation

In attempting to understand how to integrate personal experience into a fictional text, I considered the relationship between personal writing (diaries, journals, notebooks etc) and what would become a fictional account. As a teenager I read most of Anaïs Nin's work. I did not realise until doing research for this essay just how many parallels exist between her *House of Incest* which was published in 1936 and my *Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness*. Her novel is only 72 pages long and mine is approximately 150 pages. Stylistically she employs the writing of surrealist symbolist prose. The prose does not make use of everyday language. She does not write in a linear fashion. Here is an extract from her novel:

> My first vision of earth was water veiled. I am of the race of men and women who see all things through this curtain of sea and my eyes are the color of water. I looked with chameleon eyes upon the changing face of the world, looked with anonymous vision upon my uncompleted self. (Nin,1936, p.15)

And here are two extracts from my own text:

> She exited Renee's warm waters into a harsh cold light where unwelcome giant gods prodded and poked her as if she was a large fish verging on extinction.

> I hold onto a thread of air inside my lungs and I can smell the underground burial place, earth fills my mouth. I slow my heart rate to a bare beat, and I

> only breathe the oxygen that available in the soil. I see in the same way dead people see. I can feel what a person is saying by how heavily they place their feet in their shoes above me. I feel the vibration of the silence they hide from.

I do not purport to have the power or vividness in my writing that Nin has, however it is indeed very interesting that she too was writing about her sexual relationship with her father and chose a stream of consciousness, prose medium with which to do it. Perhaps it only follows if one is writing about memory from memory that one would choose less structured and less conventional forms of narrative.

I am at the outset a poet and the manner in which I first wrote *Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness* was more as a lyric essay. This was in part deliberate and part unconscious. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a lyric essay is its focus on images over narrative, on emotion over clear, deliberate storytelling. Often a lyric essay will move between related narrative threads rather quickly, using them to create an emotional tone within the confines of non-fiction prose rather than a cohesive narrative.

A good example of this can be seen in Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let me be Lonely* (2004), a book of inter-connected lyric essays, which provides an excellent example of the form. The following excerpt comes from the book's first paragraph. Note how Rankine weaves a number of fragmented narrative pieces together in a single paragraph to tell the story of death in her family, or rather the feeling of death as it was translated by Rankine's parents when she was a child:

> There was a time I could say no one I knew well had died. This is not to suggest no one died. When I was eight my mother became pregnant. She went to the hospital to give birth and returned without the baby. Where's the baby? We asked. Did she shrug? She was the kind of woman who liked to shrug; deep within her was an everlasting shrug. That didn't seem like a death...I returned home from school one day and saw my father sitting on the steps of our home...He was breaking or broken. Or, to be more precise, he looked to me like someone understanding his aloneness. Loneliness. His mother was dead. (Rankine, 2004, P.1)

In a work of creative non-fiction, each piece in the above paragraph, from her mother's miscarriage to her grandmother's death, would likely be expanded into larger sections where they could each be fully explored. However, in this lyric essay, Rankine works as a poet, establishing images and emotionally charged fragments that create the feeling of a story rather than a clear narrative.

The consistent criticism I received from all who have assisted me with the writing of *Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness,* was that I did not fully expand and explore the things I wrote about. The truth is that, like Rankine, I am a poet and my first instinct is to create images and charge them with emotion. I found myself having to go against my own grain, when I was asked to extend a meaning or further explain an incident.

As a poet I knew how to pack a sentence tightly with explosives and then detonate the entire image with the fire power of one last word. I was mortified to hear that I had not said enough and that it was not clear what I had meant. I was baffled and

immobilised and began seriously to doubt whether I was a writer at all. At first I thought I had not added enough metaphor or enough imagery so I increased those mediums only to be told that I had to only choose one of each and not use three or four. In poetry more imagery equals more meaning.

Initially, I wrote with my journals open alongside the draft of my manuscript and would sometimes look down and identify a word or phrase that seemed to fit exactly with what I was writing. I wanted to make use all of my writing that I had carried around with me all over the world. I became a little obsessed with this notion. (This obsession fed into the greater challenge of separating myself from my character.)

At the outset I did not want to separate myself from my character who was me. I wanted to write from beneath her skin. It became surreal, like I was living in the past and the present at the same time and literally ‘stitching my past into my present’. I wanted to tell my story. I desperately needed to break my silence. I wanted the reader to be the witness and confidante I never had as a child.

After two years into the writing it became patently obvious that this emotional open-heart surgery was counter-productive to the creative process at hand. I was only succeeding in taking myself under my skin; no reader was being taken with me. I could not possibly write down my entire life history in a chronologically accurate fashion and ever hope to finish in three years. Also the writing became mundane and tedious when I did try this. After all I was not a famous celebrity or self-made billionaire who would attract the attention of the public enough for them be interested in when I had my first French kiss or what the name of my high school was.

It was suggested to me that I write a fictionalised novel and steer away from this need for exact truth and searing realism. At first I balked at the idea, feeling like a defeatist or a sell-out. At heart I am a purist and felt that a memoir was the only ‘real’ vehicle for truth-telling. At the same time I had to accept that my writing just was not working. My objective to engage the reader to the extent that they would feel utterly immersed in the narrative was far from being achieved. The real challenge was to create a fiction that others could read too, that was not so subjective as to be alienating.

One day, immersed in writing, I looked around my bedroom and saw that it was covered from wall to floor with hundreds of pieces of paper. I realised that I would have to learn the art of letting go, which meant letting some of the pieces remain in the past because even though they were well written, they simply did not explain or enhance the story. At the same time, I had to learn that shaping a novel meant also shaping writing that I had written.

Eventually I was convinced that I had to make fiction from experience and not re-create the experience of non-fiction. I finally began to accept that I had to write as a *novelist* and not as a diarist or memoirist, and that meant that some things would not be exactly as they happened or exactly when they happened. I had to make the personal writing fit the story that I was now crafting, and not the other way around. This required an enormous shift in my view of what I was doing, and even brought about a small crisis for me in the writing process.

(3) The Fabric of Fabrication: Truth-Telling or Truth-Shaping

Was I being true to my own story? Could I 'fabricate' my own story? Could I make it fictional and keep it true to my experience? This was the single most difficult challenge in the writing process. Still, I did manage to use nearly a small suitcase full of my journals and a handful of my poems in the writing of the novel.

I had to write differently *and* I had to view my own story differently. Both required immense effort. The sheer magnitude of emotions I began experiencing made me feel more like a mountain climber, trying to summit a treacherous peak in very unstable and threatening weather conditions than a novelist. The problem was two-fold: both personal/emotional and technical.

I made some very conscious decisions to 'upset' pure chronology and veracity. I changed the circumstances of the different memory retrievals and made them all occur at once in the same place. In reality, my memories have returned to me over a period of years. The memory of my father sexually abusing me happened first as a 'body memory'. I later underwent hypnosis so that I could see my father's face and attach a 'real' memory to a bodily one. But I was cautious about putting that process in the text because of what I had learnt about The False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF).

The FMSF was founded in 1992 by Pamela and Peter Freyd. They had been accused by their adult daughter, Jennifer Freyd, of sexual abuse when she was a child. The

sole purpose of the FMSF is the examination of the concept of false memory syndrome and recovered memory therapy (both terms created by the FMSF which are disputed and not used scientifically). The FMSF advocate on behalf of individuals believed to be falsely accused of child sexual abuse. They publicise information and sponsor research in attempting to discover methods to distinguish between a true and a false allegation of abuse.[1]

My personal journey had an enormous impact on my writing of this manuscript. This is important to note not only because it explains the writing process but also because it sheds light on the ways in which victims of any kind of abuse process and access their trauma on the one hand, and on the possibility of a creative 'transformation' of that trauma on the other. But another consideration was the impact of my story on the broader public.

If my story were recognisable as being based on my own life, then naturally there would be questions about its credibility. This true story in the *New York Times* back in 2006 further illustrates how another writer changed from writing a memoir to writing a novel for private moral reasons. She needed to 'fudge' the truth and not tell it exactly as it was:

> LOS ANGELES, Jan. 28 – Martha Sherrill was ready to write a memoir. She had the subject: her father, Peter, a well-known polling expert and software company founder; she had the book contract, with Random House, which paid her a healthy advance. Then, the truth intervened.

> "Within four or five months of getting the money and beginning to spend it, a massive skeleton popped right out of the closet," Ms. Sherrill said in an interview here. "It was not anything that reflected really badly on my father," she said of the secret, which she has steadfastly refused to reveal. "Actually it reflected really well on him. But it was something that just couldn't ever be put in a book. It colored everything. It just changed the way I saw him."
>
> Ms. Sherrill has written a book about her father, "*The Ruins of California*," published this month by Penguin Press. But it is not a memoir. It is a novel, a heavily researched but fictional portrait that has left many of her father's ex-girlfriends – eight of whom posed for a group portrait at his memorial service – as well as friends and family members wondering what exactly is true and what is fiction.
>
> At a time when the publishing business is struggling with the meaning of truth and memoir, Ms. Sherrill, 47, is in a way the anti-James Frey: an author who turned her back on a lucrative memoir not because she could not handle the truth, but perhaps because the truth was too important to let go.

I relate to the experience of Martha Sherill on a number of levels. Her family never told her not to write the memoir but they didn't tell her to write it either.
The people I told in my family that I was going to write a memoir did not tell me not to write it but they certainly were not jumping up and down with joy that I was. My mother asked me to make sure I changed all the names and my sister did ask if I felt like I had to write it. I dared not tell my brother who is in many ways the most

emotionally shut-down and in denial about our childhood. He would most certainly never speak to me again. I weighed up the potential loss of my relationship with him and the need to tell the truth and I chose the truth, but it remains a very painful decision.

My brother and sister do not remember being sexually abused by my father. That information was relayed to me the day that I confronted my father about his abuse of me. If they read my novel, they will be notified of this disturbing fact. I have held my father's secret for him about them in exchange for the information he gave me about sexually abusing me. My brother does not even know that my father sexually abused me. He idolises my father and I did not want to run the risk of him breaking off contact with me.

I have told my sister about my father's abuse of me but when she asked him he lied to her and said that it only happened once and was a mistake. She believes him and doesn't find anything wrong with his admission. I never told my father that I was writing about the sexual abuse and he has never asked directly.

The way I 'fudged' the truth in my novel was that in reality I do have an 'inner child' that assisted me with the process of memory retrieval with regards to my father. I have always called her Ginger. However my first meeting with her did not entail her falling out of a tree and landing at my feet and she was not a constant partner in my memory retrievals. I only saw her once or twice. Ginger appeared on the first day of my hypnosis outside my therapist's office. My first words to my therapist were, "My inner child is standing outside and looking at me and she wants to talk and tell the story."

Despite current developments in the field of mental health I was reluctant to mention in my novel the fact that I had undergone hypno-therapy for fear of an FMS backlash. I still feel angry that I had to hide the entire truth of the way I remembered my sexual abuse in order to have my story free of scrutiny from organisations that specialise in invalidating the evidence or from readers who are still in denial of their own histories. The deep irony here is that I once more had to lie in order to be believed.

This truth/lies conundrum was a central challenge in the writing of the book. There were several things at play: the truth of my own story; the writing of a non-fiction text that nonetheless had elements of ‘truth’ or ‘fact’ in it. In the novel, in the section called “Holy Distortions”, Anna realises that in relation to her father’s confession, “Truth is not a one size fits all garment.”

As the author of my own truth I had to decide what part of the truth I wanted most to be viewed. The tip of the ice-berg or more the effects of hitting that ice-berg. What it came down to for me was that I wanted, like Martha Sherill, not to ‘romanticise’ the portrayal of my father and yet to make him a fully rounded character.

I fabricated the truth about being a full-time in-patient at a psychiatric facility for adolescents. I did attend a psychiatric facility for adolescents but as an out-patient from 8:30am till 3:30pm Monday to Friday for three months. A lot of the stories and the types of patients I wrote about are real. I changed or swapped their names around out of respect for their privacy.

(4) Reliable Narrators and Errant Voices

The question of who was the actual narrator was a problem from the outset of the novel. I tried writing in the third person, hoping that this would create emotional distance. This seemed to work but the writing was cold and clinical and I found myself becoming didactic and preachy. For a second revision, I therefore returned to the first person and the writing took back its immediacy and passion. I wrote from the perspective of a 'self' at different ages. This also became difficult because the narrator then has a varying point of view.

Because I as the narrator was also the main character in the story I became what is known as the focalising character. Managing this became tricky, however, because I often found myself switching from first person narrator to focalising character and to third-person omniscient narrator (the latter gives more of a panoramic view of the world of the story and the broader background and detailed emotions of the other characters). The narration became a problem: I was putting the focalising character's inner voice in italics and the memory flashback to the past in italics and so it became difficult to tell the difference. Early drafts of the manuscript were plagued by this problem. I solved this problem in later drafts by only keeping the flashbacks and some of the poetic devices in italics. The inner voices were left as part of the body of the narrative.

The problems with narrative viewpoint really highlight a larger issue. The story is not about who I am, per se: whether I prefer high heels to flat practical shoes or how I take my regular Americano every Sunday morning at the same bakery near my home.

The story is about what happened to me as a child and how I coped or did not cope and how that same child became an adult. The ‘truth’ of that particular story was going to have to emerge in the telling of it. The story would have to convey the intention and weight of the experience.

I stated in my proposal that I might employ the technique of ‘stream of consciousness’ to enhance the feel of fragmentation. Judith Herman describes such fragmentation:

> Under conditions of chronic childhood abuse, fragmentation becomes the central principle of personality organisation. Fragmentation in consciousness prevents the ordinary integration of knowledge, memory, emotional states and bodily experience. (Herman, 1992, p. 107)

I did not understand the full extent of my own emotional fragmentation and so in trying to be more coherent when asked to link fragmentary pieces or transition them into the wider narrative, again I became immobilised. My writing was also affected in ways described by Wigren in reference to trauma survivors:

> Individuals who go on to develop PTSD symptoms tend to have trauma narratives that have been characterized as having short, fast sentences, unfinished thoughts and speech fillers, and repetitious ideas. (Wigren, 1994, p. 423)

However in forcing myself to do this the writing seemed to open up and let other characters walk in who further confirmed a point of view I was trying to highlight or brought a burst of well-needed humour into an otherwise dour story.

I began to seek a balance between the story, on the one hand, and the poetic inner voice of the focalising character/narrator. I was trying to find a way through something that Herman describes as a corruption of the self in relation to the outside world:

> The very real sense of order and organisation of one's internal world in relation to one's external world is corrupted. The survivor must then unlearn the dysfunctional methods she used in order to survive the incest because in the real world these methods of disassociation and 'splitting' will be counter productive. (Herman,1992, p. 107)

Writing *about* memory while remembering, and using the vehicle of those memories to illuminate the darkness of a very old taboo has been a formidable task. It has forced me from my habitual need for fragmentation as a means of survival to a greater sense of integration within the larger context that is my life.

(5) Extra-Ordinary Forgetfulness: Traumatic Narrative & Memory

While writing this novel I often had nightmares in which I dreamt I was being strangled or a murderer was about to kill me. The feelings of invasion while I slept increased to the point where I woke up morning after morning feeling like I had been molested and raped. My body felt sore all over. My blankets were all over the bed and floor and my rage burned throughout the day. I was re-triggered into a state of the physically, sexually and psychically invaded child.

It really is difficult to fully comprehend that someone can not be ‘present’, can be separated from her own life and all life, for the first thirty years of her existence. This is what happened to me. In 1889, Pierre Janet postulated that “intense emotional reactions make events traumatic by interfering with the integration of the experience into existing memory schemes.” Janet goes on to argue that “Intense emotions cause memories of particular events to be dissociated from consciousness, and to be stored, instead, as visceral sensations (anxiety and panic), or as visual images (nightmares and flashbacks).” (Janet,1989, p.146)

Janet also observed that “traumatized patients seemed to react to reminders of the trauma with emergency responses that had been relevant to the original threat, but that had no bearing on current experience.” (Janet,1989 p.146)

Janet’s observations are supported by Tuval-Mashiach et al, who also describe what is needed in order for the trauma survivor to ‘retrieve’ themselves:

> Recent neuroscience research suggests that this memory gets trapped in brain structures relating to encoding and storage and that it awaits retrieval. However, adaptive coping mechanisms of avoidance restrict neural components of the traumatic memory and get trapped within brain structures associated with storage. In order to facilitate symptom relief, the trauma survivor will need to retrieve the trauma and all the personally meaningful emotion and cognition associated with the trauma to facilitate the extinction of chronic traumatic physiological arousal associated with the trapped PTSD memory. (Tuval-Mashiach, et al, 2004, p.280)

In lay terms what this means is that every time I have a recollection of the trauma (a memory), in order to finally have relief, I will need not only to remember what happened but how it made me feel and all the associations with those feelings.

(6) Conclusion

Michelangelo said: “I saw the angel in the marble and I carved to set him free.” I think that is what is at the core of all expressions of creativity. We take the rough amorphous idea and then we cut and polish and shape to create something that others can appreciate. But more than that I think what Michelangelo was also saying is that the artist or writer sees his creation long before he is ready to create it. I have ‘visioned’ this book, my story, since I was fifteen years old. It was a piece of marble for thirty-two years until three years ago when I began chipping away at it. I did not write the memoir I wanted to write. I wrote the novel that wanted to write me. I

discovered what I wanted to write by letting go of the pre-conceived notions about how I was going to write it.

This novel has turned out to be less than I expected and much more than I dreamed. It has taught me that poetry is contraction while writing is expansion. I have learned from writing this novel that if you sit in the fire long enough you will become the fire. There were many times where I felt like I was dying and I wanted to stop this process and run for the hills. I am a fighter by nature and knew that giving up was never an option. I hope that I succeeded in crossing the bridge from cathartic memoir to a broader contextualised novel. I hope that I place the ordeal that is incest within the family and show how that family is fractured before it and because of it. My story is not unique. I have always known that. I just wanted to write it in a unique way. To some degree if I have achieved that I am grateful

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[1] “The FMSF originated the terms 'false memory syndrome' and 'recovered memory therapy' to describe what they believe is the orientation of patients towards confabulations created by inappropriate psychotherapy, and the methods through which these confabulations are created respectively. Neither term is acknowledged by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. However, some psychiatrists and psychologists' organisations do use the terms when addressing memory related issues. The FMSF has been criticised for misrepresenting themselves, the science of memory, selectively quoting the science of memory, protecting child abusers and encouraging a societal denial of the existence of child sexual abuse.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_Memory_Syndrome_Foundation). See also http://www.fmsfonline.org/.

EXTRA-ORDINARY FORGETFULNESS

A NOVEL

By **VANESSA. A. HERMAN**

Dissociative Amnesia

The inability to recall important personal information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature, that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness.

Diagnostic Features

Spontaneous age regression, depressive symptoms with anxiety, clinically significant distress and impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

– *DSM - IV-TR 2000,* Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, *4th edition.*

I am Here Now

I am here now like an arrow pointing on a shopping mall directory map I am here now like an arrow pointing on an isolated country road, like a flat stone, like a lump of human heart gone rotten.

I am here now after a fetid silence under the earth which smells different when you're under it than when you're above it. You can smell death as well as birth and strangely they both smell like urgency and like after-sex.

I have been buried for twenty-eight years now. Buried alive underground, earth filled my mouth while it was saying something and my lungs fought for air. I quickly learned to slow my heart rate to a bare beat and I learned to breathe the oxygen that was available in the soil and I learned to see in a way that perhaps dead people see.

PRELUDE TO A BURIAL

The day was threatening to be oppressively hot, like a pubescent plump boy stuffed into a t-shirt two sizes too small for him. Anna was preparing to go to her father's funeral. She surveyed her clothing inventory and decided that she was not going to honour her father by wearing the customary black. To her surprise she had begun to feel a light dusting of sentimentality, but she would hardly call it mourning. She was forty but looked ten years younger, thanks to her jeans (and her genes.) Yes she wore tight Levis most of the time. She pulled on her pale lilac dress and pinned a big red rose made from 'who knows what' material onto the upper right hand side above her breast. She slipped on her hand-made leather sandals she had bought in Taos, New Mexico. She thought about how homemade things seemed to last longer than mass-produced merchandise.

When she had returned to South Africa after four years in America, she was three months pregnant with Charlotte and still in a relationship with Charlotte's father, Simon who accompanied her with an enthusiasm of a child. Now her father, Max, was finally dead and she felt free. She smelled the heady fragrance of liberation but then it suddenly mixed with more of a urine smell. Compassion was wee-ing on her bedroom carpet. Compassion was three year old Charlotte's, black Labrador puppy that still wasn't house-trained. Just then, Charlotte came running in, covered in maple syrup and bits of pancake.

Mummy, mummy I was feeding Smashen mancackes and papyle syrup with Daddy but then Smashen ranned out, up to your room.

Sshe couldn't say Compassion and she also transposed the letters 'm' and 'p'.

Anna had to keep herself from exploding into fits of laughter as she imagined an innocent morning in Rome, at the Vatican, where ‘mancackes’ and ‘papal syrup’ were being served for breakfast.

Charlotte, how many times have I told you not to feed Compassion anything? He gets a runny tummy and makes poo everywhere.

Runny moo is yuck.

Yes, exactly, so please don’t feed Compassion.

Ok Mums, she said, holding both Anna’s thighs and staring up at her with her sparkly-under-the-sea eyes. She was such a mixture of innocence and old soul-knowingness that Anna could not be angry with her for long. Charlotte always managed to charm her back into compliance. Anna loved her daughter with an abiding devotion mixed with ‘an abandoned parking lot after dark’ emotion. This remote feeling scared her because it ran so deep and had roots in something outside herself that she could not reach.

One night Charlotte woke up screaming from a nightmare. Anna got up to go and see what the problem was, but she felt as though she were simply going through the motions. She was on autopilot and could not show emotion or give Charlotte affection. She got a wet face cloth, wiped her daughter’s sweating brow, and steered her off to the kitchen for milk and cookies. All the while Charlotte sobbed and heaved violently. Simon came into the kitchen, scooped Charlotte up and hugged her tightly, making soothing, shooshing noises. He turned to Anna.

The opposite of love is not hate but indifference, he said vehemently. He was standing so close to her that she could see the flecks of darkness in his otherwise blue eyes and his saliva sprayed onto her chin.

Mommy has to go to Grandpa Max's funeral, Lotte. So let go of my legs. I have to put on my mascara.

What's a nooneral?

Anna smiled. (Perhaps it's a funeral at noon, she thought to herself.)

When someone dies then everyone goes to the place where they put the dead people in the ground. You remember I told you that Grandpa Max died two days ago.

Will they put a straw sticking out of the ground for Grandpa Pax to breeve in case he stops being dead.

He won't stop being dead, that only happens in the movies.

Mums please breeve some more air into my mouf in case I start to die while you at the nooneral.

Simon appeared at the door suddenly, rubbing his eyes and stretching his arms as if he had fallen asleep in a chair somewhere. Anna was always surprised at how goodlooking she still found him. He looked like a rugged outdoor adventurer crossed with a beguiled cherub.

Don't forget to drop Lotte at Jackie's house at noon for their play-date. Anna said.

And please pack a juice and some cheddar crackers she likes. She will get lunch there but you never know if she will like it enough to eat.

Anna walked to the car. Simon stepped in front of her so abruptly that she nearly fell to the ground. He grabbed her, held her to him tightly, and whispered in her ear.

I hope they bury the bastard deeper than six feet under for what he has put you and us through. Are you sure, you don't want me to go with you? I'm worried that you will be alright.

I feel I must do this alone Si, but thanks for the support, really.

She looked into his eyes and realised how often he had supported her. She kissed him and held the kiss for three beats and then drew back and smiled at him.

I love you, my man.

He smiled back.

I love you, my woman.

As she drove away from the cottage, she felt warm and loved. Six years with Simon and she felt like she finally had a shelter in the storm. Charlotte's being in their lives for the past three years had cemented their commitment.

Anna felt relieved that she didn't have to endure the drive with her mother and that Aunt Sheila and her son Philip had offered to take her with them. Daniel was only arriving from London at ten thirty and was taking a taxi directly to the cemetry. Renee was a compulsive talker. Her biggest enemy was silence.

Anna's black Toyota Yaris growled as she changed gear to head up the hill towards Maitland where the Jewish cemetery was. It was eleven in the morning but the sun was already on full beam. It still surprised her, this African light, even after almost five years of being back. New York never had this quality of sunlight, even at midday at the height of summer. The trees were an intense green and the plants seemed to jump out at her, as if she were in a 3-D movie.

People were milling about at the entrance to the cemetery as Anna pulled into the parking area. She caught sight of Larry Shneeweis, the accountant who had been Max's friend and bridge playing partner for the better part of fifteen years. She called him Shnaai Wise. His wife Merle was next to him looking zoned out on valium as usual. She was a prescription addict who always had a tan, even in winter.

Just as Anna got out of her car, Philip pulled up next to her in his vintage Mercedes. He loved these old gas-guzzlers and had owned a series of them over the years. Aunt Sheila sat in the passenger seat and Renee at the back. Sheila was wiping her nose for a change. Perhaps it dripped like a tap because she spoke through it all the time. She was Max's first cousin and had always believed he was God incarnate. When he spoke, she had listened to him with her mouth slightly open and a look of adoring awe on her face. She belonged to the generation that treated all males as though they were Messiahs and all females like they were Jezebels. Renee belonged to that generation too. Anna felt very sorry for Marcia, Sheila's daughter, because she was treated like a second-class citizen, while Philip was apparently god's gift to humanity.

Anna kissed Renee's angular cheek.

Thanks for being here. I know it is not easy for you.

Aunt Sheila looked at Anna with sad eyes.

Sorry for your loss, and may you have a long life, she whispered.

