READING GOLDILOCKS: INTERROGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THERAPEUTIC LIFE NARRATIVE AND FIRST AND THIRD PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

PHD THESIS FOR CREATIVE ARTS: CREATIVE WRITING

JANET THOMAS
BCA (Hons)

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND CREATIVE ARTS
FACULTY OF EDUCATION, HUMANITIES AND LAW
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s a comprehensive body of research has confirmed that writing, in the form of either confession or catharsis, can be therapeutic. Recent research indicates that editing, shaping and crafting therapeutic writing can also be beneficial, particularly when the therapeutic writer is given the guidelines, support and encouragement to help develop his or her therapeutic writing skills. The goal of this study is to assess the technique of writing a therapeutic life narrative using both first and third person narrative point of view. It aims to articulate the lived experience of shifting between two different narrative perspectives. It also explores whether or not therapeutic writing is more effective when accompanied by a critical stance that reflects on, and is reflective about, the lived experience of shifting between first and third narrative voice and narrative point of point of view.

This study was conducted using practice-led, phenomenological, descriptive, qualitative research methodology. It is composed of two parts. 'Reading Goldilocks' is a deliberately crafted therapeutic narrative employing both first and third person narrative point of view and narrative voice. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' describes and analyses research conducted into therapeutic writing, the character of Goldilocks, the difference between autodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative voice and the potential for an intersubjective 'relationship' between a therapeutic writer and his or her third person narrator. This study also proposes that, for therapeutic writing to be accepted as a legitimate therapeutic tool, a more nuanced understanding of therapeutic writing as an emerging genre is required.

The experience of writing a dual (or split) narrative and the potential inherent in making the shift between the two is the main focus of the study. The third person narrator of 'Reading Goldilocks' is a reimagined and reconfigured mature age version of Goldilocks from the children's fairy tale *The Three Bears*. Goldilocks' search for a 'just right' bowl of porridge, chair and bed is a metaphor that underpins the nature and consequence of choice, a central theme of the memoir.

'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' describes and analyses how research into women's life narratives, fairy tales, the character of Goldilocks, narrative point of view and narrative voice shapes and informs the production of 'Reading Goldilocks'. The

relationship between narrative voice and therapeutic writing is described as one of imaginatively experiencing the world of another. The nature of the relationship between the two different narrative voices, and between the therapeutic writer and the third person narrative voice, is explained through reference to the concept of the threshold. It is proposed that shifting, or ‘crossing’, from one voice to another is the same as experiencing a void or caesura, a space *between* different narrative perspectives that represents a potent site of change.

Writing strategies and practices that name and access the therapeutic writer’s personal strengths and help develop resilience, all require further study. Academic inquiry into new ways of thinking about, and supporting, the process of therapeutic writing is required. Theories based on rigorous research into the role of the therapeutic writer and the counsellor/writer are also essential.

Keywords: Therapeutic writing, therapeutic writer, memoir, narrative point of view, narrative voice, Goldilocks, reflectivity, reflexivity, phenomenology, intersubjectivity, writer/counsellor.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed …….3rd March 2014.

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To my partner Patrick Frost I offer heartfelt thanks for our long conversations about writing, the theatre and what it is to be an artist. His willingness to share his experience and hard won wisdom has been personally and professionally inspiring.

Finally, to my three children; you may have been mystified by your mother's decision to return to study, but your love and support has kept me on track and kept me sane. Thank you.

READING GOLDILOCKS

A MEMOIR

Epigraphs appearing at the beginning of alternate chapters are from:

Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (London: Andre Deutsch & Weidenfeld Nicolson, 1959)

Photo Source: <http://favim.com/orig/201105/10/animal-bear-bed-girl-photography-relationship-Favim.com-39395.jpg> [Accessed 2nd April 2012]

For Matt, Larri and A.R.

May I learn how to survive until my part is finished.

May I realize that I

am a

monster. I am

a

monster.

I am a monster.

And I am proud.

Robyn Morgan

Prologue

‘Which story do you want me to read tonight?’

‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears, please.’

‘I read that story to you last night. I read you that story every night. Why don’t we have another story?’

‘I want this story.’

‘I heard you read this story by yourself today.’

‘But I like it when you read it to me. Please Mummy.’

‘We’ll have this story if you read it to me.’

My fingers slide beneath the words as I read. When Goldilocks reaches the cottage door I stop and look up at my mother, ‘Goldilocks is a naughty girl, isn’t she Mummy? And I’m a good girl?’

Before she can reply my father walks into the bedroom.

‘She’s what the police call a felon,’ he says. ‘She broke into the bears’ cottage and made a mess. You know, it’s pretty smart to be able to read by yourself when you’re only three years old.’ He turns to my mother. ‘And you … you’re brilliant, teaching her to read.’ My father puts his arm around my mother’s shoulders, bends down and kisses her on her cheek. Then he straightens and smiles.

‘I’ll pour us a beer,’ he says to my mother, ‘while you girls finish the story.’

Reading and Writing

I can read but I can't write. I'm three and a half, maybe four. I want to write a book like the ones my mother reads when she sits on the couch, her reddish brown curls falling across her cheek, her hands cupping the book, her thumbs holding open the pages, her breath even and regular.

My Nana Thomas has a lined note pad she uses for shopping lists or to record her Canasta scores. I ask her if I may use her note paper and while she fetches it I go to the bedroom my parents and I share and collect my coloured pencils. When I return to the kitchen Nana is sitting at the table, working on the day's crossword, the writing pad at her elbow.

'Nana,' I say as she hands me the note pad, 'can I please have a needle and some white thread?' I plan to stitch the letters, words, sentences and pages of my book together because, as the daughter and granddaughter of home seamstresses, I know how strong a good cotton thread is.

Writing a book is all I've ever really wanted to do and yet, until recently, I've never allowed myself to believe writing a novel, play or collection of short stories was possible. It's as if I've been tied to a pillar inside a literary banquet hall. I've had the occasional whiff of a poem, a glimpse of steam rising from a short story, witnessed an author suck on the marrow of a novel, but I've taken no part in the event. Ropes cannot bind me when it comes to reading a good book; writing even a mediocre one leaves my hands, and tongue, tied.

I like writing. I like the experience of words emerging from the labyrinth of my mind, and poking their heads above the line to scout about for another word with which to disport. I admire a good paragraph, the way it wraps itself around an idea and begs to be reread. Occasionally one of my paragraphs stuns me. I wonder how the words amassed, like a flock of bright birds, and managed to wheel across the thick white sky of my computer screen.

Part of my problem is that I think other writers' paragraphs are more elegant than

mine. My words refuse to align. They're like sluts, lolling about the page waiting for me to discipline them. 'I want you to line up in this order,' I tell them because writing is about choosing how words should be arranged.

I have many excuses for not writing: my teaching, my hobbies (casting and reading astrology charts) my friends, reading, walking, and, when I was a young mother, sewing, knitting and cooking. I produced three children in exactly three years and one month, so I did a great deal of sewing, knitting and cooking and very little writing. The children themselves, three bright bubbles of love, instinct, intellect and need, were often vulnerable and prey to maternal shifts in the atmosphere but using my children as an excuse for not writing isn't fair. Plenty of women have produced both children and books. Nor is my gender a good excuse. For centuries women's writing has been derided, devalued or ignored, but once I'd strolled through the enchanted forests of feminism I had to dismiss gender as a reason for not writing. There are legions of women writers but I didn't believe I could be one of them.

I do write: lists, notes, angst ridden poems, copious, often odious, opening paragraphs of numerous short stories. I've kept a journal since I was nineteen and in the last thirty seven years I've probably written a small book of essays on a range of topics: education, women's rights, astrology, and English literature. For my Honours degree in Creative Writing, I adapted the lais of an obscure 12th century French woman writer. I've written hundreds of letters. My friends delay opening my emails because they're usually more than two pages long, and my text messages are likewise expensively gravid. As a writer I am a rabid reader: I've immersed myself in fairy tales, myths, and novels by the score and dozens of books about feminism and astrology.

I've been a teacher for most of my life. I've handed five year olds thick pencils and watched them struggle to form vowels, consonants, words and, finally, their first sentences. I've also motivated adult women who've survived incest, rape, beatings and economic anguish to write their stories of survival while denying myself the time and permission to write my own story. Writing has never been, for me, the congenial activity that reading is. I don't know why I thought it would be.

I want to write a book so I can give my mother something she can respect, the way she respects the other books on our shelves. My mother has shown me how to turn each page slowly and carefully, how to close the book gently when I've finished reading it and how to place it back on the shelf where it can stand upright and proud next to the other books. I must never mark or write on the pages of a book, unless it is a colouring in or puzzle book. My problem is, because I can read I think I can write. Somehow I've reached the conclusion that within the bound convocation of pages my mother and I treasure, words appear by magic.

'You know where I keep my needles and thread,' says Nana. When I'm not reading, watching my mother read, or waiting in the garden for Papa to arrive home from work, I learn cross stitch with Nana. My request for a needle and thread isn't unusual.

'Remember to leave my thread box tidy when you finish,' she says as she turns back to her crossword. I go to the sewing machine and help myself to white thread and a needle, then trot back into the bedroom and search for my favourite book. I take Hilda Boswell's *Book of Fairy Tales* from the shelf and tentatively prise apart its pages, making sure I don't break its spine. I peer into the book's creamy cleft, trying to work out how it has been stitched together. Satisfied, I close the book and replace it on the shelf then take three or four pages of notepaper, fold them in half, thread the needle and try to push it through the pages. The folds of paper are thick and my fingers too feeble to push the needle through the paper. I reduce the number of pages and try again. The pieces of paper slide apart and refuse to align. Frustrated, I give up. I throw the now crumpled paper into the rubbish bin and tear more sheets from Nana's note pad. Back in the kitchen, where Nana has finished her crossword and is playing solitaire with a worn set of playing cards, I ask for some glue. She stands, walks to the cupboard, hands me the pot, its brush thick with glue. I return to my bedroom and paint the glue along the middle of the fresh pages. My fingers are clumsy as well as feeble and the glue meanders along the folds I've created in the paper. Undaunted, I press the individual sheets of paper together. The glue spreads and eventually holds. I turn my six page blank book over and over in my hands. I take my pencil and, too impatient to let the glue dry properly, begin.

That's when I encounter my major problem. My mother has taught me to read; she

hasn’t taught me how to write. Undeterred, I press the wet, sticky pages of my book flat, blow on them so they will dry. I write a lopsided J, A and a crooked, T punctuated by lines resembling frayed worms. I punctuate these with. Some of my gummy pages tear but, undaunted, I draw stick figures, trees and birds above my squiggly lines. My words and pictures melt together in the glue but once the pages dry my book crackles satisfactorily. I can’t remember the story I had in my head but whatever it was I longed to reproduce it on the page.

What my mother made of the crumpled unevenly folded pages scored with indecipherable hieroglyphs I don’t know. Her reaction would have depended on her mood that day.

Over the last fifty years I have made many such abortive beginnings, ideas that never had a chance to be birthed into a complete story or novel. Despite this, the desire to write has never waned, which is finally why, in my late middle age, a student, a divorcee, a mother, a friend and a lover, I will fulfil my dream by sharing the story of how I taught myself to write.

SilverHair

> ‘The world became more intimately part of me when it entered through my mouth than through my eyes and my sense of touch.’

‘Once upon a time there was a little girl called Goldilocks.’ This is a truth and a lie. My story should begin with ‘Once upon a time there was an old woman called Silverhair. She was walking alone in the forest, picking her way along the rough path and enjoying the sun’s warmth on her tired bones.’ But narrative is capricious. My beginning was edited by those fabulists, deceivers, false witnesses and name changers who are otherwise known as story tellers. I was replaced with a more lissom creature; Goldenhair with her full red lips, blonde curls and firm flesh. But some things the story tellers cannot change. In my beginning I was bent, spirited, and cantankerous. After my metamorphosis I remained a wilful and committed sensualist.

I prefer to be known as Silverhair, but you, reader, may think of me as you want. I’ll accept Goldilocks if you wish. As for Janet, she is also known by many names. Those given to her at birth were ‘Janet Gloria Thomas’ but she has been:

Black Eyed Susan (from her mother);

Little Jinni McQuaccles (mother, again);

Scooter Boots (ditto);

Puff Puff (her aunt, her father’s sister);

Jinni (mother again);

A cack-handed affair (father this time);

Jan (her extended family);

Big Blister (her brother);

It (father).

Jan W____, nee Thomas

Janet W_____; because an American once performed tricks with the ‘a’ and ‘e’;

Mummy, Mum, Ma, Ma-zipan (her children, variously, depending on her mood, and theirs);

Jinni, Jindabyne, Jinda (her daughter during and after a difficult time).

Janet and I have been, as you can see, shaped by those who name us at their whim.

But, back to me. I was conceived, penned and drawn an age ago. I’m almost an icon now, one who haunts the boundaries of proper society. I seek unlocked doors, comfortable chairs and cooling—but never cold—bowls of porridge. Let me make this clear though: I meant no harm. At my worst I was merely a heretic in the old sense of the word. I insisted on choosing what is just right for me.

Most people cross a threshold and think little of it but I embrace the liminal and I’m obsessed with the promises offered by cusps. Maybe they will help me make an end. All I find, however, as I step across yet another doorsill is one more beginning. Like most imaginaries, most fictions, I will never die.

I’m comforted by knowing others of my kind exist: Psyche eternally sorting through seeds so she can win back her beloved; Pandora incessantly opening the chest to reveal the hope hidden beneath horror; poor Eve who insists on asking the right question even though she knows she’ll get the wrong answer, and the blame. And me: tasting, testing, sleeping, brazen and vulnerable in my quest to make the right choice based on experience. Knowledge is dangerous and those who seek it are a menace, particularly when they seek ‘just right.’ Living, as I do, on the verge of civilisation, I savour the space between ambiguity and certainty where I’m free to test the philosophy of just right and the endless opportunity to dialogue with dogma.

Few know this, but I do have an after story and I have chosen it wisely. I dwell in twilight when children are put to bed and told stories to ease the night’s journey. I fend for myself, hunt for a safe place to rest, forage for food and appreciate the animals whose home I share. I celebrate the varieties of green that embrace me, I’m soothed by night forest sounds and I honour the shifting slant of light as each season is born, evolves and dies. I’m nourished by the forest’s wildness. My banishment is a

blessing. I am where I belong.

I remain, however, a curious beast, one that cannot be quelled. I venture from my forest and peek through closed curtains. I spy on those who forget that wildness such as mine can be theirs. All this, over time, has changed me. I, who was once storied, have become a story teller and my role is to narrate how a woman like Janet can change. So, listen, reader as I begin Janet's story the way all good stories begin:

Once upon a time there was an old woman who taught herself to write. She began by excavating and cataloguing her memories. Her story and my story are stitched together, the way two pieces of cloth are joined, or a wound is closed. Sharing our stories wraps both of us in the comfort of telling but there is one thing you, reader, need to know: one of us is real, the other is a fiction.

There is wildness in Janet, roiling unexpressed beneath the surface. It has to do with what she wants, what she was given and what she has lost. Like most women, her wildness is rarely articulated. Janet is not like me. She didn't leap from a window until it was almost too late, and although she learned to read when she was three, although she loves words, stories and books, she never threw off the myopic, bewildered characters around her. She claims to admire me, so why did she stay with these people and not bolt as I did? But I leap ahead of myself. Why Janet failed to run comes at the end of our story. I can, though, tell you this; Janet needs to be tough with other people and gentler on herself. Oh, and she is, at times, boring.

Gloria was never boring.

Ah, yes, Gloria. Janet and I don't want this to be Gloria's story but Gloria cannot be avoided. I insist, however, that I introduce the Gloria I know, the once upon a time Gloria, a Gloria who is going shopping. It is 1954 or 1955 and Gloria wears a dress she made herself. The dress fabric is printed with stylised vermilion flowers and emerald leaves on a white background. The dress has a scooped neck, tight waist and full circular skirt that swings as Gloria moves her hips. Gloria's hair is brown gold in the morning sun, but in the afternoon light her hair is brown red like the undulate earth after it has been furrowed and turned. Gloria's hips move and the skirt swings, folding against her legs, then out again. Janet's father, never far from Gloria, watches his wife walk toward the front gate. She is only going shopping. She will be gone an

hour, out into the world and away from him with her hips swinging in the red splashed dress with the tight waist. Warren cannot bear to look at his hothouse flower let out into the light. Gloria turns, smiles, and lowers her lids. She knows what Warren is thinking and her look confirms: ‘Yes, tonight, again, please. Yes.’ Warren watches Gloria walk down the path to the gate. Tonight is too far away. He waves. He smiles. Gloria walks out into the street. She is going shopping. A small child walks with her.

It is Janet who walks out into the sun with Gloria, a mother who wears a red, white and green dress; Janet, the child who is now an old woman. It would be too simple to say Gloria stopped Janet from becoming the writer she wanted to be: women like Janet have a cleft deep within their souls, a tectonic plate that sighs and shifts and this cannot be a mother’s fault. Women like Janet have to learn where the fault lines are so they can take control of their lives. This story is about the Janet whose shifts have been subterranean; the Janet who had a mother like a fierce golden sunset; the Janet who, like me, has more than one name; the Janet who was once a small brown haired girl with a solemn smile; the Janet who is a Silverhair and a writer.

Pretend Brides

I was born on the 11th of October, 1952, at 5.09 in the afternoon. Immediately after my birth my mother remembers seeing a baby with a thick black patch of hair being passed from doctor to nurse across my mother's body. Then she died from hypertension and loss of blood. A determined medical team and a blood transfusion revived her.

'You were a contented, sleepy baby,' she used to tell me when I was still a small girl. 'You woke up, I fed and burped you and then you fell asleep. Your father used to come home from work and you'd be asleep. He asked me to keep you awake so he could play with you and get to know you, but you always fell straight back to sleep.'

When I was married in March 1975 I decided I wanted to wear a long slim skirt with a camisole top and a fitted, lightly tailored cream silk jacket with a peplum. I didn't want to be a bride, certainly not one who wore a boring white confection of frills and lace and while I wasn't sure about marrying, the idea of a party, and daring to wear a suit instead of the traditional wedding dress, was appealing. I thought a suit would be interesting, comfortable and practical. I didn't want to spend money on a dress I'd wear only once. After my wedding I could shorten the skirt and wear it to other parties. Nor did I want to wear white. A cream outfit, as my mother often said, goes 'more places', and no one could call me a hypocrite for pretending to be something I wasn't.

Another version of my infancy describes a difficult baby who fussed and cried and wouldn't settle. Somewhere between the fantasy baby and the nightmare monster child is the truth.

For my mother, finding the right wedding dress for me was her Holy Grail. On the day she and I went shopping for the fabric and pattern for my outfit I was sure we

would have the same mighty vision.

‘Fabric first,’ I said as we entered the largest department store in town, ‘something suitable for a semi-tailored jacket, a cream medium-weight fabric. I’m looking for something with depth and subtle texture. It can be almost bridal but doesn’t announce it unnecessarily. I think a silk and linen weave or some similar suiting material is what I should look for.’ My mother was silent.

I have a photo of myself when I was about five months old. I am sitting in a pram looking directly at the camera. My cheeks are chubby, my hair already growing into my ubiquitous pageboy bob.

We visited three department stores where I searched doggedly through the suiting material for my fabric, crossing occasionally to the evening fabrics to look for something lacy for the camisole. I pulled bolts of fabric from their stands, unrolled the material and draped it across my body. I squeezed the corners of each fabric in my hand, feeling its texture, and then crushed it against my palm to see if it creased. My mother stuck doggedly to the bridal fabric area. Occasionally we drifted toward each other, consulted and then moved apart to continue the quest. After several hours she finally called me to her side. She was holding a bolt of soft, delustred satin crepe, sensuous and cool to touch. I demurred. It might do for the camisole but it was too soft for the jacket. It was cream, as was the lace she held against the material, lace that looked more like macramé than the fine French stuff I had in mind.

‘I like it, but….’

‘It’s a beginning,’ she said and headed for the row of pattern books that sat on a high, canted top table at the back of the store’s fabric department. I joined her and we started leafing through the suit pattern section. We’d performed this ritual together many times. From the time I was four or five, I’d kneel, for what seemed like hours, on a chair next to my mother and watch her leafing through those overgrown bibles of the home seamstress, the Vogue, Butterick, McCall and Simplicity pattern

catalogue. She'd turn each page slowly, stopping every couple of pages to point out the details of the dress, check how much material was required and whether or not it was an easy pattern (that, as I grew older, I could make) or something trickier only my mother could handle. If she saw something she liked she would turn to me and ask 'I wonder how this would look?'

'It's pretty, Mummy,' I'd reply and her head would bend as she examined the pattern's merits and worked out which fabric might suit the pattern and if she could afford both pattern and fabric.

I sucked my thumb until I was ten years old, and I was a bed wetter. Another habit I had was reaching beneath my dress and, with the thumb and forefinger of my left hand, rubbing the soft flannel of my underpants. I didn't stroke the cleft between my legs, just the part of my underpants that encased my hip, or the lower front of my belly, where my pubic hair would eventually sprout. At first my parents tried to ignore my behaviour although when I was only an infant they bought a bottle of bitter aloes from the chemist and painted it onto the nub of my right thumb and its tiny pearl fingernail. They laid me in my cot and hovered nearby to watch as, so they told me, I placed my thumb in my mouth, pulled a face, removed my thumb, wiped it on my bib, replaced it in my mouth, sucked a second then a third time on its bitterness, removed the thumb again, wiped it and replaced it. I repeated this until the offending taste was washed away with baby saliva and my thumb could remain where I wanted it. My parents put the bottle of bitter aloes on a shelf in the bathroom. I eventually stopped wetting my bed, and I stopped sucking my thumb when I was ten years old. As for rubbing my underpants, my father cut several small squares of soft fabric from a clean pair of old underpants and gave one of the squares to me. I rubbed this scrap of cloth when company was present.

As we leafed through the pattern books looking for my wedding dress I could see my mother had that look on her face. I was tired from trawling through the shops and the tension between us was yeasty and rising.

‘How about this one?’ The illustration portrayed a dreamy blonde girl in a glossy puff of a dress with a long veil attached to a tiara.

‘Mum, that dress is nothing like the outfit I’ve described to you.’

A few moments later and she tried again. ‘Then what about this? It’s lovely and simple, like you want.’ It was another powder puff.

‘No. Remember: slim skirt, camisole top, jacket with a peplum. I want something different but elegant.’ I emphasised the first vowel of elegant, mimicking the way she pronounced the word. ‘And I don’t want any frills.’

Several moments passed. By now I was thinking about going home and risking my mother’s ire by searching alone, later in the week, for the fabric and pattern I wanted. Despite the tension, my mother seemed determined to remain cheerful. We kept leafing through the patterns. Vogue was our favourite because it epitomised class and style, but not even Vogue could satisfy me.

‘This one, look,’ said my mother. ‘It’s ... plain ... like you want, I’m not sure about a skirt and top, but see, the bodice is simple. I could put lace here and the pin tucks…’

When I was little my parents and I visited my godparents, a couple several years older than my parents. They didn’t have any children, owned matching furniture and had professionally made drapes hanging in their windows. One day we arrived to find five or six strangers standing and talking together in the lounge. The women smoked cigarettes from long stemmed cigarette holders and the men drank whiskey on ice from proper whiskey glasses. One of my godmother’s friends walked up to me, placed her hand beneath my chin, tilted my face toward hers and said, too loudly, ‘Look at her, she’s like a doll. Just like a little China doll.’

My parents told me to say ‘thank you’, which was not easy when a large bejewelled set of fingers holds your jaw hard in its grip. I’d seen China dolls displayed on polished mantelpieces above real log fires, dolls that came from faraway places my mother declared dangerous for women and far too expensive for us to think about visiting. I tried to imagine what it might be like sitting on someone’s mantelpiece.

Where would I sleep? How would I eat? My godmother's friend, I decided, was a silly woman but the image of me perched on a mantelpiece gnawed at the back of my mind.

'Pin tucks?'

Yes, horizontal pin tucks, across the bodice, it will look lovely and… '

I decided it was tactful to ignore the pin tucks and tried instead to focus on the skirt.

'…But the skirt, it's too full.'

'Oh, that won't be a problem. I can make the skirt much slimmer.'

'What about the jacket?'

'Janet, the wedding is in March. Why would you want a jacket? Besides the fabric is not suitable for a tailored jacket and we can't afford the extra material.' My parents had offered to pay for my wedding dress.

'Fabric? What fabric?'

'That lovely cream crepe we chose.'

'We didn't choose it, we looked at it, and it's too light for the jacket I want …'

I had a family of docile stoic dolls who spent their daylight hours in my thrall. The biggest one, Julie, was a twenty-two inch walking doll. She arrived one Christmas morning dressed as a bride although she didn't have a groom. She wore an exquisite dress of pure white flocked material, gathered at the waist, with a deep frill at the hem. A bunch of white rosebuds was tied to her hand and a band of rosebuds was pinned to her curly auburn hair. A white tulle veil hung from her rosebud halo.

My bride was a present from Nana and Papa Thomas. Sometimes I was allowed to stay with them during my school holidays. I'd sleep in my old bed at the back of the

house, where my parents and I once slept when I was a baby. At night I'd stare at Nana's headless dressmakers' model until I fell asleep. The next morning I'd creep out of my bed and turn the model's dials, trying to make her breasts smaller and hips larger. My grandmother asked me to leave her model alone because next time she wanted to make herself a dress she'd have to readjust the model to match her petite hourglass shape.

My grandmother made Julie's wedding dress, a lawn petticoat and pale apricot knickers trimmed with lace. In a separate box was a little pink 'day dress' and petticoat for when Julie didn't want to be a bride. Julie and I spent our first Christmas Day together walking along my grandparents' hall, around the dining room table, past the Christmas tree, into and out of the hot kitchen and back down the hall. I bent over her, my hands on her shoulders, and tilted her from side to side so that first her left, and then her right, foot was on the floor. Julie walked down the aisle a hundred times that day, with me behind her, shifting her weight and matching my pace to hers, the two of us taking one step forward then resting, one step forward then resting.

Patsy was my baby doll. She came with a bottle and a plastic pacifier. I put real milk in the bottle and fed it to her. She peed milk into a nappy my mother cut from one of my old nappies but some milk stayed inside Patsy and went sour and made her smell bad. My mother pushed Patsy into my bath water and I watched as little bubbles sprang from her mouth and the hole in her bottom. Then my father squeezed as much water from Patsy's rubbery body as he could, then shook her until she rattled and her blue eyes opened and closed like the shutters of my Papa's box brownie camera. When my father was satisfied that he'd shaken enough water out of Patsy's smelly insides as he could, he left her on the edge of the bath. I wasn't allowed to comfort or play with her. She sat alone and naked in the cold bathroom, periodically tilted, shaken and squeezed to extract more water. Eventually I was allowed to dress her and take her to bed with me, but she was put on a starvation diet of water only.

Sometimes I'd make her have a bath with me. I held her under the water and watched as twin columns of bubbles floated up from the holes at either end of her body, her stony eyes staring up at me through the soapy water.

My wedding suit turned into a creamy meringue concoction with wide macramé lace belabouring a square neckline, a pin tucked bodice, and short sleeves trimmed with the abysmal lace. The skirt also boasted pin tucked back and front panels, with lace inserted vertically between the pin tucked and the side panels of the skirt. These pin tucked panels stiffened the fabric making them spread awkwardly sideways, like wings that had slipped from my shoulders and settled around my hips. They made the pin tuck free sides of the skirt fold in behind the pin tucked panels and cling to my thighs and calves. The effect could have been clownish if it wasn't so surreal.

When my mother wasn't cooking or cleaning she would read or sew. She made me tartan skirts and plain white shirts for school and party dresses for family gatherings. She'd sew herself party frocks using patterns she'd chosen from Vogue's catalogue and material she'd found in the fabric sales at John Martins or Myers' department stores. My mother called what we wore our 'outfits' and made sure they complemented our looks, size and shape, except I was a skinny, no shape thing with a helmet of straight black hair and a tight smile. We arrived late for parties, walking into the room together, holding hands but with arms slightly outstretched, displaying the dresses to maximum effect. My father always trailed behind us, graciously accepting compliments for 'his girls'.

My mother and I never dressed in anything as crass as matching clothes. Our outfits defined breeding and elegance; her makeup was never overdone, that was for cheap women; our smiles were pale and virtuous and my mother's glossy auburn hair curled around her cheeks. One day she told me that when she was little my Pop White used to bathe her and wash her hair. Once he'd lifted her from her bath and towelled her dry, he dressed her in her pyjamas then sat her between his knees in front of the fire and dried her hair with a towel. When he was satisfied it was dry he'd fetch a silk scarf from his bedroom cupboard and polish her hair with it.

'When he was finished,' she said, 'my hair used to shine like brass.'

‘The lining will fix that,’ my mother reassured me. It didn’t but I was teaching in Whyalla and my mother was in charge and in her element. I phoned her, anxious about my dress, only to be told I had nothing to worry about.

‘Your wedding dress is going to be lovely and you’re going to be the most beautiful bride in South Australia,’ she’d say. ‘I have to go now, see you soon.’