Jews whisper on only three occasions: when mentioning the name of a disease someone they know is battling with or has died from; when speaking the name of a

mistress someone's husband is having an affair with; and when wishing someone a long life after someone they know has died.

Sheila took Renee's arm on one side and Philip took the other arm and began walking her towards the receiving hall where the service was about to take place. Anna, walking behind them, suddenly remembered how, as an eight-year-old, she had tugged at her mother's dress in the centre of Cape Town one Saturday morning because she wanted to see what was left of a man who had jumped off a building. Now, forty years later, she did not want to view the body of her dead father for all the tea in china. She knew if she did she'd have to live with that image for the rest of her life.

Pedestrian Fatalities

Ruth always looked mildly bemused or surprised. She suffered from astigmatism in her right eye and wore cats-eyed, framed glasses, which made her look like a curious curly haired cherub. Her face was compact, sort of, all on top of itself as if someone had been in a hurry putting it together. Her hair was so fair that it appeared as if she had no eyebrows. Her eyes were unguarded…a big pale-blue sky.

Anna felt protective of her. Her body language gave off the message that she was constantly overwhelmed and she took sustenance from any kindness shown her.
Ruth overheard Renee arguing with Max one day.
You never wanted her! When I fell pregnant accidentally, you wanted me to get rid of IT and I refused. She's always been my stand against you and you treat her like an

afterthought. Do you think she can't feel it? It's disgusting how you fawn over and idolize Anna and ignore Ruth as if she doesn't exist.

Anna remembered that day clearly, her sister coming to her. She was drawing in the bedroom they shared. She could hardly move her legs as she walked towards the bed Anna lay on. Her legs seemed lead-filled and when she spoke she had to clear her voice first. Her eyes were misty and whispered.

I'm an accident, I'm an accident, I'm an accident.

Anna laughed. She imagined her like a real accident, all her inner organs, her liver and kidneys and heart all mangled on the road and miniature cars hooting. Within this bloody massacre, fallen traffic lights blinked on and off. Just then a big fat teardrop fell onto Anna's crayoned drawing and she looked up. Ruth's face had crumpled into its own mixed up drawing.

I just heard mom and dad arguing and mom said I was an accident and that dad wanted her to get rid of me.

Anna was shocked. Ruth looked at her with tears still running down her face.

What do they mean Annie, I was an accident and how would dad made mom get rid of me?

Anna cleared her throat, which suddenly felt like a desert, and wondered how to explain birth control and abortion and felt grateful that she had listened to the gossip on the school ground only last week when her friend Barbara was telling Melissa about the girl who had an abortion because she forgot to take her birth control pills.

You see Ruthie, the wife and husband discuss how many kids they want and if the woman is on birth control pills she goes off them and they plan when to have the

baby. Getting rid of is another way of saying ‘abortion’, which means the woman goes to a doctor who removes the unborn child which is not a child yet but an embryo.

Ruth looked at Anna in shock and horror and seemed to have stopped breathing all together, her heart like a grenade thrown into a children’s crèche, exploded and she fell to her knees on the floor. Anna sat down next to her and stroked her curly blonde hair.

I love Ruthie-Woothie even if you were an accident; to me you were the best accident that ever happened.

Ruth dissolved into another torrent of tears but hardly made a sound, like she had burst from the inside but the outside she kept zipped up like a windbreaker against a storm. Anna put her arms around her but Ruth found physical affection very hard to receive and her entire body stiffened. From that moment on, Anna decided that she was not only her sister but also her unconditional mother who would love her as If she had planned to have her grow in her own womb.

To Anna her father had to remain faultless and perfect but a faint, wet coldness, crept into her heart and sat there like a dazed frog.

Their brother Daniel tormented Ruth every Tuesday night when, *Ten O’clock Tales* came on the radio, which was a programme about the supernatural. He and Anna listened to it but Ruth ran into her room immediately and hid under the covers and read her Enid Blyton books. At the end of the radio show when the eerie signature music came on, Daniel put a white sheet over his head and drifted into Ruth’s bedroom making eerie, ghoulish noises.

Daniel loved to tease his sisters, even sometimes push them to their emotional and physical limits. But he always seemed shocked when they cried. The fun for him seemed to be in the manipulation of his power over them but he didn't really want to harm them. He was an introvert. He hid away a lot. Anna was the only human being in his life who he let in. Even then she had to decipher his emotional Braille and interpret it for him. He often hid in his room and sulked for days. Max generally discounted Ruthie also, like she was just a breathing apparatus with no feelings.

Buried Metaphors

Anna climbed the tree and her legs felt like strong branches in her Wrangler jeans. To her it was a means of escaping, trying to meet the sky. She preferred doing boyish things like playing soccer. The knees of her jeans were often torn. Her report card from nursery school at age four read, 'Does not like the doll's corner with the girls and prefers playing outside with the boys, climbing the jungle gym.'

She remembered pushing the pine cones off the big pine tree in the street outside the house in Rugley Road, Vredehoek. She loved it when the pine cones fell to the ground and how she smashed them individually against the cement of the pavement and broke them open with her own hand So she could get the danna pips out. She remembered the taste of the nutty sweet pine nuts. She remembered coming home with a purple red tongue from eating mulberries from the hedge that ran next to the neighbour's house.

She remembered the sound of an earthquake and her Xhosa nanny shouting at her to get out of bed. It was late at night and her parents were out when the street they were living on began cracking in the middle.

Anna's childhood was spent at 29 Rugley Road, Vredehoek. A semi-detached house painted white with black trim. The columns outside the front door were fluted. The stairs leading up to the front door from the square garden were painted brick red.

Her brother, Daniel's room faced the street and it was above the garage. It was a long narrow room that was once a porch but had been enclosed.

One morning she walked into Daniel's room and Neville, the very quiet man from down the road was sitting with her brother on his lap. A few minutes later both her parents walked into the room. Her mother, Renee, seemed to become nervous, and in a very high pitched voice, asked Max to tell Daniel to get off Neville's lap. After Neville left the house, her parents used the word homosexual to describe Neville and explain how probably he didn't mean any harm, but that boys Daniel's age shouldn't sit on grown men's laps.

Anna remembered thinking that Neville looked as if he had lived indoors his whole life and had never seen any sunlight. He was so white, he was almost see-through and he seemed to be the loneliest person she had ever met. Anna was six years old at the time and saw Neville as a kind man who made Daniel smile, which wasn't easy to do, and bought him model airplanes. There were other new and surprising discoveries that took place but that had to remain hidden at 29 Rugley Road. Daniel and Anna often

wrestled on the living room floor, which almost always turned into him pinning her down and tickling her until she couldn't breathe and was almost blue. She would then burst into tears because of the sheer terror of the experience.

One day, they were wrestling so vigorously that the living room carpet they were rolling around on shifted from its original place revealing a hole in the wooden floor. The hole was big enough for two eyes to see through but only if those eyes were exactly next to each other. This still meant she had to look through it on her own and could just about move her face at the correct angle to see down through the hole. What Anna saw intrigued her and shook her world. It first appeared like some workshop with lots of cobwebs over it but upon closer and longer scrutiny she could see sewing machines and a worktable and chairs and another table with some other machine on it that she had never seen before.

As she looked down into that lost world, she had the sense that a presence still alive yet dead sat at that sewing machine. She could feel the energy field in the workshop still buzzing like an electric fence that water drips on after a big shower of rain. She pulled away violently and shouted at her brother who was sitting very close to her
Oh my god there are ghosts down there!
Daniel promptly shoved her out of the way like she was a heavy pocket of potatoes and he spent an age peering down the hole and sniggering. Daniel and Anna walked into the breakfast room. The breakfast room was called as such because it could fit a table and four chairs in it and was located behind the kitchen. Sometimes lunch was also eaten there during the week. Ruth sat there, munching on her Coco Pops in milk; she often liked to have breakfast things for lunch.

Daniel began his drawn-out strategic implementation of operation scare the living be-Jesus out of your baby sister.

Guess what we just discovered. Guess, Guess!

Ruth tried but forgot her mouth was crammed with Coco Pops, so when she tried to answer, milk and hijacked cereal were sprayed at Daniel and Anna.

Anna continued where Daniel had left off.

We were wrestling and I was on top of the beige mat near the coffee table and we moved the mat and there was a hole in the floor and we looked down it and there is a whole cellar under the house.

Daniel's voice gathered speed and intrigue as it galloped away towards his goal.

There are cobwebs as thick as white gloves and two sewing machines and a coffee cup and some other things. There is a coat hanging on the wall. That must be why we keep hearing strange noises at night. There are ghosts under our house Ruth.

Ruth's face turned white and she covered both her ears and got up abruptly and ran screaming from the breakfast room. She ran to where Renee lay languishing with her five cats on her bed, sipping tea and listening to Shirley Bassey's *"I'll never, never be in love with anyone but you, I love you, hate you, love you, hate you till the world stop turning but whatever you do, I'll never ever be in love with anyone but you!"*

Daniel sniggered behind his hand at Anna while she shot him an acid glance.

Did you have to be so cruel, and you know how sensitive she is?

That's what makes it such fun.

Daniel and Anna gained greater visibility of the hidden cellar the next day when they discovered an outside door on the ground level at the back of the house. It was

padlocked but they got up on a chair and looked in at a barred window and saw more of the detail they had seen from the living room floor. From a very young age Anna had sensed presences and known ‘unknown’ things but this was her first conscious contact with the spirit world… this unearthed capsule of time.

Daniel, Anna and Ruth lived with the hole in the floor and the padlocked door as part of their everyday family life. Their parents shrugged off any mention of it and said they wanted no part of opening the door and going into the cobwebbed cellar and were happy to pretend it just wasn’t there. It seemed strange that people had lived and worked under this house and had just left everything as it was the day they left. Daniel and Ruth couldn’t stand not knowing the full extent of the lost world down there, so one day they broke the padlock on the door. Daniel went in first and Anna followed hesitantly. It seemed all had been left as it was on the day this underground workshop had been shut and padlocked. There was a cup next the sewing machine and a doll mindlessly left on the floor to the right of the table. It was as if the woman who sat at the sewing machine had a little girl who played with the doll. Perhaps the girl was six years old, the same as Ruthie.

Suddenly the whole scene came alive and Anna was witnessing what happened that day. It was a sunny morning but still with a chill in the air. It was almost Spring, but Winter was not quite ready to let go. Raghiema Fredericks, sat at her sewing machine, she had an order for a big Imam’s wedding. She had finished the wedding dress and was now completing the third of the four bridesmaid’s dresses. Rudayba, her daughter played with her favourite doll that she had named Fatima, on the floor to the right of her.

Zayne, Raghiema's, husband and boss sat at the back of the workshop talking on the maroon and grey rotary dial phone. Raghiema had just finished a cup of Rooibos tea and the cup stood at her elbow on the sewing machine table. Zayne Fredericks was speaking in a flustered and hushed tone to his brother who was begging him to leave the house and bring his family to his house in Athlone. Zayne seemed to be shouting under his breath with his teeth clenched. For months now, Zayne's friends had been warning him of, the forced removals act, in parliament. Blacks and Coloureds were being forcibly removed from their houses. The houses and land had been sold to White people. The Fredericks family were classified, 'Coloured' and their religion was Muslim.

Zayne was a stubborn, proud man and he told Raghiema that he would rather die facing a bulldozer, protecting the house that his father had worked so hard to buy, than run like a coward. He didn't want to lose the house that was meant for his children. The Fredericks family had one day to grab whatever they deemed important and run for their lives. Raghiema never made it out alive.

Anna was staring transfixed at the cup on the floor. She was still shocked at what she had just witnessed.

Annie what's wrong? What's wrong? Youv'e gone white as a ghost and I 've been trying to speak to you for the last five minutes. It's like you went deaf and blind or something.

Oh, nothing Dan, I was just day dreaming. I feel claustrophobic and I'm thirsty let's get out of here

The next morning Anna saw a blue-ish grey woman with green tinges come and sit at the family breakfast table. Her eyes never stopped blinking. Anna dropped her yellow soft boiled egg on her pretty we're-a-perfect-family dress and her mother went to get a damp cloth and poked and prodded her with her I-resent-being-a- Mother fingers. Her pinched, angry mother's mouth shouted at Anna, calling her a spaced-out *loskop*. Anna was nailed to her chair and felt like she had swallowed three golf balls and a two cent piece. She blinked her eyes back at the blue grey green sewing machine lady. Her mother asked her if she wanted to go to the doctor and get whatever was in her eyes out.

Anna dared not tell Ruthie about her communication with Raghiema because she would definitely have told Renee and all hell would have broken loose.She could never have told Daniel because he would have broadcast it to the extended family, Grandmothers and cousins and he would never have stopped teasing her about it either.

Anna only told Nemone her best friend from across the street about flashing eyed Raghiema and that Raghiema had spoken about forced removals but she didn't know what she meant.. She also mentioned that Raghiema said that she couldn't rest in peace now because she had died of a heart attack, in that workshop below the house..

Nemone's Mom explained that the blue-ish grey, tinged with green, flashing-eyed woman was Raghiema, and that she was the dead un-dead. These were the souls who were not at peace enough to move on. They were earth bound and they had to tell their stories and be heard in order to find closure or resolution.She had to explain words like resolution and closure twice before Anna understood them. She also

explained that Forced Removals was a 1950 government policy . Black and coloured people were forced to leave their homes and be resettled indesignated group areas. Thousands of people from the Western Cape (which was declared *A Coloured Labour Preference Area* were moved.) It just so happened that the South African government decided to not bulldoze that area but just move White people into the houses.

Nemone's Mom brought Anna and Nemone Eat-Sum-More shortbread biscuits and Five Roses Tea . She encouraged Anna not to be scared and told her that she had a precious gift and she could help people with when she got a lot older.The biscuits were Anna's favourite as was the tea and the combination of that and Nemone's Mom's encouragement made Anna feel much better.

I AM HERE NOW.

I am here now like an arrow pointing on a shopping mall directory map I am here now like an arrow pointing on an isolated country road, like a flat stone, like a lump of human heart gone rotten.

I am here now after a fetid silence under the earth which smells different when you're under it than when you're above it. You can smell death as well as birth and strangely they both smell like urgency and like after-sex.

I have been buried for twenty-eight years now. Buried alive underground, earth filled my mouth while it was saying something and my lungs fought for air. I quickly learned to slow my heart rate to a bare beat and I learned to breathe the oxygen that was available in the soil and I learned to see in a way that perhaps dead people see.

(3) Not Listed

Renee sucked on her ballpoint pen when she made out her to-do list. She often had a blue eye-tooth from stray ballpoint ink. She lived by lists. It was as though, without her lists she would not recognise or have the skill to navigate her life. She ate kippers for breakfast, poached in butter and milk. Anna never knew her mother was strange until she reached her teens. While her parents remained in a state of marriage, the strains of Shirley Bassey, Barry White or Barbra Streisand drifted from their bedroom but always only when her mother was alone in there.

One day Renee confessed that she just never had a maternal instinct. She had never felt particularly maternal she admitted, in fact she had never felt protective over Anna in the slightest.I was only ready to be a mother when I became a grandmother, when your sister gave birth.

Anna exited Renee's warm waters on New Years Eve morning.She encountered harsh cold light where unwelcome giant gods prodded and poked her as if she was a large fish verging on extinction. She had almost died as she was being born because she had turned back up the birth canal head first. The doctor had turned her to face the world. She was determined to emerge prepared to make a clean swim for it.

Why is my baby so blue?

She's had a rough time; you've got a rebel on your hands.

She had been caught from the start between very different elements that had once been one. The mountain had come from beneath the sea. Her mother was the mountain of hate and her father the ocean of love.

Renee's body had never been Anna's home. There was no welcoming, warm breast or ample hip to nudge against. She was angular and sharp and her body spoke a language of coiled rage.

Anna was allergic to Renee's milk and eventually would purse her infant lips tightly together to keep Renee's nipple out. If Renee ever succeeded in getting Anna to latch on, she would vomit up the milk as fast as it went in. The milk was as acidic as her mother's anger. As a result Anna was put in The Lady Buxton nursing home for problem babies and left to yowl and scream her lungs out waiting to be fed formula milk.

One day, when Anna was five, they went to St James beach. Anna was paddling in the pool on the beach when a photographer from *The Argus* approached them. She remembered Renee digging her nails into her wrist rather than holding her hand as they were posing for the photograph. In the photo Anna is half smiling and half wincing in pain. Renee would be loving and sweet for two weeks and hateful and biting for the next two. Anna could never trust her but never gave up trying and never stopped getting hurt.

Renee took the state of neurosis to a completely undiscovered level. She was frightened of everything, driving, using computers, lightning, spiders, emotional intimacy and sex. She never seemed to pause for a breath. Anna decided that Renee probably breathed through her feet. She reminded Anna of a lost child in a supermarket who never was found by her parents.

She asked Anna if she was afraid of the dark. When Anna nodded she said that it was good because she wouldn't be alone anymore then, they could both be scared together. From that moment on, any attempts by Anna to separate from her mother emotionally were met with reminders of her fear and a listing of the potential dangers that would befall her if she strayed too far.

Renee constantly reminded Anna that the world was a dark and dangerous place inhabited by people who were out for themselves or looking to deceive or steal from you. As a result Anna became extremely anxious but had to hide it in order to protect her mother. She also developed an innate distrust of other people and became hyper vigilant for thieves and thievery, always expecting to be stolen from. Renee's fear was an infestation that remained buzzing in Anna's heart and mind, alerting her to the potential danger in every innocent moment. She had to bolster herself just to step out of her front door and take on the menace of daily living. She had to use all of her energy just to turn off her mother's voice.

Renee was also jealous of her husband's adoration of Anna and called her, 'Daddy's girl' through gritted teeth.

(4) Iron Heart

Max, Anna's father was the exact opposite to Renee, he never spoke unless spoken to. He was like a mole in an underground tunnel, feeling his way round with his nose. He was an emotional mute. He inhabited an airtight bubble in which he resided with his

thoughts and he gave permission to certain people to enter his air space and for a limited time only.

He hardly ever had a two-way conversation. When Anna tried to have a conversation with him, he would hook into one idea and begin lecturing her on it. He always had to have control of the conversation and spoke as an authority on anything from apartheid to which coffee she should buy.

In response to anything she said, especially if it was of an emotional nature, he would launch into a diatribe of what to do and how, peppered with a few judgements on her character. His mind worked, not only for itself but served his heart too. His heart was a closed vault that remained so at all times except on the very odd occasion when he felt safe enough and the climate was not directly emotional.

He told Anna that ever since his father was murdered he put his feelings into compartments. He was the first and only child to Fanny and Louie Herman. Max's first year and ten months of life were idyllic. After a year and a half of marriage his parents were still passionately in love. Fanny doted on Max, and when Louie came home at 5pm every evening from his father-in law's jewellery shop, he doted on him too. Max was plump with a ruddy complexion and a voracious appetite. He looked more like Fanny's side of the family – blonde, green eyes and pale skin. Unlike the Herman family, who all had dark olive skin, almond-shaped, brown eyes and dark hair.

Fanny was so distraught after the murder of her husband that the social workers thought seriously about not leaving the child in her hands. In the end, they ignored their better judgment and left the boy to fend for himself. He quickly picked up the word ‘murder’ since it was being used around him daily and he worked out that ‘Daddy’ and ‘murder’ were linked so he walked around repeating, “Daddy, murder, daddy, murder” over and over again.

The night that her husband was gunned down Fanny took her son into their big, gaping king size bed. He was kept awake all night by her sobbing and her trips to the fridge for chicken and blintzes. Even grief did not weaken her appetite. Max was kept in his mother’s bed for another year until she met David Farber. Some would later say that it was scandalous that Fanny only waited a year before taking a lover. Some would say that it was a rebound relationship that would not last. Some would say that David Farber was a social alcoholic and compulsive gambler who used his charming personality and his finely honed street smarts to make his way through life. Some would say Fanny Herman was easy prey for the likes of Mr. Farber.

Max never slept through the night for the entire first year of Fanny's new marriage and David complained bitterly. Max was so used to being woken up intermittently. He had nightmares about giant hands pulling him against moist hairy bodies and breathing fire down his neck. The sensation was no doubt a result of Fanny pulling him against her, her body moist with tears and sweat. She slept with no panties on and often he slipped down towards the bottom of the bed as two-year-olds tend to do and sometimes he had his back directly against her pubic bone and the pubic hair prickled and scared him.

Sleep deprivation took hold of David and he became bad tempered. He begged Fanny to let Max cry instead of bringing him to their bed at ungodly hours. She said that her baby boy had been abandoned enough. David asked her about her abandonment of him, since she had ignored his marriage proposal twice. Four months later they were married in a small ceremony and reception at the Garden Shul. It was even written up in the newspaper under the headline “Widow of Jewelry Shop Murder Marries aYear Later”. The Herman family was not impressed by the publicity or by Fanny's hurried replacement husband. They were even less impressed when they discovered, as much to their surprise as hers, that she was three months pregnant at the time of the nuptials.

Her life consisted of working in a stuffy office littered with papers she had to file and then rushing home at five to her now three-year-old son who was taken care of by a nanny all day. When she arrived home, she had to bath Max and prepare dinner. Often she forgot to pay the electricity, as she couldn't remember everything. David hardly ever had money and when he did he gambled it away and came home well after supper smelling of whiskey and cigarettes.

Fanny had twice found David masturbating in and around where Max was playing or sleeping. Once in the middle of a Saturday afternoon she passed Max's room, and heard strange muffled groans and opened the door slowly until it was only slightly ajar. What she saw shocked her so badly she closed the door as suddenly as she had opened it. Max lay sleeping in his cot-bed and David stood over him, his pants around his ankles, his erect penis in his hand. He was masturbating over her son. Fanny went into shock and denial and over the following weeks, pretended that she had not seen

what she had indeed seen. She ignored all the signs, too tired and not willing to see a second husband disappear and, besides, when David was in her good books, he was a living angel and she adored him all over again.

By the time Max was fifty he had already undergone triple bypass open-heart surgery following three heart attacks.

Faded Wedding Vows

One evening, when Max was nineteen, and in his first year of university, his cousin, Shirley Farber, persuaded him to go to a party with her. He agreed only because one of his best friends, Sam, was going. After being at the party for an hour, a blonde goddess entered the dancing area with five men trailing after her. Max was instantly attracted to her.

She looked like a Swedish or German model. Her hair was platinum blonde and yet her eyebrows were dark black and she wore fire engine red lipstick. He felt his groin heat up. After dancing and laughing with the five men, she drifted over to his cousin Shirley and hugged her as if her life depended on it.

Ten minutes later goddess and Shirley approached him.

Max, this is Renee Cohen, my very good friend.

Max managed to utter a Hi, pleased to meet you, and then looked down at his scuffed shoes.

Renee giggled and asked him if he wanted to dance.

He murmured that he would try. He was relieved it was a slow dance but was also nervous because he would hold her close and start to perspire and his hands already felt clammy. The dance seemed to go on for an hour, his legs felt like lead, his tongue like sandpaper and he could feel the sweat trickle down the middle of his back.

Before he could squirm away, Renee invited him to another party, a dress-up party, the following Saturday night. He couldn't think and just wanted to be home, safe in his room that resembled a book with its smell of paper and all the words that hung thick in the air, waiting to be broken open.

All he could do was nod and half smile while she told him to call his cousin Shirley for her number so they could make arrangements. He inched away from her as if she were a bright lighthouse beam. He felt semi-blinded by her and simultaneously numb with delight. The week flew by. Max could hardly breathe when Friday rolled around and felt his nerves jangle every time the phone rang.

Then he remembered that he was supposed to be phoning her. Max dialed Shirley's number. He was fond of his cousin but also intimidated by her aloofness. After he got Renee's telephone number, he called her and her mother answered. She sounded British and German. Soon Renee was on the phone and seemed to be breathing directly into his ear. He felt too solid and too liquid all at the same time.

Hi Max I'm glad you phoned, I was wondering if you had forgotten. I was thinking that we could dress up as Chinese people for the party. I've already borrowed silk

Chinese pants and top. Will you be able to come up with something by tomorrow night?

Yes, I will think of something. I have an old straw Taiwanese fishing hat that could work.

Great, looking forward to it then.

I will pick you up at nine then. What's your address?

As she spoke, Max felt like he was inside his own stomach and was churning along with it. Was he crazy going to a dress-up party with this Marilyn Monroe look alike? He'd much rather do his usual Saturday night thing, which was to stay in his room reading Descartes or Spinoza, have a long leisurely wank and then meet Samuel for a couple of games of pin-ball and steamy hot mugs of instant coffee and condensed milk at the corner cafe.

Max had a very sweet tooth that matched his incisor-sharp mind. He just wasn't any good at social interactions generally and with the opposite sex. He was still a virgin and the idea of sex with a woman sparked his desire but terrified him. Up until now the terror had won over the desire and staying inside his book of a room with the comforting smell of old and new pages, his cream for hand jobs and his fantasy of a goddess of great intellectual prowess, eyes like lasers and breasts like plump peaches, had sustained him.

The dress-up party proved to be a roaring success for Max. Renee gave him his first blowjob in the back seat of his father's car after the party. She took his trembling hands and got him to feel her naked breasts under her bra. She also guided his hands

to the very moist place between her thighs that he had only imagined for the past five years.

When he got home, he felt like he was made of pure oxygen. He was so filled with heat that he felt he could start a fire by just brushing up against a tree.

Renee needed desperately to leave home. The upstairs flat in Sea Point had become unbearably claustrophobic. Her depressive, narcissist anti-Semitic Jewish mother and her mentally disabled sister were locked in a co-dependent relationship that sidelined her in a malicious and abusive manner. Her mother made it clear that her priority was her sister. She also made it obvious that she felt resentful that Renee was so physically beautiful and that her father had favoured her during their marriage.

Her mother behaved as if she genuinely hated her. Renee started hatching a plan to marry Max immediately after their first date. He seemed calm and stable. She knew he was very intellectual and she idolised intelligence with the fervour of a rock band groupie. She was sure he would make a lot of money and she would be able to compete with the wealthy housewives of Sea Point. She dreamed of being lifted from the shame of a philandering father, a melancholic mother and a borderline mentally challenged sister.

They dated for two years and two days, and on the third day she popped the question. They were sitting at the dining room table in the lounge, which served as a dining room too, in the upstairs flat that Renee shared with her mother and sister. They had gone to the supermarket to do the monthly shop and left Renee and Max alone to eat

breakfast. It was a Saturday morning and a very dappled Autumn day. Winter was warning. Renee toyed with the eggshell before her and cleared her throat three times. Eventually she blurted out the question that had been gnawing at her for the past year. Well are you going to marry me or not?

Max looked like he was choking on seven hard-boiled eggs at once. He composed himself after coughing for a few seconds. Before he could answer, Renee bulldozed ahead.

There are plenty of men who fancy me and some of them are very wealthy. Perhaps I should give Ron Silverman a call.

Ronnie was a plump dark-haired man with a uni-brow. His father owned five shopping malls. Ronnie’s hobbies were eating hamburgers and fries and gambling on the horses. He never went to university but was doing a business marketing course at some college in town. He had made it obvious that he was in day dreaming lust with Renee. Whenever she ran into him, he would call her Marilyn Monroe and tell her how he would worship her like the film star she was and treat her like royalty if she married him. He offered her rides in his silver Mercedes sports car when he saw her walking in town. Sometimes she took a ride but not often because one thing she hated more than her mother was men who fawned all over her. His instant breathlessness and wide-eyed arousal gave her a queasy feeling. She found him slightly repulsive even with his father’s entire fortune at his disposal.

Max stared at Renee shocked. He couldn't believe she was using Ron Silverman as a threat and what bothered him more is that it was working. He felt unnerved and apprehensive and suddenly felt like the last two years were more like two weeks and he was about to fail some sort of crucially important exam.

Renee, I know you have had to be very patient but I am only half way through my Philosophy degree and have just won medals in logic and metaphysics. I may have a promising career as a university lecturer. We could even go and live in England and I could teach at Oxford!

I don't want to live in ice-cold England and you will make a much better business man. We can't live on a lecturer's salary once we have kids.

She didn't care that he was still studying for a B.A. degree. She had long given up the idea of becoming a hairdresser. She was 20 and he was 21 when they got married. They were totally in love, but entirely mismatched. It soon became apparent that they were very poor, so poor that he had to go to the petrol station with a milk bottle to buy petrol as he could not afford to fill his car up. She had to use the tablecloths that had been given to them as wedding presents for curtains. The man she had chosen to save her was not up to it, or even interested in it. In fact, he began slowly to resent her for forcing him to leave university and stop his studies in philosophy. They had three children. One every two years for the first six years of their marriage

Don't lick your knife, if I've told you a hundred times. It's bad manners! Where are the effing (she couldn't bring herself to say the word in front them) mash potatoes? Even when someone said "bloody", she told them not to swear.

Nobody was eating. They were all waiting for Renee to begin shouting at Max, and then they could all eat. That was the ritual night after night. She would look at him and spit out, how was your effing day? No wait don't answer, I will tell you, a lot better than mine. You didn't have three out-of-control children to cope with and no help.

The waiting for the shouting was worse than the shouting itself.
You'll never be anyone; you're a good for nothing, weakling of a man.

This supper litany began to have its own place and rhythm in the family's routine. Dinnertime always reminded Anna of when she dislocated her shoulder. She had that same feeling, during one of her mother's dinner tirades. Her bones moved out of their assigned places. Sometimes she went to school feeling like this and she found it hard to walk properly. She felt very odd and didn't want people to really see her. She lived like this for seventeen years. Her parents' marriage reminded her of a teenager, filled with self-loathing, no co-ordination and coated in a film of angst. Max and Renee never held hands or showed any affection or warmth towards each other. Anna had no memory of any nice words or moments exchanged between them.

Anna's pillow is wet. She has been crying solidly now for an hour and bargaining with God. If god will stop her parents fighting or rather make her stop shouting at him then she will be a good for the rest of her life. Anna hears her father open a closet and then a suitcase and then a soft thud of things thrown into the suitcase. Renee begins crying and begging him to stay.

Max left for the third and final time when Anna was twelve. A few months later her parents called her, Daniel and Ruth into the brown and beige 70's living room that smelled of cat pee and ammonia and told them that they were getting divorced. Her mother looked as if she had fallen off a twenty-storey building and lived to tell the tale, but only briefly before she threatened to disintegrate into that fine ash a body becomes when it is cremated. Her father was smouldering with rage like an electrical

fire, but his face showed nothing, it was stone that once was petrified wood. He spoke in chipped, clipped diction and kept repeating that it wasn't his children's fault, it was that him and mom didn't get on but that they loved us very much. As usual his effusive words never matched his flat-line voice or his sad cement face.

Anna went into mourning after the divorce announcement. Her bed became a coffin and her room an endless funeral. She lived inside the cocoon of death and welcomed its warm stagnancy. She made best friends with decay and even fell in love with the romance of mourning. She secretly loved how gothic and ornate mourning made her feel and began to resemble a black raven, her clothes shiny grey or wet silver. She talked about endings in her life or things that were about to end or were doomed to end. She fed off the death of things. She was warm with the dead cells that had been sloughed off bodies.

(6) The Madness Of Waiting Rooms

It was a case of not being able to perform the most menial of tasks. Between getting out of bed in the morning and making a cup of tea lay an abyss that Anna sweated, profusely, to cross. Eventually her mother called Summerfield House and booked her in for an assessment.

I don't want to go to the loony bin for any assessments Ma and you can't make me.

It's not a loony bin, it's a resting place for the emotionally exhausted and confused. You haven't washed a dish or pot let alone eaten a proper meal in bloody ages. You live on chips and gaucamole. You haven't taken a shower or bath in I can't remember when.

I’m depressed ok. Geez Ma have some sympathy with me.

It’s bad enough I have to do all the washing up and laundry. Thank God Thandeka comes to do the cleaning once a week. Otherwise this entire place would smell like you do. I also have to listen to you walk around muttering “I can’t, I can’t, I just can’t.” Your father lives on another planet all together, anyway, so he doesn’t offer any help when I phone him. I have to be up at 5am to go to work for that slave-driving boss of mine on top of having a thirty-year-old daughter who never gets out of bed. I can’t carry on like this Anna. This situation has to change. It’s like you’re punishing me somehow. I’m sick to death of it.

Why the fuck does everything always land up being about you? You are such a self-involved narcissist. Maybe if you knew how to show a little bit of affection or compassion to another human being you wouldn’t be so damn neurotic. Anna burst into tears. I lost my beloved Nanna who was more of a mother to me than you ever were and then I got fired from my job. I’m depressed so the fuck what!

Your rage towards me is eating you alive. It’s got to stop. When will you stop? You beyond depressed Missy, you’re having a nervous breakdown. I should know what a nervous breakdown looks like. My mother had three of them and killed herself finally. You know, you were fifteen when Granny Stella did herself in and now you’ve lost Nanna. And stop using the F word in every sentence you sound like a sailor not a lady.

The following morning, Renee’s chain-smoking, artistic, and slightly alcoholic best friend drove Anna to Summerfield House. Renee sat in the passenger seat, fidgeting and talking non-stop. She was way too terrified to ever learn to drive.

Max had been even less communicative than usual since the death of his mother three months before. When Anna broke down at the funeral while reading a poem she wrote for Nanna, he ran up to comfort her. She watched him fight so hard to prevent himself from crying. He had always told her not be weak whenever she cried as a child. She sat behind him at the funeral and watched each hair on his head turn grey. She had heard that grief aged you but she couldn't believe that she was witnessing it. She realised that the cliché was true – a human being could indeed die of a broken heart.

Stars fell from your eyes father and I treasured each one. You drove us on cosy and depressed Sunday drives around narrow mountain roads with perilous drops into the sea, saying very little, sometimes not even answering our questions. You were considered Godlike by all of us, while all you did was ponder God.

Summerfield House was a government-affiliated facility that resembled a white double-storey library for crackpots. It did not escape the smell of bleach. The head psychiatrist Dr. Ray Bernardo greeted Anne and her parents at the front door and watched while she said her goodbyes and they reminded her to call Alison her friend to fetch her after the assessment. The doctor then escorted her into his office.

It smelt like wood, old wood that gets warmed by the same angle of sun, day after day, for years. Anna sort of liked him although she was numb. He peered into her face with two beady eyes. His glasses looked so clean she could see every eyelash around both eyes. He spoke in a clipped, clinical way but there were embers of warmth in his voice too. He twitched slightly. It was almost imperceptible, just a slight tremor of his right shoulder. She liked his first name and wanted to say 'of sunshine' after hearing it. He was anything but.

Do you eat a lot, too much or too little?

Anna couldn't really answer that question with any accuracy because she felt so far out of her body so she never knew those sort of things.

I never know when I'm full, have never known the feeling of fullness.

In fact from the moment she had left her mother's house she kept feeling how empty she was. Not the emptiness of a chip packet as you look into it and all the chips have been eaten, but the emptiness of a big room with too little furniture in it.

Do you want to commit suicide? Do you think about suicide often and if so, how often?

Do you know there are 24 different words for snow in Inuit? Don't you think there should be as many words for death in English since we die so many deaths in one life? Yet there is only one word for death and that word is like a coffin?

I'm dressed in black patent leather shoes and white socks with frills on the top and a pink dress with a black and white poodle embroidered on it. I am a doll, a mannequin, a mascot representing a perfect family. I must have no feelings of my own or when I do, they must only reflect yours or be of the happy cheerful kind. I must be seen as perfect by the outside world. Well dressed and well mannered.

I first thought about suicide when I was fifteen. I have tried all sorts of methods to destroy myself.

Do you fall asleep easily? And do you wake up in the middle of you sleep? And can you fall back to sleep again?

I slept-walked as a child. It was a sense of relief to be dead-awake, outside and above it all and yet strangely inside it at the same time.

The sense of floating, like being on an air mattress in a swimming pool lying on my back with the full sun turning my limbs into liquid. Except it is not a warm molten mercury day but midnight and I am in the house where I live and I am eight years old. The dark house seethes with my mother's impotent hot rage and her cold grief. A house with no mouth to speak is cold, ice cold in its dark heart. I am totally asleep and yet awake in a strange way as I feel as if I am walking and I hear myself whisper "turn right now." I am directing myself through the house.

My hair is cut short and suddenly my father is at my elbow directing me back to my bed. Another time I am ten and I dress into my full school uniform in the middle of the night and go into my mother's bedroom and sit at her dressing table and brush my long blonde hair in her mirror. I can feel the brush pulling through my hair but the hand attached to the brush doesn't seem to be mine. It is disembodied. I can see through my eyes but it is like I am under water, where things appear murky and not completely in focus.

My mother wakes up, turns on the bedside lamp and asks me what I am doing. Her voice is unusually calm and yet firm. She tells me to go back to bed. I do not know that I am actually asleep and doing all this in my sleep. I know that I feel strange like everything is in slow motion and something eerie is on the edge of the picture that I am seeing. I explain that I am getting ready for school and about to put my hair up in to a ponytail. I am a little confused as to why my mother is lying in her bed staring at me and why she half gets up but remains sitting up in bed talking to me.

I recommend that you join our in-house group three-month programme, Anna.

Mr Head Psychiatrist hands her a packet of yellow anti-.depressants.

Now you have to take these or else the programme won't work for you because you are clinically depressed.

What's clinically depressed mean?

You are having a nervous breakdown and in fact, after assessing you today, I feel that you've been depressed since you were twelve. Can you begin our programme today?

No, I don't want to join your programme so I can't start today.

Look Anna, you can't fight this on your own, you need medication and therapy, group and individual. There is a tendency towards clinical depression in your family, your mother and your grandmother. Your mother has expressed to me that she cannot do anything more for you.

Well, I suppose, I'll phone Max, uh, my father and ask him to bring a suitcase of my clothes and toiletries this evening.

Anna took the bright yellow plastic packet of pills. They seemed too bright in contrast to the sombre mood of the place. A social worker called Elaine escorted her to the double room she would share with one other girl. They walked up the wooden stairs and along a long corridor. She wished she had committed suicide along with Granny Stella so she wouldn't have had to come here.

The light was shifting from late afternoon to early evening and so suddenly the sun dipped and the room was darkened. Anna could barely make out a form sitting on one of the beds, its knees drawn up to its chin. It looked like a big black parachute. As her eyes grew accustomed to the light she made out a black pinafore dress floating around

the form. The girl looked up from under bushy black eyebrows from a porcelain face. She had been crying. Her eyelids were red and puffy and she quickly wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and sniffed loudly. Elaine, the social worker came in to the room behind Anna.

I *wonder* if Joanne feels like saying hello to Anna?

Joanne flashed Anna a false hypocritical smile and disappeared into the bathroom, gently closing the door behind her. Hearing the intonation on the word ‘wonder’, Anna silently nicknamed the social worker ‘Wonder-less’.

Supper is served at 6pm sharp in the downstairs dining room.

Anna was left standing in an airless room with a porcelain doll girl in a black parachute for a dress. Her entire body felt like it was filled with lead and she wished the floor was a river into which she could sink. She felt soaked in sadness suddenly but resisted crying and began to pack her journals under her underwear in the drawer next to her bed.

I AM HERE NOW.

I am here now like an arrow pointing on a shopping mall directory map I am here now like an arrow pointing …

Joanne emerged a half an hour later from the bathroom. Anna was still packing her journals under her underwear in the drawers allocated to her side of the room.

What you doing?”

I’m paranoid and I think that people won’t look under my undies for my journals. So I guess now you know where I hide my feelings and thoughts.

Joanne delved into her worn, oversized leather bag lying on her bed. She fished out a packet of Camel Plains ignoring the No Smoking signs above each bed. She fired up her unfiltered tobacco.

Quite Frankly I don't give a toss where you hide your thoughts and feelings. Actually, let me show you where I hide my thoughts and feelings.

She pulled up her sleeve. Anna could see a fresh deep cut on her arm midway between her wrist and her elbow. The cut was far away from the veins and was about 8cm long.

I'm a cutter. She laughed through a smoke ring.

Anna recoiled at the sight of the wound.

How does it feel when you cut?

It's sometimes better than that post orgasm feeling. It's soothing, like all the emotional pain gets numbed by the physical pain. It's very addictive.

I use sex and food to numb out. As Anna spoke, she realised it was the first time she had admitted that to herself, let alone anybody else. She paused and allowed the after-shock to filter through and then added – Sex is the best pain killer but the down side is that I always choose narcissistic assholes that cheat on me and hurt me in the end.

My last drug using boyfriend raped me, Joanne said nonchalantly.

Anna finished packing and went into the bathroom. On the sink was a small hand-held pale pink leather pouch. It was open, there were razor blades and some sharp mini knives in it. One of the razor blades had blood on it.

Hey, you left your surgical instruments from your blood sports here.

Joanne shuffled toward Anna, cigarette dangling from her mouth, put the razor back in the pouch, zipped it and took the cigarette out her mouth.

No need to get snarky, she paused and looked Anna in the eye with irritation.

(7) The Sound Of Ginger

Anna entered the communal dining room. Everything was white. The walls, the chairs and tablecloths. There were two long tables parallel to each other for the patients and a long table at the back of the dining room for the staff. Dr Ray (of sunshine) was seated there in the middle of the table. Anna found a place to sit between an olive-skinned boy and a thin wide-eyed pretty girl. They were very quiet. The boy was eating from the bread basket ravenously as if he had not eaten in weeks. She turned to him.

You like bread hey?

He stopped mid chomp.

Not really, I just eat when I'm nervous.

Oh, I'm Anna by the way.

I'm Sam he said after swallowing hard.

Anna reached out for the remaining piece of bread and turned to the wide-eyed girl who had the butter in directly in front of her.

Please pass the butter?

She was staring into space and seemed lost in thought. Anna cleared her throat loudly hoping to get her attention and when that didn't work, she nudged her gently. The girl turned to her, eyes glazed.

Sorry to disturb you but can you please pass the butter

Uh, aah, sorry man was far away, sure here it is.

She passed the butter and then stuck out her hand to shake Anna's.

Mara pleased to meet you.

Anna put the butter dish down and shook Mara's hand,

Anna. What does the name Mara mean?

Oh it means suffering in Sanskrit and bitterness in Hebrew and I can assure I've lived up to my name.

By the end of the meal Anna had learnt that Mara was a professional ballet dancer who battled with anorexia and Sam was a full-blown obsessive compulsive overcome with major anxiety. They were also both gay. Mara had had a longstanding relationship with the director of the dance company she performed with. Sam had never been in a relationship. He talked about himself obsessively while Mara deferred Anna's questions back to her after answering perfunctorily. While Sam was blathering away about his obsessive compulsive problems, Anna caught a glimpse of Joanne sitting at the opposite table her head lowered, while a blonde very muscular boy tried to engage her in conversation. Anna began dreading the idea of sharing a room with the porcelain-faced, skin-cutting, parachute-dress girl.

Sitting between a girl called suffering and a boy who was bathed in fear, she wanted to scream but as she reached up to feel her own mouth it had become a sown on pocket made of cloth. It felt as dead as a school uniform on an ice cold winters day. She got up abruptly and as her water glass was about to hit the floor she ran out of the white-washed nightmare towards the doors. She ran outside to the garden, crying and fighting to breathe. The garden welcomed her like a calm rational mother. She sat down on a bench and began to pray. She prayed for release from her relentless pain, her restless scary half sleep and for an end to her relationships with half dead people that never worked out. Suddenly there was a rustle above her in the tree and a big bundle came crashing down at her feet. She looked down in the fast fading evening

light. It seemed as if she was staring into her *own* eyes. It was her, but she was ten years old. The ten year old blinked at her and said,

Hi I'm Ginger.

Anna couldn't say a word in response. She felt like she was hallucinating or worse, totally insane. Ginger stood up and Anna noticed she was wearing all pastel colours. She had long blonde hair in one poney tail. She sat down next to Anna.

I will be with you on this journey while you are here and maybe for a long time after this. I am the keeper of your memories, the nice happy picnic ones and the terrifying creepy ones. You separated from me when you were five years old.

Ginger said all these grown-up things in a little girl voice.

Anna stared at this seemingly real ten year old who looked exactly like her.

I'm spooked by your sudden arrival. I mean you literally fell out of a tree, but you're no hologram. I know that and yet you're not physically alive.

The next morning Anna felt like she had slept in a wet balloon. She dragged herself to breakfast and nibbled on the end of the toast absentmindedly while she drank strong tea . She then found herself in Group as it was called. All fifteen patients sat in a half circle on chairs with the therapist, Vikki, on the outside of the half circle. Vikki had a large picture filled with blocks and in each block was a face with an emotion written below the facial expression.

Many of you grew up in families where you were not allowed to express your feelings or where nobody, not even your parents spoke about their feelings. Every morning you will be shown this chart and we will have a go around where each one of you will choose one face and emotion to express how you're feeling that day.

For Anna, feelings were foreign countries she visited when she was very young and then was thrown out of and told that she wasn't allowed back in, or she would be severely punished by having all forms of love withdrawn from her. She never knew it was her birthright to enter the foreign country called Emotion. She found herself shivering and shaking with the promised fear of entering the territory of feelings. Crying was worse than being naked in front of a stranger. Her mother usually offered her food or sweets as a bribe so she would stop . She still could not cry in front of anyone else because she feared the humiliation of it.

I must mirror you, though not you as you are but as you want to be! You dress me as you would a doll, frilly and co-ordinated and that is what I must become, a doll, a mannequin, and a mascot representing a perfect family. I must have no feelings of my own or when I do they must only reflect yours or be of the cheerful kind. I must be seen as perfect by the outside world. I must be perfectly dressed and mannered.

Vikki, was looking at her and asking a question. Anna had not heard what she had said. She was doing 'the fade away' game, a technique for leaving situations that were too uncomfortable for her. She called it that privately and never told anybody about it. The game was done by counting anything she saw around her. She counted patterns on carpets, the number of pencils in a pack, the number of petals on a flower, the patterns on the ceiling or the curtains. When she had been in a car as a child she counted the lamp posts, the sign posts, how many silver cars drove past, how many four-door cars or how many children in the cars.

She became a constant accountant so as to not be present.When she was at school she would leave her body and walk out of the classroom down into the gardens below. Often she was only brought back into her body by the teacher shouting her name. She never understood how she could leave her body and return to it as if nothing had happened. As she grew older, counting was replaced with song tunes. She hummed song tunes in her head, or as someone finished speaking she found a song that began with the word that they finished on to silently hum to. Now, sitting in Group, she found herself making up song tunes from words. Suddenly, she became aware that everyone was looking at her, except Joanne, who was staring off into her own private distance.

I AM HERE NOW.

I am here now like a flat stone, like a lump of human heart gone rotten.

Sorry could you repeat the question please?

There was a giggle and a guffaw from a few of her fellow patients.

How are you feeling right now? Vikki asked, pointing to the chart.

Anna scanned the comically sketched faces on the chart and identified with the face that looked puzzled. She read the caption out loud.

Confused.

Good.

Vikki turned to Savannah, a striking girl with jet-black hair and a peaches-and-cream complexion. Savannah practically spat out her chosen emotion.

Angry.

The group dragged on. Anna felt the heaviness in the air. She hoped it would become rain so it could lighten her feeling of defeat. She was still pondering the idea that she even had feelings and, according to the chart, about fifty two of them, while she walked out of the 'feelings' room and down the stairs for the 15-minute break. Joanne was already fishing in her giant postal satchel for her Camels. Anna sat down on the bench where Ginger had landed at her feet. It had became 'her bench' from that moment on. Some big muscular boy called William was waving his arms and talking really loudly near her bench. He was talking to Tony a mixed race boy.

You know Tony, I just feel one emotion all the time, man. Red hot rage. I'm in here coz I can't control it, I've gotten into way too many fights and sent a few guys to the hospital.

Anna felt a little nervous over-hearing this but really she was too numb too care much. The numbness was seeping from her heart into her arms and into her head. She could almost understand how a nice sharp razor blade could wake up her flesh and begin her heart pumping again. She opened her Jeanette Winterson novel, *Oranges are not the only fruit*, and tried to read a few lines. The main character in the novel didn't belong in her family either.

Who the fuck do you think you are, white boy?

Tony screamed at Sam. Anna felt a sudden rush of fondness for Tony who had been only kind and considerate towards her so far. He was here because he often wanted to kill himself.

Sam looked pale with shock.

Don't get so steamed Tony I was just trying…

Tony didn't let him finish.

Trying to put me down and make as if you are better than me…huh!!

Anna walked up to Tony and whispered in his ear.

He isn't worth you getting thrown out of here so just relax and take a deep breath and walk away.

Tony looked at her as if she was crazy and then took a deep breath and walked away.

Anna followed him. Tony was boiling over and as soon as they're were alone he started talking as if his life depended on it

All my life I have felt unaccepted because I am 'coloured'. Then snobs like Sam must pass racist comments in the form of jokes and I just want to kill him.

Sam is ignorant and unaware Tony and he is behaving like a prize asshole and we are all getting tired of him fast, so you are not alone in this. He is self-involved and anxious, I mean the way he interrupts when someone is speaking and goes on with his own experience. It's so selfish.

Tony looked relieved and even managed to smile at her.

Thanks Anna.

He offered her a cigarette.

What the hell.

Anna took one. They smoked together in silence for five minutes and then Wonder-less came into the garden and announced loudly that it was time for individual sessions.

Anna entered her therapist's cluttered and many-windowed office. She knew only that his name was Hein but hadn't met him yet. A man with very blue eyes and a pencil-thin moustache turned around in a swivel chair and got up to shake her hand. He had a South African accent, tinged with a German one. His eyes were kind.She began by telling Hein the weird thing that happened to her three weeks before she arrived at

Summerfield. I won a structural balancing massage in a raffle at The Woman's Centre so I went for the massage with a woman called Josie. I lay on her table and she began massaging me. For the first fifteen minutes it was just soothing and de-stressing but then pictures began flashing through my mind.

I'm been laid down on the wooden kitchen table in the Rugley Road house. Hands are taking down my panties. I am suddenly in the park in Rugley Road and am being held down in the bushes by more hands. I can't see any faces, only hands.

I got such a shock so I told Josie to stop the massage. I told her that I was seeing bits and pieces of pictures that felt like memories. She said that they were called flashbacks and that she would carry on massaging less deeply so the pictures wouldn't come anymore. Afterwards Josie explained that she specialised in bringing memories up through the body. She said that I would soon understand the pictures and feel less afraid. Anna finished talking as if she had just run though a grocery list.

How do you feel now?

I feel like I'm floating up towards the ceiling.

Anna noticed that Ginger had suddenly appeared in Hein's office and was sitting in a chair next to him, sobbing really hard. She had hoped that she could think of Ginger as some kind of post office worker delivering ancient letters to her. But instead, here she was, weeping inconsolably while Anna tried to explain how she was feeling to the therapist.

I feel so lost like I have always been lost and I am waiting for someone to claim me. My father makes me feel uncomfortable.

Hein's very blue eyes were looking at her intently.

In what way?

He tells me how beautiful I am all the time and he often used to hug me so tight I could hardly breathe as a child.

Tell me more about what you remember about your father and the relationship you had with him?

Well, when I was fifteen, I took my thirteen-year-old sister away from my mother and went to live with him. We had to get away from Renee. She was partying and going out with different men and generally making up for the fact that she had become a wife at twenty one and divorced at forty. She was going out every night and leaving us kids home alone and now that she didn't have my father to take out her rage on she would scream at me all the time. I became a nervous wreck.