On weekends I travelled home for fittings. I tried on the dress, gazing at the mirror where my reflection pulled and fidgeted at the impossibly gathered and tucked skirt, the pin tucked bodice with its short sleeves. Protests that it was nothing like I wanted were met by the innocuous statement that I’d changed my mind, and anyway, I looked lovely. I tried the dress on with the shoes my mother bought me and discovered the skirt was several inches too short. I finally said it might be a good idea to find a ready-to-wear-wedding dress but my mother simply snorted and cut a wide bias strip from the plentiful amount of left over fabric and attached it to the bottom of the skirt. This made the hemline flare out even more. It was only a week before the wedding but she promised me she would do something about the way the skirt was hanging and she was true to her promise.

As I grew, the hand holding ceased, but my mother and I continued to make our joint entrances. We needed to look, my mother said, as if we’d just come from a Vogue fashion shoot, although she shrugged away the admiration she garnered from her dressmaking. She acted as if the attention and drama of our entrances were beneath her but I suspected she was delighted by it. As I grew and gained breasts (small) and hips (large), people who didn’t know us asked if we were sisters.

Our entrances required careful training. I begged my mother to send me to dancing classes, but she said dancers’ thighs grew too big once they stopped dancing. She enrolled me in modelling school when I was five and I attended ‘deportment’ classes until just after I turned ten. Every Saturday morning my mother and I travelled into the city so I could learn how to walk along a catwalk, the teacher’s voice following

me:

‘Turn smoothly at the end, dear.

Take off your jacket,

one hand on your hip,

drape the jacket over your shoulder or arm,

pull your shoulders back, dear.

Thrust, err, push, your hips forward,

now, walk back down the catwalk,

stop in the middle and turn a full circle,

we want everyone to see the ‘outfit’.

Very nice, very good indeed.’

I learned to ascend and descend a flight of stairs without looking down or stumbling. As I was the only child in the class, my mother watched from her seat at the back of the room so that, the next day, she could help me practise my walk and turns. At parties my mother asked me to show everyone what I’d learned at school. My parents’ friends cleared a space for me and I’d perform my walk and turn, then stop, one hand on my hip, my back curved, my head turned as if I was looking over my shoulder even when there was nothing to see.

I eventually became better at these manoeuvres than my teenage classmates did. I also learnt how to speak into a microphone; my mother helped me prepare short talks about nutrition or family values. I’d stand before an audience of teenagers and read my speech from small cards my mother had prepared. Everyone commented on how cute my lisp was. The only thing I refused to do was smile for the camera. The women running the school suggested my mother apply to the city’s department stores for catwalk jobs and forget about my doing any photographic modelling.

I started earning money modelling for a local department store. I also made a

television commercial. My mother was thrilled when I was asked to model at a charity fundraiser. They needed a flower girl for a tall, dark pretend bride who became, during the 60s, a popular fashion model, and in the 70s and 80s, a household name. She was tall, voluptuous and divorced and no one paid attention to my mother or me when we arrived at the venue. Before we started dressing for the parade the pretend bride stood chatting and laughing with my father. Then the three of us left to dress and get ready for the catwalk. When I had finished being a pretend flower girl I left the catwalk and hurried behind the screen and into a draughty back room that smelt of perfume and cigarettes. My mother helped me change back into my own clothes, insisting I hurry because tomorrow was a school day and I should be home in bed.

'I'll never let you be a model when you're older,' she said as she stripped the flower girl flummery from my skinny frame. 'They're too hard'. She glared at the pretend bride being helped from her pretend wedding dress. 'That isn't appropriate for a woman.'

My mother's hairdresser was married in a bright white satin gown, accented with enough frills, lace and flounces to satisfy a 16th century French courtesan. It boasted a crinoline skirt and hooped petticoat. My mother saw the photographs. 'She was a lovely bride,' she said, 'I wonder if she would lend me the hooped petticoat she wore under her wedding dress?'

During my five years of modelling my mother sewed a flurry of dresses for me. To save money she re-used a basic store-bought paper pattern, adding to the seam allowance as I grew, changing the style of bodice, sleeves and choice of fabric to make each dress unique. Each of these dresses had long ties attached to the side seams that my mother fashioned into an elaborate bow at the centre back waistline. The centre knot of the bow pressed into the small of my back when I sat down and leant against the back of the chair. I was forced to either sit up straight or fidget and complain, which earned me a sharp reprimand. Sometimes the bow came undone,

helped by my tugging at it, or its trailing ends. The loosened ties tickled the back of my knees as I walked. When my mother noticed the loosened tie I had to stand still while she retied the bow, making the loops and ends even and ensuring the entire artifice spread perfectly across the back of my waist.

Most girls growing up in the 1950s wore dresses like these but my mother added extra layers of petticoats, or chose unusual adult fabrics for my dresses because I was not allowed to be like other little girls. These petticoats, made from stiff net, made my skirt stand out crisply from the waistline. If it was a very special occasion my petticoats were so numerous and thickly gathered that when I sat down, the front of my dress sprang up several inches above my knees, revealing layers of tulle. I tried to squeeze the excess fabric between my knees but the tulle tickled my inner thighs. Despite everything, I loved these dresses. My mother used to tell me beauty came from inside, but when I wore a dress she had made for me I knew I was beautiful on the outside as well.

I protested but finally wore the hooped petticoat under a wedding dress that was nothing like the pencil slim skirt, sassy lace camisole and jacket, with its cheeky peplum, that I wanted. The lace of my wedding dress was so broad it revealed my bra strap; the pin tucks looked like abject ripples on a creamy pond and the skirt was almost a metre wide. My mother completed the effect with a wide-brimmed hat she'd procured and festooned with blue fabric carnations. She draped a spotted veil around the flowers then tied a bow at the back. Its trailing ends tickled my shoulders when I turned my head. Occasionally I asked my mother what she was going to make for herself. She told me she had some peach coloured crepe but was too busy with my dress to worry about hers.

One of my favourite dresses had a dusky rose coloured organdie skirt with a white organdie bodice embroidered with pink buds sprouting from green stalks. The neckline was high and the bodice was sleeveless. My mother said it looked cool and fresh against my olive complexion and black hair. One day I wore the dress to a real

wedding. My mother took my dress from her wardrobe and helped me put it on. Extra care was taken with my hair, my shoes and the bow at the back. When she finished my mother turned me around, smiled and told me to wait in the living room while she got ready. One of my mother's sisters was a bridesmaid in the wedding party so her husband was driving to the church with us. He was a sweet, blustery, intelligent man with thick black curls and a deep voice. When I entered the lounge he was standing alone, fidgeting with his tie and brushing his dark suit. My father, handsome and comfortable with himself in his dark grey suit, was in the kitchen pouring three glasses of beer. My uncle looked at me then bent forward and gently scooped me into his arms. I giggled and kissed him on the cheek.

'You're the prettiest little girl I've ever seen,' he said and placed me back on my feet. Moments later my mother walked into the room. She looked at me and frowned.

'It's only been a few minutes since I finished dressing you,' she said, 'and look, you're already crumpled.' She fell to her knees, tugging the hem of my skirt, and then she turned me around, smoothed the back of my dress and fiddled with the bow, obviously made askew by my uncle's bear hug. He observed this for a few moments.

'Gloria,' he said, 'it wasn't the child's fault. I hugged her when she walked into the room.' There was a long silence. My mother stiffened and glared at him. Then my father came into the room and handed them both a beer.

Eventually the gathered skirts and back bows made way for empire line dresses that ended just on the knee. I was a teenager with a pear shaped body and I was bored with the prissy clothes of my girlhood. I was happiest in jeans and flowing cheesecloth tops. I saved my pocket money and bought a purple lambskin jacket with coloured braid on the cuffs and lambs-wool down stitched to the edge of the bodice. My mother doggedly continued making my clothes, going through a period where every dress had a pin tucked bodice.

On the day of my wedding the mother of the bride donned a slimline sleeveless dress cut to a low v neck, revealing her perfect cleavage. The skirt was tight, and wrapped, sarong like, across the front of her perfectly flat stomach. The neckline was edged

with pearl trim and the outfit was worn with elegant brown peep-toe shoes and a brown clutch purse. I have a picture of her, taken as she was about to enter the church. She stands like a movie star, one hip thrust out, her dyed honey blonde hair piled on her head. She is smiling serenely into the camera.

I was sorting through the detritus of my long, recently deceased marriage and found a hat box containing my wedding dress. I decided to try it on, imagining that wearing it again might help me understand the girl who had let it be made. In the mirror stood a postmenopausal woman, her shoulder length hair dyed to cover the grey, her body, due to grief and hours in the gym, as slim as the day she married, but also more Rubenesque. She was wearing a very silly dress. I twisted and turned, trying to find something attractive about the image, but gave up and lifted the heavy skirt up and over my waist. The bodice, however, was either tighter than it had been, or my waistline was thicker than I hoped and I couldn't hoist the dress higher than my waist. I was living alone in my eyrie at the time and I panicked, imagining that I'd have to phone a friend and ask them to pull me out of my meringue prison. I pulled at the skirt, wriggling and cursing, trapped inside a dress that represented what was wrong with my past and with me. I tugged again and heard the stitches rip in the bodice. The dress released its grip and I peeled it from my body, rolled it into a ball and kicked it into the corner of the bedroom. The next day I gave it to my neighbour who was unashamedly and vibrantly gay.

'Thank you darling,' he said, hugging me. 'It will do nicely for dress up nights.'

Clearing

> ‘I converted the passivity to which my sex had condemned me into active defiance.’

There was a path and I followed it. There was nothing behind me, and above me was a sky as blue as blue, bright and clear as my eyes. All around me was green, so much green, and the uncomplicated small and large scurrying and twitterings that filtered out from the green. I wasn’t afraid.

Eventually there was a clearing with sweet smelling flowers and grasses gathered in companionable clumps. Gone was the cacophony of trees that is the forest. A stately broad brimmed oak stood guard over a cottage surrounded by daffodils, baby’s breath, pansies and blood red poppies. The rough path of the forest became level and wide, and then narrow again. It led to a little white door with pots of herbs standing on either side. Smoke rose from the chimney, and from the opened window crisp white curtains stirred in the light breeze. The smell wafting from the window was clean and homely; oatmeal and coffee. I peered in the window. Fresh flowers stood in a cut glass vase on the centre of the table that was set for breakfast. Three chairs were arranged around the little stove where a low fire burned. Everything was neat and clean, too clean, scrubbed so not a speck of dirt could be seen. It was quiet, as if the house was holding its breath. It certainly didn’t look like a cottage inhabited by bears. Then again, we were in story world where it was perfectly normal for three bears to live together in a cottage in a clearing in the middle of the forest. I returned to the door and knocked. I thought I heard a voice coming from within the house, but maybe it was the wind.

Judging by appearances, it was all too good to be true. I should have realised, but only the very wary assume that danger or abuse lurks behind every door. We want to believe that the fear and pain that hides behind those clean, domestic odours doesn’t exist. Take Janet, for instance. Her family wasn’t abusive. She was not an abused child, apart from the occasional smack on the legs or on her bottom and a slap across the face when she was older and such a difficult teenager. Nor did she experience sexual abuse because it’s unfair to count the times she complained of itching ‘down there’ and Gloria frowned and fetched the torch and made Janet lie on the bed with her legs spread while Gloria and Warren shone the torch on the sweet little folds of

Janet's labia and peered closely at it to see if she had worms. Janet was only five or six when this first happened and after several episodes with the torch, she would tell her mother she had worms and some medicine, but not the torch, would come out of the cupboard.

And of course it wasn't really sexual abuse, later, when Janet was eight or nine years old. She was living with her parents in the unit on Port Road and one afternoon, when she arrived home from school her mother wasn't home. The driver of a truck parked around the corner told Janet he was her father's friend from work. He was waiting to see her father. Did she want to wait with him in the cabin of his truck? He lifted Janet up into the cabin. She'd been in the cabin of a truck plenty of times. She recognised the speedo and the gear stick and the dust and scraps of papers littered across the dash board and she was mildly bored by it all.

After a little while the truck driver showed Janet a rubbery, shiny pink thing hidden beneath the folded newspaper on his lap. He said it was a doll but it was unlike any doll Janet had seen so she had the good sense to be suspicious when he asked her to touch, and then kiss it. While the man was talking to Janet her neighbour, Mr Kerrie, who owned the shop next to the unit where Janet and her parents lived, and whose side window offered a view of the truck, opened the door to the truck's cabin and said, 'Janet, why don't you come into the shop while you're waiting for your mother?'

Janet clambered out of the truck because she liked Mr Kerrie even if her father said he was a wog. Then she remembered her manners and said goodbye and thank you to the man who looked coldly at Mr Kerrie and had already covered the doll with his newspaper.

Maybe Janet forgot to tell her mother and father about the truck or the man but she should have. Perhaps Mr Kerrie forgot too. Or perhaps Mr Kerrie did tell Janet's parents and maybe Gloria was cold and distant with him when she thanked him and saw him out the door, then said to Warren that Mr Kerrie was a filthy old man just trying to cause trouble because no friend of Warren's would do that to her daughter. Warren agreed because the men he knew, men who drove trucks and worked hard, men who weren't Italians who ran corner shops, were all good blokes. Or maybe no

one asked Janet about the driver or the truck or the doll because they knew Gloria was crazy and had to be protected. And anyway, Janet wasn't damaged, she was still the docile, well behaved, solemn little girl she always was, except when she was being naughty, and who can tell why a child is naughty?

No, there's no physical abuse, no sexual abuse, not as far as Gloria was concerned, because the thing Gloria hated the most was an 'upset'.

'I mustn't be upset,' she would say. 'Please don't do that, it's upsetting me. Why must you upset me this way?' No one seemed to realise that the upsets Gloria experienced were set up by Gloria herself.

No, Janet wasn't starved, beaten or neglected. She was smothered with love, except when Gloria was depressed; when she was arguing with her family; when she and Warren fought. Janet was loved when Gloria was happy. Janet was fed healthy, tasty food. Janet wore pretty dresses and was fussed over and when Gloria was upset Janet must understand it was never Gloria's fault.

So, unlike Cinderella and the Match Girl and Snow White (happily cooking and cleaning for all those jolly miners) Janet wasn't abused. She was often scared but that isn't the same thing because Janet's fears were foolish. Warren and Gloria said they loved Janet and she had nothing to fear. Janet was, like me, consumed by the force of someone else's telling and buried in stories that were a simulacrum of the truth. And anyway, what is the truth? That Bears can wear woollen vests and talk? That a mother knows what is best for her daughter? And how far back do we need to go before the beginnings of that truth can be told?

In early versions of my story I don't have a mother. I came from nowhere and when I left the bears' cottage I go nowhere. It suits me. I like being an unattached, independent fearless girl: there are so few of us. Girls like Janet annoy me, they wrap themselves in cloying, sentimental love, they efface themselves, and they ignore their skills and abilities.

Then again, there was one day when Janet, reading my story, stopped at the page where the little bear was being a cry baby about his chair (he was too big for it anyway). Janet looked up from the book and watched Gloria, who was sitting before

her sewing machine, stitching together pieces of fabric she had cut from a length of material.

‘These are big pockets,’ Gloria said as she pinned a pocket piece to the skirt.

‘Big enough for me to fit in?’ said Janet. She put the book down, walked over to her mother and stood next to the sewing machine.

‘Oh, yes,’ said Gloria. She attached the pocket to the skirt, clipped the thread, laid the half-finished skirt to one side and lifted Janet onto her knee. They sat together in front of the sewing machine. Janet gazed at the little metal foot with its two toes, the thread carrier that held the white line of thread in its proper place and the needle that moved up and down and made the stitches. Hidden away, below the sewing plate, was the bobbin. Janet thought that was a pretty name for the round metal donut that carried the bottom thread. Then Janet gazed at the tension dial that she knew needed, according to the thickness of the fabric, precise adjustment prior to every new project. Janet moistened her lips as she contemplated the tension dial.

‘Would you like me to make you a dress like this, with big pockets?’ Gloria’s arms reached around Janet. She picked up the second pocket piece, gingerly plucked a pin from the round metal pin tin and pinned the pocket to the skirt. Janet sat very still, hardly breathing.

‘That would be nice,’ she said. She lowered her voice, matching Gloria’s dreamy, soft tone. Janet could feel her mother’s heart beating against the left side of Janet’s small, tight back. It felt as if Janet had two hearts, one that beat in her own chest and a pilot heart, an original heart, the heart that beat her into being.

In the part of my story that Janet was reading before she stopped to help her mother with the pockets, I was upstairs and asleep in Baby Bear’s bed so maybe this image of Janet and her mother sitting together at the sewing machine didn’t happen. Maybe Janet’s two hearts are just a dream I had. Maybe I dreamt this quiet moment between Janet and Gloria the way Janet dreamt her mother was happy instead of sad or angry.

‘We’ll go to the shops tomorrow and look for a pattern and fabric for you, but for now,’ Gloria gently slid Janet off her lap, ‘I need to finish this dress and then you can

help me make Daddy some dinner.'

'Mummy, until you make my dress, can I get into your pocket and go to parties with you?'

Was it the dream Gloria or the real Gloria who smiled her beautiful smile and replied, 'You are already in my pocket, my love, you already are.'

Painted Stones

When I was fifteen I told my family I'd never marry and have children. My mother and father laughed.

It was late on a cold wet afternoon early in July, 1963. My mother and I sat in a bus shelter on Torrens Road, Woodville. My mother was shivering so I moved closer to her. Cars sped past us, their tyres making a *shwoosh, shwoosh* sound along the slick road and flicking spumes of oily water in their wake. The green dress my mother wore had long sleeves and brown fake fur on the collar and cuff, but the material was thin and provided little warmth. I wondered why she was shivering because she had told me that pregnant women have an inbuilt furnace. I decided the baby inside her wasn't doing his job properly so I slid even closer to my mother. I wanted to wrap my arms around her and shield her from the cold and the drops of rain blowing in under the bus shelter. My mother continued shivering and tears trickled down her cheeks but I wasn't sure if that was because of the cold or the argument she had just had with Nana Thomas.

A grey bus pulled up to our stop and we stepped across the streaming gutter into the steamy warmth of the bus. My mother paid for our tickets, sat in a seat near the front of the bus and stared out of the window. I sat next to her and as close as I dared. Neither of us spoke during the thirty minute journey to the unit where my mother, father and I lived. The bus stopped and we quitted its silent warmth. The rain had stopped and the setting sun glowered darkly on our unit and the shabby delicatessen next door; both façades seemed to soak up the leaden atmosphere. My mother struggled with the front door key. Finally it turned, and we walked into our frosty unit. It had once been a fruit and vegetable shop so our front door and window looked directly out onto the footpath. A bulky cupboard divided the room lengthwise, its glass fronted doors facing into what my mother called the kitchenette. The cupboard's peeling back faced the lounge room but it was covered by a dusty curtain.

Another curtain hung across the bay window of the shop concealing the raised

platform where the fruit and vegetables had once been displayed. In the afternoons, before my father came home from work, I pretended this raised platform was my stage. I'd creep behind the curtains and announce myself with, I hoped, what my mother called 'aplomb'. With drum roll and trumpets sounding in my head I'd fling the curtains apart and dance and sing. Sometimes I'd be accompanied by the radio, other times I'd be *a capella*. My audience consisted of my three dolls—Tammy, a little black doll with gold hoop earrings, Julie, the walking doll who, like me, was tall for her age, Patsy, a chubby baby doll—and my lifelong companion, Edward G Bear, Esquire, also known as 'Teddy Bear', who kept a dignified watch over all of us.

I knew something was wrong as soon as I heard my baby's first cry. I'd only heard one other newborn's triumphant and angry cry; my baby's was a weak mewl of complaint rather than outrage. When they handed him to me he pouted and sucked in his stomach as he breathed.

Less than twenty-four hours later a doctor from the neonatal unit of the maternity hospital arrived from Adelaide. While we watched the retrieval nurse attach cords to my baby's heaving chest and connect him to a heartbeat monitor, the doctor asked me why my baby was induced prematurely. I was too stunned to reply *because my doctor said my foetus was 'small for its dates' and two weeks overdue*. Instead I watched the nurse wrap my son in what looked like pliant aluminium foil, close the lid of his space capsule on wheels and push it down the corridor to where a waiting ambulance took him to the airport and then to Adelaide where they would save his life. The sound of his heartbeat faded as she wheeled him along the corridor and I didn't hear it again until the next day when I flew to Adelaide and checked into the hospital where my son was still fighting for every breath. On arrival I had to endure the postpartum regime of having my weight, height and blood pressure measured when I felt strong enough to tear down the walls that came between me and my baby.

When I was finally allowed into the neonatal intensive care temple, my son's arms were tied down. Because he was intubated his cry was soundless. 'We had to restrain his arms because he kept pulling at his tubes,' a nurse said. 'He's the biggest bub in the suite at the moment. He's a fighter.' I stared at the tormented infant.

‘It’s okay,’ the nurse told me, ‘you can touch him and talk to him. He’ll recognise your voice.’ What was I supposed to say to an infant whose first forty-eight hours of life involved struggling for breath and being tied to his bed? I wanted to tell him everything would be all right. I wanted to apologise.

Later, in my hospital bed, I dreamt I took my baby to a school staff meeting. The only place I could find for him to sleep was in an empty aquarium. It took an effort to lift him into it but he didn’t stir so I turned my attention to the meeting. Several minutes later I looked over at the makeshift cradle. The aquarium was filling with water and my baby’s sodden blankets and clothes were dragging him down into the water. I woke up before I could save him.

Later that afternoon a doctor from the neonatal unit made a routine visit.

‘We’ve had a small problem,’ she said, ‘nothing to worry about. Do you remember the tube we had draining fluid from your baby’s lungs?’ I nodded, wondering if this woman realised she was talking about a raggedy doll I’d had no choice but leave to her ministrations because I’d failed him.

‘For some reason,’ said the doctor, a tall, thin blonde, ‘the tube became blocked. We had to drill a second hole in his chest and start the drainage again. But there’s nothing to worry about now.’ I asked when it had happened.

‘About two hours ago. Don’t worry’, she said, ‘everything is fine now.’

My baby had nearly drowned in the mucus created by his immature lungs while I slept.

The next day they fed him one millilitre of breast milk from the two or three millilitres I’d managed to express for him.

The other witness of my early forays on the stage was my mother, who, when she wasn’t cooking dinner or sewing, would lie on our sofa and read. Soon after one of my performances began she’d look up from her book, and smile absently at the future star of stage and screen I dreamt I’d become.

‘Have you finished reading?’ she’d ask. ‘Don’t you have another book you could read?’ I was tired of reading and she knew it, but she preferred me to read or play on the grass median strip that divided the up and down lanes of Port Road than jump around the hollow mock stage of the shop window. Anyone walking past our home could see me and, more importantly, past the open curtains into the flat. Realising my performance was over, I’d beam beatifically, throw farewell kisses to my mute audience, disappear behind the curtains and climb down from my latest triumph. I’d find a book to read and sit back on the lounge chair.

There would, however, be no performances tonight. My mother fumbled for the light switch and asked me to light the kerosene heater. Then she disappeared into her bedroom. I hated the evil smelling monster whose primary purpose, whenever I tried to light it, was to singe my eyelashes and eyebrows instead of keeping me warm. I switched on the kitchenette light and searched for a box of matches in one of the cupboard drawers. Kneeling before the heater I primed it the way my father had shown me and waited as the kerosene soaked into the round felt wick at the heater’s base. I touched the lit match to the wick. The heater mercifully behaved and the flame caught and grew. I lowered the wick slightly to stop it from smoking and placed the wire domed cover over the aureole and lowered the metal guard. Sitting back on my heels I watched the wire mesh slowly turn deep red, then soften to an orange glow. My arms and legs were cold so I stayed close to the heater, absorbing what warmth it shed and ignoring the smell of kerosene.

I could hear my mother moving around in her bedroom at the back of our unit. The door from the lounge led to my room and, off from that, my parents’ room. My room also led to a rickety outside porch, the laundry and bathroom. From the porch, a paved brick path meandered alongside a chaotic garden bed to a toilet at the end of the yard. I needed to go to the toilet but the cold, the dark, and the distance stopped me. I made a mental calculation and decided I could wait the hour or so until my father came home from work. He’d accompany me to the toilet. I was ten years old and ought to have gone alone but at night time the backyard concealed monsters waiting in the shadows for hapless little girls like me.

I heard my mother’s high heels drop on the wooden floor; the sound echoed through the three cold rooms of the unit and then there was silence. I held my breath. Would

she come back into the lounge or go to bed? More muffled sounds came from the back of the flat. She was moving about in slippered feet. I sat by the heater and waited. A few minutes later she returned to the lounge room. She was still shivering even though she'd put a cardigan on over her dress. She walked toward the kitchenette then suddenly stood still, her hands flitting uncertainly between her legs.

I'd finished feeding and bathing my second baby, a daughter. Today had been a good day so I lay propped on the lounge with the baby, who had just started sitting upright, perched on my stomach. Her heels rested on my chest and I supported her back with my raised knees. My son, just over two years old, was playing with a set of toy cars on the floor beside me. Brian sat across from us, reading the paper.

I gazed at my little girl, holding tight to her thighs to stop her from wobbling off me. She leant forward, reached out with both her hands and placed them on my cheeks. Her fingers roamed over my face as if she was trying to rearrange my features so they were more to her liking. On the other hand, she could have been building my face into her expanding memory. Either way, her concentration was consummate. Holding my face in her hands she conducted, in baby babble, a commentary, playing with the sounds that would eventually become words. I listened, fascinated, while my daughter decided who I was and what I might mean to her.

'Get me a towel,' my mother said, looking down at the floor, 'Quickly. Get me a towel.' I trotted into my parents' bedroom, opened the wardrobe and found a small towel on one of the shelves.

'Quickly Janet,' she called to me from the lounge. I registered the panic in her voice and didn't bother to shut the wardrobe door.

'That one's not big enough,' she said as I handed her the towel. 'Get me another one, quick, another one.' I retreated, mystified, to my parents' bedroom, grabbed another towel and ran back to the lounge. My own bladder problems forgotten, I wondered why my mother couldn't make it to the toilet in time. The front of her dress was wet

and there was a puddle on the floor between her feet. She staggered, with the two towels between her legs, to one of our chairs and sat down.

‘It’s okay,’ she said. She was breathing more evenly and tried to smile at me. ‘Remember I told you the baby floats in a sac of water, where it is warm and protected?’ I nodded dumbly. ‘I think that water is coming away.’ She breathed deeply again then said, ‘Janet, you need to phone your father at work. Over on the bench is my address book. Bring it to me and while I find the number you can get my purse from my handbag and I’ll give you some money for the phone.’ I found the address book, handed it to her and then returned to her bedroom where her handbag lay on the end of the bed. I opened the gold clasp of the bag and reached inside for her purse. I wished I was old enough to own an elegant black leather bag and a purse where I could keep money. I walked back into the warm lounge room and handed my mother her purse. She gave me a piece of paper with my father’s work number written clearly on it. She put the money into the palm of my hand and said I mustn’t ask for Daddy, but say that I wanted to speak to Warren.

‘Remember to say please and thank you,’ she said. ‘Tell them it’s very important, that you have to speak to him. Tell him he needs to come home straight away because I think I have to go to hospital.’ She gave me a quick hug.

‘Is the baby coming, Mum?’

‘No. No. The baby can’t come now,’ said my mother. ‘He’s not due for another six weeks. It’s not time for him to come. But I need you to call your father.’

We called the baby ‘he’ although it was several decades before ultrasounds took the guess work out of buying baby clothes. Our baby was a boy because that’s what he had to be.

I was tall for my age and my mother had taught me how to make a phone call from the phone box just outside our flat, but I had to stand on tip toes so I could slide the pennies in the slot and dial the number my mother had written on the piece of paper. The phone box smelt horrible. Late at night, men making their way home from the hotel nearby used the phone box for a toilet. I held the heavy black phone receiver and started dialling but the round metal dial had a mind of its own, just like the

kerosene heater. My fingers got lost in the big round holes and the dial sprang backward when I needed it to move forward. I realised I'd misdialled one of the numbers and put the receiver back onto the cradle. The pennies tumbled noisily out of the phone into the change chute. I retrieved them, picked up the receiver again, fed the pennies back into the phone and redialled the number – this time the right one. I can't remember what I said to my father or how long it took for him to arrive home. I don't remember the trip to the hospital or coming home alone with my father, or what my father made me for breakfast, or going to school the next morning.

I took my third baby into the hospital's sun room. He was born exactly three years and one month after my eldest boy and as I told my friends, by the time he'd turn twelve months old I would have been either pregnant or lactating for almost five years. The baby, propped against my shoulder, slept peacefully. I sat in a cane chair. My back was to the window where the early October sunlight streamed in, warming it. There was no one in the room but my new baby and me. I looked at his face and shifted him slightly so he was not in the sun.

Despite my exhaustion I held my baby tight against my chest. He moved slightly in his sleep and I was aware that this child and I still hadn't properly separated, and that his existence, like that of his older brother and sister, coiled back to my existence, which coiled back to my mother's and then back and back again, to my distant foremothers. For a third time in as many years I wondered if my mother and I ever shared a moment such as this.