He owned and ran a restaurant and would be there every night till midnight or later. He lived in a secure flat so we felt safe, and he was very calm and we felt peaceful. At night I read his old books on Spinoza and Descartes. The books were from his days at the University, where he won awards for Metaphysics and Logic. If I was awake when he came home I'd make us tea and toast and jam and we would discuss what I'd read.

You wrote on your intake form that your father's father was murdered?

The Mathematics Of Relatives

Anna had heard briefly about her grandfather's murder from her father but as she grew up she became curious as to the exact facts of the tragedy that had made her father so compartmentalise his emotions. She felt a strange desire to travel back in

time and pretend that she was there, at the scene of the murder, because it would link her to the grandfather she could never meet. She wondered whether reading newspapers from 1938 would help her better understand the two men, one alive but dead inside and the other truly dead. One wintry afternoon in Cape Town, as rain bucketed down in sheets, she drove her rusty VW Golf to Queen Victoria Street and parked outside The National Archives.

The young, intense man at the desk helped her operate the microfiche projector and gave her all the slides from the 1938 newspapers to look at. She felt excited and nervous.She began reading the first page, headlined *The Long Street Murder*.

“A man and a woman approached a pawnbroker’s shop at 119, Long Street, Cape Town. They came from opposite directions, one by arrangement, the other by chance or design. Neither had known of the other’s existence before that day – March 2, 1938. Yet for them coincidence or Fate, call it what you will, had arranged a rendezvous they would remember the rest of their lives.”

Anna read on through about six newspaper articles and slowly pieced the story together. Louie Bleeden, (her great grandfather) had gone to Muizenberg, a seaside village, for a week to relax and convalesce and hopefully recuperate from a lung infection he had been suffering from for weeks. He had left his pawnbroker shop at 119 Long Street in the hands of his wife Rebecca Bleeden and his son-in-law, Louie Herman. A young, handsome man had come into the shop and asked the younger Louie the price of an expensive ring, and then said that he felt ill and asked for some Aspirin and a glass of water.

Louie was sitting behind the desk in the front of the shop when Rebecca arrived at 10:30 to begin work. She was about to go directly to the back to take her hat off when Louie stopped her and told her to hang on because there was customer in the back. They waited a while and Louie went to check on the customer and reported to Rebecca that he wouldn't be much longer. Again Louie and Rebecca waited and again Louie went round to the back to see what was taking the customer so long.

This time, Rebecca heard Louie shout, "Hey, don't!" and then the sound of three gun shots and a heavy thud, the kind a body makes when it hits the floor. Just then the young man ran past Rebecca and out into the street. She ran after him shouting, "Murder, murder! He's shot my son-in-law. Catch him!" She ran back into the shop. Louie lay on his back, dying. One bullet had perforated his heart, the second bullet his liver and the third his right lung. She knelt next to him and took his hand and asked what had happened. He tried to answer but blood filled his throat and he couldn't say anything. An ambulance took him to hospital but he died before arriving.

The murderer was James William Hodgson, aged twenty-three, from Johannesburg. He was a liar, a sociopath and flat broke. He had been retrenched from his job in a stock-broking firm and on his savings had come to Cape Town where he was living in a residential hotel. He had blown all his savings, betting on horses at the track.

He met a woman at the residential hotel, two days prior to the murder, to whom he proposed marriage. The woman thought he was ridiculous and a little crazy to believe that he was hopelessly in love with her when they barely knew one another. He tried

to impress her with a fairytale version of himself that only existed in his imagination. He told her that he owned a diamond field near Kimberley where he employed a hundred workers and how he was waiting for some shares to reach a certain figure and then with the capital of ten thousand pounds he would open a stockbrokerage in Cape Town. Hodgson went on trial three months later, on June 7th, 1938.

Anna remembered her father telling her that there was a book about famous law cases in South Africa that contained a chapter about her grandfather's murder and the trial of the accused. She asked the librarian to check the catalogue to see if he could find anything that might contain information about the trial. He checked the catalogue, disappeared for a while and then came back with a pile of books. One of them was *The Clues Condemn,* by Benjamin Bennett, and in it was a chapter called "Only Case of its Kind" that yielded more information.

The rain had stopped so she went out to grab a coffee and a toasted cheese because it was three o'clock and she hadn't had lunch yet. She walked to Long Street and stood in front of number 119, which was now a camera shop, and wondered if she should go in. She decided not to, afraid that it would feel too eery, especially if the courtyard at the back still existed. She ate the toasted cheese and drank the coffee while she stared into a window of an antique shop, only to realise that is was the exact location of Mr Heller's antique shop that existed in 1938. He had alerted the police when he heard the gunshots coming from the pawnbroker that fateful morning. Anna wondered if she would ever be able to see Long street as innocently as she had in the past. She walked back to The Archives feeling as though she were living in two different time frames

simultaneously. She opened *The Clues Condemn* and paged through to the trial of James Hodgson.

"A youth who would scarcely be noticed in a bus queue or football match, James William Hodgson steps into the dock and the spotlight to play a leading role in the main news event of the day. He is sprucely dressed in a well-cut, single-breasted suit with a spotless white-shirt. Carefully fitted into his semi-stiff collar is a broad, striped tie. All the modern apparatus of publicity, the high-powered rotary press and radio, this human story will for days surpass in news interest almost overshadowing Hitler's threats and a menacing world situation. Electric chandeliers cast an amber light on the packed humanity below. The gallery is filled as it has been for more than an hour. There are elderly men and fashionably gowned women, others who have brought along their knitting, girls who look like typists taking the day off or students avoiding lectures, youths as young as Hodgson whose dreams can surely never be as troubled as his.

"During the technical evidence many of the women concentrate their gaze on Hodgson. It is seldom that a good-looking youth stands trial for his life. Many murderers are repulsive, ill-clad and unkempt creatures not worth a second glance. One woman, they say, remarked: 'He is such a handsome fellow. He couldn't possibly have committed a murder!' Another spinsterish woman, highly rouged and scented, ogles Hodgson and tries to pass an autograph book to him.

"For the 'crown' the Attorney-general of Cape Town, Mr. W.G. Hoal and Mr. C. du Plessis presided and for the defence a Mr. B. Upington. Mr. Upington had an agenda

all of his own. This was to be his last case before retirement and he was invested in it being a victory. Upington convinced a woman who worked at The Elm Tree Bioscope to lie under oath and say she had seen Mr. Hodgson at the movie he had specified to police.

“What could have been the motive for the murder? Had it been the spontaneous need for an engagement ring for his one-sided wedding proposal, or a premeditated robbery of the safe contents? Had Louie Herman actually caught Hodgson stealing the ring and punched him in the ribs and that was when Hodgson pulled the gun and fired the three bullets that killed Louie? Nobody would ever know because the only witness was dead and the other a consummate liar.

“Upington succeeded in getting James Hodgson acquitted of murder. After the verdict had been handed down, he told the Attorney-general that he was ‘glad his last mount was a winner.’ Two months later Upington died of natural causes. In a criminal case, the guilt of the accused has to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt, whereas in a civil case it is only necessary to show that the accused on a balance of probability, is guilty of the crime. Fanny Herman sued Hodgson for the sum of three thousand pounds in the civil case.

“Mr. David Baskin was the appointed attorney for Mrs Herman. He went to Johannesburg and got the co-operation of the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.) and the assistance of the ballistics expert to re-examine the shell casings found at the murder. He also obtained the use of a ground breaking, new comparison microscope that had only recently arrived in South Africa.

“After the first day of the court case, Mr. Friedlander, the counsel for Mrs Herman, got sick. His junior, Mr. Alvin Lichtenstein, in his early twenties conducted the proceedings alone. This was to be his first case. Yet again it was due to a man’s need to prove his worth that fuelled the fate of Mrs Herman.

“It was Lichtenstein’s chance to shine and he was determined to do well. Mr. Lichtenstein studied the brief for weeks. He read every piece of information on the science of ballistics. He slept two to three hours a night. Every night he would analyse each day’s evidence and prepare the cross-examination.” Hodgson was consequently found guilty and Fanny Herman awarded five hundred pounds for herself and a thousand pounds for her year and eight month old toddler. Louie Herman had been the sole breadwinner.

Anna felt like she had been transported back to 1938. She even found herself smiling at the quaintness of the adverts and amazed at some of the articles about Hitler and Germany and the world’s reaction. She stared at the photo of her grandmother leaving the courtroom with her great grandmother. She had never seen a photo of her great grandmother or one of her grandmother looking so young. The shock was recognising herself in her grandmother. The photograph of her grandfather was also surprising because Daniel looked so much like him except that Louie was much darker in complexion, eyes and hair. He looked Spanish or Italian.

Anna asked if she could print all of the articles and the man gave her the price and told her to pick them all up in a week and she could pay then. She left the Archives at

5 pm and drove home with a nagging sense of loss. She had wanted to stay in that wood-panelled room with the memories of her lost family forever. She had wanted to stay there until she had learned to time travel and transform the events of the past. She wanted to return to the 2ND of March 1938 at 10:30 and stop those three bullets from entering her grandfather's chest so that her own father's heart would open and he would be able to feel more fully. She wanted to stop those three bullets in mid-air so that her Spanish-looking grandfather could meet her for coffee and tell her that he loved her from the moment she was born.

This Is Not A Flotation Device

Days became weeks at Summerfield House and soon everyone had their place. Savannah turned out to have been molested by her stepfather. Mara was still an enigma. What became apparent was her perfectionism and need to be in control. Joanne never really spoke in Group and when she did it was usually to pass a very sarcastic, cynical remark. She was issued with a warning to stop cutting herself and start talking. All her surgical instruments had to be handed in. A nurse came to her bedroom and searched for anything sharp lying around Joanne could use. Anna had to hand in her own nail scissors, nail file, razor and razor blades. She was given a pack of plastic disposable razors to use and had to report to the nurse if she wanted to cut her nails. Anna never ratted out Joanne but one day in Group, some blood seeped out of Joanne's long-sleeved shirt onto the carpet. All eyes suddenly focused on the blood. Shirley, in charge of the session that day, suddenly realised what was going on and asked Joanne in a very sweet way if she needed to see a doctor. Joanne was so

numbed out that she had no knowledge of her blood letting. She suddenly realised that everyone was looking down at the floor near her and she saw the little pooling of blood from her arm. She had been slouched in her chair but now sat bolt upright,

I, uuh, aah, must have cut myself without knowing somehow on something, maybe the sharp fence outside.

She got up and ran out the door and Shirley signalled to Wonder-less to follow her.

The group descended into mayhem. Sweet beguiling Shirley suddenly whistled a sharp ‘no shit’ sound from between her lips and everyone did a freeze frame.

Everyone please sit down and be quiet, group is not over. We obviously need to process what just happened.

Anna loathed the word, ‘process’. It was so over-used, like ‘I Love You’. The only sound heard were bums sitting back down in seats. Sam giggled nervously which he did often. Shirley smoothed out her unruffled navy blue velvet skirt and began.

I feel we need a go-around so everyone gets a turn to say how they feel about what they just saw happen in here now. Lets start with Savannah shall we?

So the fuck what, a little blood, maybe she cut herself accidentally or on purpose. I get the whole cutting thing anyway. I used to be a bulimic and so I know it’s about feeling out of control and stuff.

Savannah finished with an ‘I could care less’ shrug.

Next up was Cheryl, a fifteen-year-old waif of a girl who whispered when she talked and apologised in every second sentence.

I feel scared and horrible in my stomach. I am more upset with the pandemonium that broke out after Joanne left. When people shout I get all stuck and paralysed coz it reminds me of my mother always shouting, always angry.

Mara was next but she was crying, her teardrops dripping onto her baby pink T-shirt that said, ‘Dance’ in wavy black writing. She inhaled hard and wiped away her tears with the back of her hand.

I hate the sight of blood, it reminds me of when I found my Mother dead. She shot herself in the head in her bedroom two days after my sixteenth birthday. A pool of blood near her head…so much blood.

She sobbed loudly. Anna’s stomach tightened into a knot that felt like a vise. It’s drama after drama in this place. I thought I was coming here for some peace!

Six weeks later, Anna went to Ray’s office and handed him the full packet of bright yellow anti-depressants.

Never took one Dr Bernado, not one.

What? I’m shocked. You mean to tell me that you got out of your depression through sheer will power.

Yes, I asked around and the general consensus was that the pills make you into a bit of a zombie so I never took them.

Anna I have never seen this in all my years of psychiatry. You have incredibly strong will power.

I was determined to fight it without the drugs.

Well Done! You have another six weeks to go but you’ve already made excellent progress, especially in Group. The only feedback I get is really about your anger and your rebellion against wearing make-up and dresses. Looking feminine isn’t a weakness you know.

The Home of the Brave

Anna arrived in New York from South Africa two years after leaving the Summerfield House programme. She remained enmeshed with Renee and tied to Max for the emotional empathy that he would never give her. She hoped to re-invent herself or at least find a partner who would stick.

Her status in New York was Legal Alien. Aliens are people from other countries who live in New York. Illegal aliens are foreigners who have no legal recourse for daring to live in New York. They make up ninety percent of the work force – the bus-boys, car wash attendants, valet parkers and refuse removers of the city. Anna had learned that New York suffered from a fatal classism. Those who had money did not like rubbing shoulders with those who did not.

Even after two years, Anna's alienation was often painful. Every morning upon waking she experienced a strong sensation of having just been vomited up by a giant prehistoric predator onto this island. Prehistoric trends still were operational. For one thing, neighbourhoods were called 'burroughs', which was apt since New York often felt like a giant rabbit's warren. Women from some of these burroughs wore their fingernails as long as talons. Anyhow, who was she to judge? She was just another mammal with prehensile thumbs.

Anna was often a hostage to words. Sometimes she became constipated with them. She smelled them before they arrived. The smell of the words for anger was always of metal. She sliced through words and arranged them so that they were a pleasure to

look at and easy on the digestion. But sometimes she left them raw or badly cooked so that they would taste as bad as they felt. Often words would not arrive when she most needed them. But when she slept they floated like barges filled with women mourning lost loves.

Anna had found it impossible to speak as a child, and only responded when spoken to but never initiated a conversation. At twelve she was bullied into speech.

The class bully, Kim Sandler, targeted her because she never spoke. She threw chalk at the back of her head during class and when everyone left for break she threw Coca-Cola over Anna's books in her desk. One day Anna saw red and when she came to, she saw black too. Well, two black school shoes swinging like the bobbles at the end of cuckoo-clock chimes. The shoes were attached to feet and long legs and a girl's body and Kim Sandler's face. Anna had Kim up against the teacher's supply cupboard in the front of the classroom and was banging her body against the cupboard repeating a rhythmic mantra.

Leave me alone, you just leave me alone now, leave me alone, you just leave me alone now.

Tears streamed down Anna's face. She had cracked, and was speaking like a zombie. She was shocked at her own strength as she lifted Kim Sandler up with one hand. She kept thinking of the bible passage that was read every Friday at the Jewish school she was forced to attend. "The Lord smote them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."

Her hand was mighty outstretched. In fact it ached for a few days afterwards. Finally, though, Anna had peace. Kim eyed her with trepidation and a kind of awe. Anna had a personality shift from that day and began cracking jokes in class. She found she had a talent for mimicry, and soon became the class clown. More than that, the class realised that she could argue about anything whether she believed in what she was saying or not. When the lessons became boring someone would nudge her and whisper, “Anna please argue so we can waste the lesson!”

She discovered that words had their own music. When she was a child her mother played the vinyl of Richard Burton reading Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood* every Sunday morning for three months for her, Daniel and Ruth. Daniel listened once. The other times he listened half way through and then went back to his room. Ruth listened once or twice but then went off to the kitchen or out into the garden and didn’t come back. Anna sat glued to the record player until the very end. She was transported to Thomas’s small Welsh town where she felt like she was meeting the characters face to face.

Because of Thomas, she had not allowed words to write themselves out of her heart completely. She had begun her journey with words, when her parents got divorced. Even then, at twelve, she had begun writing in her head to escape. She wrote things in her head and prayed she’d remember them. Sometimes she wrote on restaurant napkins, or on toilet paper on the odd occasion she found herself on a death-defying date and mopping up a cold sweat in a toilet stall.

She stood in the subway train. There was no sitting room. She felt pressed like sushi rice under a layer of seaweed. Her lungs fought for air, her mind screamed. The train was packed with Mexicans, Koreans and Irish people all pasted together in the hellish early morning rush-hour commute. It was 8:10am. Woodside, Queens, New York. The train was taking its inhabitants to Manhattan to feed the giant mainframe of Gotham City. Anna suffered from claustrophobia, quite seriously. She found herself gasping for air on this train packed with human cargo. As she opened her mouth to breathe, the image of a dying fish she had found herself staring at a few days ago in China Town popped into her mind. She thought she might die on this train and she wondered what she had done with her life. New York was sucking it out of her. What had begun as stimulating and refreshing was now a 21st-century tower of Babel about to implode from sheer intensity and infernal din. “We don’t need another hero, we just need to find our way home,” Tina Turner pulsed through her Walkman...

She wrote in her head, pushing words through keyholes of possibility. She wrote herself out of the airless rush-hour purgatory onto Clifton 4th Beach or the Sea Point beachfront where newly pregnant, just married woman waddle like smug geese. Where blue rinse grandmothers walk with their bridge-playing friends and talk about why they lost the last game and how they could win the next. Where the anorexic jogs in black sweats on legs like pins and with a face like a pin cushion all puffy and poked at. Where steroid pumped guys thunder past, earphones stuck in their ears, their faces pouring perspiration and the vein in their temples swollen like fat slugs writhing beneath their skin.

She wrote herself out of this airless rush-hour purgatory into her flat in Cape Town where the drunken homeless woman croons outside her bedroom window from the street below at midnight, “Murra Mary kums to me, speeeking worrrds if wisdum, let it be.”

Just then the train jerked violently and Anna was thrown off her fantasy beach and hometown reveries into an open seat next to a Chinese man and an overweight Hispanic woman. The woman wafted clouds of perfume and a faint trace of raw onion. The Chinese man insisted on keeping his legs as wide as possible, pressing too snugly against her. She fumed and pictured pushing her legs apart so fast that his would have to slam shut. She wondered if it just was with women that they did it or do they do it with men too? Is it a statement that says, my penis and testicles are so large that I have problems housing them in my lap; I need half of your lap too?

This guy smelled of fish and started to groom himself. He had one long over-grown thumb nail that he used to pick a pimple on his cheek. Then he cleaned his short nails with the long one. Anna opened her novel but its yellowing pages just aggravated her queasiness. She had bought the book, Simone de Beauvoir’s *She Came to Stay*, cheaply at a bookshop in the East Village. She smiled, almost laughed, because Jean Paul Sartre’s first novel was *Nausea. She Came to Stay* was about his open relationship with De Beauvoir. Anna suddenly missed her father. He had introduced her to Sartre. She was fifteen, just the right age for a sense of outright nihilism.

Anna wondered how Ms de Beauvoir would have reacted to the Chinese man’s invasion of her space, and his depositing of dead skin cells in her lap. The train

coughed and Anna's stomach heaved. She had woken up this morning feeling cheerful, even though she knew it was a cheap kind of cheerful. But now the cheerfulness was swept away like rainwater. Anna wrote in her head again. *So much for finding my Shangri-La in New York. I found my shadow.* Oh, that word, shadow. Too Jungian, she thought. The problem with Jung was that he had been Freud's friend. The problem with Freud was that he was a misogynist who had sex with his wife's sister throughout his marriage.

The train crossed over the Brooklyn Bridge. Anna began the ritual that would make her feel breathed. She would wait until the train was half-way between Brooklyn and Manhattan and then she would close her eyes and take a series of very deep breaths while imagining herself out of the train and floating in air and absorbing all the water from below. She visualised oxygen rushing through her entire body and cleaning every cell, creating space.

Living in New York she never had the experience of expanse unless she went to Central Park, so the journey across the bridge became a ritual as close to a religious experience as she was going to get. Anna felt the river and the air breathing through her, making space in her mind and throat. Now she could manage the steel, the asphalt and the underground crush of the caffeine-fuelled commuters. She closed her eyes and heard Celine Deon's. *I Will Go On.*

She knew that once the train pulled into Grand Street Station she would be owned by the narrow margins of giant buildings. The pulse of the city would make her own race to its demand for NOW. The filthiest swear word in Manhattan is WAIT.

Another day in Manhattan and everything seemed to shine. Even fish-soaked China Town seemed happy as the train passed overhead. As usual, Anna had skipped breakfast – that was the New York thing. She left the station and turned into Starbucks, choosing a double shot Americano with half and half from the endless variations on the theme of caffeine. She left Starbucks and stopped at the Armenian breakfast trolley on the corner of 5th Avenue for a doughnut.

She continued down Fifth to the Fred French Building where she had a job teaching English as a second language to business people from all over the world. She pretended she was Audrey Hepburn and said to herself, “Oh don’t mind me, I’m just going to the Fred French Building on Fifth.” She pictured herself in white satin dress and black designer sunglasses instead of the ungainly winter layers that she would strip off inside the too-warm building.

She would spend the next eight hours suspended in the skyscraper with its inaccurately calibrated central heating. She would humour the Italian couple, massage the weak language muscles of the Japanese man who never smiled with his mouth, only his eyes.

At 5pm she sat with Boris the Russian advertising copywriter, teaching him to reduce his accent. As she was leaving the classroom the Japanese man stopped her.

Aah Miss Anna you are most welcome to visit my factory and stay in my house when you visit Japan. He handed her his business card.

Thank you Mr Taioka.

She put his business card in a purse she kept specifically for cards. It fell on top of the card she had received a week before from a woman who owned a bagel shop in Tokyo. She also had cards from the manager of the Spanish bank and the manager of Fuji Film in Switzerland.

As she stepped out of the lift in the foyer downstairs, Lali, a South American student rushed up to her and put a book about Gaudí in her hands.
You said he was your favourite and I wanted to thank you for being such a patient teacher.
You're going to make me cry Lali. That is so thoughtful of you. Thank you so much.

Anna finally left the building and headed down Fifth Avenue, past Saks, Godiva, Dolce and Gabbana, Armani, Donna Karan. She crossed the street, headed down into the subway to catch the train to Central Park West. She lived on upper Columbus Avenue where mostly immigrants from The Dominican Republic lived. Amsterdam Avenue was a block away. Every time she saw the word Amsterdam on the Metro Subway map she thought about the fact that her Grandfather's family were all from Holland. It was a strange comfort to feel that she had followed some very distant ancestor to New York.

Broken Mirrors

Anna arrived at her apartment. The fried chicken take-away on the left of the building did a roaring trade at night while the Spanish bodega on the right was busy only during the day. She had to sleep with her radio on all night to drown out the noise of traffic and lovers of fried chicken. She walked the five floors to the top floor. There was no lift. She smelled cat urine, mince and cabbage on the way up. As she openened her apartment door she felt a sense of relief. The apartment had high ceilings and big windows. The light wooden floors conveyed a sense of warmth. Isis rushed past her smelling of sandal wood oil.

Oh Hi Anna I'm running off to dance class.

She spoke in an air-hostess, sing-song way. Anna felt indebted to Isis because she had rescued her from living in a grungy hostel and offered her a room in the apartment she shared with Glenda. She tried to see the humorous side of things, living with Isis and Glenda. How Isis constantly bumped into the furniture as if it wasn't there and bruised herself badly and broke dishes and cups often. Less amusing was that she left the gas stove on once and she often left the front door of the apartment unlocked with the key in the keyhole.

Several times, Isis had left her purse on the subway or in some coffee shop and was very lucky that it had been returned each time by some kind person. She saw this as a sign that she was under the strict protection of *The Divine*, spoken as an exhaled breath.

Glenda was just as spaced out as Isis but in a different way. She constantly snacked on titbits of national and international carnage that she soaked up from newspapers and television until she was consumed by terror. She was often distracted and could not remember the names of her friends or movies she had just seen. Paradoxically, she was also obsessed with her health. Her fridge was stockpiled with vitamins, minerals, tonics and various dubious health aids. She had a few organic vegetables lying around but that was it. Every night after work around 9pm she called the Japanese/Chinese take away and ordered a meal. She spoke about the law of attraction and keeping one's vibration frequency positive at all times.

When Anna walked into the kitchen at 7am she found Glenda, as usual, drinking some dark green bubbling drink. Glenda launched her morning diatribe.

There was a ten-car pile up on the New Jersey Turnpike and a man sodomised his six-year old daughter in the Bronx.

She shoved a glass of festering green sludge under Anna's nose.

You must have some of this barleygreen-aloevera wheatgrass, full of vital anti-oxidants to crush those free radicals!

Anna wished she could crush the adult 'not so free' radical in front of her.

Shall I make you some?

No thanks.

Anna managed to unglue her sleep-jammed mouth and mumble something about her morning coffee but Glenda insisted. She took a mouthful of the stuff and couldn't help the automatic gag effect. She waited for Glenda to leave the kitchen and quickly throw the intergalactic gargle blaster down the sink.

Glenda had a cat called Tinkerbelle, who was hardly small and fairy-like. More like the size of three cats, which is why Anna called her Tinker. She could have been the WWF Smack Down champion of all cats! Tinker slunk down the passage like a testosterone-fuelled cowboy scoping out the local tavern for good time girls. She was extremely over-fed. Glenda was a feeder in the pathological sense.

Isis do you realise that we are going to be accomplices to murder? Tinkerbelle is going to die if Glenda keeps feeding her like this.

It was a Saturday afternoon and Glenda had gone to her weekly drawing class.

Isis was blending peanut butter, bananas and yogurt for one of her legendary smoothies. Anna sat drinking a strawberry Snapple and thumbing through an old *New Yorker*.

She won't listen to us. Maybe she'll listen to the vet.

You're right. I'll talk to her tomorrow and insist she takes Tinker to the vet.

Anna wondered if she should ask Isis not to spend two hours in the bath soaking in patchouli and lavender oils. For all her talk of 'mindfulness' and 'compassion for all sentient beings', she could surely conserve hot water for others, and occasionally take out the trash too.

For about two weeks after that Glenda listened to the vet and fed the cat *Science Diet* in the correct proportions. But then she returned to her pathological feeding ways. She bought tins of fatty salmon and hand fed Tinker while she watched TV late at night when she thought Anna and Isis were in their bedrooms. Eventually Anna couldn't

take it anymore and one night she confronted Glenda mid oily-salmoned-hand under cat's mouth.

What are you doing?

Glenda turned to Anna and her facial expression was frightening, like she wasn't even there.

What do you mean?

What are you doing with the cat? Hand-feeding it?

Glenda snapped back into her body.

How dare you accuse me. I'm doing no such thing.

Don't deny it. I just saw you do it with my own eyes.

Ok! I will stop feeding the cat.

Two weeks later Isis came home from dance class at 1pm and heard panicked meowing coming from the bathroom. Tinker was sprawled out on the floor. Glenda and Isis took Tinkerbelle to the vet. Her spine had broken and she had to be put down. Anna was angry and disgusted and didn't go to Tinker's funeral at which, she heard from Isis, Glenda made an impassioned speech.

I AM HERE NOW.

I am here now like an arrow pointing on a shopping mall directory map I am here now like an arrow pointing on an isolated country road, like a flat stone, like a lump of human heart gone rotten.

I am here now after a fetid silence under the earth which smells different when you're under it than when you're above it. You can smell death as well as birth and strangely they both smell like urgency and like after-sex.

I have been buried for twenty-eight years now. Buried alive underground, earth filled my mouth while it was saying something and my lungs fought for air. I quickly learned to slow my heart rate to a bare beat and I learned to breathe the oxygen that was available in the soil and I learned to see in a way that perhaps dead people see.

Finding Simon-Jeffrey

Snakes shed skins and are reborn. They symbolise death and rebirth. In some cultures a person who survives a deadly snakebite is considered a shaman but in our neatly tucked and trimmed lives that same person is just considered scarred and lucky.

Anna knew that some kind of poison was eating away at her but she had no memory of the attack or the breed of snake. She didn't even know she had been scarred yet. She just felt like she was bleeding all over the place and everyone could notice it and it felt very socially inappropriate. She did not, for one second, feel lucky. She was a prisoner trapped, claustrophobic with the knowledge that the warmth of the sun was not everyone's natural birthright.

Two days after the funeral Anna went to The Bitter End, in the West Village. She needed to recover from the Tinkerbelle murder and speak to Holly about leaving her two very strange roommates. Holly was waiting for her at the bar. The club was packed and they had to talk above the sound of a jazz band from Mississippi.
Holls, I can't live with them anymore. It's like I'm living in some kind of B-grade black-and-white zombie movie. Why do I always land up in these freaky living situations? I feel scared and queasy at the idea of going back to the apartment later.
Holly shook her head and patted Anna on her arm.

Holls it's so frightening how the kids who were abused as children become such checked-out adults. You know Isis and Glenda were both sexually abused as children?

Yeah exactly, when I went out with Jasper I couldn't deal with how checked out he was. He didn't do weed or any drugs, just beer and cigarettes but he was hardly ever in his body. I used to feel like I was having sex with a robot. He was beaten up by his dad on a weekly basis when he was a kid and never really went to therapy to process the shit that it left him with.

I treat my body like a car that transports me but I ignore it most of the time. I don't even know when I am tired.

Suddenly a short man with brilliant blue eyes tripped over something and flew into Anna's lap, spilling his Mojito. She felt the ice-cold stickiness down the front of her favourite blouse.

Oops, so sorry, so sorry, he stammered, heaving himself off her.

So you should be, I just bought this blouse yesterday.

I'm really so sorry, I must have tripped over the curtain cord there. Can I buy you another glass of wine?

Well, I'm on my third and I haven't eaten since lunchtime so maybe not.

Can I take you somewhere for dinner then as a way of apologising.

I'm a little too tanked already, uuh, what's your name?

Simon-Jeffrey and yours?

Anna no middle name Becker, Simon-Jeffrey who?

Simon-Jeffrey Levy. Let me order you and your friend some Nachos or Buffalo wings Okee Dokes.

This came out before Anna had really even planned to answer him.

Holly Trent this is Simon-Jeffrey Levy.

Anna slurred a little while introducing them and giggled again.

A week later they met at Madiba's. For their first official date, he looked very casual in denim Levis and a blue T-shirt. She felt like she had made too much of an effort in contrast. She ran to the bathroom before he could see that she had arrived and wiped the bright red lipstick off together with the black eyeliner. She was embarrassed at her new pair of red wedge-heels and spaghetti-strap teal-coloured dress.

Wow! You look beautiful, like Alice in Wonderland.

Thanks I guess.

I ordered two ice-cold brew-skis while I was waiting. Sorry no Japanese ones but South African indeed. Interesting taste this Black Label. I know you like your Merlot but thought you could join me to start off with.

Sorry I'm late; you know how the subway is. She wriggled into the chair opposite him.

No sweat

They chatted about their jobs and she ordered boerewors, pap and chakalaka for both of them.

What is all that?

Well, boerewors is really farmers' sausage, pap is cooked maize and chakalaka is spicy shredded carrot, onion and tomato.

Thank God I'm dyslexic but I hope it's good. By the way I also have adult A.D.D.

What's that?

I can't pay attention for very long so don't get freaked if I change the subject suddenly. Were you born in South Africa?

Yip, in Cape Town. And you?

Right here in Brooklyn. Your folks still married?

No, they got divorced when I was twelve. Yours?

I was ten when they split. My mom discovered she was a really a social activist and a lesbian and kept calling my father an overly passive accountant. I grew up around a lot of angry feminists sitting around discussing how hopelessly inadequate men were both specifically and universally.

Yikes, that must have been disturbing for you as a young boy.

Yeah, for a long time I felt ashamed that I was a guy and was shit-scared of outspoken women. Ironically now I share an apartment with an obsessive-compulsive lesbian. I have to sanitise the bathroom after I use it and literally wash down the kitchen every time I cook in it otherwise Debra lectures me on consideration and respect.

Hope you are not still scared of outspoken women?

Not as much but a little, why?

I've been accused of being outspoken often.

On the subway train a few days later, Simon started reading a Rumi poem to Anna. She felt a rush of love for this strange boy-man who didn't seem to care that the train was full and he was reading a deep love poem to her while a very hairy man was jammed up against him having to hear every syllable. Later, while they were walking down Broome Street, Simon asked if he could tell Anna about something embarrassing he had done when he was thirteen.

Yes sure, if you have to. She nudged him and laughed.

I tied a rope around the neck of my sister's Barbie doll and dragged the doll down the wooden stairs from the top of the house to the bottom. I got so turned on every time

the doll's head bumped against the steps. I had a stone hard erection when I finally took the rope off and put the doll back in my sister's bedroom.

Anna swallowed hard and hoped she wasn't blushing. She felt embarrassed for him, and frightened at her slow but steady excitement.

Well, that was some dirty little secret. Not sure what to do with that information.

She heard a faint, far off warning bell, but before she could entertain any further thoughts she found that he was kissing her. She drew away slowly.

I'm not gonna be like that Barbie doll, you know that right?

Yeah, of course, I don't plan on tying a rope round your neck and dragging you down the stairs.

Well that's a relief, although I quite enjoy getting tied up sometimes if you get my drift.

I get it and I love it, tell me more about what you like in the Booood Woir

Simon's mind reminded Anna of a Frisbee thrown by a Coca-Cola-drinking six-year-old but she enjoyed where it travelled and found the places that it visited provoking and fun. They went window-shopping and he morphed into Charlie Chaplin. Shuffling up to a hot dog vendor pretending to lean on an invisible walking stick, he asked for two dogs with mustard and onions in a perfect Chinese accent.

Life will never be boring with you, you're so spontaneous, she whispered in his ear.

She grabbed his hand and ran down the street, making a howling noise. He responded by gripping her hand tightly and roaring like a lion. They ran round around China Town making animal noises at each other. Later, they went back to her apartment and after they had eaten their take out from *The Bamboo Shoot* they had first time, hesitant

sex with a cassette tape of a rainstorm playing in the background to block out the Columbus Avenue traffic noise below.

Anna soon discovered that Simon was ambivalent about everything, even her. In fact he was much more than ambivalent, he was crippling doubt multiplied by baffling indecision. She nicknamed him her ‘collapsible beach-chair man’. She would watch him fold himself into all the question marks he bombarded her with as they walked down a busy Manhattan street until he was dragging his feet and his voice was an inaudible low moan.

Initially his doubt and ambivalence worked for her. She was attracted to rejection and stuck like glue to men who were most likely to abandon her. After their first year together when she felt more assured that he would not in fact leave her. His indecision began to irritate her. Thankfully their sex life was the one place he decisively took control and she craved that type of domination. She often cried afterwards because of how much energy it took to not trust the entire universe and everyone in it. Most of all she couldn’t trust Simon-Jeffrey. Her inherent mistrust of all things human drained her of motivation. She couldn’t even trust that the check-out girl had given her the right change at the supermarket and had to go over the till slip and change every time.

During their second year together they fought endlessly. She hated herself so much that she couldn’t believe he really wanted her. His arrogance and the shirking of responsibility began to wear on her. He craved heroin (he had only been clean for a year when they met) after taking a smorgasbord of drugs for five years. This, coupled with Anna’s consistent nightmares, made for a very explosive relationship.

When Anna turned off the light at night the smallest sounds became the loudest. Her body went on high alert and snipers seemed pitched at every contour patrolling on timed schedules. She slept the sleep of the prisoner of war, always listening for the captor. Her hearing became so acute that she could hear a soldier exhale his cigarette smoke on a freezing cold night.

One night, everything erupted.

Help me! Help me! Anna screamed in her sleep.

Simon shook her awake.

You're having another nightmare babe. It's ok It's me.

Sweating and panting she slowly came out of it.

What was going on there? Simon put the bedside lamp on.

I only saw hands, no face but I could smell him. He was touching me, bringing me to orgasm.

Do you feel safe enough for me to hold you now?

No not yet, can you get me a glass of water sweetie?

Please go and see a psychologist, you can't do this on your own Annie, I'm begging you. You can't go on like this, barely sleeping and when you do getting woken with these nightmares.

I can't trust them Si. The last one in Cape Town fell asleep during one of my sessions. How can anyone help me when I can't remember who it was who may have done these things to me?

Their devotion to one another won out over their personal demons and they made it through two years together. Simon even asked her to marry him once when she was stoned on hashish at a Moroccan-themed party in the village. She responded by giggling and speaking about gardening at night and how it calmed her down. She never noticed how her flippant disregard cut him and he never asked again.

At the end of their second year together Simon went on a Hunter. S. Thompson drug and alcohol binge. He did not contact her for two weeks. Prior to his binge he had been undecided about whether they should move in together and became emotionally abusive by telling her that she wasn't feminine enough for him and she didn't need him enough.

Ashes with Wings

The uninterrupted blue September sky offered up the expectation of a perfect day. Anna had not taken any of Simon's calls and was deciding whether or not to respond to his text message to meet him for breakfast to discuss their relationship. She was getting ready to go up to C.C.U.N.Y on 135th street, where she had been studying English Literature for the last six months, when Glenda shouted frantically to her from the living-room.

Anna come here quickly, look at the news, the World Trade Center is burning.

They watched the TV screen in horror as flames engulfed the two huge towers in lower Manhattan. A man waved his white shirt and then jumped out of a window.

The apartment wasn't that far away from what would become known as Ground Zero, just a 10 or 15 minute subway ride away. An hour later yellow grey ash blotted out that hopeful sky and an awful sulphuric smell filled Anna's nose when she stepped outside. She could feel those three thousand distentegrated bodies climbing into her nostrils, settling on her own alive skin. Anna felt the panic of annihilation coupled with the animal urge to fight or flee. The image of the man waving his white shirt then jumping to his death would stay with her forever.

As she walked downtown, buses packed with survivors drove past her from Ground Zero, their stricken faces up against the glass staring like wild savages with matted hair, arriving in a world gone mad. Before she could catch herself she said aloud, "This is what war feels like, this is it, a feeling of utter fragility and randomness." Only the lucky survive. She was relieved that Simon lived in Williamsburg. She was supposed to meet him there later but felt caught in indecision.

Two weeks later, she made an appointment to see the Dean of Student Affairs at the college. The campus was quiet. Not all the students were back, and some were still looking for friends or family lost in the World Trade Center. Anna was amazed at how denial worked and that even very intelligent, rational people refused to accept the painfully obvious. People were not lost, they were DEAD.

She suddenly felt herself lost and hollow. The blue sky today seemed mocking. Students were milling around outside. A bus drove past creaking and pushing out black smoke. The sound of her rubber-soled ankle boots, made in Brazil, bought in

New York, crunching on the gravel as she walked comforted her a little. She had stuck the sticker of a Toucan bird that came with the boots, on a college notebook.

She loved the sticker because it made her think of jungles. Visualising lush green proliferation cooled her mind that had been pressure cooked by New York's silver underground trains and the mass grave at the end of the island. She felt as if she was being fed off and drunk from by a metropolis that did not discriminate between flesh or steel, animate or inanimate.

Anna walked up two flights of stairs smelling the academic smell of the place, a combination of books, paper, steel, cement and disinfectant. She felt safe. Academia was her sanctuary where she could be excused for not actively participating in life but still retain the rationale that she was analysing all the thoughts and ideas of people who had gone before her and who participated in life actively.

She knocked softly on the door and waited. She heard a faint voice inside her saying "Let go" and she remembered the only other time she heard that same message was when she was falling off a hiking trail in South Africa. As she somersaulted through the air she heard, "Let go and relax," and she did and landed in a tree. If she hadn't relaxed and let go she would have landed ten metres to the right and plummeted straight down onto the granite slab below.

Dean Bob's voice pulled her back to the present.

Come in.

The fluorescent lights in the office stabbed her eyes, which were puffy from crying. Her shirt felt too tight and her throat closed and scratchy. She felt the dread of the desperate and the terrified.

Anna how I can I help you?

With no warning, she began to cry, big tears falling onto her shirt.

Don't cry, it's going to be alright, he said in a soothing doctor's voice.

Anna's voice came out like an acrobat balancing on a tightrope.

I want to leave New York now. It's been two years and I can't take this hardship anymore. My job was reliant on corporate people flying in to learn English and now no one is risking flying into New York. I have no money to even eat, let alone buy my two books for the next semester.

I tell you what I'm going to do, Dean Bob said with concern and conviction.

I am going to arrange an emergency loan from the college for $400 so you can eat and I am going to make out a personal cheque for you for your books. The cheque is a gift that you need not repay. The student loan you must repay at the end of semester and will need to sign something verifying your commitment to repay.

Anna could barely respond she was crying so hard now.

She kept thinking that this African American man was helping her, a white South African who, for all he knew, could be a racist.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. You must be my guardian angel.

Don't mention it, I want to help you. In fact I really feel you should stay in New York and at this university. You may feel like an uninvited guest now but I know that in a year's time you WILL be the belle of the ball. Your grades are in the top 15% of the

college and you won those English awards. Think about staying, really, it is going to get better.

The Tao of Taos

After her meeting with Dean Bob and her full repayment of the emergency loan from the college, Anna called her second cousin Rael, in Taos, New Mexico. She hadn't seen him since she was thirteen when he visited her family and his in South Africa. She told him that she was burnt out and needed to go home to South Africa. New York felt too threatening with the Anthrax paranoia and the germ warfare that could take place in the subways. He coaxed her on the phone not to return to South Africa before experiencing Taos and meeting his teenage son and daughter.

She was leaving New York after her prediction that The Tower of Babel would come tumbling down. She had even written a poem a year before called "Mid-Town Sunset" where she had used words like *the bad news sky* that brings its own *Armageddon* and hadn't known why she wrote those words until now. It was nine months, after three thousand people had died a few kilometers from where she lived on Columbus Avenue.

She packed her bags, and said goodbye to Isis and Glenda the next morning. Everyone hugged and cried. Glenda gave Anna several packs of wheatgrass powder and two bottles of aloe vera juice. Isis gave her a small bottle of patchouli oil and a tiny book on the philosophy of Zen. They both still couldn't accept that she hated the taste of

aloe juice and the smell of patchouli, even though she had told them this on a number of occasions. They said things like, the desert would feed her soul and the space would help her write. Isis added that Anna could finally let Simon go. After all, he really was damaged. Anna was too numb with grief and loss to point out to her that she had just made a huge judgement and that she prided herself on being non-judgemental. Anna still loved Simon and carried a sweater he had left in her closet to bed every night and wrapped it around her to make as if he was holding her. His blue eyes followed her everywhere and she sometimes thought she heard him laugh.

She flew into Denver airport on July 4th, Independence Day, which she decided was symbolic because she planned on being fully independent of Simon. Her flight to New Mexico was delayed because Julia Roberts, who lived in Taos, was getting married.

Taos seemed to be the last exit on the highway of a life that had exhausted every other highway and come up empty and confounded. It spewed the bitter bile of the misunderstood, the overlooked and the outcast. Yet it also housed the artistic romantics, self proclaimed die-hard idealists, deranged dissenters and astrological junkies. To add to this colourful palette were the conspiracy theorists, the followers of alien sightings, the organic, the chemically sensitive, the corporate burn outs, the alternative-energy people, the back-to the-barter-system people and the lack-of-running-water-only-wearing-animal-skins people. There appeared to be a thin line between lunatic and visionary in Taos. Actually, it really was a veil between not dissimilar worlds.

It was in Taos that D.H. Lawrence fell in love with New Mexico and bought his ranch. There he wrote, *The Plumed Serpent*, about the Aztec snake god rising from the river. Many creative people found inspiration in the Sangre De Christo (The Blood of Christ), a name given to the mountains running from Colorado through Taos because the clay was red like blood.

Cousin Rael turned out to be a pot-smoking maker of renaissance musical instruments, with a sense of humour dryer than the desert he lived in. He had to light a fire to heat up the water in his house. He taught Anna about solar power and grey water and took her to a dinner party in a friend's Earth Ship on the mesa. Earth Ships are houses that are 90% under ground and only the roof, front door and first level are visible. The houses are made from recyclable materials. On his car Rael had a bumper sticker that said *Compost Happens*.

Anna fell apart after arriving in Taos. She ate all day long and fell asleep eating in bed. She became the female version of Salvador Dali, singing goodnight lullabies into ears of corn and waking up with chocolate wrappers stuck to her nipples. She had always used food generally to comfort herself but now she took the addiction to a whole new level. She was a 'foodie' as Soledad would later call her.

She had twenty-two dollars in her bank account and no prospect of a job. She filled herself hourly with bleau cheese, rice cakes, peanut butter and cherry jam. When she got invited to Rael's friend's houses for dinner, she had three helpings of everything. Part of her felt like a camel in the desert but instead of storing water she stored food in her various rolls. She vowed to exercise the next morning when she woke up but she

usually woke up with an over-eater's hangover, which meant she was grumpy, slightly depressed and hungry.

Hunger is an insidious thing; it's like an uninhabitable country you keep returning to in the hope that this time you will be welcomed by some friendly natives. Instead, you are accosted by limping dragons with no fire but terrible halitosis You recoil and slip back into the ocean of interminable longing and swim for your life.

Anna knew it was not real hunger. Unlike starving children in Cambodia or Ethiopia, she never knew what an empty stomach felt like, yet she always felt empty and deprived. Emotional hunger haunted her. Demon entities follow her around, compulsively whispering into her ear, 'go and eat those chocolate chip cookies and some of that leftover casserole, it will be better than sex and because you are not having any sex, this is the next best thing.' Sex and food, like children playing ring a ring a Rosie, went round and round in her head.

It was almost impossible to get work in Taos generally and as a non-American it was never going to happen. Rael's ex-girl friend Silvia was the manager of The Taos Tea Room where twenty-five different types of tea were offered. Anna got a job there as a waitress and cook. She was taught to prepare and cook chilli reanellos and bake scones and make lemon curd from scratch. Anna was starting to remember things while she was awake. She would be serving a customer tea and find herself staring at a menu on the table and suddenly be transported to a restaurant years ago.

She is fourteen and is seated opposite Max in a fancy restaurant. He holds her hand in his across the table. He stares into her eyes, he seems lost and overpowered by some nameless thing. She feel like he is making her into some kind of rare pearl and at the same time she feels like a dirty homeless person with no name.

Do you know that you are the most beautiful girl in the whole wide world?

This is a question he has asked her ever since she was five years old. He always asks it in a very soft and gentle tone that reminds her of syrup dripping from a spoon onto a waffle. She has learned over the years that this is a rhetorical question and so she just nods and blushes and feels trapped, flattered and very sweaty.

The menus lie between them unopened. The waiter approaches, a feminine man whose hip bones seem to be sticking through his black jeans. He looks Max in the eye.

So what can I get for you and your girlfriend?

Anna snaps back like a rubber band and shakes her hand free from her father's grip.

Actually I, I, I'm his daughter.

Max smiles slyly and chuckles a bit.

Thanks for the compliment pal.

Anna wonders if the whole world's gone mad, can't the waiter see that her father is twenty- six years older than her. He is forty-one, doesn't he look it? She orders the mushroom burger and peppermint milkshake and feels invisible and angry.

Cousin Rael was very kind to her. He fed her barbequed salmon made with his own secret marinade. Long before Anna had arrived in Taos, Rael had sent out an e-mail for a gathering of like-minded individuals who wanted to create a self-sustainable community that lived completely off the grid with no links to government or politics whatsoever.

Three people answered this call – Spencer, from Arizona and Hamlin, with his fifteen year old son, Damien, from Olympia in Washington State. Anna attended the gathering more out of coincidence than choice. She was living in Rael's small house, sleeping on the sofa upstairs near the kitchen. She ended up living with these two men and a boy for the next three months in one of Rael's abandoned workshops in El Rito.

Hamlin and Damien were so alternative that they never watched or owned a television and never went to the movie theatre. They read David Icke books about how there are people who are really reptiles from an alien planet who live amongst us. They were computer nerds who earned money by repairing programming problems over the phone. They never socialised and stayed home all the time except for trips to the shops for food. Anna was fond but also slightly scared of them.

Anna loved the Mesa Vista. The Mesa and the sagebrush that went on for miles and miles welcomed her. The cold grey asphalt of New York was replaced with the endless face of sky that peered down on her and whispered *you are free of any threat here*. The only sound she could hear was the sound of her own inner demons fighting it out.

Hummingbirds gathered round her cousin's feeder outside the window of his workshop. Rael put sugar in their water. The deep silence was interrupted only by the sound of a belching pick-up Ford truck owned by a half-Mexican, half-Native-American man. He eyed her, the 'Gringo' settler, come to visit the Red Indian and

learn about sweat lodges and prayer ties. Manhattan seemed eons away in a different stratosphere.

Although Anna was relieved to be out of New York she also realised that it was under her skin. She loved the creativity and cosmopolitan community of the city. It had been her place of initiation; she grew into her own voice there. She proved there that she really was strong and could survive the improbable and unbelievable.

COUNTING BACKWARDS

Six months after Anna moved to Taos, Simon arrived.

I am here to win you back, he proclaimed when he walked into The Taos Tea Room one freezing cold winter morning.

How did you know where I was and where I worked? She nearly dropped the lemon curd she was making in the kitchen.

I got it out of Glenda. She always was a sucker for sushi so I brought her some and explained how I had worked on my issues and wanted my true love back. I called Rael and asked where you worked, pretended I was an old college buddy of yours from New York just visiting Taos and wanting to catch up with you

Anna stared at Simon, his blue eyes were bright with anticipation and his curly sandy brown hair had been unsuccessfully pasted down with hair gel. He stood there in his black Levis and his burnt orange insulated wind-breaker and she felt the ice around her heart melt and her own jeans feel a little warm and moist in the crotch area. She steadied herself and put some metaphoric steel armour on.

Simon why all of a sudden?

It's not all of a sudden for me. I realised that I truly loved you and did not want to give up on us on September the 11th when you never called or came to breakfast. For me it's been a year and three months of waiting for you and working on my issues. I've gone to N.A. meetings for a year now, twice during the week and once on the weekends. I have a sponsor and am working the programme with sincerity. I have been clean for a year. I hardly see my mother and I speak to her just as rarely. C'mon Annie give me a break.

He looked right into Anna's eyes now and she could feel him pulling her into that love vortex.

She suddenly stepped back.You can't stay with me, where are you going to stay?

Don't freak, I have a room at The Sagebrush Inn.

For the rest of the afternoon, Anna could not concentrate. She mixed up the tea orders and had to throw away a batch of chilli reilleneros because she threw in tomato sauce instead of salsa. She was loving her desert life in Taos. She had been in a relationship with Soledad, a Chilean woman, for the past five months. She had joined a black box theatre group with her cousin Grace and had just written a short play that was going to be staged.

She was moving on and now here was Simon to shake everything up. She was still very attracted to him. That was obvious from how her body reacted when she saw him, and she was impressed by his efforts to address his problems. She felt terrified to get involved with him again since her trust had been shattered the last time. She

resolutely promised herself to be only platonic with him; after all, she was having a relationship with a woman whom she was also extremely attracted to.

Anna had known that she was utterly and unequivocally bisexual from the age of fifteen. She was in equal but very different parts attracted to both men and women. To be exact she was attracted to the male energy in a woman and the female energy in a man. She realised that she always fell in love with women who were dying and men who were already dead. The women usually had some form of cancer or developed it after the relationship was over.