Three or four days after my mother's waters broke I walked into my godmother's bright kitchen and asked her if I could please phone the hospital. She dialled the number for me while I tried not to feel insulted and then she handed me the phone. I waited, then in a voice mimicking the tone my mother reserved for her younger sisters or rude salesgirls, asked the switchboard for maternity. After another short wait, the phone clicking irritably in my ear, a second nurse chirruped 'Maternity.' Chagrined by my godmother's stern look, I politely asked how Mrs Thomas was.

‘Is this her little girl? Your Mum’s fine. In fact she’s being wheeled past us now. Hold on a moment.’

There was another wait then my mother’s voice: ‘Is that you Janet?’ She sounded tired. ‘I have wonderful news. You have a little brother. We have our dear little boy.’

‘I can’t wait to tell Daddy,’ I said.

‘Oh no, don’t tell your father. I’ll call him as soon as I can. It was lucky they were wheeling me past the phone and I could talk to you, but it would never do for him to think you knew first. Just wait and he’ll call you after I call him. I have to go now. Bye.’

The following evening, my father and I had dinner at my godparents’ house. The men opened a bottle of beer, to ‘wet the baby’s head’. My aunt sipped from a small glass of sherry and I was allowed a weak shandy. The oil heater glowed and my godparents’ basset hound dozed noisily in front of it. The adults, however, were unusually quiet. We finished dinner and my father told me to fetch my coat; he wanted to take me for a drive. We drove silently while my excitement grew. I’d worked out we were heading for the hospital where my mother and my baby brother were.

‘I thought I wasn’t allowed to visit Mum and the baby?’ I said as my father parked the car in front of the hospital. He smiled at me and we got out of the car.

‘Look up there,’ he said and pointed to a window on the second floor. The room he pointed to was lit from within and I could see a woman in a blue dressing gown waving at me. It took me a little while to recognise my mother. I felt sad because she couldn’t hug me. She stopped waving and the curtains closed.

‘I have another surprise for you. Come on.’ My father took my hand. ‘You have to be quiet.’ He led me around the back of the building to a flight of metal stairs. We climbed cautiously. It had been raining again and the steps were slippery. We ducked into a door at the back of the building, along a corridor, then through another door and out again into the cold, and up another flight of stairs. We stood on a small balcony before a dark window. It was raining again. My father let go of my hand.

Was my mother going to appear at this window too? My father stepped forward and knocked quietly on the glass. The inside blind was raised and light flowed down the grey metal landing, the wet handrail and over my father and me. A blonde nurse stood nervously in a small room on the other side of the window. There were several large clear boxes arranged against the walls. The nurse stood before the window, looking out at us. Her hands rested on one of the boxes. My father propelled me closer to the window. Inside the box was something shaped like an oversized, white cigar with a pink tip. The pink part resolved into a face. The eyes opened momentarily then shut again. There was a miniscule nose and a pale forehead but no arms or legs, just a swaddled infant oblivious to the spectre of his big sister standing in the soft rain outside his window. The nurse waited a moment longer as I peered in the window, then she pulled down the blind and the light disappeared.

Our new baby boy was premature. The doctors doubted he would survive but they decided to let my mother bring our baby home so we could get to know him and so she could care for him before he left us, once more, to ourselves. When they made their prognosis, however, the doctors failed to take my mother into account.

In the early 1990s I bought a family-sized tent with the money I earned by teaching. We decided to take the children camping at Moana Caravan Park for Christmas. Brian and the children spent hours on the beach, perfecting their duck dives and learning to body surf. I tried to join in but I wasn't a confident swimmer and to my daughter's disappointment and ongoing bemusement I never learned to duck dive. If it was too cold to swim I played board games with the children while Brian read. When I wanted to read, Brian took the children for long walks or they played cricket, the cries of 'caught', 'six' and 'out' a backdrop to my novel. At night the wind shook the tent and the children squealed and giggled until we all curled into our sleeping bags and slept through the gusts of wind that carried the sound of the waves into our dreams. We woke early and after a breakfast of bacon and eggs cooked on a gas stove, we walked along the beach. I told the children to write their names in the sand, as close to the water as possible. We held hands and watched the tide sweep across their names. I told them the ocean had learnt their names and would carry them to every shore on the planet.

‘No matter where you travel when you grow up and leave home, you’ll be recognised because you have been introduced to the world,’ I said. My children scoffed. Like their father, they were given to practical, prosaic pursuits. I am the dreamer of the family.

One summer I packed paints, paint brushes, paper and crayons along with the cricket bats and balls, spades, sun cream, books and board games. The children and I walked to the cliffs north of the beach and hunted for flat round stones the size of an adult’s hand. After collecting several each we hauled them, in our pockets and a small bucket, back to the tent. I rescued the paints and brushes from the bottom of the backpack and we sat on the grass outside the tent and painted the stones. Brian asked why we bothered painting over something already beautiful and turned back to his book.

My mother, father and I brought our baby home in early August. It was another wet day and the wheels of our car sent white flares of water into the air. I was wedged between my parents in the front seat of the car, cradling my baby brother. I thought he might slide off my lap onto the floor among our feet but my mother, gazing at him constantly, would have made sure that could never happen. I looked at her face and its tender regard then down at the baby asleep on my knee. He resembled none of us. I was, and am, dark haired and brown eyed, like my parents. My little brother had tufts of pale blond hair on his head. His eyes, then a newborn slate, turned, months later, light blue and occasionally, when he was older and angry at the world, green. Otherwise he was a cipher whose little face my mother read and reread as if trying to memorise a secret code.

My mother’s devotion and my baby brother’s survival was the talk of the family. He had to be bottle fed every two hours and in between feeds my mother held him close, as if to coax him into staying with us. At night she lay awake listening to his shallow, hard won breaths. The rain continued. I went to school wearing the status of ‘big sister’ like a scratchy, oversized new coat. Due to his fragile hold on life, my mother didn’t bathe him, but ‘topped and tailed’ him instead. He wasn’t fully naked until he was six weeks old.

On the day my mother decided to finally bathe her little boy I was home from school for the holidays. Although it was the middle of September, and close to my eleventh birthday there were, once again, low, dulling clouds and the air was chill. Intermittent rain pounded the iron roof of our unit and my mother lit the kerosene heater early. She drew the curtains and rolled our spare towels into long sausages, placing them against the bottom of the door to ensure no cold windy fingers could find the innocent flesh of the about to be bathed infant. Then my mother fetched my old baby bath, heated the water, laid out the soap, flannel and baby powder and poured the water into the bath. She started to unwrap my brother. His mittens, booties and a white knitted matinee jacket were peeled off. This was before babies were dressed in towelling all-in-one suits so she unbuttoned and removed his unmanly night gown, followed by a finely knitted singlet and last of all a wet nappy. The towel that had hung close to the heater was placed over him. The water temperature was checked a final time, the towel removed and my mother picked up the, by now, protesting infant.

Mothering for me was tidal. My interest in it rose and fell. I loved my children the way the sea loves the shore but I periodically shrank from them, to return later and flood the hollows of their lives. Sometimes there were storms and I, or one of them, almost drowned in the emotions that accompanied the whirlpools of motherhood. I hated myself for my cruelty: I was a murky glass of icy water reflecting my children's unsatisfied needs. I yelled at my little ones, I threw things, not at them, but across the room. I hit my children and afterwards I'd sob and go to my frightened child to hold them, if they'd let me near them. My tears fell on their heads and I apologised over and over again, telling them it wasn't their fault, that I was sorry they'd been buffeted by the passionate inconstancy of my love. Over the years I visited doctors, psychologists, feminist counsellors, interpersonal therapists, rebirthers and cognitive behaviourists in the hope they'd help me understand why I found mothering difficult and unsatisfying and help me to control my anger and resentment. I had hypnotherapy and purchased a small library of self-help books. I studied counselling because I thought it would be a quick and cheap way to learn psychology. These measures helped for a short time then I'd slip back into behaving

as if my children didn't exist. I'd look straight through them as if were invisible, a skill, my mother told me, I'd always had. At other times, like the Inuit Goddess Sedna, I was grey and lethargic and dragged my children down with me into a sea of despair and secret loss. Then there were the precious moments when I was their morning sunlight that warmed them as we played together and shared stories of their birth or holidays by the sea.

Eventually my despair lifted a little; the years passed and the storms lessened but I will always believe my children survived their childhood because they had each other.

My brother looked like a skinned rabbit. His flesh was pink and soft and his pale wormlike manhood scrolled in on itself. He uttered skittish, weak cries. My mother stood frozen in the middle of the kitchen, holding my brother in rigidly extended arms, as if to offer him to some stern god. She said, over and over again,

'I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do with him. He's so small. What do I do?'

He was in danger of wriggling weakly out of her arms so I walked up to them and took him from her. I turned to the little white bath with a blue bunny emblazoned on it and lowered him into the warm water. He startled, arched his back and screamed, but after a while relaxed and began to kick, and the ungracious mewling stopped. I gently pulled my arm away from underneath his neck at the same time as our mother, from the other side of the bath, slid one hand under his neck and the other under his bottom. I retrieved my other arm from under his torso, stepped back, took the towel from the table, wiped my wet hands on it and rehung it in front of the heater. When I turned back to them they were gazing at each other as if for the first time. I picked up my book, sat on the couch and started to read.

I'm probably the only one of us who kept their painted stone. It sits on the shelf in my study. It is coffee coloured, as long as the palm of my hand and almost as wide,

flat and smooth with rounded edges, wider at one end, curving inward slightly at the centre. When I found it the shape suggested the numeral eight, and that's what I painted, in orange, on it. The upper section of the eight is smaller than the bottom. Towards the top of the lower section, close to the 'neck' of the eight, I painted small white breasts and, further down her torso, a dark brown belly button. Further down again, in the lowest arc of the eight I painted a small, white pubic triangle. On either side of my Goddess I painted three horizontal red streaks of sunset with red dots placed between them. Her hair is yellow with white dots along each strand and at her base, on either side of the torso, I added horizontal white streaks. Across the bottom of her body is an undulating curl of stylised wave.

When I look at my painted stone I hear voices: the sea, the wind and my children. I feel cool stinging water around my thighs and the thrill and uncertainty of immersion. I remember the wet, slippery bodies of my children, how they circled around me like slick, playful seals, or clung to my shoulders before launching themselves from my arms toward the deeper stretches of the sea. My stone is a symbol of the phenomenon known as *microchimerism*, when two genetically distinct cells are found in the same individual. It occurs when cells are transferred between a mother and her foetus while the child is developing in the womb. In Greek mythology a chimera is a fire breathing female monster with a lion's head, the body of a goat and a serpent's tail. Micro, of course, means small. I imagine each of my children's cells, diminutive, beloved, monstrous aliens floating deep within me but the painted stone also reminds me of the shattered pieces of shell that clutters my psychic sea bed and sours everything I do.

Hospitality

> ‘My behaviour conformed to the morality implicit in my environment; but with one important exception; I insisted that men should be subject to the same law as women.’

I moved away from the cottage window and once more contemplated the front door with its shiny brass handle and a welcome mat blanketing the threshold. Not knowing what lies behind an unfamiliar door excites me. I wondered if I should knock again or retrace my steps. The woods were behind me and I’ve never been one to go back to something I’ve left so I decided to knock on the door one more time. Did I need company after my long walk? Perhaps. Did I tarry near the cottage because I imagined its inhabitants were, like me, eager for adventure? Probably. I couldn’t have known the bears had only just stepped out for a walk because I hadn’t spotted them while I was in the forest. If I had known the cottage belonged to bears, would that have stopped me? It was unlikely. I sought the hospitality that is a wayfarer’s right and so I knocked again and waited for an answer. I was hungry, tired from my walk and curious. When I reflect on what happened next, I am positive, despite the reputation I have, that I meant no harm; breaking the little chair was an accident and it was only a thing, a possession. I didn’t take a life; no human or beast was hurt. The bears, those would be humans, those impostors looking for a way to prove their humanity ignored humanity’s first obligation—hospitality to a stranger. I might have known where to find a pot of gold, the answer to the riddle of the four fair creatures, and the bird that helped those creatures create the tracks to help humankind. I could have told them the name of a magical baby. I didn’t possess that knowledge, not then, but I might have. Instead of letting me sleep, and dream, the bears woke me with their growls and their bewildered, hostile stares. I ran into the forest and became the girl who ran away, the guilty girl with the pert curls bouncing against her back as she ran. The girl, wearing a frilled apron, who stole another creature’s food, wrecked their home and fled. It was the bears—animals of the wild, dwellers in the dangerous forests—dressed in silly vests and hats, who were awarded the moral high ground. They forgot *their* beginning. The story tellers transformed them into Daddy, with his big gruff voice, Mummy with her middle-sized voice, and that annoying pest Baby Bear with his ineffective, squeaky little voice. No one knows that when Mummy and Daddy bear weren’t looking, Baby Bear used to bounce up and down on his chair like a demented grasshopper. None of these

thoughts, however, occurred to me then.

Would things have been different if I'd come across a castle and found a prince and his princess, a glamour couple like Gloria and Warren Thomas? Perhaps. Then again, fairy tales are merely illusions wrapped in antinomy. In their early twenties Gloria and Warren possessed similar charms to those of Cinderella and her mate with the foot fetish. Unlike Cinderella and her Prince, the young Thomas' had little money and so were forced to live with his parents, Reg and Zella. The newlyweds made love and slept curled together in a double bed pushed against the sleepout wall, a narrow room with louvered windows and a bare floor at one end of an enclosed veranda. When, less than a year after their marriage, they realised Gloria was pregnant they hoped they had conceived a prince to complete their narrative.

They named their little girl Janet. During the pregnancy Zella had convinced the twenty-one-year-old Gloria that she should 'eat for two'. Gloria gained twenty-five kilograms and developed toxaemia. When she gave birth to Janet, she lost a lot of blood and her heart stopped beating. Gloria's doctor was determined the young woman would live, so Gloria received new blood and was revived. When Janet was a little girl her mother often told her the story of her birth and Gloria's trials.

'I remember,' said Gloria 'looking down on my body. I saw the doctors and nurses working on me, trying to find my pulse, trying to bring me back. I saw one of the nurses running from the room. I heard the doctor call out to her, "We'll need two lots of blood, and quickly"'. Gloria said she could see the doctor push a needle into her arm and force blood into Gloria's depleted veins. 'Then,' Gloria went on, 'I heard two voices. They were clear, but came from a long way away. I couldn't catch everything they said, but I could tell they were arguing. One of them insisted it was my time and I had to go. The other voice said I had to stay; I had a child and a husband to care for. They argued for a long time. Everything shimmered—there was a bright light shining somewhere—but I wasn't frightened. I wasn't scared. And then …' Gloria looked at her silent, solemn daughter, '… the voices stopped and the light went away. Everything was quiet. When I woke up, the doctor and nurses were looking at me.'

'They let Daddy in to see you didn't they, Mummy?'

‘Oh yes, the doctors told him to come and be with me, just in case. I was lying on the bed drenched in blood; “Why,” I said to the nurses, “did you let him see me in this state?”’

Gloria told Janet that while she lay in her own blood a nurse handed the newborn Janet to a second nurse. That was the first time Gloria saw Janet.

‘You were a big healthy baby with tight black curls all over your head.’ Janet, in fact, has never had curly hair, unless a hairdresser gave them to her from a bottle of foul-smelling chemicals. ‘I needed,’ added Gloria, ‘ten days to recover.’

The nurses spoon fed coddled eggs to Gloria and left her to sleep. One day Gloria’s mother, Isabella, visited her daughter and first grandchild. Bel arrived while Gloria was having lunch; she stood at the door to Gloria’s room, watching the nurse feed Gloria.

‘What’s going on?’ asked Bel.

Gloria started to cry.

‘For pity’s sake, child,’ said her mother. ‘You have a baby and a husband to think about.’

The nurse turned and looked at the new grandmother.

‘This poor girl has been through hell,’ said the nurse.

Isabella’s gaze moved from the nurse to her daughter and back again. She turned, left the room, walked along the corridor to the hospital entrance and down the broad steps into the October sunshine. She did not stop to see her first grandchild.

Once Gloria felt better she asked to feed her new baby. A nurse, who had been away on leave and was not aware of the circumstances of Janet’s birth, found Janet tucked away in a corner of the nursery. She checked the baby’s age and weight, picked her up and carried her to her mother. Setting the baby on Gloria’s lap she said, ‘Ten minutes both sides for this little one,’ and left the room. Gloria hadn’t been taught how to breastfeed a baby but Janet knew how to suck from a rubber teat and she was hungry. At their first meeting Janet sucked eagerly on her mother’s virgin nipples

while Gloria winced in pain but didn't unlatch the infant from her breast.

'You cut my nipples to ribbons,' said Gloria, every time she told Janet this story.

By the time Janet was three or four, and could read but not write, she had heard this story many times. She'd also heard friends of Reg and Zella say how beautiful Gloria and Warren's little girl was; how prettily Gloria dressed her; how smooth and gleaming her cap of dark hair was; how delightfully polite she was when asked a question; what a charming little family of three they were. There'd be a moment's pause before they asked, 'And when are you planning another one?' They'd look pointedly at Gloria's flat belly and empty arms.

'We only have our little girl,' answered Gloria. She was smiling, but her eyes were purple and brown thunderclouds, 'We love Janet dearly, but our family would be complete if we had a little boy.'

Several weeks after her birth, Janet's great grandmother, a Scotswoman, visited the new mother. She peered into the bassinette and surveyed the sleeping infant.

'I'm glad you called her Janet, and not the other names you considered. My best friend back home in Glasgow was Janet. I miss her. We used to look out for each other.'

I'm here because someone has to look out for Janet.

Gravity

I'm from the oily smell of the wharves, wheat bags hoisted on broad shoulders and further back than that, the Welsh mountains, rumours of scandal and escape to the sea.

I'm from churned butter, cold pressed meat and fresh baked bread, and further back than that, cold winters in Scotland that fill the lungs with fluid.

I'm from raspberry cordial and lemonade in the front bar of the Exchange Hotel, Commercial Street, Port Adelaide: wharfies wink at me, and tone their language down in deference to my being, further back, from the trenches in France.

I'm from the clink of glasses, satin dresses, corsages made of orchids and baby's breath. I'm from shantung, velvet, gabardine, tailor's tacks and embroidery thread. I'm from needle painted rosebuds, satin stitched on white organza.

I'm from early mornings at Cheltenham racecourse, from training on the Port River matching my pace to the short, redheaded coxswain barking 'Stroke, Stroke'. I'm from waking at five am to milk the family's cows and I'm from sharp scissors, sharper pins, hems measured, seams let out, fashion magazines, tissue paper patterns pinned to gleaming fabric laid on a freshly vacuumed floor.

Books were my cubby house. I could crawl into them and find peace and safety. When money was left over from the fortnightly housekeeping money my mother bought me one of the endless collections of *Little Golden Books*. I loved *The Saggy Baggy Elephant* dancing his 'one two three kick' way through the jungle; *The Poky Little Puppy*, *Raggedy Ann and Andy and the Little Gray Kitten.* I badly wanted a Raggedy Anne doll. At Christmas, and no other time in the year, I read my copy of the beautifully illustrated *The Christmas Story*. I stored my Golden books in the drawer of my divan bed until I had collected too many and struggled to open the drawer.

We bury our beloved dead deep in the earth and in our psyche. Corporeal memories fade but the beloved can be unearthed by that archaeologist known as memory. My grandparents' names were a song that taught me the difference between a consonant and a vowel: Valentine Hamilton White; Isabella Tickel White; Reginald Leslie Thomas; Zella Maud Beryl Fricker Thomas. When Zel visited friends to play bridge, she wore a fox fur around her neck, its snout and eyes mournfully pointing to the floor. My mother's mother, Isabella, never played bridge and was called Bel by her husband Valentine. She baked bread and could roll her own cigarettes using one hand although never, I must add, at the same time. And then there was Reg: I have read that a child blessed with the unconditional regard of one person will survive anything. Papa Thomas secured my survival.

When I was a child my four grandparents seemed, to me, to travel gently through the world. My mother liked to disabuse me of this notion. She told me my barrel chested Welsh grandfather, known to his friends as Val, once upended the dinner table in a fit of anger, scattering plates, tea cups, saucers and children across the room. My mother often reminded me that my paternal grandmother, Zel, was arrogant and autocratic, and warned me I showed signs of becoming like her. Zella Maud Beryl Fricker Thomas was a milliner in a time when few women had a trade. Mercurial, independent and outspoken, she taught me to swear and how to stand up for myself if a man tried to bully me. She was born in the first year of the twentieth century. Her father painted theatre sets and taught his daughter that if she wanted something she had to get it herself. Zella was small, with porcelain blue eyes and a perfect complexion. She was fearless in a time when most women were subdued by domesticity and knew their place, but she had a hearing problem. I once observed, with the lucidity that a five year old can sometimes possess, that, 'Nana's not hard of hearing, she's just ignoring us.' My parents laughed and told me never to repeat what I said in front of Nana. Zel loved football, her son, her husband and clothes, although I'm not sure in which order. When she and Papa attended the races at Cheltenham, or watched Port Adelaide Football Club play at Alberton Oval, she wore a tailored suit she'd made herself, topped by a three quarter length coat with fur on the collar. Her hat was secured with a pearl tipped hat-pin and her gloves matched her coat. She added high heels, stockings and an umbrella with a mother of pearl handle to the outfit. In the handbag that matched her shoes, she hid a silver flask filled with

whiskey. During quarter and half time Nana smoked cigarettes placed in a long black and gold cigarette holder and sipped whiskey from her flask. She was watching a game of football once when a barracker from an opposing team irritated her so much she threatened him with her umbrella. My father and his mate, standing nearby, but not close enough for people to assume they knew this elegant woman, were obliged to intervene on behalf of the opposition team's supporter.

At the end of World War I, after Papa had been demobbed, Zel felt it was necessary to travel unaccompanied from Adelaide to Perth where Reg, suffering from shell shock, was deposited. Having determined my Papa was being unnecessarily tardy in making good his promise to marry her, Zel convinced him a wedding in Bunbury was just what he needed. They returned to Adelaide as newlyweds and built a home in Woodville where, throughout the 1940s, they invited members of the American military to their lavish parties. My father told me that when he was fourteen his father would send him to the nurse's quarters next to a local hospital and invite nurses to the parties. 'Everything,' my father assured me, 'was above board. After all, I was still a kid and my sister was engaged to one of our soldiers, so it was all good, clean fun. Mum and Dad would give those blokes, those Yanks, a good feed and a few beers and then,' my father paused, 'well, those poor bastards probably ended up at Guadalcanal.'

Reg and Zel's parties continued into the 1950s, well after I was born. Zel played the piano in between serving plates of sandwiches, her satin dress gleaming as she moved from one group to another topping up her guests' glasses. I was allowed to stay up late, because, before each party, Nana had taught me a little song to sing. Early in the evening she'd ask everyone to be quiet while I sang. I had no idea what I was singing but the songs made my mother blush and she insisted Nana stop teaching them to me.

Nana also taught me to play Solitaire, or, as she used to call it, Patience. Once she'd peeled and cut the vegetables and put them in a pot to simmer for dinner, she would take her pack of cards, sit at the kitchen table, and play. The sapphire and diamond rings adorning her elegant fingers created cartwheels of light as she shuffled the cards and counted them out into seven little piles, the first pile comprised of only one card and the final pile, seven. She'd sit and briefly contemplate the piles, still face

down, as if willing them to work according to her dictates. Then she turned over the top card of each pile, scrutinised them, and placed the Aces, if they appeared, into a separate row above the columns of cards. I watched as, with her help, a Black Queen leapt onto Red King and was promptly sandwiched by a Black Jack followed by numbered red cards onto black, low numbers onto high. If Nana could make only a few initial moves, she'd mutter under her breath and count out the remaining twenty-five cards into lots of three. If the last of a count of three could sit atop one of the seven piles she'd place it there with a flourish and count out another three cards. The game, I learned, was called Patience because the twenty five-cards, dealt out in groups of three, didn't always yield a matching card. When that happened, Nana gathered the cards together, reshuffled them and dealt out a new set of seven piles. Occasionally Nana could sort the entire pack from the first deal, but more often she would have to play a number of hands before she was able to complete the game. Each of the people cards (known, I discovered later when I taught myself Tarot, as 'court cards'), had a personality. There were recalcitrant Knights and mischievous Jacks who, my Nana insisted, purposely hid themselves under the tens or beneath the skirts of the demure Queens.

I eventually learned that Nana cheated when she played Patience; instead of taking the top card from the three she dealt she'd palm the bottom card, or turn one of the piles of seven cards over to find a shy Queen so she could play it and complete a game. This enraged my mother who, once I was old enough to play by myself, made sure I didn't cheat. As a result, my games of Patience were more arduous and less interesting than Nana's.

'Cheating never pays,' my mother said to me when I complained. I think I know why my grandmother cheated; the cards she dealt onto her kitchen table represented a daily dose of fate. How they came out could not be controlled. While Nana found a certain joy in playing the hand she was dealt, by refusing to accept the inevitable, she gave fate a good shake.

Playing a few games of Solitaire on my computer is part of my morning pre-writing ritual, along with checking my emails. I also play after a bout of writing. My computer deals the cards and waits placidly while I contemplate the seven virtual piles of cards sitting on my virtual table. I take the mouse firmly in hand and begin to

shift cards from one pile to another. If I complete a game the computer gives a miffed beep and asks if I want it to deal again. A computer brooks no cheating; it won't let me interfere with fate the way Nana Thomas did when she let the vegetables burn while she hunted for her nemesis, an unruly Jack. Patience does, however, teach me other lessons. Procrastination is unhealthy, as is staring at virtual cards on a computer screen for an hour after spending two writing hours writing. I've also learned that there will always be a red queen on the fifth pile who longs for that saucy little Jack waiting on the first pile while I've fruitlessly searched for a red ten to cover him, a ten that has, of course, lurked on the seventh pile the entire time. My dilatoriness is unhealthy, but a quick game helps refocus my mind. Ideas emerge while I sort and resort virtual piles of cards and I've learned the fate my grandmother tried to cheat can only be confronted, never manipulated. It is pointless to fear the draw, nor does it matter if a game is long or short; the act of sitting down, shuffling, dealing, sorting and attending to each pile is what's important. Patience represents faith in one's ability to deliberately reverently sort out fate. Playing Solitaire helps me remember Nana, who was a fast ticking clock, a cascade of diamonds, and a woman who confronted her fate.

From Little Golden Books I moved onto the *Noddy* series. Enid Blyton gave me another world to explore. Toyland was populated with good and bad characters but everything turned out all right in the end particularly if you helped others. I loved the books' bright colours and Noddy's innocence, faith and vulnerability—though they're not the words my five-year-old self would have used. Most of all I loved the house Noddy lived in, its clean, straight lines, and strong, clear colours. I marvelled that he was still small, but could live alone and look after himself.

My Pop White, Val, was an enigma. He was solid, inscrutable and had hands like fleshy hammers. He was a Welshman who'd travelled from the United Kingdom early in the 1920s and jumped ship at Port Vincent, a coastal town west of Adelaide. I imagine him, encountering for the first time the trumpet of heat that blares its morning song to the flat red Australian countryside. What did this man, whose hair

was the colour of burnished bronze, think of the landscape before him, one shimmeringly different to the extravagant hills of his native land? Val was never, he insisted, a 'pom'. He was a Welshman and always would be. When he met my small compact Nana White with her brown eyes and sleek dark hair, I like to think it was her smile that took his breath away. It started with a small crinkle around her eyes then migrated to her fine mouth, revealing a set of white teeth. When her smile turned into a deep belly laugh everyone felt the better for it. A Scot, she was sent by her mother to join her brother in Australia because she had a weak chest. It didn't prevent her from conceiving twelve babies and, during the Depression, raising nine of them to adulthood. I liked to say my Nana White's name quietly to myself. 'Isabella', I would whisper, 'Isabella'. It felt like a festival in my mouth.

Despite owning almost every *Noddy* book in the series, I never warmed to *The Famous Five* or *The Magic Faraway Tree.* After reading as many of the *Milly Molly Mandy* books I could find in the local library, I turned to *The Bobbsey Twins*. I thought they were a perfect family; two girls and two boys, fraternal twins. The children and their parents were polite, unhurried—even when there was a crisis—and unfailingly cheerful. At about the same time I discovered Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. Like me, Heidi was an only child and she had a beloved grandfather although he wasn't exactly like my Papa, because my Papa wasn't a hermit. Heidi also had a best friend, a boy, which I found exotic. Heidi also had a good heart, something my mother said I needed to cultivate. Both reading and writing were important to Heidi and to me. I was sad when I finished reading the books about her life but I soon moved on to *Anne of Green Gables*, promptly falling in love with Matthew though, predictably, it took me a while to warm to Marilla. By then I was an avid reader of sequels, and Lucy Maud Montgomery (it thrilled me that she shared one of her names with my Nana Thomas) fulfilled my need. The tales of Anne Shirley, and the *Little Women* sequels, filled my reading hours and fuelled my imagination. I didn't want to be a teacher like Anne, even if my mother had decided it was a good job for a girl. I wanted to be like Jo March; I would write a book, one that other little girls could read. Only recently did I realise that I spent my childhood in the company of feisty young females who shared my passion for reading and writing.