She hadn't planned to fall smack-bang crushingly in love with Soledad. In fact their relationship had begun as an ego game for her. Soledad was the owner of Cids wholefood Store. She was financially well off and a much respected member of the Taos community. She was the perfect blend of masculine and feminine. Her angelic face did not prepare one for her compact, robust carriage. She dressed in Latin-Anglo going-on-safari clothing and exuded a veneer of boarding school and boardroom protocol.

Anna found the power that Soledad wielded a distinct aphrodisiac and decided to test whether her seductive skills were still sharp enough to cut a swathe directly into Soledad's bed. Soledad had her mother's British pale, almost translucent skin combined with her Chilean farmer father's hair dark and eyes. Soledad described her mother as a repressed Victorian. When she called Anna she always put on a pukker British accent and announced that it was The Commonwealth calling.

There had been an instant spark of recognition when they had met at a sweat lodge ceremony. Soledad had been a series of firsts for Anna. She had taken Anna to her first opera in Sante Fe and bought her her first Mimosa at brunch the following week. She had also taken her to her first first transvestite bar where the waitrons lip-synched Dianna Ross and Barbara Streisand songs while serving customers.

Their sexual chemistry was sublime. Soledad knew that Anna was bisexual and often spoke of her running off with a man suddenly and what she would do if this happened.

Anna wondered if Simon had in fact reformed and was able to redeem himself. Oh boy. She realised that she was coming off very religiously, with words like reform and redeem. Ultimately she knew she stood little chance against Simon's charm. He read her behaviour and thoughts so well, though he hadn't picked up that she was actually involved with someone else. They were platonic for precisely three weeks. He tried to kiss Anna goodnight nearly every-time at the end of their dates but she gently pushed him away.

When I'm ready.

Simon backed away.

Well then I'm still in with a chance.

One Saturday night at the Guadalajara Grill they ate grilled shrimp and chilli and tortillas. Simon drank *Arizona Green Tea* straight out of the bottle decorated with Japanese cherry blossoms. Anna drank red wine made in Chile and thought of Soledad's body that reminded her of the shape of a violin.

> This thought led to her remembering a particular afternoon when she experienced bliss like she never had in her entire life. It was a very hot afternoon. Soledad had come to Anna's casita with a bottle of Freixnet Brut Champagne and a large packet of Scotch smoked salmon. They had been seeing one another for a month. Four weeks of magic, lost in pheromone paradise. She greeted Soledad at the front door dressed only in a Kimono. Soledad kissed Anna intently on the mouth and Anna guided Soledad's hands to cup her breasts under the silk Kimono. Soledad moaned with pleasure. They closed the front door, went into the kitchen and opened the Champagne and Salmon and got plates, cutlery, glasses and a lemon. They drank and kissed with deep languid slithering snake-like kisses, the dry sharp crisp Negro Brut champagne taste heightening the excitement. They kissed themselves into the bedroom. Soledad took off her clothes slowly and with reticence while Anna assured her that she was beautiful and perfect in her eyes. The fed each other slivers of scotch smoked salmon and trickled lemon juice onto each others tongues. Smells and tastes met and shook hands and then waltzed, food and sex became one. The bright sunlight that flooded them was also from within.

Anna came out of her delightful reverie and suddenly told Simon about her relationship with Soledad.

She sounds incredible. Do you love her? He looked crestfallen and defeated.

Yes I do. You know that I have had relationships with women before, right? But I've never felt this kind of compatibility before.

Anna burst into tears.

She is dying though and it is breaking my heart.

What do you mean dying; you said that she was forty three.

She got skin cancer two years ago and was in remission when we met but last month she went to be tested and its back.

He sat with his arms folded and didn't get up to comfort her. He looked irritated.

After dinner he asked her to come to his room at The Sagebrush and they made love for hours, sleeping in between, until the morning. The sexual alchemy between them was still there. Counting backwards later Anna worked out that must have been the night that Charlotte was conceived.

Anna broke the news to Soledad.

I always knew that low-life, good for nothing prick would show up to claim you back. So you slept with him last night and he has been in this town for two weeks and you never had the human decency to tell me.

I never thought I had any feelings left for him. I thought he had drowned them all, but the nasty buggers learnt to swim.

My heart is being eaten whole by you and you are making wise cracks.

She took a photo off the bedroom bureau of them laughing into each other's eyes, taken at Chaco canyon, and threw it on the floor so hard that the glass shattered and the wooden frame split.

I'm not honey, really. I didn't plan this. I am crazy in love with you.

Don't 'honey' me when you are allowing that man to put his sting in you. I want you out of my life instantly. You cannot love me and him. I cannot share you. I want you too much for that.

Her brown eyes were black volcanic basalt now.

What? I have to share you with Mariposa and can only see you during the week while you spend Friday night to Sunday night and sometimes till Monday morning with her. Don't you think you're being slightly hypocritical?

I told you from the start that I was in a weekend situation with Mariposa and have been for the past four years.

It's not a situation, it's a relationship and I'm goddamn sick of hearing how much Mariposa is in the closet and has to hide you away from her New England hoity toity advocate father who must have his 'cost a fortune' truffles for thanksgiving. I'm also tired of being your dirty secret and having to drive to Sante Fe every time we want to go out together so we won't run into precious Mariposa or anyone she knows.

I've told you a thousand times I cannot break up with Mariposa, she was there for me during the two years of my first cancer treatment.

It's all bullshit and I'm sick of it. You love both us; blah blah … well life is a series of compromises. If you want me gone then I'm gone. I really wanted to be with you and only you but you refused to choose so I guess Simon coming back has forced me to choose. I want monogamy, I'm too insecure to be polyamorous or polygamous or whatever the fuck it's called.

If you had a death sentence hanging over you maybe you would realise that morality is a commodity for the privileged. Impending death makes one realise that. Wouldn't you try and live two or three lifetimes in one if you knew that you had a short time left?

Love always boils down to choice Soli. You must choose, you cannot have all that you want whether you have a short-term death sentence or a very long one.

Anna tried to hug Soledad as she stormed past her but she shrugged her off .

It’s too late for any displays of affection or remorse. You have made your bed, now go and lie in it.

But Soli I wanna be there for you for the chemo and buy you marijuana and help you with the nausea. I love you so much, I want to be there to help you beat this thing.

You will never call me Soli again and I will never see you again.

She quoted Pablo Naruda in Spanish, marched out the front door and slammed it so hard that a Tiwa peace pipe fell off the wall and bounced on the tiles until it came to rest at Anna’s feet. Anna had heard her quote Naruda a few times while they made love. Then it sounded sultry and inviting, now it came off as aggressive and insulting. She bent down to pick up the badly dented peace pipe and sat on the cold tiled floor, put her face in her hands and felt her heart tear right down the middle. She sat and sobbed like that until the sky was beginning to darken.

Simon got a job with a construction company building a micro-brewery out on the mesa. Anna discovered she was pregnant. Simon was overjoyed and Anna was overwhelmed. she loved Simon but she missed Soli terribly. She found it cruelly ironic that Soli was probably dying while she was growing a new life within her. She decided then and there that if the baby was a girl, her name would be Charlotte because that was Soledad’s second name. It was her way of keeping a piece of Soledad in her life forever.

Anna had begun missing Cape Town almost as soon as she arrived in Taos and now with the knowledge of her pregnancy she longed to go home. She wanted to have her baby amongst all that was familiar to her.

Don’t you mean ‘our baby’. I thought Cape Town anaesthetised you and it was a sleepy sea-side island cut off from the rest of the world.

I know I said that but I haven’t been home in four years now and I miss my people and culture. I’ll always be a stranger in a strange land here.

Well, thanks for inviting me along then. Do you care if our baby grows up without her father? Or is there a stand-in dad already on stand-by? Did I not fly across the United States to be with you seven months ago?

I was asking you to come with me in a round about way.

Very friggin’ round about, bloody hell Anna, ask me directly.

Simon Jeffrey Levy will you come and live with me in South Africa and be a father to OUR baby? Maybe with you by my side and with our child I can enjoy Cape Town in a different way.

I will seriously think about it and give you an answer in a few days.

Good enough for me.

She kissed him in his stubble. He shrugged her off, still angry because she had scared him with a perceived threat of abandonment.

Anna called Max the next day in Cape Town.

Hi Dad, how are you?

Well if it’s not my long-lost fairest daughter. Haven’t heard from you

in a few months. How are you my Angel?

Anna recoiled at his use of the word ‘Angel’. She hated it when he called her that.

I’m totally pregnant Dad.

Are you sure you’re not just slightly pregnant. Is that drug addict Sean the father?

It’s Simon dad, not Sean, and he is not a drug addict anymore and yes, he is the father.

Oh boy, are you sure you wanna do this Annie and with this guy?
Dad I'm three months along. I can't change my mind now, exactly and anyhow I decided to keep the baby almost straight away. Simon will make a great dad.
Well, as long as you know what you're doing. Your mother and I had no clue. We were half your age when we had you kids and we had to improvise for the most part.
Yes I know, that's why it's good that Simon is the dad, he knows how to think on his feet. But, dad, speaking of improvisation, can we rent 29 Rugley from you till we are on our feet? Can you give us a reduced rental?

There was silence on the other end of the phone and then a clearing of a throat. Max was never fond of parting with money.
I will need a months notice for the present tenants. You're lucky because I was planning on booting them out anyway. Received too many complaints of loud music till all hours from all the neighbours plus they are always late with their rent. I will also have to re-paint the living room because the students have it silver with a disco ball hanging from the ceiling.
As it turned out, Anna and Simon had to pay half the bill, which Anna thought was unfair. But Max had a sly way of making up on the swings what he lost on the roundabout.

Anna and Simon said goodbye to their new friends and had one last party in an earth ship before travelling back to South Africa.

Housing The Forgetting

Mom I'm bleeding from down there, I think I cut myself, it won't stop.

Renee says in a calm voice, very unlike her. Come over here.

So I go around to the side of the bed she is lying on.

Come closer.

It's too close for me. I can smell her which I don't like doing. She smells of fear, years and years of stale stacked up fear like books piled up. Musty and full of never-read stories. She pulls me closer so that my cheek is near her mouth. I think she is going to kiss me. Instead she suddenly lifts her hand and slaps me hard on my cheek. It stings and I am shocked.

What did you do that for?

Then she says in that calm even paving stones voice,

May that be the only pain you feel as a woman. You're a woman now, you just got your first period! My Mother slapped me too. It's our Jewish tradition.

Anna menstruated for the first time in the house she was now moving back into. She felt excited and happy about the move, but she also felt a sense of foreboding. The move happened fairly easily. Their container arrived filled with a washing machine, television, fridge, computer, a double bed, a single bed and a cot. Anna had collected some second-hand pieces of art that came too. She loved Georgia O'Keefe's flowers and bleached animal skeletons. She couldn't afford originals so had bought posters of some of the paintings and framed them. Simon had bought a second-hand brown leather sofa set that was in the container as well. Anna loved to stretch out and read on it.

On the second day of the move, she walked past the bathroom to go and help the domestic worker unpack some of the crockery and she could have sworn that she heard the sounds of Daniel and Ruth playing in the bath when they were all children. Memories welled up.

Her,Ruth and Daniel squeeze past each in the bath, two against one. They are wet and warm and they push and strain and laugh. This is the only way they show each other affection and this is the way they understand intimacy, the struggle to be together and then the pushing away. Renee never holds them or kisses them so they look forward to bath time when one of them becomes a tugboat and the other two a harbour.
Anna blinked and suddenly the bathroom was silent and she was staring at an empty bath.

Besides the odd creaking floor board Simon and Anna slept soundly in their new home. At least for the first three months. Simon teased Anna about sleep walking as a child and often did imitations of her brushing her hair while fast asleep. She took him to the basement of the house and was disappointed to discover the entire old workshop had been replaced with two empty rooms that had been re-floored and re-painted. A large set of glass doors had been installed to add light in the first one, and once inside, the rooms were inter-leading with an archway between them. No more cobwebs or sewing machines or dolls. Just beige-coloured walls, dark wood floors and a horrible echo when anyone spoke.

Why did you get rid of the sewing workshop Dad?

Anna and Max were eating Gelato and walking on the beachfront a few days later.

Oh, you know, make things cleaner and more organised. I use those rooms to show movies when I feel like it.

Anna now understood the one white wall and the long sofa opposite it. They arrived at The Lighthouse. Anna stood at the railings above the sea. Suddenly her body seemed to shrink and become that of a seven year old.

She is on the Sea Point promenade with her father. She is swinging through the railings that separate the sidewalk from the beach below. Her little seven-year-old body feels strong and she realises that she feels different, like she is not like other girls her age. She is a boy-girl. She stops swinging and goes up to Max who is talking to her aunt and uncle. She is standing in front of Max with her back to him and is talking to her cousin. Max lifts her arms above her head and pulls her toward him so her back is resting against him. She is acutely aware that his penis is directly behind the back of her head, it feels like it is burning a hole in her head.The place on her head becomes hotter and hotter. She wonders if it will burn her hair and the smell of burnt hair and smoke will make the adults realise that something is wrong. She can't understand why they do not notice or stop him from burning her and making her whole body go hard like steel and her mouth like a mouse trap with no mouse in it but waiting to trap something that can harm her. She feels terror and excitement and she doesn't know where the one feeling starts and the other ends. She wonders if this is how all girls feel about their dads.

Anna, Anna. Max is pulling at her sleeve. Ginger is standing behind him, pulling ugly faces.

I've been talking to you for five minutes and you have not been listening. Where did you go?

Uh, I Uh I dunno … lost in thought for a minute …

She apologised and said she wasn't feeling too well and had to go home.

When Simon got back from work he found Anna in the kitchen making spaghetti bolognaise. Her hair was pinned up in a wild, haphazard way. He could see that she had been crying. He went up to her and hugged her from behind.

What's up Annie, you look sad?

I had a weird memory flashback thingy, except I wasn't asleep or going to sleep. I was wide awake. On the beach front with Max.

She turned around still in Simon's arms and her face was very close to his.

I think my father did something to me Si and I don't want him at the birth of our daughter.

She hugged Simon tightly and cried into his white shirt.

I've always known something must have happened. I mean the way he looks at you. When he visited us in Manhattan years ago, how he would hold your hand for too long and tell you how beautiful you were in front of me. I always found it creepy to say the least. Of course he won't be at the birth of our child. It's amazing how you keep calling it, 'her' and 'our daughter.' We both agreed no test before to check gender so how do you know? Is it one of your psychic knowings? Anna nodded and shivered.

You want to talk about the beachfront this afternoon?

She shook her head and then leaned forward into his shoulder and he picked her up and carried her to their bedroom.

She woke up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. A feeling of intense claustrophobia had overcome her in her dream. She had been in a bus filled with loud tourists speaking different languages and all the windows had been shut tight and it was a sweltering hot day. Nobody noticed that there was hardly any air to breathe. An adult female voice kept repeating in her head, *I have been the answer to all your broken promises and you have been all the breaking of my promise.*

A wave, first small and barely visible rose up in Anna, it was like a small fist. The wave gathered momentum and the fist grew bigger. The hair on her head began to prickle and she was suddenly hot with rage. The rage seemed to come from being part of a transaction that she had no choice but to agree to. *I have been the answer to all your broken promises and you have been all the breaking of my promise.* She had a demanding thirst so she put on her slippers and padded through to the kitchen for cold water. She drank three glasses in desperate gulps and went back to bed. Simon was smiling at something in his sleep. She wished she could crawl inside of him and become him so she could avoid all this pain. She cuddled up behind him and put her arms around his stomach. He murmured something inaudable.Soon she was sleeping deeply and dreaming.

She is in the outhouse of her grandfather's house in Leeuwenhof Road in Tamboerskloof. Her grandfather is alone with her. She is four years old. He unzips his pants and calls his penis a puppy dog. He takes her hand.
Here stroke the puppy's head, he likes it. Here tug at his head a bit he enjoys that.

And he puts his very large hand over her tiny one and goes back and forth and pulls the puppy dog's head until the puppy dog chokes and coughs up some gooey white stuff and Grandpa is all sweaty and breathing hard. She is also hot and very spaced out and floating like a ghost out of her body and counting the squares on the pressed ceiling.

They leave the outhouse.

Now Anna, let the puppy dog that hides in my pants be a secret between us ok? If you keep it a secret I will buy you a pram in your favourite colour yellow, and a big dolly to go in it at Christmas time. She runs to her Mother who is sipping hot tea with lemon in the front garden. She can't help it and starts crying and stammering.

Grandpa, big puppy dog, made me do, made me choke the puppy dog.

Her Mother puts her gloved fingers to Anna's mouth.

Sssh now sweetie I'm sure he meant no harm. If you stop crying Mommy will buy you that pretty dress you've been wanting for so long now. Here's twenty cents to buy yourself those pink, chewy, star sweets at the shop on the way home.

Anna woke Simon up who was snoring open-mouthed and drooling onto his pillow.

What, w h a a t's going on? What time is it?

I don't know but I've just had a nightmarish flashback dream of my grandfather molesting me.

Anna started shaking. She felt sick to her stomach. She started crying and then vomited violently over the side of the bed. Ginger appeared at the edge of the bed with a rose in her hand.

It is all starting to happen Annie, the memories are coming. I am helping you remember. It is frightening but call me and I will be with you to help you see and to hug you if you need hugs.

Simon runs to the kitchen and fetches a bucket of water and dishwashing soap.

He runs cold water over a facecloth in the bathroom on the way back from the kitchen.

Fucking-bitch-mother did nothing when I tried to tell her. Anna shouts to him from the bedroom.

He cleanes up the vomit on the floor and wipes Anna's mouth and chin, except she won't stop shouting and wailing.

Why is this happening now Si, three months before Charlotte is due? She has to go through all of this shit while she is in utero. It's not fuckin' fair on her man! It's not fair on me either, being pregnant and discovering my frikkin grandfather and father molested me. She takes another handful of tissues out of the box and blows her nose.

Is our daughter's name going to be Charlotte? Please don't do that to her Annie. I had a Charlotte in my class all through high school and everyone called her *Charlotte the Harlot* or *Lottie the Easy Hottie*.

Anna was quiet for a minute while she incredulously listens to Simon banter on.

Are you serious Simon, are you fuckin' kidding me right now!? Is that all you can think about at a time like this? My whole identity is in question here. I mean, who am I now? The man, whom I have called Father, whom I have adored, even idolised most of my life could be a lying, soul- murdering coward. He gave me my name when I was born. Will I have to change my name now? My very DNA is poisoned by this monster and you are whingeing about our daughter's name.

They never slept that night. Anna told Simon the entire dream and flash back about her grandfather and the complete flashback she had about her own father on the beachfront. Simon fumed.

I want to go over there right now and smash your fuckin' father's head in. Your grandfather is lucky he is dead too otherwise I would have made mincemeat out of that chauffeur-driven-silverware-stealing-paedophile.

Anna thought about Grandpa Mike. He died of stomach cancer when she was fifteen. When he was dying he took all his money out of the safe he had in his bedroom and put his chocolates in it and hid the money under his bed. He was a book keeper at the horse racing track for many years and was known as Chocolates. His entire family was born in Holland except him and his sister who had been born in England. His mother died while giving birth to him and Anna often wondered what guilt he carried because of that.

He ruled his own household with sheer emotional and physical co-ercion. He was a bully and a charmer. Max idolised him and told Anna that he had many enemies because he told people to fuck off if he didn't like them. You either hated or loved Mike, you never felt anything in the middle, Max often said. Anna always felt bad after that because she neither loved nor hated Grandpa Mike. She felt that he was like a rock star, over-inflated and in love with his own image. She couldn't deny the power he had over her though. She always felt a mixture of fear and privelage to be in his presence.

For days after the flashback Anna kept bargaining with God. If there was no real evidence of her father doing anything, it could have just been her own demons at that particular age. She was more upset about her grandfather's hand job and her mother's ignoring her distress and bribing her with sweets than her father's betrayal.

Anna slept in till 1 pm and then called Renee.

Mom can you come over here now? It's kind of an emergency.

Well, I'm in the middle of work you know. Can't tell the boss that I had 'a kind of' an emergency. Is it an emergency or not?

Anna realised then that there was little point in asking Renee over to help her with anything. She was far too self-involved and helpless anyway. She made emergencies only worse. Like the time when Anna was eleven and broke her leg at the new ice-skating rink. Renee just went hysterical, shouting and screaming at her, blaming her for not skating slower and holding on the side railings of the rink. She was the worst person to have around in any crisis.

Oh never mind. I just remembered my grandfather, YOUR FATHER, sexually abusing me when I was five years old, but you never let me tell you about it then, either!

What? What rubbish are you talking about? Pregnancy makes you crazy and imagine all sorts of things. I went loopy when I was pregnant with you too. My father did nothing to you.

Oh really! And your husband had a go as well I think.

Ok now I know you're suffering from hormonal hallucinations. Your father is a man of the utmost integrity and he has the highest moral fibre.You talk about him like he is some kind of miracle diet breakfast cereal. Never mind Ren- NAY, denial is not just a

river in Egypt obviously. Goodbye!Anna slammed the phone down with such vehemence that the night stand it was on, almost gave way. She began to shake and felt herself getting colder and colder. She dialled Michelle's cell number hoping that she had no sports injury clients for the afternoon.

Michelle Soffer hello?

Mish it's me, I need your help. Can you come here as soon as possible?

Where are you?

29 Rugley.

Anna sat at the edge of her unmade double bed shivering and crying. A wave swept over her like she was in the middle of the sea, and then darkness. She slipped down a long dark hole and a voice like heavy molasses whispered, "Do you know that you are the most beautiful girl in the world?" Anna's skin crawled and her stomach cramped convulsively.

I have been the answer to all your broken promises and you have been all the breaking of my promise.

Anna ran, zigzagging, along the freezing-cold walls of the house, her throat burning and her chest filling with a thousand mourners' stones. She could not feel the lower half of her body.

Her body, the crime-scene, where sex was traded for love, where ancient merchants swindled islanders with shiny cheap valueless buttons for precious salt. The site where her body became currency. How could she value that same body again when it had been sold? She realised that slavery was relative but the end result always the

same, to be rendered nameless and reduced to a price. She could not name herself without including the namer of her. She could not use her name without acknowledging its DNA. She had been the answer to all his broken promises and he had been all the breaking of her promise. Anna slowed down she alsmost fell over, her heart hammering in her chest.

Three days later Anna received a call from her mother's half-sister Jessica, who was the same age as Anna. Anna's grandfather had lived with three different women in his life and had a total of seven children, five of whom were stepbrothers and sisters to her mother. Jessica said that she had heard from Renee about her allegations about her father and grandfather. Jessica said that Grandpa Mike had molested her very often until her mother had eventually resorted to sleeping in her bedroom to stop him from anymore visits. Anna put the phone down and started shaking. She drank a glass of sugared water to ease the shock. So the memory of her grandfather had just been corroborated.

Surely he had molested his eldest daughter Renee too? If he had molested her half sisters and his grand-daughter, then her mother had been hiding from this all her life.The pieces of this puzzle were falling into place except the pieces felt like they were giant buildings and as they moved into their puzzle places they threatened to crush Anna and she felt she had to run to get out of their way.

I have been the sum of all your fear. I have been the thing that bleeds without sound while you were the thing that carried knives against your chest under your velvet cloak. I held onto all the lies because they were better than the truth. Danger signals going off in my head but they were wrapped in love parcels over-nighted by you. The taste of fear that smelled like a man in the light blue painted bedroom I shared with my sister.

A month later Anna booked an appointment with Dr Gary Lewinson. She wanted to confront Max and have another strong male present because Max often emotionally bullied her and she became overwhelmed. Max only really respected other men.She booked two sessions prior to the actual confrontational session with Max.

Lewinson was a strange-looking man, slightly Neanderthal, with a jutting-out forehead and bushy eyebrows with brown beady eyes set deep in his head. He appeared intense and lost in convoluted thought. He spoke in a staccato manner and seemed to verbally punch every word that he uttered. His mind worked faster than his mouth so he often said three things at once and had to back track. He was a paradoxical combination of compassion and detachment.

I don’t support sex with children by family members and I don’t support sex with children generally but if the child was allowed to talk about it freely at the breakfast table, it would be healthier. It’s the shame of having to keep it as a secret and not being allowed to express the feelings that makes it all so damaging. I stress very strongly Anna that you are to have little or no expectation of your father telling the

truth. The stats on perps confessing is dismally low, especially closer family members. So rather focus on what you need to express and not on his responses. Anna enjoyed her father being referrred to as a ‘perp’.

Anna wrote a five page letter that she posted to her father, her mother. She gave one to Dr Lewinson and kept a photocopy for herself. She had given her father a week to digest the contents of her letter. She didn’t want to give him too much time to make up lies and but enough time to feel the teeth in her words. The only thing she was not prepared for was if he confessed to molesting her. Yet she could not live with his lies anymore either, because her body had spoken. She had seen the pictures of some of the things he had done. In the week leading up to the meeting she prayed with every fibre in her body that it was all just a bad dream and that her father would carry on being, ‘a man of utmost integrity and a paragon of virtue.’

A part of her wanted to cling to the familiar, even though it felt like a velvet cage. Another part of her wanted him to finally set her free. Free from an endless, unspoken shame, free from feeling dead while being alive and free from the relentless terror in and out of her sleep. The day dawned too bright and optimistic for her. She got up out of bed with the knowledge that the concept of who her father was might change irrevocably.

They all sat in Dr Lewsinson’s comfortable and family friendly office. The first words out of her father’s mouth,were;

Everything you wrote in that letter was true, Anna. I did molest you.

*Main Entry: mo.lest

Pronunciation: \ma- ‘lest\

Function: transitive verb

Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French

Molester, from Latin molestare, from molestus

Burdensome, annoying, akin to Latin moles mass

1: to annoy, disturb, or persecute especially with hostile intent or injurious effect.

2: to make annoying sexual advances to; especially to force physical and usually sexual contact on.