Nana White was like a brown nut, tough but sweet on the inside. I used to watch her kneading her dough, wheezing as she pushed and rolled, turned and pummelled the soft white mixture of flour water and yeast. A cigarette would be burning away on the kitchen windowsill behind her and her laugh was quick and infectious. In her last years she suffered from dementia. She died when I was almost forty. Throughout the preceding decade my mother had been estranged from her mother, brothers and sisters so I was surprised when my mother phoned and insisted I take her to my grandmother's bedside. The rest of the family had already gathered and they greeted us with mute alarm.

My Nana died the way I want to die, curled into a foetal position and surrounded by her family. Her daughters and I stood close to her bed, stroking her arms and still dark hair. Her sons and sons-in-law stood uncomfortably against the hospital room wall, talking about the football, trying not to acknowledge what was happening. I hadn't seen some of my aunts for years. Their work, family commitments and the slights my mother imagined had kept us apart. As we bent over the dying woman, we caught up on each other's lives. They could see I was no longer a child and as the oldest granddaughter, I was accepted at the bedside. Perhaps they noticed that I was like my mother in looks only; they appeared to relax as they talked to me. My mother was sly in her questions about nieces and nephews, their accomplishments and failures, but quick to share her children's achievements. We women parleyed for an hour or two until one of my aunts looked down and said, 'She's gone.' The men stopped talking, the women started to cry. Later, in the residential care facility's waiting room, Bel's children argued about the funeral arrangements.

I didn't know it at the time but my mother subtly shaped my reading tastes, directing me to books she deemed worthy. I read Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* because it was on the book list at high school. I discovered later in the year that my mother had visited the school demanding the book be removed from the reading list. It was, she claimed, unsuitable matter for a child of thirteen, but it was on the education department reading list and nothing could be done.

When my world needed re-ordering I went to Papa Thomas. During one of his parties I'd rest my head against his wheezy chest and listen as he accepted people's gratitude for a kindness he'd shown. A liqueur glass of Drambuie sat at his elbows. Once we were finally left in peace we'd watch the party fold and unfold around us. I'd gaze sleepily at the women's glittering necklaces, at my mother, happy, beautiful and surrounded by handsome men chafing in their dinner suits. My father, tall, assured, handsome and unaware of the women trying to flirt with him, was always close by my mother. He never noticed the other women, although he was always charming.

After a little while Papa would sip some of the liqueur from his glass then offer it to me. I'd dip my finger in the thick warm liquid, put my finger in my mouth, suck on the fierce sweetness, lay my head on his chest and fall asleep surrounded by a symphony of adult voices.

On Sunday afternoons I'd help Papa wash his car, a dark green Holden. He'd gather the bucket, chamois, soap and polishing cloth from the garage and fill the bucket with warm, soapy water. Then he'd lay out the washcloths. I liked the strange smell and feel of the slimy, pliable chamois but that was Papa's special cloth, so I'd hand it to him and watch as he dipped it into the warm soapy water and wrung it out. Then, with his large veined paw covering my small hand, he'd show me how to make soapy circles across the car's smooth surface. Once he was satisfied with my effort he'd hand me another cloth and move to another part of the car to make his own large circles, sweeping away stubborn streaks, rubbing and buffing until the car gleamed. While I wore myself out with small, vigorous arcs, Papa answered every question I asked. He never interrupted or stopped my chatter. His replies were a velvet counterpoint to my high inquisitions and together we created a rhythm; polish, question, rub, reply, rise and fall, wipe, polish and buff.

Once the car was washed my Papa stood, wash rag in hand, next to the satiny green car and the cold bucket of soapy water. He'd ask me to leave the wash rags on the veranda while he put the bucket and the rolled up chamois, tucked into its little cylinder, back into the garage. Then he'd take my hand and together we'd walk along Leslie Street to the corner shop. Once we were inside the shop he'd look down at me

and ask, ‘What kind of ice cream would you like today?’

‘I’d like a double chocolate cone, please Papa.’

‘Are you sure? Would your mother like you to have one so close to tea?’

‘Yes, I think she will.’

Papa would smile at the shopkeeper, who was familiar with the question and its usual answer.

‘Well then, a double chocolate cone it is but don’t drip any ice cream down the front of your dress.’ The shopkeeper pressed two fat round scoops of brown ice cream into the cone, money was passed over the counter, and Papa and I left the store. Our walk home was measured by my cautious licks of ice cream. Finally I’d start nibbling into the base of the ice cream cone, hearing it crunch against my cold teeth. By the time we arrived at our front gate the late afternoon shadows were falling across the car. Papa would bend down and scoop me into his old, still strong, arms and lean against the car. I would rest my head on his shoulder and together we’d savour the last patch of sunlight.

How do I remember these details? They occurred when I was three. I know why: one of the consolations of my life is remembering Reginald Leslie Thomas. I also have a photograph. My three-year-old self is looking up at the camera, momentarily distracted from my work. In the background Papa bends over the bucket, his ample bottom facing the camera.

After completing *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* I read *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters.* I started filling notepads and old school exercise books with ideas for stories and notes about how I was feeling and what I was thinking. My mother started reading historical novels that were really love stories. She’d pass them on to me, telling me how much I’d enjoy them.

Like me, my father worshipped his father; he was proud of my Papa's war service, and a story he knew about Papa's time in the trenches on the Western Front.

'My Dad, your Papa,' my father began, 'was demoted from corporal to private because he stole a couple of bottles from a box of French wine a grateful group of villagers gave to his battalion. The officers had taken possession of it but Papa thought the real soldiers should have it. He and a mate managed to commandeer several bottles and share it among the men. Corporal Reg Thomas,' my father would pause here, pride and love jostling for a place in his heart, 'reckoned his men and not the bloody officers deserved the wine. The bastards found out and demoted him. He was made a corporal again, but soon after that … well … the gas and the shell shock. They sent him to England.'

England, I thought, where Milly-Molly-Mandy and Noddy lived. Much later, a long time after Reg Thomas died, my father told me another story.

'Your Papa was sitting in a trench in France, up to his bloody knees in mud, stinking and cold. Poor bastards. I didn't hear this story from your Papa, one of his mates told me about it, when I was a teenager. I'd been giving your Papa a hard time. His mate told me to ease off. Then he told me about this day, at the front.

'They were all resting .... and someone handed your Papa a mug of black tea and a tin of sweetened milk. The tin was empty. Those blokes raised enough energy to banter about who should fetch another tin from the supply store but it was your Papa who set his mug of tea down into the mud and climbed his way over the legs and rifles and found his way to the bunker where they kept the supplies. By the cold winter light filtering in from the doorway, your Papa eventually located the condensed milk. One of Papa's mates called out, "You bugger Reg, are you going to use all that bloody milk for yourself?" Your grandfather called something back and wrapped his hand around the can.'

My father stopped a moment, turning a mosaic of memories over in his mind's eye, memories from his childhood, his adolescence and the first time he heard this story.

'Then,' continued my father, 'all hell broke loose. A shell came over you see, and it burst nearby. Dad, your Papa, was thrown to the ground, waiting for fate to take a

breath. Eventually his ears stopped ringing, but, Christ, it would be the silence beyond the ringing that'd bother you. Because, you see, all his mates were dead, there was no one left to cry or scream or laugh again. When they pulled your Papa from the wrecked supply store,' said my father, and there was another long silence, 'he was still holding that bloody can of condensed milk.'

All I have of my Papa Thomas are a few photographs, a gold cigarette case, engraved with RLT, and a postcard sent by him from Arras, France. I take it out of its envelope occasionally and read his too brief words. The postcard is dated 21-7-16 and Papa writes;

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know I am still in the best of health. I will write as soon as we get settled down as we are on the move again. Trusting this will find you all in the best of health.

From your Loving Son

Reg.

A postscript, written where there was space at the top of the card says:

I have just remembered today is your birthday. I wish you many happy returns of the day.

Reg.

Both my paternal and maternal grandparents' marriages seemed stable and solid. Yes, Nana Thomas would chide my Papa and Pop White was renowned for his temper, but these things skated across the surface of my world. I knew my Pop was a wharfie who, during the depression, unloaded wheat bags from dawn to dusk, but once his children grew up he became a Justice of the Peace. He'd spend hours in his

vegetable garden, or caring for his chickens as if they were his children. He never said a cross word to me. When we visited my maternal grandparents I ate Nana's roast lamb and vegetables, followed by homemade bread smothered with marmalade made from their lemon and orange trees. I'd avoid, for as long as I could, going to the outside toilet and the squares of paper torn from last week's newspaper. After dinner my grandfather played his mouth organ or his squeeze box and sang songs from Wales and Scotland. His adult children sat around the table, the men drinking beer or whiskey, the girls nursing a sherry or a shandy, or a baby. They'd all be squabbling the way my mother said they had when they were children crowded together in a three bedroom weatherboard house. When it was time to leave, Pop walked us to the front gate to say goodbye. He'd bend toward me and press a two shilling coin into my hand while I kissed his pale whiskers. He and Nana White were, I realised when I was a teenager, as perplexed by their first daughter, and third child, my mother, as I was.

My grandparents were celestial orbs briefly travelling along the same orbital plane as I. Wanderers in a vast space, we aspect each other by dint of blood. As a child I understood them, and their place in the universe, as vaguely as I understood my place and myself. Their visits were a revelation and, as I drifted to sleep after the Christmases, birthdays, weddings and other celestial events that bought our orbits closer together, a joy to remember. We drifted apart, however. My ever expanding universe of high school, teaching and, later, my own growing family, plus the inward pull, in my grandparents' case, of entropy threw us out of each other's orbit. I keenly felt the loss of their light.

When I see my cousins now, most often at funerals, I feel the gravitational pull of a being that shares my blood. We don't know or understand each other, however, because our solar system suffered from the inclusion of a random comet, my mother. Her beautiful light blazed across our sky, leaving a trail of ice that could fray the fabric of the hardiest cosmos.

Across the Threshold

> ‘By writing a work based on myself I would recreate myself and justify my existence.’

I tried the latch and the door silently opened to my touch. I called out, ‘Hello. Is anybody home?’ There was no reply. I stepped over the threshold. What lay before me was both familiar and strange. A kettle simpered on the stove. I could see in more detail the bowls, cups and saucers, spoon, jug of milk and bowl of sugar laid on the table. Steam curled from one of the bowls. Everything appeared to be normal, but nothing was what it seemed.

It was that way with Gloria. No one knew what triggered her moods, certainly not Janet. Yes, Gloria was easily slighted and sensitive to people’s opinions, but like the underlining of a jacket that gives the garment its shape, the reasons for Gloria’s behaviour were hidden, perhaps even to her. What no one seemed prepared to say, at least not in Janet’s hearing, is what I must make clear: something was wrong with Gloria. What saved her was her beauty, but not all beautiful, spiteful, unstable women survive. Gloria survived because of Warren, a man who did everything he could to make his wife happy.

‘Darling,’ he’d say, ‘what’s wrong?’

‘If you cared about me, if you really loved me, you would know what’s wrong with me. You don’t care for me. You’ve never cared. If you cared you would know.’ But Warren didn’t know. He could never fathom the reasons for his wife’s unhappiness and it was pointless trying to reason with Gloria when she was in one of her moods. She would not be distracted, but Warren tried: he placated her, he flattered her, he bought her perfume in delicate glass vials; he arrived home from work bearing a necklace, brooch or a pair of earrings. Gloria wouldn’t wear perfume and she put the jewellery in the bottom draw. She said it was gaudy but it really reminded her of the desperation she felt and Warren’s futile attempts to assuage it.

‘Tell me what’s wrong darling?’ he’d say.

‘How can you ask me that?’ she’d shout, masking her loveliness with a veil of anger and contempt. ‘You,’ she’d spit at him, ‘ought to know why.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Warren, his fingers clawing at his scalp. Then he’d tried to take her in his arms, asking her again, pleading with her, ‘tell me, tell me what happened, what did I do?’

She couldn’t tell him. Did she even know?

Arguing only made things worse.

‘This is ridiculous,’ he’d say, his patience finally gone. ‘Please, Gloria, try to be reasonable. Please,’ he’d say, ‘look at it logically.’

‘You don’t care, you’ve never cared.’

‘Oh, don’t I?’ he’d return. ‘That’s right then. I’ve never cared. You’re right. That’s it. I don’t care. Why would I care? I’ve loved you since the day I met you but you’re right. You’re always right. I don’t care.’

‘What have I done to deserve this?’ she’d scream, her fists clenched, her mouth drawn to a thin slit. ‘Why did you marry me if you hate me so much? Why did you marry a nothing, a nobody, a piece of dirt you found on the wrong side of the tracks, the Ottoway girl? Ha! Me, the Ottoway girl, a wharfie’s daughter, from a family of worthless nobodies.’

Gloria’s ‘Ha’ had a touch of Bette Davis about it. Her ranting was unexplained and unproductive but it had to be endured, so her ‘Ha’, flung as if to challenge the very gods themselves, was haughty and agitated and dared Warren, and later Janet, to dissent. Any resistance to her abuse was interpreted as evidence that she was right; Warren and Janet’s objections to Gloria’s claims, their attempts to defend themselves or point out the flaws in Gloria’s logic only escalated the abuse. Gloria’s talent, however, was an uncanny knack of knowing what hurt, how it would hurt and a diabolic gift for timing.

‘All those other women, all those clever, beautiful women wearing expensive clothes, those women your mother wanted you to marry, you should have married them.’

‘But, Gloria, I love you,’ said Warren, ‘You’re the one I love.’

Poor, foolish Warren. He spent a lifetime trying to learn the right way to say ‘I love you.’ He never found it—for women like Gloria there is no right way.

‘I don’t care anymore,’ she’d hiss at him in the spurious privacy of the sleep-out at the back of Reg and Zella’s house. ‘I can’t go on anymore; I can’t live like this. I’m treated like dirt in this house. Your mother and sister both hate me. This is no kind of life. We can’t be alone together; I can’t cook or clean for us, for *us* Warren. Your mother, your sister, they’re always …’

On the rare occasions when they were alone, she’d sit in the lounge room on Zella’s sofa and sob. The china ducks on the wall above her head tried to escape the noise. Warren would try, but fail, to comfort her. Eventually the verbal abuse would start, her accusations ricocheting around and through the house then landing on the man who adored every part of her being and who always, inevitably, gave in to her.

The infant Janet, like a finely tuned emotional barometer, picked up her mother’s agitation. One day, when she was four months old, she refused to settle. Janet cried and Janet howled and nothing comforted her. Gloria cried too. She knew her baby didn’t love her although Gloria couldn’t say that, the shame would be too much to bear. Gloria knew the depths of her baby’s hate because if the baby loved her mother then she would let her mother soothe her. Gloria stood in the kitchen holding her baby. Tears ran down both their faces. They were exhausted. They were inconsolable. Warren stood alongside them, tired, sorry and helpless. Zella hovered, vexed, in the background. Reg, who could usually calm his little granddaughter, sat in a corner of the room. Janet sobbed, her little red face contorted. She hiccupped, arched her back and threw her arms above her head as if to practice saying ‘Ha’ to the gods. She was a tempest held in the arms of a tempest.

Warren’s sister, as if summonsed by Janet’s howls, appeared at the kitchen door. Janet’s cousins, aged seven and five, stood behind their mother wild eyed and silenced by the drama taking place in their grandmother’s kitchen. Warren’s sister understood the situation immediately.

‘Give me that baby,’ said Warren’s sister. She took Janet from her mother’s arms. Perhaps the baby was exhausted or maybe she responded the way everyone did, with stunned silence, but she was suddenly subdued. Warren’s sister rocked Janet in her

sure, capable, practical grasp. Janet's hiccups slowed and stopped. The family's attention was fixed on the infant. No one saw Gloria slip from the room. No one knew Gloria went to the cramped sleep-out where she and Warren and Janet slept. No one witnessed her search for the bottle of pills the doctor gave her to help her calm down. No one cared that she swallowed the entire contents of the bottle because no one loved her. Gloria dropped the empty bottle onto her marriage bed, ran from the room and out the back door. Still no one saw her because she was quiet and quick and because her baby was asleep in another woman's arms. Minutes later Warren realised Gloria wasn't in the kitchen. He looked in their bedroom and found the empty pill bottle.

The house was searched. The garden was scoured but they did not find Gloria. People hurried from room to room, grabbing car keys, shouting directions, replies and counter directions. Janet's cousins sat fearfully on the hard kitchen chairs and watched as their uncle hurled himself out the door, making for the car, and the streets, to look for his wife.

It was early evening when Reg found Gloria slumped over a bench in the grounds of the high school across the road from his house. She was taken to hospital and her stomach was pumped. Warren stayed with her, arriving home just after midnight. Reg was waiting up for him. He poured his son a large whiskey. For a while they were silent. After several sips of his drink, Reg said, 'This can't keep on son, and you know that.'

'I know Dad. It'll get better now. This will give her a scare. She'll be right after this.'

'I'm not too sure about that.' Reg couldn't look at Warren. 'She's flawed son. She's a beautiful girl but there's something not quite … right … about her. She comes from good people. She's had a good upbringing. She's a clever enough girl, but this behaviour, it's … she's ….'

'... she's my wife. I made a promise. You were in the church when I made it. I made a promise to love and keep her. You've told me a man always keeps a promise.'

'It's not just about promises,' replied Reg. 'This is your whole life, and the baby's and Gloria's too.'

‘You’ve never given up on Mum, have you? Not for one minute?’

‘Your mother has never pulled a stunt like this. How many more times is this going to happen?’ Reg’s voice had an unkind edge to it. ‘What if she’s alone with the baby? What if, as she has said, she decides life isn’t worth it, and the two of them are alone ... if …?’

‘Then she can’t be alone. She can never feel that way again. I have to make sure she never feels that way.’

‘Damn it son, you can’t be with her twenty-four hours a day. You have to work.’

‘No, Dad. As I said, I promised. I am going to stick with her, no matter what it takes or what happens’.

Reg sighed. ‘She’ll give you nothing but trouble.’

Suicide is a selfish act. That’s an unfashionable thing to say, but I will say it. Suicide signals that the choices, beliefs and feelings of the one who commits suicide are important and damn those who are left behind. Yet suicide is also a declaration of self-supremacy smeared with the grime of self-hate. Gloria threatened suicide so she could feel superior even though she really felt wretched about herself and her life. Her suicide attempt was a declaration of rights; her assertion of ‘being right’, not ‘doing right’ and certainly not ‘just right’. On that hot January day in 1953 Gloria negated the love and support of Warren, her parents, her siblings, her in-laws and her friends. She ignored their entreaties that her life was worth living. She wouldn’t listen when they suggested coping strategies. No one knew why Gloria suffered and Gloria refused to investigate the reason underlying her behaviour. Her greatest sin was that she believed she alone should be exempt from the ordinary, and extraordinary, miseries that assail humankind.

Warren finished the last of his whiskey and said good night to his father. Gloria lived and she didn’t change. She cried; she was depressed; she was perpetually aggrieved; she blamed others for her troubles; she alienated her siblings and many of her friends. Warren, however, remained faithful and he kept his promise. He loved, honoured and protected Gloria until death, finally, parted them.

Middle of the Road

Before my marriage ended I'd lie awake at night and create an imaginary room for myself, a place to write, a place for rituals of self-care, a safety net of routine and affirmations of sanity where I'd prove I was capable of looking after myself. My eyrie above the shores of the Gulf St Vincent was that place and even though it was saturated with the tears I shed over my marriage, I loved that unit. I could feel its cement block arms folding over me and I was comforted by the shabby solidness of the building and how it withstood the winter storms that shook its arthritic window frames. During my first summer I kept cool by taping black plastic rubbish bags to the west facing windows and then opened those windows wide each evening to whatever breeze the night decided to send. I lived on the second floor and was therefore unafraid—if anyone was foolhardy enough to scale the unit's sheer walls or break open the screen door without my hearing, so be it. I exalted in the safety of Unit Four Seaview Ave; it was both shield and sword.

I survived on my scholarship by putting aside enough money for rent and utilities, watching what I spent on food and allowing myself small luxuries such as the new clothes that fitted my post marriage, slender shape. Yes, I was depressed: I spent long nights writing, in my journal, diatribes against my ex-husband. But despite the dangers of grief and rage I managed to get though each day by phoning friends, watching DVDs or sleeping the pain away. I never drank alcohol alone: intuition and common sense told me that if I started I'd be lost. In the first twelve months after my separation I learned to be resilient, resourceful and capable.

In the 1950s Adelaide, a large country town rather than a city, was temperate in weather, class, attitude and vision. The house where I was conceived and spent my first four years was neither a cottage nor a castle. There was likewise nothing remarkable about how the low, pale yellow wrought iron fence, constructed from rectangles and semicircles or the pink roses outlining the green front lawn, hid the disquiet in the house beyond.

The front gate was closed during the day but after 4:00 pm Nana Thomas opened them so Papa could steer straight into the drive when he arrived home from work. I'd

spend my afternoons behind the fence watching for Papa's car. I'd squeeze myself between the roses and the inside of the fence and then, placing one foot between two upright bars and the other between the next two, I'd sidestep my way along the entire length of the fence and back again. Thorns from the rose bushes bit my legs and drops of blood spotted my white socks. Sometimes a rose bush grabbed and ripped the hem of my dress. When I grew bored with hanging over the fence, being harassed by and harassing the roses, I waited on the grass between the roses and the house. I'd lie on my back and watch the clouds navigate their way across the wide blue river of sky. The grass and waiting made me want to scratch but I never asked for a blanket because little girls shouldn't lie on their backs in the front yard and stick their legs in the air. If it was hot, I waited under the wide cool front veranda next to which, outside my grandparents' bedroom, strutted a white wooden pergola. The hydrangeas living under this pergola were blue, not the usual pink. I thought they were magical but my mother told me their unnatural colour was a result of Nana feeding her 'hydies' with a special mixture. Playing near these flowers with their generous heads of heart shaped petals drew attention to both flowers and I, so I tried to stay under the veranda or on the lawn.

Sometimes it was silent inside the house; both my mother and grandmother would be busy sewing, cooking or reading. At other times I could hear the tight, hard female voices rubbing against each other and when a door slammed I'd leave the veranda and, crab like, measure once more the length of the fence until at last Papa's car turned into our street. I'd wave and wait as he pulled into the drive, turned off the engine and climbed out of the driver's seat. He always bent down and gave me a big bear hug.

In my eyrie above the sea, I'd spend hours sitting by the window looking out at the gulf below. On Saturday mornings I'd get out of bed, make myself pancakes and go for a long walk along Seacliff and Brighton Beach. During my first winter there I felt like I was inside an oyster shell; the sky was solid grey, the sea pale grey blue and fringed by slate coloured sand stained with seaweed. During the year that I was lodged inside my shell I hoped I'd eventually turn into a pearl.

After my walk I'd clean the one bedroom unit then spend the rest of the day reading, writing or watching an episode of *Six Feet Under*. A friend had lent me the entire series and early in my separation I worked my way through all five seasons. I was adding to my stock of knowledge about death and loss and it somehow soothed me to watch others standing on the abyss. When I finished the series, I borrowed DVDs of Alfred Hitchcock movies from my son or the university library. While watching them I tried to work out how Hitchcock constructed his scenes, placed his actors and lured his audience. But these ploys only worked for a short time and I rediscovered a partner who'd been part of my life for years although I'd never acknowledged him. His name was loneliness and I resisted his advances as well as I could until one day he moved in with me.

After my mother, father and I left Leslie St, we lived in Exeter for a short time then moved into a unit, an empty shop on Port Road, Alberton. The seventy metre dual carriage way was divided by a wide strip of green that was originally going to be a canal and railway track. The back yard of our unit was overgrown with grass that hid old bits of timber and corrugated iron studded with rusted nails. After I ripped my thigh open on a rusty nail my mother let me play on the green strip in the middle of Port Road. She watched from the unit door as I crossed the Port-to-city side of the road to reach the green strip, warning me not to cross the city-to-Port side with its forbidden footpath and shops. Carrying a book or two, one of my dolls, and my teddy bear, I'd march across the two lane eastern side of the road and once safely on the grass I'd sit under a palm tree, swatting away flies, brushing ants from my legs and talking to my doll or reading. From where I sat our unit looked far away, squat and dull with its faded curtains and peeling paint. Next door, in the window of Mr Kerrie's delicatessen, were big red and white or yellow and blue signs advertising ice cream and soft drink. Smaller posters hung in the door to the shop and on the wall between our unit and the shop.

When I tired of my book, I lay on my back and looked up at the palm tree fronds swaying in the breeze like drunken men. When I grew bored with the odd shaped bits of sky that the palm fronds made as they moved in the wind I'd sit up, my back against the rough trunk of the palm tree, and pick up my book again. My mother

preferred me to sit up; she wanted me to be aware of any danger. But the palm trunk prickled my back the way I prickled with longing for other children to play with. I think, however, that if a child had appeared and asked me to play, I would have gathered my doll, teddy and book and scuttled home. My mother told me not to talk to anyone, especially if it was a grown man I didn't know. Men we knew, men my father knew, were the only kind of men I could to talk to. I sat under my tree, longing for, and scared of, human company; wanting something and being frightened of it feels like grit is scouring your soul.

Loneliness was a persistent lover. He took up a lot of my time. He was attentive but he offered no emotional support. He did introduce me to hitherto untried events and situations and, in his own way, he taught me how to deal with them. I joined internet dating sites because of loneliness. I met men with backgrounds, beliefs, experiences and attitudes I'd not previously encountered. I even had sex with a couple of them. Loneliness is a voyeur; he enjoys people's attempts to banish him, but he also teaches that sex is no antidote for desolation.

I'm not sure if the hours I spent playing on the grassy division between the up and down carriages of Port Road gave me a break from my mother or if it gave her a break from me. I like to think she periodically checked what I was doing, peeping out from the unit window, or opening the front door to make sure I was still under my tree, but I was never sure. When she thought it was time for me to come home, she stood outside our unit and called to me across the strands of traffic threading their way from Port Adelaide to the city. Occasionally, relishing the distance between us, I ignored her and stayed in the flat green world between the buzzing carriageway. I wondered what the drivers, speeding back and forth either side of me, thought about the little girl who played alone in the middle of the road. Sometimes I wished a kind lady would pull over and ask me to visit her. She'd live in a house with matching furniture and a big bed. She'd be happy and take me to piano and dancing lessons.

Loneliness introduced me to dining alone, solitary visits to art galleries, sitting alone in movie theatres and strolling by myself through fairs and festivals. He, of course, was with me, but he hid from other people or I hid him from them. We were both especially pleased when we convinced my friends I was happy and coping well with the separation and divorce. The truth was, I was trapped in loneliness' embrace. He hounded me when I went shopping, encouraging me to buy things I didn't need; food loaded with fat and sugar, cooking utensils I never used. On the other hand, he drove me to the gym where I spent hours discovering I possessed the hourglass figure I'd always coveted. But despite my physical weariness, I had trouble sleeping. Loneliness and I listened to late night radio; we played sad songs until every word and note was embedded in my DNA. Because of Loneliness I learned to identify different ways of weeping: the gentle, hopeless cry; the baby wail, the pathetic sob, the moaning sob, the volcanic sob and my personal favourite, the hiccup cry. When Loneliness grew tired of my noise he rocked me to sleep, crooning about what might have been.

Sometimes I tired of the vastness of the grass, the rattle of the palm fronds and the relentless indifference of the cars zooming past and I'd retreat to the unit and my mother. If my reception was cool I'd put my book away, sit my doll and Teddy on my bed, search through my drawer for some chalk I'd found on the floor of my classroom and had forgotten to return to my teacher, and go outside again. I'd draw poorly executed squares and numbers on the footpath in front of our flat, my nose gradually becoming accustomed to the smell of urine coming from the phone box. Hopscotch is a perfect game for a little girl; it teaches her she'll never complete a task. Like the housework my mother did, once I'd reached the end of the hopscotch course there was nothing else to do but pick up my pebble, return to the beginning, toss the pebble as far as possible across the squares and hope for the best.

Occasionally I ventured further than the front of our flat. A Presbyterian Church was several doors north of the unit. I'd walk to it and stand under the stone veranda trying to pretend I was a princess, but the silent vastness of the locked building offered little stimulation for my imagination.

Once loneliness moved in I thought he'd never leave. He was stubborn, it was hard to shift him and I was forced to accept his way of doing things. At first I was angry with him but eventually our relationship became easy and comfortable.

When my baby brother was born we needed a bigger home with a third bedroom. My parents bought a house from a builder who had just been declared bankrupt; my father was doing the builder, and us, a favour. My parents had little furniture and no money for curtains or floor coverings and my mother complained she had been made a prisoner of the outer suburbs. She also dreamt and plotted: she would have a garden, make curtains and buy matching lounge chairs and an electric cake mixer with a vast range of attachments.