*Merriam-Webster online dictionary. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/molest

Anna’s eyes began swimming and her body became a boat released from its mooring. She floated from a serene lake into a violent sea. Ginger spoke for her.

Why did it take you all these years to admit the truth when you saw me suffering so much? Why did you never come forward with the truth?

Max looked at her. All his masks and cloaks lay in shreds at his feet. There was nothing behind his eyes.

I wasn’t sure if it was you or your sister, you see. I didn’t want to make a mistake. You see, I spent more time in my children’s beds than my wife’s.

He said ‘you see’ twice but Anna couldn’t see at all. A dark impenetrable blackness rose steadily from her feet and was almost at her heart. This man, her father was telling her that he was really some kind of mind-altering magician who had performed elaborate intricate tricks on her, to such an extent, that she would have to practice extra-ordinary forgetfulness in order to keep the image of him alive and herself dead in the process.

She now had information that he had molested her sister and brother too. He went on to reveal the most shocking part of his confession.

I only once tried to penetrate you one night, but then I woke up and left your bed. You see, I often thought you were your mother. My sex life with your mother was non-existent at the time.

Anna had no memory of him actually having intercourse with her! She had only remebered the coerced oral sex. She felt like she had stopped breathing. She had wanted confirmation for what she remembered but now she had so much more. More than she could possibly cope with.

The session dragged on but Anna had become a woman who had been shot at point blank range in a car. The car had then been pushed over a cliff and was sinking to the bottom of the lake where nobody brought their children to picnic because the lake had been abandoned for years and was thick with algae.

Her father looked at her with eyes that were filled with regret and all his cowardice showed in them. He sort of whispered the words.

No amount of saying I am sorry can ever take this away or make all this, okay, but all I can say is I love you and I never meant to hurt you in any way. I was supposed to protect you but I did the opposite.

Anna decided in that instant that she would not offer him asylum for his confessions, nor would she hold him as a prisoner of war. All she could think of was to run away from him as fast and as far as she could. She was a dead woman walking and she could feel rigor mortis setting in. She had to outrun death itself.

Simon was outside in his silver 4x4 Honda. Anna looked at him and was too numb to talk, barely able to nod as a form of greeting. He put his arm around her and gently edged her into the front seat and drove her home. By the time they arrived her teeth were chattering and she had gone into shock. He covered her in a shawl he had in the back seat and kept his arm around her all the way up the stairs and into the front door. Anna went to their bedroom and crawled under the covers in all her clothes, even her shoes. A few minutes later Simon came in with a hot water bottle and a mug of cocoa. He took her shoes off and asked if she needed more blankets. He kissed her on her forehead and said to call him if she needed anything at all.

Just lying down to sleep, her body went on high alert The smallest sound woke her, like the slipping of an adult body into a child's bed. It was always the smallest sounds that made the loudest noise. Anna fell into a shadowy, fitful sleep after drinking half of the cocoa. She dreamed of stiletto shoes made out of potato chips with a white bow in the front and of a man sticking hat pins into a child's heart which looked like an apple. Max kept saying in the dream, "no amount of saying I'm sorry, no amount of saying I'm sorry, no amount of saying I'm sorry" and as he spoke his mouth became a giant cave and the word, LIES, came swimming out like water but the water was filled with the word, lies.

> The next morning she phoned her mother and arranged to meet her in a cafe. After they had ordered their tea she told Renee that her father had indeed confessed. Instead of a torrent of tears and an embrace from her or even just a moment of acknowledgement or empathy for her daughter, she told Anna to

get on the phone to her pharmacy and order her anti-depressants and a bottle of tranquilisers.

I wait for you in the dug out canoe of silence, from within the beating rain. I wait for you in nights like shrouds that mistake me for dead.

I wait for you to take your own body off me while I sleep. I wait for you to un-declare my body a crime scene.

I wait for you to wash the blood from between my legs.

I wait to hear you run the bathwater and bathe my body as if it was sacred.

I wait for you on beds that turn into torture chambers.

I wait for you on beds that become mortuary gurneys where I am suddenly wheeled away and taken to my own autopsy.

My body is cut and divided section by section at the places where different words have been written. The words are the ones you used to murder me with. 'I love you', 'You're my angel', 'I would die without you', 'You're my every breath', 'You are so beautiful'.

I wait for you in the dug out canoe of silence, from within the beating rain.

Anna began calling the memory flashbacks, Tundra Mode. Technically the correct term is Dysphoria. It is the opposite of Euphoria where everything feels wonderful and one is optimistic and hopeful. For Anna, Dysphoria felt like she was all alone on an ice-cold tundra after some kind of global nuclear holocaust had just happened and she was the only surviving human. An ominous horror combined with a relentless virus of terror inhabited her blood. No attempt at self-soothing worked. She could take a steaming hot bath, try and read a book and remind herself of all the friends she had, but the enormous unrelenting freezing-cold fear inhabited her nevertheless.

She began fragmenting like ice over a pond and the natural boundaries between her physical body and the space it occupied blended into one. She felt utterly betrayed and impossibly isolated and she always wanted to die. Her faith was lost, all the armies of the lord could never find her or bring her back to the flock and shepherd her to airless prayer services and vacuum-packed sermons. Tundra Mode meant that her soul had gone renegade and reality resembled more an impenetrable jungle than a white-washed, gold-embossed synagogue.

She had to fight hard to overcome the urge to dump a hundred sleeping pills down her throat and slip into oblivion. Oh. Sweet oblivion. She usually cried until she was dehydrated and sometimes had to block the urge to vomit. She hated vomiting; she found it very traumatic. But more traumatic would be the flashbacks the vomiting induced.

Anna phoned Michelle when she was in full blown Tundra Mode. Michelle was not a pyschologist but had an intuitive ability to handle someone in such crisis.

Hello Michelle speaking.

Tundra Alert. I'm spiralling. Help!

Are we Code Red yet?

They had worked out a system for diagnosing what point Anna was at so the other knew what help was needed. Green was the first stage, an ice-cold physical sensation and the chattering of teeth. Orange was fierce, unrelenting panic. Stage Red was the most critical, the death-wish stage.

When the Code was Red, Michelle jumped in her car and drove immediately over to where ever Anna was, her house, the Public Park or even the supermarket.

Yes Code Red, Code Red. Anna sobbed.

Where are you?

Children's Toy Aisle in Pick ’n Pay, Century City.

I will be there in ten. Keep breathing and go outside and find the nearest grass patch and take your shoes off and walk up and down. Don't stop walking and breathing. Hold onto the memory of my voice saying this and know I'm on my way.

Tha … nks, Anna stammered into the phone.

I feel pinned down by an enormous weight. The light is blue-black shadows of warmth and safety at first but then I can’t breathe. Something is lying on my chest, the weight is bearing down on my entire body. I am powerless under it like a butterfly pinned by all four wings in a botany book. I try and move but cannot, the weight is all over me covering me, from my chest down to and over my feet.

It takes a few seconds although it feels like ages because I am asleep and I'm trying to wake up, I can hardly breathe. I begin to realise the weight is moving and breathing and the weight has its own chest and arms and legs and the weight is in fact human and then that the weight is that of a grown adult man and that man is my own father!

He is putting something into my vagina or trying to put it in but it won't go in. This thing is made of skin and comes from between his legs and it feels like a sharp stone and it feels as if it is tearing and cutting me. It hurts so much. I am only five years old and I cannot understand why my daddy would want to hurt me while I'm sleeping so I pretend that I am still asleep so I don't have to know the answer to that question. I'm also hoping that he will stop sooner if I pretend that I'm not there. I want to keep believing in the good daddy who loves me for me and would never do anything to harm me. He tries more and more to get the stone that is long to go inside me.

I feel like I am dying. I see flickers of lights behind my eyes. I hold onto a thread of air inside my lungs and I can smell the underground burial place, earth fills my mouth.

I slow my heart rate to a bare beat, and I only breathe the oxygen that is available in the soil. I see in the same way dead people see. I can feel what a person is saying by how heavily they place their feet in their shoes above me. I feel the vibration of the silence they hide from. I see a man's face come closer and closer. It's Grandpa Louie, the man I've never met. He has olive skin and dark black hair, he takes my hand. I knows I am safe!

When I open my eyes I'm still lying on my back in my bed, my father has gone and my pyjama bottoms are back on my body. It hurts between my legs and my wee-wee feels like it was bashed with small sharp stones.

Michelle arrived ten minutes later to find Anna pacing up and down across the street from the exit of the shopping centre. Anna looks like a bewildered, wounded animal. She is wild with panic and grief. Michelle approaches her gingerly.

Annie, Annie, I'm here. Lets sit down and count.

Anna comes out of her thick fog of darkness and gradually focuses her eyes on her best friend. They both simultaneously seem to waft down to grass roots level.

Let's count from a hundred and fifty down to zero.

On the count of zero Michelle takes Anna's ice-cold clammy hand and holds it in hers and looks into her eyes. What's your favourite colour?

Orange.

Why?

Because it reminds me of the sun and fire and all things alive. It's always ready to go somewhere.

Et Tu Brutus

Anna decided to invite Ruth to, *It's A Piece of Cake* to have tea and their favourite red velvet, vanilla-iced cupcake. Up until now she had not had the courage to share with Ruth the news of the flashbacks she'd been having but hoped now that Max had actually confessed, Ruth would have no problem accepting the reality. She knew that Renee had not bothered to tell Ruth anything and was too busy popping sedatives as

she called the knock-a-prize-race-horse-out-cold, pills she was swallowing like Smarties.

Anna arrived five minutes late. Ruth was seated and chatting to Teresa the owner who she had been friends with in her twenties. They had gone to parties and gotten drunk and even once started a children's party business together. Teresa had done the catering and Ruth all the art theme work.

Hi Ruth, Anna kissed her on her cheek.

Hi, you late as usual. I was just telling Teresa that you are about to pop any day now.

Anna ignored the snide comment about her punctuality and addressed Teresa.

Hey, Miss T, yes I've got two weeks to go. It's time, I can hardly move, let alone drive. But look how packed your café is, probably since the feature on the *New Hot Spot* page in *Cosmo* last week.

Ja, we have been hopping since then can barely keep up, but congrats Annie. I'll do his or her first birthday free of charge as a welcome gift.

Aww that's so sweet of you, but I still owe you a 40th birthday gift I seem to recall.

Oh bugger that darling, that birthday was a blurr last year. You can give me a bottle of bubbly on your baby's birthday. Ruth has aleady ordered a large pot of Rooibos and two red velvet cupcakes, you need anything else?

Just a couple slices of lemon, Angel, thanks a mill and thanks Tee, I'll take you up on the birthday party offer for Charlotte.

Whose Charlotte?

The baby I'm carrying. I can feel it's a girl and I've told Simon to come to terms with the fact that I'm calling her Charlotte.

Beautiful name, I approve.

Teresa hugged them both and dissapeared into the kitchen.

Charlotte huh? Not very Jewish.What inspired that name?

Charlotte's Web was my favourite book as a kid.

This was a half truth, she couldn't bring herself to tell her about Soledad Charlotte Fuente and their torrid love affair and risk the lecturing and condemnation on the sins of lesbianism. Anway she kept Soledad's memory sacred by not telling all and sundry. Anna had heard via a mutual friend in Taos that Soledad had been sent to Switzerland at the expense of Mariposa for a miracle cure of her cancer.

So how's Trinity going?

Ruth had her own homewares business. She made all the ceramic and perspex herself and imported everything else.

Doing ok, a little slow at the moment. Had a mammoth order for that new restaurant, Yum, that opened in Kalk Bay last month but this month has been a trickle.

No worries, Sis, you always land on your feet and at least your car and delivery van are all paid off.

I know, you're right but still gotta pay off the roof over my head. I'm only half paid up.

Anna loved Ruth's cottage. It was all white with so much light and space. Unlike her, Ruth did not collect things. She was a true minimalist. One glass vase and two long-stemmed lillies on a vast wooden dining table. Her bedroom, a brass four-poster bed with white netting canopy. A print of Gustav Klimt's *The Embrace* hung opposite the bed. Anna thought that Edvard Munch's, *The Scream* would better suit Ruth. She wondered if she lay opposite the picture of *The Embrace* and cried herself to sleep at night, longing to be held but terrified of the claustraphobia that intimacy brought up in her.

The tea and cupcakes arrived.

How's Simon and his work with Jake going?

Oh, you know Jake's had the furniture import place for a couple of years so it's well established and it's so nice that they were buddies back in Brooklyn. Jake gave Simon a break just when he needed it, what with the baby coming and all.

So how you doing Annie? Any nausea or pain?

No actually it's been a very easy eight months considering …

Considering what?

Let's just have our tea and cake first and get to the gory stuff after.

Oh, boy feels like I'm in a for a treat. With you it's always high drama.

And with you it's always hum drum sitcom but let's not get too bitchy too fast shall we. Let's talk about things we have in common and enjoy like art and movies. I want to see the latest Almoldovar, missed it when it was on circuit. Did you see it?

Ja, I loved it Annie, he is such a wizard, our Pedro. Think it was called *In Our Skin* or something like that. The script was superb as usual, so cleverly layered. The actors also so well cast.

Ruth looked down at the floor when she spoke, she hardly ever made eye contact which Anna found exasperating.

Ruthie you still going to the Saturday morning brocha at the shul?

Ja, I'm really enjoying it. The Rebbetzin gives such lovely and informative shiurim and the brocha is always so delish. Shoshana sometimes joins me as well when she has a sitter for Nechama.

So this religious perchant is here to stay then?

It's not a perchant, it's a new way of life that I'm enjoying.

Okee dokes then. Are you observing Shabbat?

About 50 percent yes. I'm still driving but I'm keeping kosher and lighting the candles and all the food stuff.

Is it working for you?

I'm not answering that question, it sounded so condescending!

They sat in an awkward silence and ate the rest of their cupcakes. Eventually Ruth asked, So what was that comment earlier about your pregnancy being easy considering … considering what?

Considering that I've been having memory flashbacks of being sexually abused by Grandpa Mike and Dad.

Ruth practically choked on her tea. What!? I can maybe understand Grandpa Mike but Dad. She cleared her throat. “I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him; the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.”

Anna stopped Ruth mid sentence, What are you on about? Keep your voice down. You sound deranged and not pleansantly either. Quoting Shakespeare at a time like this.Well, Brutus is an honourable man!! Dad would NEVER and I mean NEVER touch any of us inappropriately.

She raised her voice on the word, never, twice.

Well, for your information Miss Ostrich, rather-have-my-head-up-my-own-ass than in the truth, Brutus confessed, three days ago in my psychologist’s office.

Ruth went silent and her face seemed to set into a frozen staring mould.

I don’t believe it. I won’t believe it. I’m going to ask him myself. She got up and grabbed her raffia basket she used as a handbag and ran out of the cafe.

Anna looked at the café door incredulously.

Birthing Butterflies

Anna had a week to delivery. She carried her unborn child with a double heaviness. Her heart was filled to bursting with a new truth that her entire life up until that point

had been a lie. Her pregnancy had been an easy one, besides the recent nausea and vomiting which was caused by the flashbacks.

Her feet and hands had begun swelling in the last few days and she was afraid that she may be developing Preeclampsia. Her friend Alison had gotten that and had to have an induced caesarean birth. She wanted to have a drug-free natural birth, preferably at home in water. Simon had recently talked her out of that idea because of what she had been going through with remembering all that she had to forget in order to survive.

She realised he was right. Hospital it had to be but she insisted on having Alexandra her mid-wife with her at all times and *Toni Childs, Union* playing on the C.D. player throughout the birth. Also she insisted on not lying in the hospital bed but squatting on the floor on a rug she would buy. She had read that squatting was the best method for a faster and less painful birth.

Anna was eating her morning muesli nonchalantly and staring out of her bedroom window at the loquat tree, remembering how as a child she loved eating the sweet bright yellow fruit. Her friend Nemone was going to fetch her at 9:45 a.m. to buy a rocking chair for Charlotte's room. Anna planned on breast-feeding and wanted a rocker for that purpose. Suddenly she felt a sharp pain and then a deeper cramping pain. She stood up rubbing the site of discomfort and warm water gushed from between her legs onto the floor. She took a couple of seconds to register and stepped out of the puddle to grab her cell phone on the bedside table. She prayed Simon would pick up.

Babe, she's a week early, it's happening, my water just broke. Yes, the hospital bag is packed and I'm ready. Ok, see you soon, don't drive like a lunatic, get here in one piece.

She called Xoliswa to come and help her. While she waited for Simon, she thought about Renee and Max and for a split second had the urge to call them but then remembered the reality. It was like they had died and she had forgotten and wanted to pretend they were still alive. Simon arrived in ten minutes; the shop was fairly close by. His face was ashen and his hands trembled as he reached for her hand.

You more nervous than me Simon, don't worry everything will be alright.

Aaaah, she held her lower abdomen as a sharper, deeper pain hit her.

The contractions are starting, let's go, he announced, scooping up her hospital bag.

As Anna walked down the red polished stairs of 29 Rugley Road, she was glad she hadn't bought the rocking chair. She decided in that instant that she would not bring Charlotte back to this house, the house where all the lies happened.

Si, we need to give Max a month's notice. I can't bring our child back to live in this house. Not after all that's happened here. We can camp in Nemone's den which is an entire floor of her house with everything we need. She would love to have us, since she kicked Steve out and her daughter's in London. She's lonely.

Geez Annie after all the work I did on the nursery. Wish you would have made a decision sooner.

Well, the memories only started picking up speed lately. Remember!
Aaah…ouch…that was a mother of a pain.

They got into the Honda and sped off to the hospital. Alexandra was in the delivery room with the Toni Childs, C.D in her hand.

Namaste, Simon, she said.

He nodded and frowned.

Anna loved the words and the flowing garments Alexandra made use of. Her tender gracefulness always made Anna feel like she was in the presence of a water goddess rather than a mortal woman. She felt comforted that Alex was going to be at her side.

Anna also felt another comforting albeit somewhat mischievous presence around her. Ginger stood at the end of the corridor. She had a large Candy Cane that she was licking and her blonde hair was in two pony tails that hung on each side of her head. She bounded up to Anna and whispered in her ear, Easy Peasy Japanesey, we'll have her out of you in a flash. She winked and went and sat near the window where the rug for squatting had been placed. Although Alexandra and Simon were both Anna's birth coaches, it was Ginger who whispered things that made Anna translate the entire birthing process into a pure spiritual and energetic one. She had learnt about magical realism in the literature class back in New York and that was what Ginger reminded her of. A blurry line between reality and imagination and the place where they sometimes overlap.

The last thing Ginger whispered before Charlotte's head began crowning was, her soul is entering our dimension now.

Anna was in labour for two hours. Charlotte shot right out, yelling as she arrived. When Anna held her for the first time she saw a ring of white butterflies around her newly birthed head. She stared into the eyes of an old wise soul with eyes sparkling with light. Anna kissed her damp cheek,

Welcome Charlotte Louise Kirin Levy, oh! wise-sparkly one.

They had decided to call her Louise after Louie Herman and Kirin after Simon's favourite Japanese beer Kirin Ichiban, which he was drinking the night they met.

Simon smiled from ear to ear while tears poured down his face and onto Charlotte's head.

Levy! Does that mean you will finally marry me?

Yes, Si, that's exactly what it means. She kissed him emphatically on his lips.

Blessed be, what a beautiful trinity, murmured Alexandra.

Unholy Distortions

When Charlotte was six months old Anna decided that since Max had told some of the truth and not lied outright and not told her that she was insane as most perpetrators tended to do, he deserved some contact with her. She asked him to teach her how to drive a manual car. She only drove an automatic because of Renee's influence. In a way, it was healing for him to help her slay one of her other dragons.

He arrived in his orange Toyota with the brown faux suede seats and they drove around the parking lot of the Green Point Stadium. After three weeks, they practiced hill starts and stops on the vertical drops of his neighbourhood of Oranjezicht, and although he had to have a nip of whisky to steady his nerves, it wasn't long before Anna's hill starts were flawless.

She found his physical proximity very unnerving and felt like she was squirming from deep inside. There was still a softness, however, that she expressed towards him that she resented and which confused her. She asked him not to hug or kiss her. He became very awkward when greeting her and saying goodbye consisted of a lot of head nodding and then bowing his head in shame. She found herself relishing his shame and yet felt that she couldn't even trust that to be sincere.

She let him see Charlotte but never left him alone with her for a second. Anna realised that Truth was not like a one size fits all garment. Max told her more of the truth than she was ready for when he spoke about the "one time I penetrated you" and he told less of the truth when he said that it only happened once or twice. His truth-telling was limited, incomplete and divided into compartments. He recently lied to Ruth when she asked him if he had abused Anna. He told Ruth it only happened once with Anna and it was a mistake. Ruth seemed to believe him and think that was fine and continued allowing him to visit her.

Anna had fantasies of suing him in a civil court for all the money he had or throwing him in jail until he died there. Sometimes her fantasies were very violent. In one of them she hired hit men to cut off his penis and stuff it in his mouth and then bury him

standing up in the desert, with only his head sticking out of the sand so that the vultures could peck out his eyes while he was still breathing.

He asked her to meet for coffee and talk about art and politics and please not to keep bringing up the past.

She even sometimes went to his flat for lunch.

> *I sit in my father's studio flat; it is a claustrophobic and insane experience to sit in a room that serves as a living room, dining room and bedroom to the man who raped me as a child. I pretend that the bed, his bed, does not make me feel that I'm at some bizarre crime scene.*

> *He has a large poster of us, his three children on the wall alongside the bed in which we are thirteen, eleven and nine, and another smaller picture of us near his television, and we are approximately twelve, ten and eight. He has no pictures of us as adults. How can he or how dare he have these innocent pictures of us near his bed? It's as if he pretends he is normal and has a normal attachment to these children. I think perhaps he has us surrounding his bed because he is still turned on by children.*

> *I have a fantasy of me ripping the poster off the wall and snatching the photo from next to the bed and saying something like, You have not earned the right*

to have your children represented here. I want to vomit and I want to scream at the same time, instead I jump up and offer to make him tea.

It feels like my heart is a gridlocked freeway during rush hour. I wrestle with the need to release the rage that burns in me and the need to practice compassion and spiritual acceptance.

As a child there was the night-time father who she created as a depraved creature that inhabited her father's body, but was not him. She erased every night-time memory as soon as it happened. Then there was the day-time father who protected her from insects, snakes and her mother's constant rage. He was the father who hugged her and told her that he loved her more than life itself. In order to survive his nocturnal visits she had to trick herself into desiring him or perhaps he told her that she wanted him so often that she believed him.

Anna was so deeply attached to her father for all the years that he dominated her mind and body that even after his confession she still found that she couldn't seperate. She could not really see him exactly as he was. She still believed that he did love her but was not able to show it and somehow she would still help him become the emotionally, nurturing father he could be. She finally realised that her father was not normal. The realisation happened at one of those staged, casual noon brunches that they had begun having on a Sunday.

It was at a noisy trendy cafe on the beachfront. She had been hurt again by his lack of care in some way or another. On this particular occasion, she asked him directly, Dad why do you not interact emotionally. Why do you not show me empathy?

When you talk about feelings it's like you are talking a foreign language like Cantonese or Swahili. I don't get it. The empathy thing, I was never shown any as a child. I was expected to just get on with things so I expect my children to do the same.

A timer on how much longer Anna was able to have these staged meetings with Max was set that day. She found that the emotional boundary between the father and the 'demonic' lover was falling away and she began integrating the two as one. Soon after that brunch she could never really look at him without knowing fully who he was and what he had done to her.

She felt that she could not betray herself any further. She also acknowledged that her body in any proximity to his would go to war with itself. Her senses would be like a military ambush and she would be caught in a cross-fire of fight or flight or lie-down and play dead. Playing dead meant shutting down and living underground and pretending that she was fine having coffee with him and laughing at his jokes. She found her attempts at remaining in contact with him too painful to endure.

After she stopped all contact with him she started slowly to let go of her self-hatred. She began to deeply mourn the fact that as a child she had a boyfriend instead of a father. She realised that she would have to make peace with the reality that desire and annihilation may remain inextricably linked for her.

She began to forgive the child in her for developing the ability to trick herself into desiring something that was in effect killing off parts of her.

Anna was left with an attraction to repulsion and the thrill of possible emotional annihilation that drew her to friendships and intimate relationships that other people ran from. She was left with the impact of being initiated into sex through physical domination and emotional coercion and that would always have a sexual charge for her.

Max's emotional callousness and incapacity to empathise with her as an adult had proved more painful than his sexual abuse of her as a child because it forced her to accept that he could never be a father to her and could offer her only more pretence. Was Max totally evil because he was unable to be compassionate? Through knowing her father she learned that evil was in fact much more complex than that, because it always existed with redeeming features. She also acknowledged that her father was a victim who had to separate himself from his heart so he could never feel what was in it. The difference between them was that she was braver than him.

Two Sheddings and a Funeral

Anna and her family occupied the front row closest to where the rabbi would stand. People would file past them to wish them a long life after the speech by the Rabbi and the eulogies given by family members. This all took place before the burial outside.

Daniel, dressed in a black double-breasted suit with a pale blue tie, hugged her very woodenly and sat down next to Philip, his favourite cousin.

Anna smelled Max's Gunston cigarettes and his leather jacket brought back by Nana from Istanbul. She also smelled Ruthie’s wax of Crayola crayons and the polish of the red stairs outside 29 Rugley Road. The past blended in with the present: aftershave, perfume and coffee, smells of morning with smells of mourning, Kleenex, flowers, worn velvet upholstery and prayer books.

The hall was just a big box really with face brick walls and wooden chairs with faded velvet red upholstery. Unlike the Christian faith, in Judaism the dead are not put in view with open or closed casket. They are kept in a separate viewing room at the back of the reception hall of the cemetery. Only immediate family are allowed to view and spend time with the dead body. A dead body is never left alone. From the moment someone dies a guard is placed with the body until burial. Max had specified in his will that he wanted to be buried, unlike Nana who had opted for cremation (which is frowned on by Jewish traditionalists).