I walked to my new school along a dirt road bounded on one side by a creek and on the other by newly built cream brick homes. I missed Port Road with its familiar, run down shops and the wide green strip that divided the traffic driving to and from the city. Our new house was surrounded by empty blocks of land so instead of my green, palm studded haven I was forced to retreat, with my books, to my new room at the end of the hallway. It was next to the laundry and had a large uncurtained window. I'd sit on my bed and read, occasionally looking up from my book. No palm trees or fronds formed patterns and shapes from the rectangle of sky framed by my window.

When Loneliness beset me I sought the company, via the phone, email or social networking sites, of friends. Loneliness complained about the time I spent with others; he insisted I spend my time writing. The joke was that as often as loneliness drove me to the computer, he sent me away from it.

The first home I ever owned was in Whyalla. Brian and I bought it in late 1975 and set about scrubbing and painting its walls, installing a new kitchen and purchasing

curtains material with large, stylised feathers splashed across its width. We hung the curtain in the front rooms and each morning I'd open them to the Whyalla sun and dust then close them again at night. Three large frangipani trees shielded our deep front veranda and the two front rooms. They flowered from November to May, producing waxy cream flowers with golden yellow throats. During Christmas 1977 I'd take my newborn son out onto the veranda and feed him in the filtered green and cream light of early morning.

Just as I became comfortable with loneliness, he withdrew his attentions. I suspected he was lurking somewhere, but he became distant and forgetful. He retreated even further when I started to organise my days around writing instead of the needs and desires of others.

We'd been married five years when we sold our home in Whyalla and bought a large old farmhouse in the Barossa Valley. Once we'd settled in, and I'd given birth to my third baby in as many years, we unpacked our ladders, scrubbing brushes and paint brushes and in between entertaining two small children and feeding the baby, I helped Brian strip wallpaper. I also baked bread, made curtains for the children's rooms and entertained my mother. I wasn't earning any money and the small changes we made to our four bedroom house seemed lost. The house and children consumed my time; the garden, with its outside toilet, chicken coop and unkempt vegetable patch, was never really tamed except for a sandpit and set of swings we erected for the children near the back door.

I decided to keep a journal again, writing about the frustrations I experienced, being stuck at home with three children under four and living only minutes away from my mother and father. After three years I decided country living wasn't for me but the decision to move was finalised one hot summer day when we had visitors for lunch. The children, aged five, three and two went outside to play in the sandpit. I could hear and check on them but I was distracted by our guests and the children grew bored. Instead of coming back inside, the little one, who was more adventurous than

his cautious older brother, toddled around the corner to explore. His brother and sister followed him. My watchful and protective eldest son grabbed his baby brother in time to stop him from stumbling onto two large grey snakes. He managed to steer both his siblings back inside and told us, white faced and grim, the tale of the snakes. His father went outside and killed one snake but the other disappeared into the nearby bushes. After our guests left I insisted we move back to the city.

Loneliness was perverse. He promised a future of glorious sunset and satisfaction with my own company and at the same time underwrote my misery.

We sold the farmlet in the Barossa Valley and moved our family to Salisbury. The children's kindergarten and school was a five minute walk away but the new house was smaller than the one in the Barossa and the boys had to share a room. I travelled by bus to university and completed a Graduate Diploma in education. I was teaching part time, studying part time and trying to write poetry. I placed a small desk in the corner of the master bedroom and started attending writing workshops. The children turned into teenagers; Brian and I grew apart.

Loneliness taught me how to survive. He taught me that I might behave like a despairing and unhinged woman but I was none of these things; I was simply grieving. Once I understood this I relinquished my despair and relaxed into loneliness' embrace. High up in my eyrie, above the sea, among the trees that lined my street, I experienced moments of deep satisfaction and pure happiness. On warm evenings I'd sit on the steps that led to my unit, balance my evening meal on my knee and watch the sun set as I ate. From inside my unit came the music that I liked playing on my sound system. A book I wanted to read was waiting for me on my coffee table. I spent my days reading poetry and novels, studying and writing.

When he turned fifty, Brian retired from teaching. We paid off our mortgage for the Salisbury house and were debt free. Brian, however, wanted to live near the beach so we purchased a house in the seaside suburb of Seacliff. It needed extensive renovation so out came the ladders and brushes once again. The children were all still at high school and neither of us was earning a full time wage but we pulled wallpaper from the walls, stripped ancient carpets off the floors, repainted and remodelled two bedrooms and installed a new bathroom and kitchen along with a fresh set of resentments concerning our marriage. I taught astrology classes from the lounge room of our home and although the classes barely earned enough to pay the mortgage, we managed. It was a large house and I claimed a room to myself, calling it my 'library' even though it was the lounge room. Its attraction was that it lay at the opposite end of the house from the family room. I spent my time either writing astrology manuals or rereading some of my books. My shelves boasted volumes of women's history and spirituality, health and cook books, novels and poetry and as many 'how to' books about writing as I could afford.

Brian enrolled at the local university and I struggled to maintain the astrology school. When it folded I enrolled in a Bachelor of Creative Arts. During my second year of study, and after ten years of renovations and hard work on our house, with more to do, Brian insisted we sell again. He said our marriage would improve if he didn't have to look after a large garden and a larger mortgage. We sold the home, disposed of three decades worth of goods we knew wouldn't fit into the 'downsized' home for two and moved early in 2005. By the middle of 2006 I knew our marriage was over.

Two years after my marriage ended I woke and found I no longer needed to fling myself from bed and wrestle or coerce my day into submission. Loneliness remained but he was a scent, a stirring and little more. I had learned to let my days happen. I wrote every day, the words landing on the computer screen like beached, flapping fish. I either scaled and gutted them or threw them back and sent out another line. I had part time paid work and when I wasn't writing or working I attended to the needs of my body and my mind. I regularly saw my psychologist, had coffee with my friends and started rereading my diaries. What, I wondered, did I do with my twenties, thirties and forties? What did I want? What didn't I want? What did I think

was missing from my life? I encountered a needy woman in those scrappy notebooks and she exhausted me.

I was working my way through the 1980s one afternoon when I heard a sound coming from my bedroom. I lay the journal on my sofa and went to investigate. A bee had crawled through a bee sized crack in my window, formed when the rubber seal rotted and shrunk. Having found its way into my eyrie, the bee was trying to escape, futilely buzzing and pushing itself against the glass it could feel but not understand. It had crawled into captivity and was unable to find its way out again. I could imagine what that bee was feeling: it could see the world beyond the hard but invisible barrier; it could remember the smells and sound of that world but, with each frantic flap of its wings, those memories were lost. The bee dropped to the windowsill, gathered its strength, rose up and pushed once more against the merciless glass. I knew it would continue to do so until it died on the sill and I knew it would take a long time to die.

The woman in my journal was like the bee. She'd crawled into a space that she called her life but she could see a world beyond, a world she thought might have been her world. There was an invisible barrier between her and that world, between her and the smells, sounds and sensations she longed for. Like the bee she pressed against her barriers, real and imagined, and had almost worn herself out writing her journals and getting nowhere. Even her eyrie could, if she let it, turn into a trap. But unlike the bee she didn't have to wait for someone to open the window. She had already burst through the barrier between the world she had and the world she wanted.

I stopped reading my journals that afternoon, leaving the woman I was to languish between their scabrous pages. I became a writer, not a whining, melodramatic creature trapped in the entrails of her journal. Occasionally, however, that woman returns, and with her, ever attendant, is loneliness. When that happens I reinhabit her world, I revisit her unfulfilled longings and I watch her squirm in the grip of the guilt she feels because, in order to be free, she had to sting someone she once loved.

Hunger

> ‘Papa used to say with pride: “Simone has a man’s brain; she thinks like a man; she is a man.” And yet everyone treated me like a girl.’

I stood in the kitchen, waiting for footsteps, or the sound of a voice. There was nothing. I was quite alone. I realised then how hungry I was. I went over to the table and leant over the first bowl. Steam rose from the puddle of porridge in the centre of the bowl. In the next bowl the porridge seemed to have congealed. In the third and smallest bowl the porridge looked mildly appetising. I sat down and took up the nearest spoon. Despite my hunger I ate mindfully, waiting and watching. The kitchen was warm, the pots and pans and the crockery and cutlery looked new. It wasn’t the kind of kitchen Gloria coveted – it was too folksy and kitsch for her tastes – but it looked as if the inhabitants owned the place. There was a sense of belonging, of being settled.

Gloria, at twenty-six, had become a beautiful but flawed woman with a handsome, charming husband and a docile, polite daughter. Pretty in her own way, Janet was, as people often commented, ‘unusual’, something Gloria had learned to accept. The family had moved from Leslie Street and were living, temporarily, near the beach in Exeter, a suburb whose name was as ugly as the old houses that tarnished the street where Gloria, Warren and Janet lived. They occupied one half of a small cottage that had threadbare carpet and was furnished with borrowed beds, chairs and a kitchen table. Gloria hated the cottage and spent her days fretting and dreaming. She read the kind of fashion and sewing catalogues, home and garden magazines, recipe books and novels that fuelled her fantasies and validated her frustrations. Janet sat nearby and read her own books. There was no front veranda and no fence to hang on while she waited for her Papa to arrive home—and no Papa to kiss her good night before she went to bed. When she wasn’t reading, Janet played with her dolls or coloured her colouring books or cut, from books her mother bought her, paper shirts, dresses and hats with little tabs attached to them. She cleared away the scraps of paper as she worked and then, once each garment was cut out, hung the paper clothes on a paper girl she had also cut out of the book.

Gloria felt sorry for herself but that was something Janet was never allowed to do, even though she missed Leslie Street and Zella’s brown china ducks on the living

room wall soaring toward the creamy white ceiling. Sometimes Janet pretended to read; she needed to watch her mother. Even though she was only four years old, Janet could read the words on a page and the signals from her mother that emanated from her like semaphores from a distressed vessel. Most of the time Janet was able to interpret and understand these signals; sometimes she forgot and was a naughty, disruptive, selfish, tiresome girl who Gloria had every right to berate.

At the end of each day, despite being exhausted with frustration, Gloria cooked a delicious meal for Janet and Warren, who often arrived home work well after six o'clock. While she peeled potatoes and shelled peas, Gloria remembered the photos of bright, streamlined kitchens she saw in her magazines and she deserved to own. Everything in Gloria's kitchen was old but the scrubbed and polished surfaces of the kettle and the saucepans reflected the face of a woman who trusted that her husband would move them all into a big, new house one day and replace the old, borrowed things in this unit with matching furniture and elegant dinnerware. She knew this because at night, afterwards, as she lay replete in Warren's arms, he said he'd buy her a house and all the kitchen utensils she needed.

In the other half of the Exeter unit lived a man whose mates visited him late at night, after 6 pm, when the hotels were closed. The men arrived carrying bottles of alcohol in brown paper parcels. Gloria peered through the front window at these men, noting their heavy boots, the rolled cigarettes that hung from the corners of their sour mouths, and their Returned Soldiers League badges on the lapels of their coats. As they passed her door she turned from the window, served Janet's meal, then her own and finally Warren's, which she placed, covered by the lid of a saucepan, over a pan of simmering water.

While Gloria and Janet ate their meal Gloria attuned her ears to the noises coming from next door. She did not like the man next door or his friends. If her neighbour tried to talk to her she always replied in a haughty voice, as if speaking to a servant. As she cut Janet's lamb chop into bite sized pieces and coaxed her daughter to eat her carrots, Gloria heard the intense, abrupt laughter of unattached men on the other side of a wall only metres from where she and Janet sat. She heard swearing, then more laughter and the clink of cheap glasses. These parties were nothing like those her father-in-law held. The men on the other side of her wall laughed the kind of

laugh men laugh when there were no women in the house. Gloria knew there were no women next door because, straining to listen, she could not hear women's voices, or women's laughter.

After they finished eating, Gloria put Janet to bed, but not in her own little bed. She put Janet in the old double bed that Warren and Gloria shared. She read stories to her little girl, who eventually closed her eyes. The laughter and clinking of glasses did not stop so Gloria walked back into the kitchen and silently took one of the sturdier kitchen chairs from under the dining table back into the bedroom. She climbed cautiously onto the chair and lifted something down from the top of the wardrobe then stepped off the chair. A long metal barrel gleamed dully in the half-light.

Gloria carried the rifle and the chair back to the kitchen and made herself a cup of coffee to help her to stay awake although the noises from next door would stop her from sleeping. She drank the coffee, rinsed the cup, set it upside down on the drain board then, dropping to her knees, opened a cupboard door and peered inside. She put her hand into the dark, dank space, praying she'd find nothing but saucepans and a small cardboard box at the back of the cupboard. She grimaced as she felt around in the back of the cupboard then she touched the box and took it out of the cupboard. She stood, closed the cupboard door and walked into the bedroom to check Janet. The child was breathing deeply and evenly.

Gloria heard more swearing from next door, followed by glass breaking. She loaded the bullets into the rifle the way Warren taught her and sat on the bed, fully clothed, pillows at her back. She put one arm around Janet, whose breathing remained quiet and even. With the other hand Gloria propped her husband's rifle against her leg. The finger of her free hand was poised on the trigger and the rifle was pointed at the bedroom door. She sat like this for a long time, waiting. Eventually she heard the front door open. Footsteps echoed in the lounge room, on the other side of the bedroom door. Whoever it was had not turned on the light. The footsteps came closer to the bedroom door and then stopped. Gloria watched the bedroom door handle turn. She saw the door slowly swing open. It was dark and she couldn't see who stood at the threshold of her bedroom, but Warren, standing in the doorway, could see the rifle. He could see his wife holding the rifle and he could see that the rifle was pointed at him. He could also see his daughter alongside of his wife. He had, a

minute earlier, been drunk but was sobered by the picture before him. Then Janet stirred and rolled towards her mother who was distracted by the movement. Gloria gathered her daughter closer to her; as she did so Warren took two swift steps into the bedroom and disarmed his wife.

There are still nights when the threads of anxiety are pulled too tight and Janet has trouble sleeping.

Natasha

My youngest child was barely three when I returned to part time teaching. Work brought financial independence and escape from the routine of marriage and motherhood. I taught in a school situated at the heart of a working class community. Most were well cared for, despite problems created by want of a regular parental income. Others were brutalized and abused. I liked teaching but never found it easy; I wished I was more confident, and my classroom discipline more consistent.

My first unconditional love was for Reginald Leslie Thomas, but my most enduring relationship has been with Edward Bear Esq. My Nana and Papa Thomas gave him to me for my first birthday. I still love Edward Bear, and he must love me; he's stayed with me for fifty nine years. I also loved my father; we shared a quirky sense of humour and love of the ridiculous. He loved my mother and always defended her no matter how arbitrary and spiteful her moods.

Some of my students were emotionally strong for their age, others achingly vulnerable. Natasha was both. She was one of a group of children I took, one early spring morning, to the South Australian Museum. A colleague and I had been planning the excursion for weeks. Soon after the first siren called the children to class, we herded fifty or more excited seven and eight year olds, several mothers who'd volunteered to help, and one or two of their toddlers, out of the classroom. Our chattering, straggling, hand holding group took six minutes to walk to the local train station and we managed to get everyone onto the train. We settled the children and survived the trip to the city by casting dark teacher's glares toward the more excitable students.

My first kiss happened in the back of the school bus as it pulled into Chain of Ponds. It was the last day of the school year. I was fourteen and my boyfriend was a mature fifteen. As a reward for my license he gave me one of his school photos. My parents

made me return it at the beginning of the next school year. I was too young, they said, to ‘be that serious about a boy’.

I waited, not by choice, until I was sixteen for my second kiss. It happened after a wedding. The reception had finished and the bride and groom had departed on their honeymoon. My father’s sister, the mother of the groom, had invited her family, and other guests, home for drinks. The adults unpicked the proceedings of the wedding and speculated about the bride and groom’s current activities but my cousin and his friend Simon—a boy three years older than I—played ‘The Beatles’ and ‘With the Beatles’ in the rumpus room. I wore a low cut pink dress printed with white flowers for the wedding. It had pleated ruffles at the neckline and sleeve edge and a narrow pink grosgrain ribbon tied at the waist. My mother, of course, chose the fabric and the style. My long hair was pulled off my face and formed into a tight bun at the top of my head. I also wore my first pair of white high heeled shoes, but in the familiarity of my aunt’s home I’d kicked them off and sat, my legs tucked under me, on a sofa in the family room. During the reception Simon and I had circled around each other like wary cats but, now we were alone—apart from the congenial presence of my cousin—the three of us chatted about our favourite records, the Vietnam war, how boring our parents were, and our relief that they were leaving us alone. I also learned that Simon had taught himself to play the guitar.

My mother was always uncomfortable in her sister-in-law’s home, though I had no idea why. Perhaps it was because my father’s sister specialised in practicality, order and control. Tonight, however, there was an air of laxity. We three teenagers played the music as loud as we dared and the boys surreptitiously added brandy to their cola every time they poured a drink from the fridge. I sat on the couch, pretending to read the back of the album sleeves and hoped something would happen, although I wasn’t sure what. For the third time in an hour, my cousin disappeared into the kitchen to fix more drinks, leaving Simon and me alone. After a moment or two Simon eased himself out of his chair, strolled to my side of the room and sat next to me on the couch. He smiled at me then pivoted, slid down and lay on the couch, his head in my lap. The Beatles were singing ‘Love Me Do’. For the first time, but not the last, the harmonica riff from that song became grounds for instant arousal. After waiting a moment or two Simon raised his head. I bent down to him and we shared a long,

gentle, thrilling kiss. When I looked up my father was walking down the hall toward us.

We arrived at the Adelaide train station and my co-teacher and I made sure everyone dismounted the train and visited the toilet. After ten minutes we set off, we teachers heading the line, a pair of mother ducks with too many ducklings. We asked the parents at the rear to watch for stragglers and began our procession along North Terrace to the museum. It was a warm day. The clouds were high and friendly and a cool breeze lifted the girl's ribbons as they walked. I was anxious at first but relaxed once I realised conscientious planning, good organization and plausible discipline were paying off. The fear of losing a child subsided, I stopped worrying about what might go wrong on the train home, and dismissed the possibility the children would run amok through the museum. Students and teachers alike shrugged off the confines of the classroom and viewed each other from a different perspective.

I had a crush on Simon for two years after the wedding. Every time I visited my aunt I asked her what he was doing. She told me he'd joined a rock band and planned to dodge conscription. I dreamt of going to his home and knocking on his door. He'd open the door, smile, wrap me in his arms and tell me he loved me. When that seemed impossible I imagined he'd find my home, ignore my parents' remonstrations and convince me to run away with him. We'd live in a commune where we'd drink wine, read, talk, and play music all day and I'd write stories about love, the counter culture and avoiding conscription.

Excursions clue teachers into which mothers send cardigans in case the weather turned cold, which child's mother packed lunch and which one forgot. I noted which children paired up as they walked along the street and who clung to my hand because no one wanted to walk with them.

In the museum foyer we broke the children into groups—rowdy ones with the

teachers, quiet ones with mothers. We assigned tasks and handed out worksheets to the children. Groups of children from other schools strolled among the museum's cabinets and stood, chatting, before the displays. We watched them from the corners of our eyes, hoping our brood was better behaved. My colleague and I spent the next hour asking questions, directing attention to pinned insects, dioramas and cases of purloined artefacts. When we noticed that feet were dragging and interest flagging, we gathered everyone together and trailed back toward the railway station, stopping by Torrens Lake for lunch. Children unwrapped Vegemite or fritz or jam sandwiches and drank warm cordial from brightly coloured plastic drink bottles. Once they'd eaten lunch we let them play. Many of the boys ran around together between the trees whooping at the world for no other reason than they could. Some girls joined in, chasing their friends or the boys among the trees; others convinced the mothers to walk with them by the edge of the water.

I was barely seventeen when I felt compelled to find out what my parents seemed to enjoy and want to conceal from me. The glue that kept my parent together, despite ongoing conflicts was their sexual passion, and I wanted to lose my virginity and enter into that adult world. I was in my last year of high school; the boy I had sex with was, too briefly, my boyfriend. He was a red haired reed with a sixties hair style, hunched shoulders and he walked as if didn't give a damn about the world. My mother didn't like him because I made the mistake of telling her he said I was plain.

'Why do you want anything to do with a boy like that?' she asked, and 'what does he know about anything?' I wanted to be with him because he had a 'reputation'. It turned out, however, that we lost our virginity together one Saturday afternoon while his mother went to the shop to buy milk. He was a 'double g': gentle and grateful. From conversations I've had with other women about their first time, I was lucky.

My colleague and I sat on the steps of the rotunda and watched the mums and their charges feeding leftover crusts of bread to the ducks. We corralled a few of the boys into a more defined space where they were less of a hazard to the babies and toddlers

on the rugs dotted around us, but where they could still race about. Several children sat near us enjoying the novelty of relaxed teachers. We answered their shy questions about our own children, let ourselves be teased about the things we said in class and gently teased them about the funny things they did. Finally, we rounded up mothers, children and toddlers and took several headcounts, just to be sure. We sent groups of children, accompanied by a mother, to the toilets, made a penultimate headcount and trudged to the railway station, counting our charges once more as they boarded the train. Minutes after the train left the station the younger children were dozing, heads against the carriage window, the sun bestowing halos that most had earned. Others chatted quietly to friends or started their homework, writing bumpily on their worksheets. Somnolence and a sense of peace settled over the carriage. The day was worth the work my co teacher and I had put into it.

I had lovers throughout teachers' college. It was the early seventies and my friends and I believed in revolutions, we protested about militarism, racism, dogmatism and imperialism but for some of us the right to safe, enjoyable sex with whomever we chose was as important. We were eventually grateful when feminism pulled us, some literally, off our backs and we began to insist on equal wages as well as satisfied libidos. By the time I left teachers' college, in June 1973, I felt ready for a stable relationship. I was barely twenty years old.

Natasha sat opposite me, gazing, distant and thoughtful, out of the window. She was self-possessed, solemn, well behaved and diligent. Her skin was the colour of a pale eggshell. Her light blonde hair was long and tied into a single braid at the nape of her neck. Her blue eyes stole their colour from an Australian dawn sky but her skin and hair indicated her heritage was from colder Northern climes. Next to her sat one of the volunteer mothers, a thin, humourless woman who'd barely spoken to any of her daughter's friends or the other mothers. My colleague and I suspected she accompanied us to make sure we teachers behaved properly. She steadfastly ignored Natasha who, after several minutes, turned from the window, looked at me, then glanced down at her schoolmate who was resting her head in her mother's lap.

‘My mum would have come today,’ Natasha said, ‘except for her being pregnant again, and she had to take care of my baby sister, Angela.’

‘Maybe there’ll be another time,’ I said.

‘She’s got pains at the moment,’ said Natasha, ‘really bad pains.’

‘Your mother?’

‘Yes.’

‘I hope she feels better soon,’ I said. ‘Is there anyone to look after her?’

‘My big sister Maria was going to stay home from work today. And Tony, my big brother, he’ll wait around for some of the time. There’s six of us you know,’ she said, ‘those two, then me, and Stefan, then Angela.’

She paused. ‘Well, the baby will make six.’ Another pause, then, ‘That’s a lot.’

I nod, unsure of what to say. Natasha watched me for a long moment then continued.

‘Can you get a baby anymore Mrs …?’

I considered the question then decided I could answer it.

‘No, I can’t Natasha.’

Three days after finishing my teacher training I met Brian. He was tall with dark curly hair, wide shoulders and narrow hips. Although it was 1973 he wore narrow legged trousers, dark ties and dark rimmed glasses reminiscent of the 1960s. His right eye was slightly turned giving him a quizzical mien. Seven years older than me, he thought I was passionate, sociable and alluring. I behaved like an experienced woman but in reality I had no idea how to conduct and maintain a relationship. I was attracted to Brian because he was nothing like the boys I dated in college. I fell in love with him because I thought he was stable and reliable. I ignored the fact he had recently separated from a marriage that hadn’t been consummated until it was nearly over.

‘Oh, you got cut and tied did you? I hope my mum does that after this one. Six is enough, she shouldn’t have any more, but it would be nice to have a real brother or sister, not a half one.’

I suppressed a frown and the questions I longed to ask and tried to turn the topic back to the day’s excursion. This didn’t stop Natasha who, it seemed, had embraced her subject.

‘You see Tony and Maria, they’re brother and sister, they’ve got Italian blood. I’ve got Russian, but not Stefan, he’s got something or other, I can’t remember, and then Angela’s a Pommy, like the baby that’s coming…’

‘Their father is from England?’

‘Yeah, and so I don’t have a real brother or sister, just halfs.’ She delivered this narrative in the serious, matter of fact manner that many seven-year-old girls develop early in life. I was completely hooked.

‘How old were you when your father left?’ I asked

‘Just born.’

‘Have you met him?’

‘I’ve seen a photo. He took Mum’s car when he left, and her money. Mum had to go to court to get the money back. Stefan’s dad is worse though.’ Natasha leant forward slightly. The mother across from me also leant forward.

‘He drinks,’ said Natasha. She rested her back against the seat once more. ‘He took Mum’s rent money and came back with a keg. All his mates came round, made a mess of the house. She had to call the police. Mum made him leave after that. Angela’s Dad says if he comes round again he’ll kill him.’

Brian had been involved in a two year affair with a woman who generously relieved

him of his virginity. He wanted to marry this woman, but when he was free of his wife his lover backed off, although they were still seeing each other when Brian and I met. After he decided we were 'serious', Brian ended the relationship. I felt as if I'd won one of life's first battles; I couldn't imagine why his lover would reject him. I was intrigued by his lack of sexual experience as he was by my sexual generosity. I believed he'd make me happy and I hoped I would do the same for him.

A shy and silent child, modelling, teacher training and alcohol helped overcome my shyness and at teachers' college I loved going to parties. Being married didn't change the need for social connection I'd developed at teacher's college. I loved dancing; I'd stride onto the dance floor and, aware Brian was watching me, dance seductively with my partner, man or woman. Brian told me he was proud other men wanted me. He also admired my ability to talk to anyone about anything. Little did he know that I hated small talk.

'I'm going to have a baby one day,' said Natasha, 'but just one, not six like Mum or ten like Gran. And I'm either going to be a teacher like you or a shop girl.'

'A shop assistant?'

'Yeah, a shop assistant.'

'You know, Natasha, you can be anything you want to be, teaching is good, and so is working in a store, but you're clever. If you work hard…'

Natasha regarded me silently. No, life wasn't the way I'd just described it and Natasha already understood that. She knew women had babies unless they did something to prevent babies. She was often late for school because she had to feed her baby sister. Her clothes were clean, but faded. She was sensible, trustworthy, responsible and seven years old. I gazed at her clear blue eyes seeing the dependable teenager and indomitable woman she would become and I wanted to befriend that woman, whose grasp of reality would be firmer than mine had ever been.

After our wedding Brian and I lived and taught in Whyalla, a provincial country town hundreds of kilometres north-west of Adelaide. Our friends were teachers and our parties began immediately after the last bell on Friday afternoon. We drank beer, smoked cigarettes in the school staff room, talked about our classes and then climbed into our cars and drove to the local hotel that served fresh crayfish with potato chips. We'd work our way through a whole crayfish, still talking about our students, their problems and how we tried to help them. We played music on the jukebox and drank steadily. None of us, except Brian, was over twenty-five years old. Once the crayfish was finished we'd go to another hotel or to someone's unit and party until late into the night. After a few hours' sleep, we'd clean our respective flats, do the week's shopping and start our Saturdays with a barbecue. By midnight we'd be playing word association games, risqué and hilarious by turn. When we tired of that we'd play 'Murder' until our eyes drooped and we could no longer wink at each other. On Sunday there'd be another barbecue lunch or trips to the local beach. We hunted for crabs or swam in the shallow blue water before driving to someone's flat to listen to music, drink and talk until midnight. The next day we'd turn up at school, hastily throw together a few lesson plans, and greet our classes. I became tanned, confident and comfortable with my life.

The train pulled up at the station. Children and mothers clambered out of the carriage. We organised the children into a weary line along the platform and when we arrived back at school we let the children have a drink of water or go to the toilet, and then sat them down. There were thirty minutes left of school so the other teacher and I took turns reading them their favourite stories.

I started to find myself at the hub of these weekend parties. My new husband shrank into a corner, can of beer in his hand, observing me while I chatted with others, helped prepare salads or chose another album to play.

'Come over here and join us,' I'd say to him.

‘This is my way of enjoying myself,’ he’d reply.

We all longed for the last bell to ring. We told our classes how proud we were of them. We told them they had behaved well. Some of the little girls hugged us before rushing out to tell their mothers about their trip to the city. I said goodbye to Natasha as she left the classroom to make her own way home alone.

I think of my dead marriage as a bag of knotted, coloured skeins of wool. I reach in and pull out a tangled red skein: Brian walking from the sea to join me on the sand. Behind him is the blue sky and green blue sea against which glows his well-proportioned body with its long brown legs and broad shoulders. My desire for him increases with each step he takes. I want to leave the beach, go home and tumble into bed with him. He takes another step and I want to take him there, on the beach, exposing the world to the urgent openness of my love.

I plunge my hand deeper into the bag and pull out a pale lavender skein: Brian cradles our newborn daughter moments after her birth. ‘Hello little fella,’ he says.

‘Little fella?’ I say, ‘but she’s a girl.’

‘I know that,’ he replies, ‘I said “hello little fella” to my son when he was born, and I want to treat her equally.’

I choose another skein; blue. Brian holds his dying father’s hand. ‘I love you Dad,’ he says, ‘you can go now, it’s all right.’ When it’s over, Brian kisses his father goodbye and begins his mourning. Before my father-in-law’s body is removed, his second wife’s children start to remove my father-in-law’s clothes from his wardrobe. When they have finished Brian comes to me and says, ‘I need to leave here. I need to be with my children.’

I cannot stop trying to untangle the skeins. This time I choose an orange hank. Brian is play wrestling with our teenage boys. They try to pick him up but, even at fifty, he’s too strong, and far too stubborn, to let them do so.

I dig deeper into the bag of wool and retrieve an older skein, pale yellow. We've only been married a few months. We're driving across Eyre Peninsula. It is early evening. The stars have emerged to farewell the sun and the surrounding bush is cooling. We're enjoying a long, silent companionship when Brian raises his hand from the steering wheel and points. Following his gaze I see a hawk hovering in the air several meters ahead of us.

Deeper still into the slub of memories and I find a silvery skein. A full moon hovers above the bush, illuminating trees, road and rocks. It's late, we're looking for a place to camp. Suddenly the tyres screech and the car slides to an ungainly stop. 'What?' I say, still bracing myself.

'Look.' He leans forward and points beyond the front of the car. A wombat, spot lit by the car's headlights, crosses the road ahead. Brian saw it in time to brake and avoid hitting it. We watch the wombat waddle across the road and disappear into the bush.

The next skein is a knobbly, iridescent pink. Brian tells a young teacher he can teach a math's lesson to her class without speaking a word. The teacher doesn't believe him. He conducts the thirty minute class without uttering a word.

Practical brown this time and Brian's packing and unpacking the boot of the car in preparation for our holidays. He methodically creates space where two minutes earlier there was none.

Another rosy skein, the sound of Charlie Rich's 'The Most Beautiful Girl in the World'. Brian always played it when we argued. It was his way of making peace with me.

Aqua next; Brian takes the children swimming so I can study.

Finally a dull grey yarn too thin to use: it bothered Brian when I sat alone in the dark to rest or think; it bothered me when I found him sitting alone in full light, his eyes closed against it.

The bitterness of the last few years and our divorce has dissipated; I imagine untangling the wool and weaving the tangled, multicoloured magic into a wall

hanging. I want to create something, other than the children we made together, from our marriage, a memorial to the long years of loving and fighting. But the bag of wool is metaphorical, no more than a jumbled collection of memories I hide away in my heart.

MarriedWorld

‘Literature takes its revenge on reality by making it the slave of fiction.’

I finished the porridge and still no one came. By then, the combination of a long walk, a bowl of porridge and the warmth of the hearth made me sleepy and I needed rest before deciding what to do next. The morning had been characterised by decision making. Should I continue through the forest or remain where I was? Should I knock on the cottage door or retrace my steps? Enter the cottage or wait? Eat the cold, hot or warm porridge? Now I had to decide which of the three chairs, set in a tight semicircle on the other side of the room, to sit in while I considered my situation. I won’t rehash the well-known rigmarole: the big, middle sized and small chair; the comfortable just right for my size chair; the sound of splintering wood; the legs splaying slowly; the final bump on the floor and the realisation I’d broken one of a set of three.

I sat there for several moments, stunned and a little panicked. A clock ticked on the mantelpiece, birds chirruped outside the open window, but otherwise all was silence. Another choice confronted me. Run away or stay and make reparation for the broken chair? Write a note of thanks and apology or explore the second storey of the cottage? I decided to stay rather than run. I stood, dusted down the back of my dress and headed for the stairs.

Remember, I wasn’t a child, or if that is what you want me to be, I was a precocious child, eager to choose according to what was just right for me. Some story tellers say I was selfish, gentler folk say I was immature. Is it only the old who have a stronger claim, due to long years of experience, to choose their ‘just right’? And what of altruism? It is a nonsense; moral choices are based on one’s personal ‘just right’. Philanthropy is attended by the noble feelings we harvest when we help another. All choices boil down to a few: *what path will I take, and how will I tread it; what will nourish me and how will I earn it; where will I rest and what must I do to find a resting place; will I do this alone or in the company of another; what is right for me and how will my rights affect the people, creatures and flora that surround me?*

Janet, poor fool, made choices based on the needs of others. One of them was to enter MarriedWorld. She was only twentytwo at the time, still, in so many ways, a

child who'd never ventured alone into the woods. How I wish she had chosen differently. Perhaps she did too. She had lived in MarriedWorld for only a short time when she remembered that, at fifteen, she had vowed never to marry or have children. But seven years later there she was, living in a cottage in an imagined clearing, trapped in the dreary narrative of MarriedWorld. A better choice would have been to wait, to continue her studies, to write, to travel to Europe with the friend who knew travel was what Janet needed, not marriage. But Janet didn't travel, she studied part-time, she wrote part-time and she loved full time.

In the final third of last century, some 140 years after I was first storied, Janet's MarriedWorld was an improvement on older models. Modern MarriedWorld Mummies 'had a job' as well as housework, feeding the family and caring for the children. In MarriedWorld there was a Mummy and a Daddy; mortgages and scrubbed floors; a sandpit, a set of swings, a trampoline, a built in brick barbeque and a pergola in the back yard for entertaining friends or family; carpets for the floors; windows festooned with the curtains Janet made. In MarriedWorld Janet sewed most of her own, and the children's, clothes. She helped Daddy scrape wallpaper from the walls and she wielded a paint brush when it was time to paint those walls. She organised birthday parties, baking and decorating cakes in the shape of racing tracks, or footballs, or witches with julienned strips of liquorice for the hair, tinted green icing for the face and a broomstick made from broken pieces of cinnamon sticks. Janet did what every other MarriedWorld Mummy did: shop, cook, clean and negotiate Daddy's help with these tasks because Mummies 'do' and Daddies 'help'. The money Janet saved by painting, sewing and other budgeting skills went towards …? Well, dreams come true in MarriedWorld. Trips to the theatre, a larger house, an occasional interstate holiday. Even a trip to the United Kingdom was possible although it never materialised.

MarriedWorld Mummies carried a list of birthdays and anniversaries in their heads. They knew when the dog needed vaccinating, when bills needed paying, when children's sporting events were scheduled. But some Mummies in MarriedWorld, Mummies like Janet for example, had lists that were jumbled and incomplete because they had more interesting things to think about. Some Mummies had a hobby. Janet's pastime was writing. Her journals and notebooks satisfied MarriedWorld's ultimate

deception; Mummies are free to do what Mummies want. Janet poured her frustration, weariness and dissatisfaction onto forgiving, blue-lined pages that accepted Janet's sentiments without judgement. Janet's journals, however, were limited. They weren't boring (though some of them are) and they weren't helpful (or, only occasionally helpful). And the writing: sometimes Janet's words blistered the page. Some passages were as crisp as a spring dawn, others throbbed like purple stars strung across the heavens. There is art, and artfulness, in Janet's journals. She constructed, she graded, she sifted and she manipulated her words and images. Janet purchased books about writing and she attended workshops to help improve her journaling. But there were days, sometimes weeks, when she didn't, or couldn't write because MarriedWorld dominated her life. Not having the time to write turned Janet to sandpaper; she scoured everything she touched. But even though she longed for the honesty of a pen and paper, she began to suspect there was a hopeless circularity in writing about her grievances but doing nothing to change them. Once she closed her notebook, lay down her pen and re-entered MarriedWorld, little had changed. Marshalling and containing her feelings didn't precipitate a tectonic shift or an alteration to the climate. She couldn't, however, stop journaling because at least she was writing something.

Janet's 'just right' choice should have been to write poems or short stories, slowly and surely learning her craft. She should have sought support and encouragement, shared her dreams and her words. She would have met writers confronting the same problems as she, her writing might have blossomed. I have read Janet's journals. During uncharitable moments I wonder at the selfishness that makes her hoard her words, the ego that prevents her from sharing them. Then I remember; that writing a good story takes time, it requires focus and self-belief. MarriedWorld has no room for such things and the only narrative it permits is the one that ends with 'happily ever after'. There was another reason for keeping a journal; it was cheaper and less intrusive than therapy.

Ultimately journal therapy didn't work and, like many other MarriedWorld Mummies, Janet needed 'talking' therapy because Mummies, as is well known, are emotionally unstable. Needing therapy is proof that Mummy's instability causes all MarriedWorld's troubles. So Janet had therapy, wrote in her journal, attended

writer's workshops, and enrolled in and completed a Graduate Diploma in Women's Education. She spent weekends away with friends at women's spirituality workshops—I mustn't call it Wicca; that just frightens people. These entertainments should have left Janet satisfied with MarriedWorld, and with the real core of MarriedWorld, its central focus, its raison d'être; Daddy. He was the sun around which MarriedWorld's planets revolved.

Daddy. Magnificent, self-effacing, long suffering, wise, patient, practical, loving, stable. I call him 'The Rock', which only alludes to what eventually emerged as his singularly Neanderthal qualities. The Rock oozed filial concern. His was a benign patriarchy; he epitomised temperance and judicious support. You might say 'supportive' was The Rock's second name. He fed clothes into the washing machine, turned it on, then sat down and read a book while the machine ground away. He extracted the clothes when the cycle was complete and hung everyone, sorry, the *clothes,* out to dry. He didn't iron; every man has his limits. He rarely washed floors, or picked up the children's toys after they'd gone to bed. He didn't buy birthday and Christmas presents for his children, his parents or his in-laws. The Rock didn't have friends either. MarriedWorld was his only world and Mummy was his best friend which meant he had the right to change Mummy's plans, tell her she wasn't cold even when she sat in a draught.

It's as churlish to find fault with The Rock as it is to detest the off-key falsetto of Baby Bear. The Rock drank only occasionally, though that increased as MarriedWorld grew old, shabby and began to crumble, none of which was The Rock's fault. The Rock was a saint, and saints have crosses, often in the shape of a woman, to bear. This man, this paragon, this exemplar of everything right and benevolent about MarriedWorld, was one of the best. Along with his other MarriedWorld tasks, The Rock held his uncomfortable and messy feelings deep within. He also withheld information, struggled with intimacy, but couldn't admit it, and, in the end, refused to change. 'I am,' he said to the end game counsellor Mummy and the Rock consulted, 'who I am and I am too old to change now.'

I have imagined The Rock, a remote, often patronizing, occasionally contemptuous man, in my place at the threshold of the Bear's cottage. I picture him knocking on the door, waiting and, receiving no answer, leaving a note, saying he would return. If, by

some unlikely chance, The Rock ventured inside the cottage he'd immediately notice what was wrong. He'd sniff out the wildness despite the civilized façade. He'd see that things were awry. He'd judge each bowl of porridge as inedible and make another batch, just to demonstrate how to do it properly. If he sat in and broke Baby Bear's chair, he would examine it for design faults, declare it 'Gerry rigged', unworthy of his attention and the damage no fault of his. The Rock would find all three beds uncomfortable and promptly fall asleep on the floor because he liked to sleep rough. The Rock's decisions were never based on 'just right' but, always and only, on 'being right'. A wag once anonymously posted a notice on The Rock's office door, under his name. It read:

I am never wrong. I thought I was once, but then I realised I was mistaken.

In the end The Rock preferred being right (that is, never wrong) over being happy. We do, however, have one thing in common; if The Rock and I experience guilt we don't let it bother us.

I want to feel sorry for The Rock. Beneath his pedantry, his insistence that how he sees the world is indisputably the way of the world, dwells a little boy with no self-confidence and a chronic lack of self-awareness. He has no idea of his effect on others.

Janet eventually dispensed with MarriedWorld. She went to her once upon a time place, an eyrie overlooking the sea. She wrote fiction, but her characters were based on people and places and events from her life; it is hard to break the habit of a lifetime, harder to escape the first person. Like Anais Nin or Frida Kahlo, Janet's topic, her subject, is herself but she learned, during the long, lonely, early days in her eyrie, to create fiction from autobiography. Unlike Nin, however, Janet avoids the nub of her story and so, in frustration, I've moved from my space on the margins of narrative to push Janet, my reader, my writer, into public revelation. It's time Janet made a 'just right' choice. She's tried being a good Mummy, she's tried 'doing right' and she finally rejected the tyranny of 'being right'. If she can't say what she needs to say by herself then we must do it together because her story, like mine, is a story about choice.

Moments

People say to me, ‘It happened so long ago why is it so important? Why must you dwell on it? Can’t you put it out of your mind, put it behind you? My answer is; why does the sea respond when the wind moves over it? Why does the blank page accept the pen?

There are moments that cannot be categorised, that refuse to be organised, that are particular instances, that are culminations of other moments. They have consequences, some might call them a turning point, but that is not all that characterises them. I want to describe them: the photographs taken years apart; the narrative of decay and discard; the discourse, the belief system, archaic and, almost lost; the space, the void, the emptiness, which cannot be filled. I’ll litter the page with these instants of time; arrange them so they’ll make sense. One, however, is a void, contradictory non-moment of true moment that draws the others to it the way dark matter swallows the stars.

I cannot forget, this darkness, this void. If I do what those well-meaning people suggest, was the 12th December 1970 is forgotten. I offer these moments, these splintered, unrelated points of time, hoping someone might make sense of it all.

When I was a child time oozed like treacle from a spoon. I played alone. I waited for my grandfather to come home from work. I longed for the school day to end so I could go home and read. I watched my parents dressing for a party.

When my parents gave me a wrist watch for my tenth birthday I struggled with telling time. I loved reading but I was numerically illiterate: base ten confounded me, the purpose of a decimal point eluded me and base sixty was an unsolvable riddle. It took me eons to work out that the small hand denoted hours. When the big hand passed the six on my wristwatch face I was in trouble. I read ‘ten past twelve’ as ‘two past twelve’ and failed to understand how 12:30 became, only ten minutes later, 12:40 *and* twenty to one.

I have a black and white photograph of my mother and father, Nana and Papa Thomas, their daughter and son in law, my godparents and one other couple. The ten of them are incongruously squeezed into a curtained alcove. They're wearing evening clothes, the men in dark suits and bow ties, the women in gowns. My grandmother wears a striped dress with a jacket. A corsage is pinned to her left breast and she holds a cigarette, in a long holder, between her fingers. Her shoes may be either gold or silver; the camera's flash has highlighted their open-toed sparkle. Behind Nana, Papa has a cheeky, almost puckish look in his eyes. Pinned to his chest, but hidden slightly by Nana's shoulder, are his service medals.

Behind Papa stands my aunt, my father's older sister. Her hair is cut into a bob reminiscent of the 1920s, although the photo is taken in the early 1950s. Her clasped hands rest lightly on her father's left shoulder. Behind her is her husband, a dapper man with a thin brown moustache and dark wavy hair. Next to, and slightly behind him, is my father, the tallest person in the photo. He wears a white tie and his broad grin shows frank pleasure. He is impossibly handsome, with a wide forehead, black hair swept back from his brow, a long, patrician nose, high cheekbones and the hint of a dimple in his strong chin. To my father's right are the two other men, including my godfather. In front of them are their two spouses. My godmother wears a dress made of guipure lace. Its thin straps hold up the tight bodice. Around her shoulders is a chiffon shawl and on her neck a diamond necklace. The group has formed a tight, happy circle, the men at the rear, the women either standing, sitting or, in Nana's case crouching, in the foreground.

In the centre of this circle stands my mother. She smiles, but not directly at the camera. It is a beatific smile. She gazes to her right and her body is angled slightly to the right, unlike the rest of the party. She wears a simple gown with a tight bodice, a wide shawl collar and a gathered skirt. Her corsage is pinned to the middle of her bodice. Her hair is curled and parted on one side.

Every time I look at this photograph my eyes are drawn to my mother not only because of her wistful beauty, but because she is at the centre of a moment she doesn't seem to be part of.

Astrology taught me to understand the endless race the little and big hand ran as they whirled around the track of time. Astrology has also reconciled me to clock faces and taught me that nothing is static. The heavens are in flux. An astrologer who tarried over learning to tell the time, I'm finally entranced by how time slides by only to slither around again. I might accept, finally, that time is cyclical but this knowledge, and the capacity of clocks and watches to make two different statements about the same moment, confirm my childhood suspicion; reality is a slippery concept.

In 1951, the year they were married, my mother and father were handsome, glamorous creatures. My aunt, my mother's baby sister, said she thought they looked like Hollywood movie stars.

Astrology is a snowflake. At first glance it looks simple, but a close study reveals its intricate, multiple, delicate branches and tendrils.

My father lent my mother to the world; by day she shopped, read, sewed, knitted, cooked and attended to me. My mother did the same with him; she sent him to work and acquiesced to his going to the pub with his mates after work, but at night they belonged to each other. Once I became an adult I realised that when he looked at her he was thinking of the night before, how passionately she'd held him, how giving she was. Now I understand his smiles were those of a sexually satisfied man and that my mother read those smiles and signalled her ongoing desire back to him.

I'm entering my night time; I have time left, but more is gone than remains. The clock on my wall mocks me with the sound of my life draining away. I try to imagine my end is really a beginning, an entrance to an unknowable, unimaginable adventure. This is not a Christian belief. I understand my end may merely be a release into nothingness and I refuse to mourn my passing. But I don't wish to hear the final tick,

the moment when, once again, I will fail to tell time because there is no time left to tell.

As well as his love I witnessed my father's quest to find the right shade of peace with which to colour my mother's life. My mother's mantra was, 'Please, don't cause an upset', or, an equal favourite, 'I cannot be upset'. In reality she was a maven of making mountains from molehills and the 'upsets' my father endured were the product of my mother's mind. In the morning we might be greeted at breakfast by a bright, charming and playful wife and mother; an hour later, for no apparent reason, she was angry, resentful and vengeful, or worse: desolate, insecure and clingy. A friend once told me an 'upset' is really a 'set up'. I was momentarily puzzled and then I understood. For decades my mother tyrannised her family with her insistence 'there be no upsets,' which meant we behaved how she imagined a family ought to behave.

When I was a child my nightly pre-bed ritual involved a walk along the chevron-patterned, red brick path to the outdoor toilet. My father accompanied me, and I'd pause along the way and peer up at the mysterious glassy dots of light glittering implacably against the black heavens. All my father knew of the stars was that one of the patterns he helped me find in the sky was the 'dipper'. Another, he told me, was the Southern Cross. I imagined that these marks in the sky, like the marks on the pages of my books that I had so easily learned to read, could also be read and their message revealed.

I cannot abide the thought of those efficient, organised housewives filling the void of, to them, an unremarkable December 12, 1970. I reject the idea of those middle aged women spending that day stirring dried fruit and spices into a mixture of butter, sugar, eggs and milk. What did they think they were doing, wrapping the last of the Christmas presents, placing them on top of the wardrobe and covering them with a

blanket? Did they really think that day could be filled with these mundane tasks? How could they imagine that, in the void that became 12 December 1970, it was acceptable to dress for pre-Christmas parties while planning the children's trip to the Magic Cave?

I started learning astrology in 1994. The Moon's node, a mathematically derived intersection between the path the earth takes as it moves around the sun, and the path of the moon as it cycles around the earth, fascinated me. Nodal points have mathematical and archetypal connections with the cycle of eclipses. Cultures that calculated the Moon's Nodal points could predict eclipses and the shamans, priests and rulers probably used this knowledge to frighten the uneducated. Time, in the wrong hands, is a weapon.

My father, brother and I were my mother's puppets; dangling, hapless, tangled creatures walking around as if on broken glass. Even if we could avoid the fragments we weren't privy to how, or why, the damage had happened. My father tried to fix my mother, but it is hard to repair a person who doesn't believe she is broken.

Astrology is a metaphor. The moon sashays along on the same path each month, performing a dance with the sun that was choreographed when they settled into their uneasy cohabitation.

Since December 1970 I've tried to ensure the void is never filled. I want nothing of the prosaic consumption, by elderly, weary Christmas revellers, of mince pies and sherry. That day is sullied by lounge rooms festooned with paper snowflakes, reindeers and plastic fir trees belaboured with tinsel and silver bells without a clapper. How can young lovers, sitting on Glenelg beach, trying to satisfy their longings with shy kisses and shared ice cream, fill that void I want to memorialise

and long to forget?

Astrology is a language with its own vocabulary, grammar, dialects and meaning. It has a discourse, like literature or history, as well as its narratives and political intrigues. Astrology is sitting on a balcony on a warm afternoon, sipping sweet chilled wine and watching the sun set. The sun, however, isn't sinking into the sea, the earth is turning. It is this misperception of celestial movement that creates the conditions of astrology and colours the evening sky with blue, gold, pale purple pink and coral. The setting sun and astrology describe the shifting landscape of the mind and heart. The symbolism of the planets, the zodiac, the houses and aspects, the transits and progressions don't tell us our fate; anyone who plays a game of solitaire understands that. Astrology tells us how we are implicated in our fate; it's because of the way we perceive things.

In her 50s and 60s my mother made patchwork quilts pieced together from painstakingly selected fabrics. She also embroidered peonies and lavender, or cross-stitch cows and teddy bears, onto canvas. My father made frames for them and they gave them to friends as Christmas presents.

Astrology is an early form of psychology that allows us to associate the macrocosm of the sky with the microcosm of our lives. Astrology has been twisted and put to ill use but that, too, is part of its narrative. Astrology seduced me but I was a willing partner.

While my mother made quilts my father had his woodwork projects. In his shed, away from my mother, he made toys for local kindergartens and carved a model Harley Davidson motor cycle from wood. It was fixed to rockers, in the manner of a rocking horse. The first time we saw it he said, looking pointedly at my children, that

he made it for his first great-grandson.

Eventually my mother began to demand my father stay with her, inside the house, and help with tasks she could no longer manage on her own: laying dress patterns on fabric and cutting them out, reading the instructions for her latest knitting project, searching for the right colour embroidery thread, complaining about her life. They were, by then, in their late 60s and early 70s. She had suffered from asthma for nearly fifteen years and had also been diagnosed with emphysema. She was gradually losing her lung capacity and was fighting for each breath. The less easily oxygen came to her the more bitter, petulant and demanding she became. Was she aware she was losing her skill with scissors, needle and thread? Could she remember the night she laid her work aside, never to take it up again? Did she fret about the projects next to her chair, fading in the cold, dusty lounge room along with a pile of books about quilt making, magazines on stitch craft, knitting patterns, bags of wool and a forest of knitting needles with their undergrowth of rusting pins?

Every month, at two o'clock on a Friday, I meet with friends at a local cafe. When staff members approach the table to ask if we need a second coffee, hot chocolate or lemon lime and bitters (depending on the season), we look up from our astrology charts, blinking slightly as if called back to a world we forgot existed. Over the course of the afternoon we are, as we read our charts, perplexed, sombre and occasionally triumphant. Thick sheets of laughter whirl dramatically around our table before skiving up toward the cafe's ceiling. Nearby customers, bunkered down over a late lunch and glass of red wine, are bewildered by fragments of a strange archaic conversation that drift from our table to theirs.

'Do you think we need to consider the Sun on the Midheaven receiving the square from the Moon?'

'I still think the Moon's aspect to Mercury is the nub of the whole thing. That Mercury rules the fourth, fifth and seventh, and it's ruled by Saturn. It's tedious and restricted.'

'I'm looking at this Venus, also high in the chart, and so…'

'…Peregrine?'

'And besieged'.

Someone says this is typical of a Venus in Scorpio's morals. We laugh again at a private joke, spoken in the private language, thick with symbol and meaning, that we've spent years exploring, learning and refining. We are average, middle class 'baby boomers' and professional astrologers, beings entirely different from mere hobbyists or, heaven forbid, uneducated charlatans. We've studied the subject exhaustively, passed exams and read (we prefer to say delineated) hundreds of charts for paying customers who invariably confirm our findings.

My father's response to my mother's decline was to cook all their meals and drink red wine every afternoon while he and my mother watched endless cooking shows on the television. For several years he also managed to escape the house by going shopping. He enjoyed his solitary shopping expeditions. He'd pant and grunt his slow, stoic way around the aisles of the local supermarket, stopping to chat to the staff along the way. Once the food shopping was completed he visited the local hardware store, inspecting the shelves for tools he might need for a drawer he had to repair or the clock he wanted to fix. From the hardware store he'd go to the kitchenware shop: his personal epicurean Shangri La. He knew each shop assistant by name; they greeted him cheerfully and listened patiently while he told them about his latest culinary victory. Then they showed him the latest kitchen gewgaw. As his culinary skills grew his friendship with the women in the kitchenware store deepened, and his kitchen drawers and cupboards swelled. He purchased enough knives to arm a small revolutionary force and a range of beaters, mixers and food processors for every mixing, folding, stirring and serving need. He had frypans, sauté pans and saucepans for every eventuality. Working in a kitchen with limited cupboard space and with an ancient electric stove, he cooked delicious meals for my mother and, when we visited, my children and me. In summer the temperature in the kitchen could reach 38 degrees and in winter as cold as three but every meal was a celebration—especially when he could convince my mother to sit at the table and eat with him.

I know how to read the heavens; I know the names of the constellations and the difference between the morning and evening star; Venus on her venal rounds. I understand the phases of the Moon. I've not only mastered the base six calculations used for each cycle, I've taught them to others.

Eventually my father's own laboured breathing limited his shopping excursions. Months later we discovered he had asbestosis as well as a time bomb, in the form of an aneurism, ticking away in his gut. My mother insisted he was not ill, he was making it up.

That December 1970 day is my memoriam. Something existed but was gone in a moment. Whether it deserved to exist or not, it did, briefly, invisibly, definably.

My father rose each morning, fed the dog, made his breakfast and ate it alone. In the early stages of her illness my mother slept until late morning, ate her breakfast and read or tried to finish a knitting or embroidery project. When she lost her power with needle and thread she sat propped against her pillows and watched the television a neighbour helped Dad install in their bedroom. When comprehending a television program became too large a challenge she slept until two pm. When she woke, she took her medication—hours after she should have had it—rose from her bed, tottered into the lounge and sat with my father in front of the television, their four pm glass of red wine at their elbows, their favourite television cooking program stewing in front of them. After another glass or two of wine my father went into the kitchen and prepared dinner.

I look at the world through the filter of astrology. It is my alternative viewpoint, my

rebellion. I ply arcane, occult knowledge, symbol, myth and archetype and laugh at the imprecations of fate. Astrology taught me the story of a moment; it taught me to trust a moment's qualities, extract its meaning and contradiction, mine its hope and accept its disappointments.

My parents ate dinner around 6.30 pm, beautiful meals my father painstakingly created; grilled chicken, green salads, curries or his favourite; salmon steaks placed on a bed of sliced blood oranges and poached in red wine. They shared another glass of wine or two before returning to the lounge to watch more television. One favourite was an Australian soapie called *McLeod's Daughters* set on a cattle station in the near north of the state. If I phoned my father while they were watching it he asked me to call back after what he called 'Sex in the Saddle' was finished.

To forget the 12th December 2013 is to create a void that must be filled. There is nothing I want to forget and so I have cast a chart of the moment—or the possible moment. This chart is something I can read, something that tells me the moment existed.

When my mother needed oxygen twenty out of twenty-four hours a day she refused to leave the house and did everything she could to prevent my father from going out as well. She refused to see visitors except the woman sent once a week by the regional aged care service to clean the house. The care worker encouraged my father to take respite care, but after broaching the subject with my mother, he suffered days of abuse.

'You've never loved me. You're abandoning me. I'm a sick and worthless old woman now and you, you bastard, you want to abandon me. This life, this life, (Ha!), it means nothing. You and I, we're over, we're finished.' It was her usual recital interjected by the ragged breath of her emphysema ridden lungs and accompanied by

the slow beat of the oxygen convertor that lived permanently in their lounge room and fed her oxygen through a tube.

My father became restless and anxious for my mother's health. Instead of being out in the world, visiting friends, going to the movies or participating in activities organised by the aged care facility he devoted his scant energy to keeping my mother alive. Day after day they sat in the dusty and airless lounge room gnawing the bones of their marriage and ignoring what, even for her, was increasingly unreasonable and erratic behaviour.

My mother was in the early stages of dementia, but she and my father refused to accept the diagnosis and attempts to alleviate the shared suffering her condition caused. When my mother found a set of new underwear and socks in my father's bedroom drawers she decided he was seeing another woman, one who, as a token of love, bought him the intimate garments my mother had once purchased for him. The socks and underpants battle raged for five years.

'You were with me when I bought them,' he said.

'When?'

'The last time we went to Elizabeth to shop.'

'No we didn't.'

Indignant and exasperated, my father persisted rather than letting it go. 'Gloria, darling, yes we did. You were with me. We bought these together. I paid for them and then wheeled you to that coffee shop in the mall …'

'What coffee shop? I don't like that wheel chair. People look at me.'

'No they don't.'

'Yes they do. Where did you get those underpants? Those socks? Who bought them for you? Who is she? Your latest? Ha, that's right. I'm abandoned, alone, you never cared, never.'