Anna thought that Renee looked like she had been crying all night and had not been able to reach the back of her head when brushing it so she resembled a puffy eyed monkey who was suffering from tummy ache after eating some bad berries. It was difficult for Anna to feel much empathy for her.

Ruth sat in the fading red chair next to Renee. Renee leaned into Ruth’s shoulder and whispered loudly, Why can’t Anna be more like you, nice and loving towards her

father? Although I wish you weren't forty-seven going on sixty-five, childless and with no boyfriend, living with those three outlandishly named cats, as if they were your only family. With your beautiful face you could have any man you wanted if you stopped being married to your fridge every night. As for your job, you sit at home all day making pots of clay and Perspex cats that are bottle openers.

Neo, Orpheus and Matrix are more unconditional and trustworthy than any man and by the way, if you were not so terrified of everything and everyone you could have also been self-employed and not working for misogynists with axes to grind in nine to five, soul-destroying jobs. I am a well-known ceramicist and have my own home-wares designer on-line business. What do you have Mother Dear?

Renee totally ignored Ruth's response.

What's your sister's story? Is she going to play some music or a song just now? She can't let go of her anger towards Max. She is going to embarrass me and disrespect the memory of your father, I just know it.

Oh, like you can let go of your anger towards anything and everyone

... like you EVER have!! Anyway, I'm not my sister's keeper, she is a free agent.

This entire conversation was conducted in loud whispers and growls. Words were spat out like un-chewable bits of food. Afterwards the silence between them was filled with sourness, like curdled milk.

Soon the twenty friends and family who had come to bury Max were all seated and aside from one or two coughs and clearing of throats all was quiet. The Rabbi came through the side door and walked to the podium to speak.

We have come here today to send Max… Blah blah (and his Hebrew name and son of his father's name in Hebrew to his maker.) Blah…blah.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Anna stopped listening and drifted back to a time her parents had visitors and she stayed up late, sitting on the couch, listening to the adult conversation. She was probably six or at the most seven and had fallen asleep, sitting there. She remembered being lifted up into the sky and being carried by her father to her bed. It was an incredible feeling of elevation and then safety. In summer, his legs, like the trunks of giant trees, moved through crashing waves with her on his shoulders. He protected her from Renee's rage when she would not stop reprimanding her after she had done something wrong.

The Rabbi has stopped speaking and Anna's father's half brother, Leonard was up at the podium. During his adolescence and early adulthood, Leonard was a wild one, smoking and drinking and causing trouble. Anna had been told that he was called a Ducktail. Ducktails were young people who wore their hair gelled, they had it heavy on the top and slicked thin towards the back, like a tail. Leonard's speech was filled with fabrication and false praise. Leonard had lived in Max's shadow all his life constantly being compared with 'the golden boy' as Leonard called him between gritted teeth when he had one too many Vodkas.

Max was often called on to bail Leonard out of financial black holes that he had found himself in and was even known to back him in one or two of his pie-in-the-sky schemes that always started off with such promise and always deflated like a balloon.

In the past five years Max had washed his hands of his half-brother and even when Leonard needed money to have his leg amputated. Max never sent the money.

Leonard was a diabetic (from drinking too much Vodka), and an untreated alcoholic. He was never violent or homeless so nobody in the family took his addiction seriously. No matter what hardship he was battling he always retained his sense of humour. Eventually he had his leg amputated in a government hospital in Windhoek where he had lived for the past twenty years. He leaned on his crutches and balanced on his one leg and read his eulogy from a legal pad. Anna smiled to herself, remembering her father saying, “He could never stand on his own two feet” when he was told of the amputation.

Everyone clapped when he was finished and some even dried their eyes. It was time for Anna to speak or forever hold her peace or piece. She walked towards the front carrying her portable C.D. player. She felt like a member of the New York feminist organisation known as The Gorilla Gurlz, who graffiti bridges and advertising billboards with slogans. Her body felt as if it was packed with explosives. With every step she expected to be detonated.

She plugged her CD player in at the wall. She began, or at least she was supposed to begin. Suddenly all the righteous indignation left her, all the seething resentment and the hatred towards this man who she called father, poured like water down a hill. She cleared her throat and tried to speak. She cleared her throat again but still not a syllable came out. She thought of what she had planned to say…

I have been the bandage for your wounded history. My body, your cradle and sanctuary. The place you ran to in order to hide and feel safe. My body, your burial ground where you buried your shame. I have been your private oblivion. I have been the sum of all your fear. I have been the thing that bleeds without sound while you were the thing that carried knives against your chest under your velvet cloak. I held onto all the lies because they were better than the truth. Danger signals going off in my head but they were wrapped in love parcels over-nighted by you.

Since she could not bring herself to speak she pressed play on the CD player and Christina Aguilera's voice began to lament.
Because of you I can never walk … on anything but the sidewalk. Because of you…I can't let anyone else in…because of you I am afraid. Because of you.

Aunt Sheila got up to leave in protest. She made it known that she was not impressed. Harry Shneewiess also took his wife's hand, who by now had nodded off into a deep valium-induced sleep. He pulled her to her feet and frog-marched her outside. Anna realised that there was too much perfumed denial in the room and way too many lives that had been lived as dress rehearsals for her to really say what she wanted to in a more direct fashion.

> The song ended and Anna walked away from the podium carrying her CD player like a dead baby in her arms. Some people moved violently away from her as she approached her seat. The Rabbi went to the front and tried to steer what he thought of as a heretical ship away from the jagged rocks it was about to dash itself on. He talked about how anger harmed the carrier of it more than

the recipient. The congregation had been halved by Anna's attempt at paternal exposure. It was time for the viewing of the body. Anna walked in the opposite direction to the viewing room and out another side exit to the outside of the hall. She had brought a packet of Marlboro Lights with her. She only smoked in bars and at funerals. She found a lonely looking tree, set her CD player down and lit a cigarette.

I'm here now like a flat stone, like a lump of human heart gone rotten. I am here now after a fetid silence under the earth. I was buried alive for twenty-eight years.

Remembering Goodbye

Anna's first goodbye to Max had occurred two years previously.

This surely can't be him, she thought, the man was once the Victor Ludorum of his school. His robust, muscular body now looked too thin and wiry. His jeans flapped around his legs like flags on a pirate ship. This seventy-three-old man approaching her couldn't be the same man who until now had held her entire life hostage? It couldn't be him. His hair thin and grey, the blue of his eyes milky. His teeth all false. She couldn't bring herself to stand up or embrace him. She felt like time had trapped her in amber. She managed a weak smile. He sat opposite her and ordered a rooibos tea, the same as she was drinking.

Hi Angel.

That, word, again, she thought.

He smiled, would you like a muffin? I think I will order muffins. Blueberry?

I hate blueberry muffins you never remember! I'll have lemon-poppy.

So you wanted to see me

Yes, I want to talk about a few things.

You know some men wouldn't meet you, after everything.

What do you mean?

Well, after the whole confrontation and then you not speaking to me for two years…all of a sudden you want me to meet you.

Yeah I know, I appreciate it, Dad.

She didn't mean to say Dad. She had practiced in front of the mirror saying his name. Max. Yes I know Max, the weather in Cape Town is beautiful this time of year. So Max I was wondering, could you pay for me to go back into therapy once a week? So Max do you think you could tell my sister that you lied to her about the fact that you only molested me once. So Max do you know that it is virtually impossible for me to trust anybody ? She wanted to say that she was stronger now and didn' have to split herself in two in order to see him.She wanted to say that she still hoped that he could be helpful to her, financially and even, maybe emotionally.

Instead all she said was, I need a father, someone who I can call and chat to and get support from.

Well, you cut yourself off from after I confessed and then taught you to drive a manaul car.Anyhow, yes, let's try for a new beginning. I would like that very much.

The word ‘confess’ hung in the air like a priest’s collar on a wash line. She wanted to say, you confessed to spending more time in your children’s beds than your wife’s and then denied you ever said that. She thought that it looked like he didn’t have much time left for a new beginning. I would like you to be more open-hearted and generous towards me, she semi-pleaded.

In what way?

Like offer me your car to borrow when mine’s in the garage and call me and ask me how I am and really care how I am.

But I do care, my children mean the world to me.
His eyes begin to fill with tears but Anna found it hard to reconcile this display of emotion with his cold dispassionate actions toward her in the recent past. The words lay empty like chocolate wrappers after a child’s birthday party.
Max complained about the price of the muffins, so she paid for everything.
When they left the café he took her face in his hands and looked her in the eyes and said, You take care of yourself and don’t forget to phone me if you need anything, as long as it’s not money. Anna realised again

She had not known that she would be at his death bed as would her sister, Ruth, two years later. Daniel could not be reached in time. He was living in London and was not on e-mail and he had no telephone in his apartment. He had a cell phone and could only be reached on Friday nights between 8 and 10 pm.

It was 5:30pm. There was a smell of hollowness and husks, of flesh falling from bone, flesh becoming dust. Linen is heavier than paper and his body had become rice paper.

There was no heaviness of white, fabric softener-smelling sheets on him, only the weight of departure. Now, the burden of leaving those that you have injured.

Max's greenish blue vein seemed to signal to her through the tissue paper skin covering his hand before he even lifted the hand to beckon her closer to his thin line of a mouth.
As I have said before a thousand apologies will never change what I did. I just want to believe that you will be free someday. Do not continue to hate me it will only chain you to me further. Release me now so that you can live a fulfilled life and give Charlotte the love she needs.

With that he coughed and seemed to choke and stop breathing for five seconds. Anna couldn't help the tears that broke open in hot splashes. Even with her splintered nervous system and glued-back-together life she still wanted to crush his wind pipe with her bare hands and be the one to finally put an end to the intravenous poison he dripped through her veins one word at a time.

She also wanted to hold him and say that she loved him like a daughter who was always on double duty – always the wife. She tried to speak but found that her throat had become wind-screen wipers. The sound of rubber pushing against glass beat in her ears. He was the rubber and she was the glass. She was always the glass, his container, utterly shatter-proof.

Again she felt lured and charmed by him into believing that he had a heart, a real heart that could hold empathy. Anna had to remind herself even now at the minute of

his passing that his emotion was and could always only be split second. He was and always would be two people and she would have to stop seeing the world like that from now on.

Ruth sat at the foot of the bed, sobbing softly but deeply. Max beckoned her over and Anna had to leave the room for fear of being overly nauseated by Ruth's total and complete adoration and idealisation of him. If only Ruth had remembered … and if only she believed Anna and not Max, that it had been more than once. If only she could tell Ruth it had been her too.

The Small Death

While Anna was puffing on her Marlboro, Robert approached her looking slightly puzzled.

Annie Hi, Why didn't you ever tell me about you and your dad?

Oh, I don't know maybe because you had your own problems.

Anna was one of the few who knew that Rob was a drug addict. His immediate family were oblivious to his pain. Although they were not blood related their families had known each other since they were infants so they had grown up together. Rob was younger than Anna and half Greek. His Jewish mother had married a sweet Greek Christian man who hardly ever had the chance to say a word because wife never stopped speaking.

But you could have spoken to me, I feel like you didn't trust me enough or something?

No, nothing like that at all. I didn't want to hassle you or bring up anything that may freak you out. He reached out and gave her a long, strong hug and almost whispered, You protected me and you were hurting so badly.

He hugged her and she felt the familiar flicker attraction to him somewhere in the pit of her stomach.

You know what Rob I'm ok now, Simon has stood by me in the last six years and helped me so much.

Anna felt her cheekbones become sponge and her face dissolve into tears. Rob took her hand and squeezed it and looked into her eyes.

You're the most beautiful woman I know inside and out, he leaned forward and gently kissed her on the mouth.

Before she knew it, they were passionately kissing. He grabbed her CD player and her hand and headed straight for his Ford van in the parking lot. He had a made-up bed in the back. He was a biker and often went away on biking, camping trips. Before they could really think about where or what they were doing they were inside the van and he was inside her. They were writhing and panting.

Stop moving, Anna rasped. Let me feel you in me, make me reach for my orgasm.

Afterwards their bodies hummed like the engines of motor bikes that had just been switched off after a long ride.

Surely by now Anna's father was being put into the ground and she was nowhere to be found. She berated herself silently. She was living with the father of her child in a monogamous relationship. How could she have just done this to him and at her father's funeral. Actually she enjoyed that part of this indiscretion and smiled slyly.

What about Rob's girlfriend, Jade? Anna had laughed and joked with her at Rob's last birthday party and had really enjoyed her mania. Rob had been living with her for the past two years. Even though she was a manic speed freak she was utterly devoted to him. She cooked him gourmet meals every night and laughed at every corny off-colour joke as if she hadn't heard him tell it two days ago. She was deeply in love with him and as deeply in denial about his numerous infidelities. Anna felt like she had betrayed Jade too.

Suddenly it was very quiet, almost uncannily so. Anna turned to Rob who was struggling to pull his fly up whilst still lying down.
What have we done?
He looked up, We got carried away, we had no time to think, and instinct took over.
He tried to take her hand but she pulled away.
Look Annie I can't pretend I have never wanted you so I would be a hypocrite to say anything else.
He was used to cheating on Jade so it wasn't a biggie for him to get carried away as he so casually put it.

Anna on the other hand, had driven Simon up the wall with her paranoia and suspicion for the first three years of their union. He navigated with her during the flashbacks she had during sex. He brought her steaming mugs of sweet tea when Winter came in and her deep pockets of self-doubt and self-loathing were re-visited.

He had gone through the whole confrontation with Max. They had beautiful Charlotte together. Now she was the betrayer. She could say that extenuating circumstances like

her father’s funeral had led her to behave like a recycled teenager but she knew better than that. She was now the predator and not the prey. What frightened her more was that a sadistic part of her felt this misuse of power somewhat gratifying and yet she was always so proud of her faithfulness to him. She had never as much as kissed another person besides him, since Soledad, and that relationship she got into after she and Simon had broken up.

As she climbed towards the door of the van, Rob said in a small, gentle voice,
Annie, that was really awesome. I’m available whenever you are for more.
Anna couldn't speak, her body had already agreed in triplicate while her mind ran screaming for the hills.

She walked back to the cemetery because she wanted to hear the thud of earth as it hit her father’s coffin. That thud of finality and reassurance.

She arrived just when the members of the immediate male family were each stepping forward and shovelling earth into the grave. When she neared the grave there was a visible ruffling of feathers and an audible low ‘Oh’ of surprise. Anna grabbed a shovel and moved in. She dug deep into the earth in a stabbing and gouging manner. She was stopped by Philip's hand.
Only males are allowed to dig and throw the earth on the coffin.
She pushed Philip's arm away. She needed a large amount of earth to create the loud thud she was so in need of hearing. The moment arrived she lifted the shovel and earth and she hoisted it into the air and then down it went…and then the awaited thud arrived. The finality felt like a welcome relief. Anna threw in the letter that had her

speech written on it, the speech that she had not read. It floated down into the grave like a torn flag of a country that had just been saved from a merciless enemy. She then turned and stared at the rabbi defiantly and marched off back towards the parking area and the exit. She heard Janice Joplin singing in her head, "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose."

The Shelter of Necessary Lies

Anna drove home from her father's funeral smelling of another man. She wondered how she could bath without having to first encounter Simon. It was 1:30 pm now. She had not gone on to the reception lunch at her mother's house because she wanted to avoid all the hypocrisy and eulogising of a man she would always despise and love simultaneously. She wanted to avoid the whispers behind sweaty palmed hands and the eyes belonging to the person of the hands, staring at her while her behaviour at the funeral was being dissected.

She had done the unthinkable by playing a pop song at a fairly orthodox funeral. Not only that, but she had flouted the rules of the traditional Jewish burial by pushing in and grabbing a shovel and tipping earth onto her father's coffin. To top all of this off she had had sex with a friend of the family while her father was being buried.

Her quickie with Robert bothered her much more than the first two transgressions, mainly, because it would hurt a man who had walked on broken glass with her. One thing that emerged from her flagrant indiscretion was that she was finally not ambivalent about her love for Simon.

All the way home she debated with herself, should she tell Simon and risk losing him? How could she not tell him? She prided herself on her integrity and honesty in all areas of her life. She detested deception and loathed anything vaguely duplicitous. She always told him that if he ever as much as french kissed anyone other than her, he must tell her immediately.

She had done much more than snog and here she was wondering if she should outright omit telling him. Anna admitted to herself that Simon loved her in a way that nobody had, least of all her screwed-up parents. They had been together for six and a half years. Was this the almost seven year itch that people spoke about and wrote magazine articles on?

What made her act so impulsively? She thought she had outgrown that negative chatacteristic. If she did tell Simon, would he leave her, or stay but abandon her emotionally? Maybe he would punish her by having an affair and not tell her about it. She fretted and perspired all the way home. Her pulse raced and her mouth dried up. When she stopped at a traffic light and took her hands off the wheel they were trembling. She lit a cigarette out of desperation. She usually forbade anyone smoking in her car.

She had just buried the biggest liar she knew and now she was becoming one too. She had been so damaged by Max's lies, how could she even think of perpetuating another lie. She felt that Simon deserved the truth no matter how hurtful. Anna was relieved when she saw that the silver Honda 4x4 was not in the driveway or garage. She bolted

upstairs, straight into their bathroom-en-suite and turned on the hot water tap full blast. She peeled off the purple dress and soaked panties and then took off her sandals and threw them all in the laundry basket. She brushed her teeth at the sink and looked in the mirror at somebody she barely recognised.

A middle-aged woman stared back at her. Her dark blonde hair had been dyed auburn and her once sparkling green eyes were now grey with sadness. The crow's feet around her eyes had deepened into full-blown wrinkles. She was also beginning to get jowls. She loathed jowls and had prayed that she would never get them. For your sins, she said out loud.

She switched off the cold tap, felt the water for temperature, added lavender oil, the only aromatherapy oil she used, and sunk beneath the hot water like a kidnapped victim who had been weighted with cement blocks and thrown in a river to die.

She had been lying in the bath for at least five minutes and was even beginning to fall asleep. She hadn't slept well the night before, her sleep had been fitful, punctuated with nightmares of her body being lowered into a freshly dug grave while she was still alive. She also dreamed of two people getting married who were both deaf and had forgotten their hearing aids at home.At 3 am Charlotte had woken crying and come through to Simon and Anna's bedroom dragging her blankie and Rufus, the one-eyed bear she'd had since birth. She was crying because she had dreamed that she was under the 'erf' and couldn't 'breeve'.

Anna never heard Simon knock softly, turn the doorknob and step into the bathroom. He cleared his throat. Anna sat up so fast that water splashed out of the bath. Simon giggled.

Sorry Hun Bun didn't mean to startle you but I did knock for a while and was worried you'd fallen asleep in here after last night's fiasco. So you didn't feel like the whole reception thing? I guessed as much so I went round to Koi and got us some Thai lunch.

Great Si you're so thoughtful, what would I do without you?

Well, that's not something you ever have to worry about. How was the funeral? How you doing?

Oh! You know the usual clap trap and back patting, trite clichés and Old Spice Aftershave.

No seriously Annie how you really dealing?

Anna couldn't tell him that she felt elated. Not only by the final release of a man who had controlled her life for as long as she could remember but because her body still tingled and her pores still hummed. She couldn't possibly tell him that she had had delicious quickie sex with a family friend, ten years her junior. So she swallowed quickly and sped through her reply. I behaved badly Si, you would have been proud. I couldn't say my prepared speech though so I just played the song, and stood there like Lot's wife. At the actual burial, I ignored the rule that only men can pour earth into the grave because I wanted to hear the thud of finality you and I spoke about.

Well done Angel! I would have loved to have seen the look on the men's faces. Priceless!

So do you feel any resolution?

He looked so sincere, she could feel a lump growing in her throat. She could cry now if she really let go. Simon had worked so hard in healing himself and being true to their commitment to one another. Could she shatter all of that? Could she lie to him for the rest of their lives? She did plan on living the rest of her life with Simon. She never got bored or tired of him, his inventiveness and humour kept her interested and connected to him. She decided not to tell him, at least for now. Instead she vowed to return to the Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous group weekly.

Clothing The Thought

After the funeral Anna and Ruth were summoned by Renee to come and clean out their father's flat to fetch his clothes and decide what they wanted of his belongings.

I just can’t bear looking at his clothes and deciding who to give them to Renee whined, while chewing loudly in Anna’s ear.

What you eating Ma?

Sliced Biltong from Joubert’s Butchery, the best.

Renee always ate while talking on the phone and it never ceased to irritate Anna. Renee opened the door to Max’s apartment.

I've got coffee and Danishes for us. It’s 11 am so its time for a cuppa.

Renee was a caffeine addict who drank coffee every hour. Brian was with her. Brian had been living with Renee for five years. He was a compulsive hoarder. His car was more of a garbage bin, filled with old papers, food wrappers, soda cans, wet towels

from swimming. It was a wonder that there was any seating left in it. He was also an insomniac, angst ridden, misogynist, who suffered from verbal diarrhoea, to the point of only being silent when he slept, which was for two, three-hour periods per night. He hardly ever gave Renee a chance to speak and when she did speak, he interrupted her all the time. He constantly brought her down and told her she was stupid.

Renee had been involved with a series of broken-down excuses for men ever since Max had finally walked out on her thirty odd years ago. These relationships lasted between five and seven years. The first boyfriend she had just after her divorce was Ivan. He was a cross-dresser and a clean freak and would wash everything including her parakeet when she was at work. She came home one day to find he had bathed and blowed dried her parakeet. It died of a heart attack the next day. He later became physically abusive towards her.

Anna had become more and more psychic since the day she saw the blue-green flashing lady at the breakfast table. She phoned Renee at work and asked her if her ribs hurt. Renee was shocked and asked how Anna knew. She told her that she had received a picture in her mind of Ivan kicking her in her ribs. He also tried to seduce Anna once when he walked her home from Renee's house. She was fifteen and horrified and told Renee that if she continued to see him she would never forgive her. Renee continued to see him.

As they sat down at the round oak table in the kitchen, Renee tried giving Anna the latest updates on her friends' lives, but when she mentioned a name, Brian would begin tracing the origin of that particular surname back to the dawn of time. He thrived on playing this relentless form of Jewish geography.

Uuh, Levy…are those the Levys originally from Paarl? The ones who owned the Vienna sausage factory? Abe Levy, whose father was Joseph? Abe who actually won a medal for swimming but then his wife Denise left him for a much younger man who was a Yok and always shikkered, but ongeshtopped with boodle. Joseph was so distraught he began to go for long walks around Paarl and sometimes got lost. Thank god, Becky Berelowits, only recently widowed, took a pity on him and invited him over for chicken soup, bagels with lox every Sunday night. After a year he proposed to her and they were married.

Renee nodded and laughed at Brian's interjection, and to Anna's dismay added in details. Anna sat there feeling like she was in a movie directed by Woody Allen and Alfred Hitchcock simultaneously. The smell of the Danish and the sight of Brian's greasy hair began to make her stomach turn. She realised that she had been holding her breath for the past half hour. She excused herself and ran to the toilet. While she was in the toilet she heard the doorbell. When Anna re-entered the kitchen Ruth was sitting opposite Brian. She was crying.

I miss him so much, I don't know if I can live without him.

Anna rolled her eyes and yawned. Ruth licked her lips and launched in.

Why don't you grow up Anna? You are so disrespectful to his memory. The way you behaved at the cemetery. Your behaviour during the funeral when you made your little statement with that pathetic song. Then at the actual burial, insisting on shovelling earth into the grave when you know women aren't allowed to do that. Not to mention arriving late to the actual burial, ja I know you think you have a secret but

I saw you and Rob have a passionate kiss and then go to his van in the parking lot just before the burial then arrive all flushed and your shirt buttons all done up wrong. You judge me for not remembering our childhood and for not having a man in my life and for being neat and tidy but look at what you are doing to the man in your life who simply adores you. You're a total slut and bitch.

Anna sat there with a mouthful of Danish, she could not bring herself to chew. She was mortified with guilt and immobilised with shame. Before she could stop them, tears rolled down her cheeks and plopped into her coffee. There was a long silence until Renee piped up, These things happen, especially at funerals.

Brian interrupted her, Ja in 1972 at Hymie Mendelowits's funeral his son shtoeped his best friend's shikse girlfriend in the upstairs toilet that night during prayers in the very house where his family were sitting shiva. Oy! Was it a shande.

Anna mumbled, Shut up Brian. You're pathetic!

Don't you talk to Brian like that, you little cow, he has done nothing but be nice to you.

Well, at least he hasn't tried to get into my panties, like dad or Ivan or every other man you've been with.

Ruth stood up so suddenly she knocked her chair onto the floor. She marched over to the drawer next to the oven, opened it and took out a large bread knife. She came over to Anna and held the knife at Anna's throat.

You shut up now Annie, you shut the fuck up and take back what you just said about dad, take it back right now or else I swear I will plunge this knife into your throat.

Why should I, you need professional help for idolising a sociopath who spent his entire life telling one lie after another. Just because you refuse to remember his visits to your bed at night does not mean that he did not visit mine.

Ruth pulled back as if to begin the forward thrust of the knife.

Renee screamed hysterically, Someone stop this madness. My children are killing each other.

Suddenly Brian grabbed Ruth from behind and pulled her towards him violently. She dropped the knife and he let her go. She grabbed her Raffia bag and walked right up to Anna and spat in her face.

I hate your guts, you're the liar. You're a lying whore.

She headed for the front door.

I'll come back tomorrow to help you Ma and take what I want. I don't want to be anywhere near that bitch-sister of mine. May she rot in hell.

When Renee and Anna opened Max's closet they were hit by an array of blues and grey and all the tones in between. Max was indeed a great lover of grey. His favourite saying was, Things are never black or white.

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