Despite my father's lifelong and unswerving fidelity my mother held fast to her

conviction that, at seventy-five years old, her husband was involved in a passionate affair with the aged care worker who periodically visited their home to try to encourage my mother to attend the bingo games held in the church hall.

Shortly after my separation, I visited my parents. It was after lunch and my mother was still in bed. She heard my father and me talking in the kitchen and called out to him. I watched my father haul himself from the kitchen chair, find his walking stick and lumber into the bedroom,

‘What can I get you, darling?’

My father rarely asked, ‘How are you darling?’ or ‘Have you had a good sleep?’ It was always, ‘What can I get you?’ He hoped a meal, a drink, a book, my mother’s embroidery would help my mother breathe again. I heard a mumbled reply, scuffling sounds, muted orders from my mother, and placatory tones from my father. After a long while my mother emerged from the bedroom, dressed and walking unaided—she refused to use the walker my father had organised for her. The flesh above her thin lips was blue and drawn. The oxygen tube, connected to the oxygen converter, that was supposed to curl around her ears and loop across her cheeks into her nostrils had slipped out and she wasn’t getting the oxygen she needed. She hated the inelegant plastic tubes and fretted about the deep tracks they carved into her cheeks. My father constantly cajoled her to put the tubes in properly, or he did it for her while she sighed and looked at him bitterly.

My mother sat at the table across from me while my father diced vegetables for the gourmet meal he planned especially for ‘his girls’. I told my mother about the separation. She seemed to gain energy from my news and demanded to know if I, or Brian, was seeing anyone. Her obvious disappointment when I said neither of us was involved with another person prompted my father to suggest I take my mother into the lounge room. We walked slowly into the hallway, her oxygen tube trailing in our wake as I monitored every slow step lest she trip. I settled her in her chair next to the window then sat next to her, in my father’s chair. Across the road from my parents’ rented bungalow, a school siren sounded the end of the day. My mother parted the

curtains slightly and peered outside. I watched her watch mothers load their children into cars while other mothers grasped their little ones hands and steered them, and a pusher, across the road. If anyone walked past the house my mother dropped the curtains and abruptly and sat back in her chair. She repeated this action several times until the school grounds were quiet. Then she turned to me and asked what Brian was doing. ‘Is he seeing anyone? Are you?’

Watching the school empty of children was better, I thought, than picking at the black insects she believed clung to her skin and burrowed into her flesh. This had begun, she claimed, two years ago. She insisted she could feel and see them and became angry when Brian and I, visiting prior to our separation, said we couldn’t see them. My father agreed with her – something was burrowing into her skin, although they didn’t affect him. He took her to see their doctor—the one place she would leave home for—to have the infestation examined. Despite her protests that the pain was like a hot needle piercing her flesh, the doctor found nothing. Undaunted, she insisted; mesmerised by the misery of it she began to dig into her flesh, claiming that she had to grab and hold the black speck then root it out of her skin before it could lay any eggs. Her finger nails were still strong and sharp and after several months her arms and legs were covered in sores.

Astrologically, on the 12th December 1970, the Sun was in Sagittarius, a period characterised as jovial, pleasant and easy going, but it can also be materialistic, selfish and hypocritical. An emotionally restless, excitable, nervous and verbose Gemini Moon, the symbol of motherhood, was opposite Neptune rendering it confused and prey to deception. The Moon and Neptune form a Yod or arrowhead—renowned among astrologers as a symbol of fate—with a sin-drenched, seductive and occasionally cruel Venus in Scorpio, and a controlling, pessimistic, humourless Mercury in Capricorn. (Pass another mince pie, please.)

Instead of being grateful for his care my mother resented my father’s efforts to cook for her. Her kitchen, she said, had been stolen.

‘He buys knives, bowls and spoons from the shop where beautiful young women smile at him. He flirts with them. At his age! He tells them what a hero he is, how he looks after his wife, and does all the cooking.’

I admit my father used to arrive home haloed with fresh young smiles granted to him by those girls. For a week or two, he’d use the expensive peelers, juicers or whisks he had purchased, and then they’d be caught in the fervent arms of the discarded utensils at the back of the cupboard where they lay, unused, for months.

‘I never had those nice things,’ said my mother. ‘I didn’t deserve them. I have to wait here, alone in my bed while he goes shopping and these things,’ she gestured to her arms, ‘embed themselves in my arms and legs. No one smiles at me while I battle this horror.’

My father’s health worsened. His only social contact was talking to his sister or me on the phone. His breath became laboured but he refused to admit he had trouble breathing or that he struggled to care for my mother. I think he knew she should go into residential care, but could never broach the topic.

Astrology, photography and memory try to hostage time, to trap moments and pin them to a page. But time always escapes: it moves too slowly and too fast; it is created from moments that must be forgotten and should be remembered.

Another frozen moment; another consequence of remembering and forgetting; another photograph. Taken in the early 90s, it portrays Brian, facing square to the camera but with his shoulders and face turned toward me. His arms are around my waist, his fingers locked together on my right hip. He wears dark shoes, cream moleskins, a long-sleeved blue skivvy and his Akubra hat. Although I am slightly turned away from him and the camera, my right shoulder rests against his left shoulder. My right arm is around his back and my left arm hangs to my side. It looks like I’m holding a key in my left hand. I’m wearing sneakers, blue jeans and a red short-sleeved tee shirt. We both have a silver chain around our necks. My face is

turned to his, my left foot is oriented to the left of the photo, but my right knee is bent and my sneakered right foot points to the ground. We appear to have been walking toward the photographer but have stopped and turned, me slightly, he more so, to pose. We seem about to kiss. We probably did kiss and, although the upper part of my face is under the shadow of his hat, my kiss looks relaxed. His, on the other hand, looks stilted. He seems to be straining his lips toward me, as if he will come only so far. To complete the kiss I must cross the distance between us. His eyes can't be seen because of the shadow cast by the Akubra. To the right of us is an odd, singularly shaped stain on the earth; our merged shadow, reaching out of frame.

The position of my feet makes it appear that I'm about to step past him and head west toward the setting sun. He has caught me in a last embrace. He holds me but, although I look relaxed, I don't look still. He stands firmly on a sandy patch of ground and has momentarily arrested my progress, but it is too late; I have already moved on.

In my memory, December 12 1970 was a Friday. It was hot and the sky was cloudless.

My parents fought almost every night, bitter, crazy fights my father recorded one evening on his portable cassette player. I could listen to only three minutes of it. The child I once was had heard it all before. One night, after hours of argument, my mother grabbed the car keys. Despite spending the last four years sitting in a chair or lying in bed she was able to unlock the back door and wheeze her way into the back yard where the car was parked. My father followed her and told me later they performed a slow dodging dance around the rainwater tank—him on one side, her, darting left and right—on the other.

'I wasn't fast enough to catch her,' he said while I wondered if *fast* was the correct word given their physical conditions but I said nothing.

'I pretended to give up and walk back into the house but then she dashed for the car.

I saw her and tried to catch her but, God, she is still quick when she wants to be.' My mother climbed in the car, locked the door and started the engine.

'The window was down, so, as she was backing out of the yard, I tried to grab the keys and then the steering wheel. The car bumped me sideways and I fell. The bloody driver side tyre rolled over my leg. She peered out the window at me, backed out the drive and was gone. She didn't have her oxygen.'

My father lay on the ground for a while. It was lucky my mother hadn't driven over the leg he broke months earlier, a leg that had just healed. Eventually he crawled back into the house and phoned his neighbour who called an ambulance. My mother returned just after the ambulance arrived and was persuaded to relinquish the keys to the car although she denied driving over my father.

'Why are you taking him to hospital?' she demanded. 'There's nothing wrong with him.' Angered by the presence of the ambulance officers and the neighbours my mother bolted, again without her oxygen, into the night. The ambulance officers phoned the police and took my father to hospital. After several hours a policeman found her sitting in a neighbour's back yard and she, too, was taken to hospital. My father's doctor confirmed the bruises, that clearly resembled tyre tracks, were the result of a car tyre rolling over his leg. My mother continued to vehemently deny she had anything to do with the injuries. The doctor put a detention order on my mother, pending psychiatric assessment, and she was incarcerated in a facility for the aged with mental health problems for at least three weeks.

Once out of hospital my father travelled for ninety minutes each way to visit her. They both talked to the attending psychologists, who listened as my parents insisted their fifty-five-year marriage was sound; no, she didn't deliberately intend to hurt my father, if he was hurt. It was all a misunderstanding.

I visited my mother the day after she was admitted. She was sitting in a large recreational area and spotted me coming down the hallway. She reached into her bra, withdrew a folded piece of paper, spread it open and handed the breast-warm paper to me. It was a list of patient rights.

'You can challenge this, this ... order,' she said. 'A family member can challenge a

detention order. I have to get out of this terrible place.'

I read the paper and looked back at her.

'Of all people, I don't belong here,' she continued. 'I have to go home and take care of my husband.' I explained I couldn't help her and received the 'look' my mother reserved for Daughters Who Are Cold Hearted and Don't Care.

'I'll bet you're glad I'm here,' she said, and began to weep.

A bright-eyed possum of a woman sat next my mother quietly observing our exchange.

'I'm your mother's best friend,' she said to me before turning to my mother. 'Shush dear, don't cry, you mustn't get upset. I was bought here by the police too. If the nurses see you crying they never let you out.'

My mother stopped crying and, with Possum holding my mother's hand and listening keenly, my mother and I chatted about the weather and the food she had been served during her short stay. As I took my leave I said to Possum, 'You two will have some stories to tell each other tonight.'

'Oh, no,' Possum replied, 'I won't *tell* anyone anything. When I get out of here I'll *write* it all down. I'm a writer.'

Of course, I thought. There is always a writer. I smiled at Possum, kissed my mother goodbye and headed for the door. One of the staff intercepted me on my way out. My mother, in the first thirty-six hours of residence, had already tried to abscond. I thanked the care giver and wished her luck. As I walked to my car I imagined my mother and Possum sneaking out together at midnight, causing havoc in the local neighbourhood. It was, I thought grimly, like *Girl, Interrupted* with walking frames.

My father moved into residential care in November 2009. I cleaned their home, throwing my mother's unfinished projects, tangled, unusable wool and embroidery threads into the rubbish, saving only a little thread for the day when I might take up a

needle and follow my mother into old age. I sold her quilting books and magazines and her sewing machine. It was over fifty years old and still worked although it bore the scars of a thousand pins and needles that clawed and scratched their way across its surface. The bobbin and sewing foot were still as bright and polished as when I was a child. I also discarded half used spools of threads, blunt needles, elastic that had rotted, unravelled bias tape, hooks, eyes, press studs, buttons, safety pins and new but never inserted zippers.

There was an early heatwave that November: I emptied rooms smelling of decay and mouse turds; opened windows that had been shut for years, to an unforgiving hot north wind that baked the smell of age into my skin; sorted through the rubble of two lives. In the kitchen cupboards I found enough glasses to stock a small bar or bistro. My father had several sets of knives, each set supposedly better that the other. Every day I had to decide: keep or sell a set of glasses; pack a dress for my mother or put it in the bag for charity; take home a book or give it to a neighbour? I sold some of the knives, the rest I wrapped in a tea towel and threw in the garbage. In the pantry, four deep shelves simmered with ancient jars of spices, herbs, sauces and a jar of the last batch of jam my mother made. It was rock hard and the finely sliced slivers of oranges and grapefruit were clouded and greying. I hired one domestic rubbish skip, filled it and was forced to hire a second. Late one night I furtively deposited nine jumbo sized garbage bags of clothes at the back of the local Salvation Army and drove away, guilt and relief trailing me.

I sat in my psychologist's office and complained about a recent a phone call from my father. 'He hasn't grasped the fact she has dementia,' I said. 'I think it's because she's always been ...,' my mother would have been distressed if she knew I was talking to a psychologist about her, '... difficult and I don't think he can tell the difference between her bitchiness and the dementia.'

The psychologist was a tall woman who wore open-toed brown leather sandals, plain skirts and a tee shirt or a blouse featuring unusual patterns. She always sat opposite me, pen in hand, notebook on her lap, my thick file on a table next to her.

‘Ok,’ she said, ‘their relationship sounds ... toxic,’ she watched me calmly, ‘but do you have the right to change it? Their behaviour, the way your mother treats your father, her ... problems ... none of it is ... your fault. It sounds as if your father is inured to the constant conflicts between them, to your mother’s verbal abuse, to the way she exaggerates everything, how she sees hurt and insult in every comment. You say this pattern has gone on since before you were born. Your father might not like it, but he’s no longer able to prevent it. You can make a different choice.’

‘You’re letting your hair grow,’ my mother said. My father, mother and I are sitting in my mother’s room. My father’s room is in another wing of the facility.

‘Yes, Mum.’

‘You seem to like that spiky, messy style everyone has.’

‘I guess it’s the way it’s been cut,’ I reply, ‘and I haven’t had time to blow dry it this morning.’

‘You’ve lost weight though. That’s good, you look better.’

My father and I start talking about the cricket. I feel guilty that we’re chatting about something she remembers nothing of, but want to provide some relief for him.

‘There was another big party here last night. Too much noise. In that big room, next to … next … there, over there.’ My mother points, her bony hand flutters, her fingers only just remembering which direction they want to indicate, toward the hallway just outside her door.

‘I didn’t hear of any party,’ says my father. She looks as if she wants to rebuke him, but her lambast is erased before she opens her mouth. She looks back at me.

‘What’s that you’re wearing? Did you make it?’ This is the fourth time in ten minutes she has asked me this question. Before I can reply, my father says, ‘We’re having roast beef and vegetables for dinner today, love.’ She looks from me to him then, briefly, out the window.

‘How are we going to pay for that?’

‘We don’t have to pay,’ my father says. There’s irritation in his voice. I shake my head slightly, hoping he’ll notice. It will only make things worse if he shows his frustration.

‘Why not?’ Too late. She’s glaring at him,

‘Because we live here now, darling. And our meals are paid for in the fees.’

‘Where’s my room, then?’

He sighs. ‘Here. This is your room, See, here’s your bed, your television and here’s ...’

‘Then where’s your bed?’

A louder sigh. I’m ten years old and desperate to stave off the inevitable.

‘I’ve just met a lovely man,’ I say.

‘Who?’

‘His name is Patrick.’

‘What does he do?’

‘He’s an actor.’ My mother turns back to my father.

‘Where are you staying?’

‘I’ve told you, darling. I have my own room but I live here now, like you. I’ve been here two weeks. We both live here. My room is in another wing. I come and see you every day, remember?’

‘No you don’t. You never visit me, I’m alone here all day, no one visits, you don’t care, why would you care?’

My psychologist waited while I pondered the choices other people have made and their effect on my life. I remember something from my childhood about making choices, but it eludes me.

'While I was married,' I finally said, 'I made choices based on what Brian thought was right. That meant, usually, that he was right and I was wrong. When I was a child my parents told me I had only one choice: do the right thing. Is there,' I stopped and looked at the psychologist. 'Is there a third way?'

I recently consulted my ephemeris, a list of the geocentric positions of the Sun, the Moon and the planets for every day of the 20th century. I find 1970 then flick through the tissue thin pages until I come to December. I run my finger down the line of dates. December 12th was a Saturday, not, as I have always believed, a Friday.

Perspective

> ‘I had also realized that novels, short stories and tales are not divorced from life but that they are, in their own way, expressions of it.’

I climbed the stairs and found one large room with windows looking out onto the forest. Three beds were lined up along one wall. It’s a story teller’s lie that I tested all three. I’m not that foolish; I’d learnt something by then. Big is severe, hard, hot and daunting; middle is cool, soft, maternal; small is a beginning, a foundation on which to build.

I don’t think anyone has wondered why, on that late morning, I was relaxed and comfortable enough to fall asleep in a strange bed in a strange house. Maybe I was asserting my rights and myself; the very young and very old, unlike those caught between those two extremes, are more certain of what is theirs. Nor did I think I’d done anything wrong. The door wasn’t locked, the food was waiting on the table and the small chair was going to break anyway. My breaking it was unintentional. I climbed the stairs to find a place to rest and wait. Sleep, and the dreams that accompanied it, came after I had reviewed my morning’s adventure. I thought, as I drifted into sleep, about perspective, the unique way we experience the world, the influence we have on those about us, how we shape our world while the world is busy moulding us. I wondered, turning from my left to my right side, if we choose according to our desires or if our decisions are based on the circumstances in which we find ourselves? Even astrologers argue about this. Some say character is destiny; others that destiny is written, still others aver that we control our own destiny.

Take, for instance, Janet’s astigmatism. The rays of light emanating from whatever Janet looked at failed, in her case, to converge to a single focal point. In common parlance this was once called a ‘turned eye’. Although not a major problem, it meant Janet, or in this case Janet’s eyesight, wasn’t perfect, something her anxious mother knew because of the way her baby looked askance at her. Gloria took Janet to the doctor who had saved Gloria’s life when Janet was born. He confirmed Gloria’s fears and referred Janet to an eye specialist. Magical drops were prepared and decanted into a small brown bottle with a glass dropper topped with a rubber teat and Gloria learned to lay her ten month old baby on her back while someone held the baby’s head. Gloria waited until Janet’s unfixed gaze swept by Gloria who quickly

dispensed the magic drops. The baby kicked her legs, twisted her body away from her mother and, once the drops were dispensed, blinked and tried to rub her eyes with pudgy fists that her mother held at the baby's side until, after a few moments, Janet became accustomed to the viscous fluid and her blurred vision.

The optometrist also taught Gloria a series of eye exercises, the other treatment for Janet's ophthalmic imperfection. This involved encouraging the baby to move her eyes from side to side, then up and down and around and around in a circular eyeball dance. Gloria practised these exercises diligently, waving her forefinger at Janet until both mother and baby wearied. Once she grew out of babyhood Janet understood a turned eye made her different from other children. This was most apparent at bedtime when Janet wanted to stay with her parents in the warm lounge room and read. Instead, she was told she was tired and had to go to bed.

'I'm not tired,' said Janet, her eyes fixed on her book.

'Yes, you are,' replied Gloria. 'Your eye is turned. No more reading. Go to bed and go to sleep.'

Janet kissed her parents goodnight, climbed into her bed and thought about her turned eye. Did it turn into something or did it turn around, as Janet did when she tried to look at the bow her mother tied at the back of her dress? Did having a turned eye mean she could look in the mirror and see her inside self? Janet fell asleep thinking about the morning and what she would see when she looked in the mirror.

When she awoke she got out of bed and stood, like the witch in Snow White, before her bedroom mirror. Janet wasn't concerned with being the fairest of them all, she wanted to see if her eye was turned enough to let her see her inside self. But it wasn't to be. The mirror showed only the familiar, tall, and solemn outside Janet.

Janet grew into a young woman who often felt her turned eye had become a tired eye. Eventually, when she was nineteen, she visited the optometrist, the same one her mother consulted when Janet was a baby, only this time Janet went alone. The optometrist was gnarled, garrulous, in his fifties and remembered Janet and her beautiful mother. He saw what Janet didn't see, the daughter was as lovely as the mother. He looked down at Janet's long, shapely legs barely covered by the mini

skirt she wore, told Janet she had beautiful legs and patted her bare knee to emphasise the compliment. Then he said that Janet would wear reading spectacles until the end of her days. Janet wondered if she imagined the compliment and was grateful the spectacles were only for reading.

Janet had the glasses made and fitted and her grades at teachers' college improved but by her mid-thirties she started having trouble reading street names when driving. Not only was her short vision impaired so was her long vision. She was advised to try bifocal lenses in order to remain friends with both long distance words and the close ones. Janet no longer visited the optometrist of her childhood so she made an appointment with an optician located in her local shopping centre.

'Bifocal lenses take some getting used to,' said the new optometrist, a young, prematurely bald man who looked at Janet intently but didn't mention her legs.

'My husband has them,' Janet replied, 'I think it took him several days to ...'

'Bifocal lenses take some getting used to,' said the assistant who helped Janet choose the spectacle frames.

'Mm,' said Janet, peering at herself through a pair of pale pink plastic frames that, although too large for her face, were very chic. Janet sat on a chair while the assistant, who wore pale blue eye shadow and a short blue skirt topped with a white shirt stretched tightly over her breasts, measured Janet's eyes, noting where her eyeball was when she looked straight ahead and how broad the bridge of Janet's nose was. She recorded these details in a script known only to those who dealt with the mysteries of seeing.

The prescription was filled, the glasses were forged and Janet went to collect her new bifocal spectacles. The Rock accompanied her.

The optician's assistant greeted them warmly, opened a drawer, searched for a package with Janet's name on it and delicately drew out the new spectacles. She coaxed the wings open and placed the glasses on Janet's face. The world became an indefinable wrong; Janet's turned eye did not like the new glasses.

'There's something wrong with them,' said Janet.

‘Bifocal lenses take time to get used to,’ said the assistant, as if her life’s work was to repeat a phrase often enough to make it true. ‘How do you like them?’ she added.

Janet turned to the wall of mirrors behind her. She still couldn’t see her inside self and her older, dark haired and solemn outside self was suddenly less well defined.

‘I’m not sure,’ she said.

Brian sighed. Janet stared at outside Janet. The pink frames with the pale lavender highlights on the wings were pretty, but Janet’s face, peering back at Janet, was perplexed.

The assistant thrust a card, with large print at the top and minute print at the bottom, into Janet’s hands. Using a long forefinger tipped with a glossy pink nail she directed Janet to the second from last paragraph and said, ‘You can read that okay.’

Janet looked at the card. None of the words made sense to Janet. She could see them, she could read them but something about how she saw them bothered her. For the first time in Janet’s memory the printed word was mocking her.

‘I can read them but something’s not right, it feels …’

‘Are you looking through the reading part of the bifocals?’ asked the assistant, ‘you need to look down through the lower part of the glasses to read, and then up for distances. You’ll get used to it,’ she said, ‘it takes a little time.’ If it had been me trying to see through those bifocals I would have cursed them all—the optometrist, his assistant and The Rock—at this point. Janet just sighed.

‘I think there might be something wrong with the glasses,’ she said.

‘It took me time to get used to them,’ said The Rock. How could Janet be so unaware? These people were repeating themselves. Why didn’t she say something instead of gazing around the room, up at her husband and back down at the unruly words?

‘Give yourself a couple of days to adjust to them,’ said the assistant. Janet paid for the glasses and she and The Rock left the shop.

‘There is something wrong with these glasses,’ she said to The Rock as they walked to the car.

‘You look fine in them,’ he replied.

‘No, I mean there is something wrong with the prescription.’

‘It takes time to get used to them. I thought mine were strange at first.’

Janet stumbled over a bump in the pavement. ‘Here, old lady in bifocals, take my arm and I’ll guide you across the street.’ The Rock was enjoying himself.

Janet persevered with the bifocals, but wearing them made both her eyes ache. Three nights after collecting them from the optometrists, she lay in bed, trying to read, something she’d done all her life but was now finding a chore.

I waited.

Words that normally flowed past Janet’s eyes like leaves on a fast running stream lumbered across the horizon of her brain like mammoths on an afternoon stroll.

I took a deep breath.

Janet took off her new glasses and rested her hands on the open book. She looked around the room then down at the spectacles in her hand. The top part of the lens rested on the book and Janet, glancing down, could see the words clearly. She brought both the book and the glasses up to her left eye, closed her right eye and looked at the print through the upper, supposedly distance, section of the lens of the left hand side of the spectacles.

I held my breath.

The words on the page sprang into action, cheering, whooping and welcoming her back. She looked at the same words through the ‘reading’ part of the lens and the words became dead bodies lined up on a dry page. Janet repeated this action with her right eye, then again with her left. She turned the glasses upside down and looked at the words.

‘There is something wrong with these glasses,’ she announced.

I breathed again.

The Rock barely looked up from his book.

‘It’s only been three days, you’ll get used to them.’

Janet had worked hard since marrying The Rock. She lived, with mixed portions of patience and rage, with a man who liked being right and having his own way. Marriage and motherhood, Janet believed, had scoured her heart with anger and soured her tongue with sarcasm. I think her forbearance was stupefying. Janet had persevered with the glasses for three days even though she knew, the moment the assistant placed them on her nose, there was something wrong with them. The spectacle gymnastics she’d just performed proved she was right.

Janet patiently demonstrated to The Rock that the lens for distance vision was where the lens for close reading ought to be and vice versa. The Rock took the glasses from Janet’s hand and applied the same manoeuvres.

‘Mm, something odd is going on there,’ he finally said neglecting, typically, to add that Janet was right and he should have listened to her.

I held my breath again.

Ever since Gloria waved her forefinger at the infant Janet, ever since Janet was told she had a turned eye, she’d been coerced into believing her way of seeing, her perceptions, were wrong. There were many reasons why it was safer for Janet to change her perceptions to match those of the people around her, but it meant Janet never became lost in the woods. Janet had never opened unanswered doors and explored what lay beyond them, nor had she helped herself to whatever was available. How can a woman find her just right when she denies herself those experiences? How can she see her inside self? That night, lying in her marriage bed, ‘inside Janet’ had every right to express her frustration. Instead, she folded away the faulty spectacles, turned off the bedside lamp and closed her eyes, the one that turned and the one that remained straight.

Janet had always believed, in the way confused and lost children do, that her inside self was angry and this angry self longed to shout angry inside voice things to Gloria,

Warren and, later, to The Rock. When she did shout those things she was punished. ‘How dare you talk like that,’ her mother said. ‘No one will love you when you behave like that. That’s not proper behaviour for a girl.’ Janet tried to stop inside voice from shouting but she’d often fail; inside voice spewed horrible, cruel words to the people she loved and if she said inside voice things to her children, she hated herself and wished she was dead.

That night she lay in her bed and silently thanked the optometrists for the mistake they made with her bifocals. She had allowed other people to tell her what to see and how to see it. The reversed lens spectacles were a door for Janet to open but only in her journals did Janet practise self-determination. Personal writing had become a way to create herself and a form of self-recognition. Her journal accepted her inside voice but it trapped her in a labyrinth of self-pity.

Janet had learned to believe the evidence of her own eyes but could she act on that evidence? She had often approached, but never reached, the monster at the centre of writing; the fear and ecstasy that is art. Did she have the courage to close her chosen journal, to speak from a different space, a third place, with an entirely different voice?

Inchoate

The entire school population walks down the long hallway toward the activities room. I'm alone in the room, standing by the door, which has glass in the top half. I can see the long line of children walking toward me. To my right, next to the door sits a stock pot of soup and about fifty soup bowls and spoons arranged on a picnic table. The sound of over three hundred children making their chattering, lively way toward the activity room grows. I peer into the pot.

I conceived in the first year of my marriage but twelve weeks into my pregnancy I miscarried. It was during a hot January in Whyalla. My foetus didn't abort naturally; I held it, not knowing it had died, in my womb until our dog, playing a game it often played, ran at me from behind and knocked me to my knees. The next day there was a little blood and I phoned my doctor. He said to come to the surgery but was sure there was nothing to worry about; sometimes a show of blood was normal. The next day I was admitted to hospital for a dilation and curettage, my second 'D and C' in five years.

Several days after the D and C, Brian and I argued. It wasn't our first argument and it wouldn't be the last. The doctor had prescribed Valium to help me sleep but Brian hated drugs and eschewed medication unless absolutely necessary. He believed my grief and the tardiness of my recovery was indulgent. He reminded me that he suspected he was asthmatic when he was little.

'I wheezed my way through several winters but Mum never took me to a doctor,' he said, 'she bundled me in one of the hand knitted jumpers she made, wrapped me in a coat and scarf, put a cap on my head and propelled me out the back door.'

I pictured this little boy, my future husband, sitting on a wooden bench in the cold, his spine pressed against the back wall of his house, staring at the canaries his mother kept in an aviary just outside their back door. Adelaide winters are generally mild but sudden blasts of cold can seep into one's bones. That stoic little boy had become a man for whom being ill was a weakness. He wore shorts and a tee shirt all year round, ignored signs of fatigue or pain sent by his body, got on with life and didn't

understand why I mourned my lost pregnancy. I looked physically well, my health was restored; my mental anguish was foolish. I don't recall why or how, but during the argument we ended up in our Holden Kingswood. Perhaps Brian suggested we should go for a drive to cool down, maybe we had an appointment, but once in the car he uncharacteristically pulled out of the drive at speed and headed along Cudmore Terrace, onto Broadbent Avenue and south, out of Whyalla, along Lincoln Highway. He was a competent and normally cautious driver, but as we continued arguing, as the salt bush and stunted eucalyptus sped past us and Whyalla faded behind us into the surrounding low hills, I was filled with dread. The car's motion made me ill. I wanted to go home and sit in my lounge, a room I helped to paint, a room we'd chosen the curtains for together, a room I dusted every weekend, a room where we'd entertained our friends, and where, at the end of each school day, I'd sit and read a book. Brian wasn't shouting at me or being verbally abusive; he never behaved like that. I was probably panicked unnecessarily. He was probably driving slower than I thought but I started to cry.

I peer into the stock pot; the soup consists of a thin broth and a few grey pieces of an unidentifiable vegetable floating on the surface. I look again through the door and into the hallway and watch as pairs of children come closer to the room. I look from the children back to the pot of soup and then to the pile of soup bowls next to the stock pot. I pick up three of the bowls and set them out on the small table. Even though I know there is not enough soup and not enough bowls I hurry, trying to set the bowls out before the children enter the room. They are getting closer, their little feet scraping along the linoleum, their voices low but urgent. There are too many children and not enough soup but in the dream I try to calculate how each child can have one bowl of soup.

'If I calm down,' I said between my sobs, 'if I do that, if you take me home, I'll do whatever you want. I'll calm down, I promise. You're right; it is time to cheer up. Classes will start soon, we'll be back teaching in two weeks. I'll cook dinner if you'll only turn the car around and drive home. I'll cook us a lovely meal tonight and

tomorrow morning I'll get out of bed early and clean the house. It's been a long time since the floors have seen the vacuum cleaner or a mop. No, there is no need for me to take the Valium.'

Brian turned the car around and we headed back towards Whyalla. I sat in the passenger seat silently watching the sun set. Brian was right, of course. I would conceive again, it was only a miscarriage. Brian was a kind, stable, steady man, a good provider. He loved me and I was safe with him. Yes, he had been driving at speed, yes he berated me, but his voice was low and his tone, while insistent, was gentle and his words reasonable. I was shaking but I was alright, Brian was my rock, he helped me see sense, he wouldn't manipulate me, he'd guide me, he'd care for me.

I dream I am pregnant again. It is a familiar dream. I place my hand on my rounded stomach, feeling the child move. I easily give birth to a perfectly formed baby, not much bigger than my hand. It is extraordinarily intelligent and, immediately after its birth, can conduct long philosophical and political conversations with me but it is underweight and barely moves. Occasionally I find this uncomplaining infant in a shoebox at the bottom of a grandfather clock.

I started writing a journal on the 28th November, 1971. I had a notebook I'd bought for my lectures at teacher's college, but I'd only used a couple of pages. I ripped those out and started to write, hoping I could, like the storytellers who created Goldilocks, manipulate reality. Or maybe I merely wanted to exaggerate or obscure the facts of my life? Perhaps I wanted to reveal what had been secreted within the elaborate embroideries of language? Whatever my reasons, I had no idea what to do to become a writer. Because fiction seemed beyond me I tried writing the truth, my truth. I recorded my experience of the world and my reactions to those experiences. Writing what I thought and felt eased the feelings churning inside me. If I did wonder how to develop characters or create a plot, I wondered alone. I had no mentors to help untangle my inchoate feelings and turn them into story. No one

acknowledged or encouraged my fledgling writing skills and so I didn't share my writing and no one shared the mysteries and delights of redrafting and editing with me. I stumbled through the pages of my journal on my own, knowing only that it was important to conceal my journal. This didn't deter my mother. She knew the power of words and what they revealed and concealed. She could wrinkle words from any hiding place. She found my journal and both she and my father read it. What they found there, they told me, was filthy.

I retrieve my precocious baby from its shoe box and rock it to sleep, then turn to another task. Hours later I remember the baby, but I've travelled miles away from where I left it. I climb onto buses that take the wrong route, one that leads me away from my child. I make frantic phone calls but the connection is poor, or I incessantly dial the wrong number. It's hours or sometimes days before I have to accept that I've lost my intelligent, articulate infant. If I do manage to find it, the baby has shrivelled. It resembles an apple core left to dry in the heat. I wake to these dreams as one waking to a bequest of ongoing grief.

Brian, I convinced myself, was my just right but I nevertheless continued to write in my journal. The growing collection of tattered notebooks were usually banished to suitcases or sent to the back of my wardrobe where they ruminated on rebellion then sighed, rolled over, flattened themselves and gave in. In the late 80s, in a fit of self-righteous anger and declaration of his rights, Brian, like his mother-in-law before him, searched for and read my journal. What he read angered him, not because he thought it was filthy but because he thought it was disloyal. He finished reading it and flung it back to me across our bed. I took the offending and offended notebook into the back yard, knelt on the lawn, and with the children hovering by the back door, I tried to burn my journal. The paper wouldn't catch; it refused my self-abnegation, allowing only a brief blue flame that died before it lived. I took the matches and the journal back into the house and put the children to bed. Brian opened a bottle of wine.

I’m at a party with a group of people. Some are friends, some are unfamiliar to me and many of them seem younger than I am. They wear brightly coloured clothes, are relaxed, friendly and clever. We sit together in a circle, laughing, talking and sharing food and drinks. Someone plays a guitar but I don’t recognise the tune. I sit and listen, gazing around the room at the happy faces. I notice a young man, a stranger, watching me. He has a gracious, shy smile and a peaceful demeanour. I wonder why I haven’t noticed him before. He’s very beautiful.

The first thing that I packed when my marriage ended was my journals: chronicles of my life, receptacles of my fury and longing. I placed them on the bookshelves in my eyrie overlooking the sea. While I lived there, those infuriating journals, the blessing and scourge of my writing life, stared down at me from their shelves. They’re a dishevelled lot, my opus, but perhaps they saved my life.

The young man and I move around the room, watching each other, smiling. Eventually we sit together in a corner of the room. The party continues around us as we talk. It’s obvious we’re attracted to each other but just as I realise I must tell him how I feel, how much I love him, the dream scene shifts. The young man is gone and I’m sad we didn’t acknowledge what we felt.

In the autumn of 1996, just as our marriage enters its death throes, Brian and I moved our family from Salisbury to Seacliff. We hoped relocating our marriage to the seaside would soothe its aching discontent and for a time, it did. Brian and I walked along the beach together every morning. Some mornings, the warm, still ones, we saw a woman in a floral bathing cap and a thick white dressing gown, walking towards the water. She needed two strong walking sticks and her gait was slow and measured. When she was within fifteen metres of the water’s edge she let the

walking sticks fall then dropped her dressing gown from her shoulders, revealing limbs like weathered driftwood. Under the gown she wore a pale green bathing suit that clung to her emaciated frame like the over ripe skin of an apple. The woman's husband, following two paces behind, retrieved her gown and the walking sticks. He handed the sticks back to her then waited while she picked a path through the beach detritus. She stopped five paces from the water's edge and, using the sticks for support, lowered herself to the sand. Ignoring the joggers and beach walkers averting their gaze from the marathon taking place before them, she crawled on her hands and knees into the water.

In the way of dreams, the beautiful young man returns as suddenly as he left. He walks up to me and we face each other, saying nothing. Then he takes me into his arms. Although he's slender and fine boned, his embrace is the strongest I've experienced. We kiss and then I wake, the kiss still warm on my lips. The space in the bed alongside me is empty. From the kitchen I can hear the morning noises of three children and a husband. I stay in bed, willing myself back to sleep, longing to recapture that embrace.

The woman's husband, planted against the rising sun, watched as she rested briefly, letting the waves lap at her chin and caress her shanks. Then she crawled further into the cool embrace of the water, lowered her head, spread her arms and legs out and floated. After another brief lull, she started to swim, her bony elbows flashing in the sun as she lifted first one arm, then the other, in long, sure, blissful strokes. After a few minutes she swam back to shore, retraced her long crawl across the sand, retrieved her sticks, climbed along their length until she was upright and took several slow steps to the proffered bath gown.

The woman's daily routine helped me decide it was never too late to have what I wanted. Several months later I enrolled in a creative writing degree at my local university. Three years later, and thirty-two years and six months after I married Brian, I told my children I was leaving their father, my rock, my steady, stable,

loving husband.

Several weeks before our marriage ended, I dreamt Brian and I were back in Whyalla, where we met and purchased our first home. It was evening and the gulf waters were smooth and still. Just up from the shore were the gardens where I'd once hoped we could be married. The darkening sky was already dotted with light when Brian suddenly stopped and, as was his habit, pointed wordlessly to something that had caught his attention. It was a bright light; unfamiliar and almost as large as the moon. Brian commented on how large and bright it was. I look up and agreed.

'Yes, it is bright but it's not the moon. It isn't a star either, it's moving too fast.'

A week after my separation, a man I called Bear—he reminded me of Edward Bear Esq., my childhood companion—became my lover. The first day I took him into my arms was cold. A fierce wind knocked trees over and blew rubbish bins along the footpaths. We found refuge from the gales and did what we needed to do to keep warm and safe. Bear was tall, red haired and flooded my senses with his broad-shouldered, pale body and the thick pelt of hair that adorned his broad back. I never thought I would desire such a hirsute beast, but I did. I'd wake at night and long to feel his paw on my breast and his bear-like breath against my ear.

There was only one problem with Bear; he shared his cave with Mother Bear and their two adolescent cubs. I was intrigued and ashamed by my new status as a mistress. Bear was unconcerned by our arrangement; he was a serial adulterer with no intention of permanently leaving his cave. He reasoned we had similar unfulfilled needs and merely helped each other out. Despite myself I began to love him, but only on weekdays when he was free to venture from his cave, amble to my eyrie and romp with me for the afternoon.

Bear was a symbol of what I'd lost. If I cried when he couldn't visit me because Mother Bear and the cubs needed his attention, I was crying for my dead marriage. When I thought Bear was neglecting me it was because I had felt neglected for most

of my life. Bear took the edge off my pain but every few months I'd tell him I didn't want to see him again and to return to his part of the forest and stay there. He did as I asked for several weeks but always found a way to lumber into my eyrie again. He knew stroking his fur distracted and soothed me.

My decree nisi was delivered in the mail on the 12th December 2008. Bear hung around for another twelve months. Then I banished him for good. I was tired of being a mistress and weary of feeling guilty about Mother Bear. More importantly, I wanted to be free again.

As Brian and I gazed up at the sky we realised we were looking at something sinister, something growing brighter and larger because it was falling from the sky. Brian looked around and saw a low wall behind us. He ran behind it, trying to find cover, pulling me along as he went. I knew we would die but I refused to cower or be fearful in the last moments of my life. I stood and watched the light fall. Brian pulled me down again but I stood up, watching the shockwaves from a massive explosion coming towards me. I was fearful but awed by its beauty.

Dreams

> ‘My life would be a beautiful story come true, a story I would make up as I went along.’

No one has asked what I dreamt while asleep in Baby Bear’s bed. It is universally acknowledged that the recitation of one’s dreams is boring, although I’ve found that doesn’t stop either surrealists or filmmakers, and it won’t stop me.

I had two dreams that morning. The first was about a girl who woke just as the fabric of stars was lifted from the earth. While the rest of her family lay dreaming their last dream, this girl, she was aged around twelve years, gently untangled herself from the jumble of arms and legs that belonged to her two sisters and slipped from their shared bed. Dragging a skirt and jumper over her thin nightie she found her shoes and tiptoed along the hallway, timing each step on a creaking floorboard with her father’s snores. She reached the front door, opened it silently, stepped outside, closed the door, sat on the front step and put on her shoes. Only then did she relax into the embrace of the velvety darkness.

She stood and walked down the side of the house to the back yard. The old cow called softly from its enclosure at the far end of the property.

‘I won’t be long,’ she whispered. She stopped at the vegetable patch and tugged on a feathery green tuft. Brushing the soil away she bit into the carrot. It was sweet and cool and tasted gritty. Still nibbling, she reached the back fence. Her father had repaired it several times with off cuts salvaged from the wharf where he worked. She lifted a loose piece of rusted corrugated iron, bent low and clambered through.

Half a mile west lay the Port River and beyond that Gulf St Vincent. The girl headed in that direction. Night birds fluttered past her, heading for their rest. The magpies slumbered on, not yet ready to call the sun to full account. The girl breathed in the cool pre-dawn air and spread her arms out from her side, mimicking the birds. The final traces of warmth from her bed fell away. She loved curling up with her two little sisters at night, but by morning she felt as if she was suffocating in their dreams.

A slight breeze brushed her shoulders and the sharp, salty smell of the sea hung close to her like a shawl. She walked for fifteen minutes then stopped and bent down to a clump of bushes. Droplets of water, a varnish of tiny stars, lay along the thick grey green leaves. Cupping her left hand she collected the condensation with her right hand then brought both hands together and swept the dew over her face, rubbing vigorously.

Behind her the sun was hovering just below the horizon. In the increasing light she checked to see if any bushes had blooms but it was still too early in the season. She occasionally returned from her solitary walks clutching a small bunch of native flowers that she would arrange in a glass jar and place in the centre of the kitchen table. Her father told her she shouldn't go on her morning walks, an order easy to obey during winter, but with spring so near she felt like a moth in a bottle; she needed to be alone if only for a short while.

The girl's face tingled from its dewdrop wash. Back at her house the old rooster was finally awake and the rest of her family would be waking up. It was time to turn home and milk the cow. The girl had noted that her mother's shape had changed again and she needed more help with the little ones, particularly Huw, who had been sick for most of the winter. Gloria loved Huw the way she imagined loving her own baby. Every afternoon after school she'd carry him out to a sunny corner of the yard and read to him. If he was well enough she'd hoist him onto her back, his light frame resting against her spine, legs dangling either side of her waist, arms tight around her neck, and take him through the vegetable patch, with its dark rows of spinach, then to the apple tree to look for early blossoms, on to the cow's pen so he could pat the cow and finally to the chook house where she'd put him down on unsteady feet and help him search for eggs.

The sun was above the horizon now and she had to get home before her father realised she was missing. She felt the dawn and her responsibilities gnawing at her back so she turned and faced east and began to run, leaning her slender body against the morning breeze.

Once inside the fence she collected the bucket and milking stool, put hay in the cow's feeder, sat next to the cow, rubbed her hands together then grasped the teats.

The cow was accustomed to her steady rhythm and confident grip and they both settled into a meditative, productive silence. After several minutes a voice came from the other side of the animal.

‘You’re up early this morning.’ Her father, Val, walked around to the front of the cow and looked down at her.

‘Yes Dad.’ She concentrated on the streams of milk hitting the bottom of the bucket.

‘I didn’t hear you get out of bed.’ He stroked the cow’s nose and looked at her steadily.

‘No, I tried not to wake you,’ she said.

‘What time did you wake up?’ His pale blue eyes narrowed.

‘Only a little while ago.’

The cow moved awkwardly, causing her to squirt milk on her father’s boots. He didn’t move.

‘Did you check on Huw?’

Gloria concentrated on her task. The milk covered the bottom of the bucket now, its surface boiling with each squirt from a teat. She usually checked on Huw as soon as she woke. This morning she had been so eager to leave the house, she had forgotten.

‘No. I thought he might be better, so I let him sleep.’

‘Well he’s worse.’ Her father’s face showed no emotion.

The cow lowed and moved irritably. Gloria reached up and soothed the beast, then resumed the milking.

‘Your Mum and I are going to take him to the hospital and…’

‘Dad, No! You said wouldn’t.’ Gloria stood up clumsily, nearly spilling the bucket of milk. Her father grabbed the rope around the cow’s neck and steadied the beast.

‘Watch it. We need that milk.’

The girl sat down again, burying her head against the side of the cow.

‘We have to take him, his breathing is too shallow and the fever is worse.’

Gloria didn’t look up. ‘They won’t let anyone visit him in hospital,’ she said, ‘he’ll be lonely and frightened.’

‘I’ll make sure those doctors let Mum and me visit, don’t worry about that. Finish the milking and then go and help your mother get him ready.’ His voice softened. ‘You can say goodbye to him then.’

Once the milking was finished Gloria took the bucket into the kitchen and emptied it into the butter churn and the jugs so her brothers could pour some onto their porridge. She poured two glasses of milk for her little sisters, left the glasses on the kitchen table then walked into the hallway and then the boy’s room. Huw lay in his cot in the corner of the room. He was a damp, discarded rag, his white blond hair thick and wet on his forehead, his skin as translucent as the dawn she had just witnessed. He smiled when he saw her and five little fingers appeared from under the covers, fluttering at her playfully.

Her mother came into the room. ‘Help me get his pyjamas off,’ said Bel.

‘Spoilt kid,’ said Gloria to her baby brother, ‘You just act like you’re sick so you get to go on a bus with Mum and Dad. I have to stay here with the brats.’ Huw smiled again but his breath was shallow in the closed, dimly lit room. Val walked in, dressed in his best clothes. He watched as Huw was dressed and swaddled in a scarf, coat and hat then he lifted his youngest son from the bed and held him while Bel put two pairs of socks on Huw’s blue feet and wrapped him in a blanket. Gloria kissed him on the forehead. His skin was hot against her lips.

‘Cool head and warm feet for a fever,’ said Bel.

Huw came home two days later, wrapped in the same blanket. His head was covered and his body cold. Val laid him on the bed where he’d been conceived and backed out of the door.

‘Help me wash him’, said Bel, and started unwrapping the corpse. Death had come

and gone, leaving Huw's body embroidered with the scars and stitches of an autopsy. Gloria picked up a wash cloth and dipped it into the warm soapy water her mother had prepared.

And the second dream? It was about another girl: dark haired, tall, slender and exotic looking. She was older than the girl in the first dream and she had made a mistake; or everyone called it a mistake even though, under completely different circumstances, her mistake would have been called a blessing. In my dream, however, the girl wasn't punished for the blessed mistake, she and the mistake were accepted as a poor choice, not right, but hardly wrong either. And so the mistake, sorry, the poor choice, resulted in the creation of something beautiful because beautiful things are often the result of what are unwisely labelled as mistakes.

The girl was nurtured and sustained and the beautiful creation grew in a container of regard and wonder. When it was born, not only did life go on, it was better than before. That's not to say life was easy, much of life is hard and as the girl soon discovered, nurturing and sustaining a new life is difficult even when there's help and guidance. Nevertheless, the girl and her creation grew strong and healthy and sustained each other.

The girl grew to be a young adult and a dream she'd always had—to write something worthwhile, something her mother would hold and turn over in her hands—started to materialise. Again, it wasn't easy. The woman who was the girl who made a poor choice worked hard. She wrote stories and poems. She began and discarded novels. She attended seminars and parties where she met writers, artists, musicians and actors. She read books and most importantly of all she kept writing. Yes, she wearied and despaired and learnt more each time she failed and soon other people read and enjoyed her stories and celebrated her poems. Eventually she finished her first novel and then she wrote another and another. In between writing she met a man who loved her and gave her the stability she needed to continue writing. He enjoyed her writing and admired her madness and her passion. Best of all, he loved all her choices because he knew the rightness of just right. The three of them became a family—and …

'She's sleeping in my bed,' Baby Bear squealed. I opened my eyes and saw the bears

in their ridiculous clothes. I could smell their furry, wet, wild smell covered by the thin veneer of civilisation. I tried not to laugh, which made me look scared, or guilty, although I didn't feel guilty because I'd made a poor choice, not a mistake. I sat up, breaking the threads of my second dream. The woman-who-wrote disappeared and I remembered my morning: the forest, the cottage, the unlocked door, the bowl of porridge, the broken chair, the stairs, and the bed. Maybe these were a series of poor choices, but then again, where was the Bears' hospitality, their concerns for a lost child, a creature, like but other, to them? I sat there for a moment and the woman-who-wrote reappeared briefly. 'Only one dream,' she said, 'is true. That dream made the other impossible.' Then she was gone.

Leaving the angry bears in my wake, I fled the cottage. As I ran, the woman's words, like startled hawks, took flight, soared away from me and were lost in the burning light of the sun.

Nobody

‘I want this story.’

‘We’ll have this story if you read it to me.’

My fingers slide beneath the words as I read. ‘ … “and here she is …”. Goldilocks is a naughty girl, isn’t she, Mummy? And I’m a good girl?’ My mother doesn’t answer.

I open my eyes to another dream, a dream within a dream. Someone is telling me I should feel guilty, I’m a bad person, a nobody. I’d made a poor choice, yes, a series of poor choices, but I’m not bad.

I lie still for a moment and remember the dream within the dream. A woman appeared. She tried to speak to me but her words, like startled hawks, took flight and soared away. She fails, I fail, every time I try to tell this story because I cannot capture the words.

Janet and her boyfriend made good time that night. The drive through the hills was fast and smooth, which was important because once they reached the outer suburbs the traffic could delay them. It was early evening and the large gums seemed to race towards the car. Just as they looked as if the car was about to shatter against one of the thick trunks, Janet’s boyfriend put his foot on the brake, changed into low gear, turned the wheel and slid past the tree like a sigh. Janet sat close to him her hand on his left thigh. His right arm rested against the open window. Although it was early spring, the air was warm. Janet was about to turn eighteen, her new boyfriend was twenty, in the armed services and proud of the green Holden Kingswood he’d bought two weeks earlier, just before he and Janet met. He was slightly shorter than Janet and had pale blue eyes fringed with colourless lashes, a creamy complexion and fair hair. He walked as if a gun was strapped to each thigh and while Janet didn’t think he was handsome, he was funny and easy to talk to.

On that early spring night they were returning from a visit to his cousin who lived in a country town more than an hour’s drive south of Adelaide. Warren and Gloria didn’t approve of Charlie or these long drives. They insisted Janet arrive home early

but Janet usually explained their late arrival was because of the heavy city traffic. Warren and Gloria said they worried about her. Janet knew they were more concerned with imposing their curfews and knowing where she'd been and what she'd been doing. Once home, Janet shrugged off their remonstrations and headed for her bedroom, shouting over her shoulder that she needed to study.

On the car radio the soft male voice from 'Bread', boisterously accompanied by my boyfriend, was singing 'I want to make it with you'. We'd made good time that night. I could see the city lights when Charlie slowed the car and turned off the main road onto a dirt track. We drove for several minutes then turned right into a stand of eucalyptus set back from the dirt road. They were planted in a horseshoe shape and the lower branches formed a deep, dark bay of green on the side of the road. Charlie nosed the car close to the tree trunks, so we were parked under a leafy bower, and turned off the engine. I wondered if it was luck that we found a place that was private or if he'd searched for somewhere to park while visiting his cousin without me? I could hear the slow cooling clicks of the car's engine as he kissed me.

Janet was compliant; she welcomed Charlie's kisses and let her body melt against his. Their tongues flickered against each other and he slid his hand up under her blouse touching each breast in turn. Her nipples hardened and he whispered something to her. She giggled and returned his kisses, imagining that this is what passion was. They climbed out of the front seat and into the back. After a few moments Charlie's jeans were around his ankles but Janet could neither see nor feel the shape and length of his penis. She was still too reserved to touch or look at a boy that way. She hoped, as he pulled her jeans and underpants off, that he couldn't see between her legs either. At seventeen there's little curiosity about what the different parts look or feel like. Touch is neglected for the more urgent questions of whether the boy will get the sex he wants and, if he does, with the minimum of embarrassment. Janet could feel him pushing his way inside her. He was trying not to be too rough or hurried and, after all, Janet wasn't a virgin, but they hadn't been able to have sex for a week or two and she felt a wash of pain followed by the delicious

giving way as he pushed himself deep inside her. What followed was not the slow dip and withdrawal that she's since experienced with late life lovers who like her, want the pleasure to last, but an adolescent lunge and retreat. He may not have been in a hurry but his hormones were and she had precious little time, so she moved her hips in tune with his movement. His push and release intensified into the final convulsion and he lay still on top of her. He was heavy but she held him tightly, rubbing his back, willing them to melt together in some kind of post coital closeness that Janet imagined they ought to have. After a short while he withdrew and they awkwardly pulled on their jeans. She fastened her bra and buttoned her blouse and they climbed back into the front seat to resume their journey.

Several weeks later Charlie, his cousin Leo and I shared a long spring afternoon doing little except imagining life would always be the same long afternoon of talk, beer and love. Leo was tall with long dark hair that curled around his collar. He had what I called 'bedroom eyes' and a crooked smile. The three of us played pool in the lounge of the country pub where my boyfriend's cousin lived. The boys occasionally went into the main bar, where I was refused entry, to buy beers and talk to the local dairy farmers, men with faces etched by early morning winds who held cigarettes between yellowed fingers and their schooners in hands that had overgrown knuckles and scars from mishaps with barbed wire fences. The farmers watched the television above the bar, brushing away the flies and occasionally buying a shandy and a packet of potato chips for their wives who sat in the family station wagon parked at the front of the hotel. I might have chafed at not being allowed into the front bar, but I viewed these women, sitting all afternoon knitting and gossiping to each other, as backward. Most of the time, however, my boyfriend and his cousin stayed with me in the lounge. They talked about cars or we argued about the Vietnam War and I played song after song on the juke box. It was the middle of October, I was eighteen, and studying, able to legally drink alcohol, and in what I thought might be a long term relationship. The weather had become steadily warmer. I wore a short blue skirt and a tight white tee shirt, stockings and new dark blue patent leather shoes with silver heels and a silver buckle. I flirted with Leo, drank beer for beer with them and ate a steak and salad lunch. By late afternoon we'd steadily consumed several schooners

of beer, although I'd slowed down in the last hour. The boys decided they'd teach me to play pool. I bent over the table pretending I didn't see the men coming in from the bar to order a pie and chips so they could look at my legs. The setting sun filled the pub with a golden light making the farmers look like figures from a Tom Robert's painting. Outside, clouds gathered.

'It will be raining by nightfall,' one of the blokes assured us as he stopped to watch me make a shot. 'Nice work,' he said when I potted Charlie's ball.

I reminded my boyfriend we'd have to leave soon so he ordered 'one more for the road.' I punched another set of numbers into the jukebox and waited. Charlie wandered into the front bar, glass in one hand, shaking the farmers' hands in goodbye. He knew most of them from summer holiday visits to Leo's parents. Finally we made our way to the car, the air cool on our faces. Charlie got into the driver's seat, and I took my place beside him. The sun had almost set and a light drizzle made the road look like polished stone. I shivered and leant into Charlie's warmth. Leo stood in the car park and watched us drive off.

Janet turned around and waved to Leo through the car's rear window, admiring his tall athletic frame as it receded into the watery evening light. She liked him. He made her feel as if she was interesting. She turned back and peered out of the side window then leant forward and switched on the radio. They drove for what seemed like only three or four minutes before they came to a large bend in the road. Charlie didn't brake, but took the corner smoothly and they continued gliding into the night on a thin sheen of beer and good feelings. Janet was too giggly and talkative to worry that Charlie might have been driving too fast. She wasn't even aware of their speed so she was surprised when she felt the car rise into the night and saw the horizon tilt, revolve and disappear. Then, suddenly, she felt light and cold. She heard a loud bang somewhere to her right and then silence. She was on her back, blinking up into the misty evening rain. She rolled onto her stomach, climbed onto her hands and knees, looked down at the glass on the road and then up again. Car lights shone in the distance. Understanding, finally, where she was, but unsure how she got there, she started to crawl along the road but her legs and arms splayed out from beneath her.

She felt sick and although the rain was light her knees were wet and her head hurt. Something thick and warm was running into her right eye. She looked up again and saw that the car was close and she panicked. She wasn't sure if she was on the bitumen or the side of the road. The car started to slow down. Janet got up on her hands and knees, lifted one arm and waved hoping whoever was driving could see her.

I'm not sure how long I lay on the side of the road and I don't remember the names of the couple who helped me, but they drove Charlie – who was unhurt but sobbing loudly – and me to a farm house. I heard voices tell Charlie he was all right, he wasn't hurt, and he was going to be okay. No one spoke to me. The car stopped and I was carried into a farmhouse and laid on a cream patterned lounge. I asked for a phone. I wanted to call my parents.

'You'd better wait,' said a male voice, but I stood up and insisted I needed to tell my parents I was alright, that when they found out I'd been in a car accident I wanted them to hear my voice, not a stranger's. I was led to a phone in the kitchen, someone dialled my number and my mother answered. I looked back towards the lounge and saw blood on the lounge and carpet of this neat farmhouse. I wasn't sure I could keep standing, but I had to talk to my mother and make sure she knew I was okay, that I was hurt but walking and talking.

'They are taking me to hospital,' I said, 'but only as a precaution.' My father came on the phone. I told him which hospital they were taking me to and he said they'd be there as soon as they could. An ambulance arrived and we were loaded into it. There was no siren. I was surprised by how well lit the inside of an ambulance was. I wanted to go to sleep, but the light shone in my eyes. As we rocked inside the shiny moving cocoon Charlie started to sob again. I was annoyed; back at the farmhouse I'd overheard someone say he'd only hurt his right ring finger, that it had been cut by the signet ring he wore. My body, on the other hand, was scraped along the entire left side by bitumen, glass, gravel and stones. Over the next few weeks I intermittently birthed pieces of gravel from a multiple open surface wounds. I told Charlie to shut up and I tried to hold the St John's volunteer's hand, but he took his hand away.

Warren and Gloria had arrived at the hospital before the attending doctor and were annoyed they had to wait for him. Gloria stood alongside Janet's bed. Janet could hear Warren's voice, although she couldn't see him. She knew her little brother was with their father and she was frightened for him. Her parents told the nurses Janet should be transferred to a larger hospital in the city, but the nurses said Janet's wounds were superficial.

'It'll be better if she stays put,' one of them said. The doctor arrived, examined Janet and said her nose could be pushed back into shape.

'It's not broken, but bent,' he said, pressing both his thumbs against Janet's nose while a nurse braced Janet's head against the doctor's force. The doctor, nurse and Janet's mother stood back and looked at Janet's nose from different angles, trying to judge if it was straight again. The doctor was irritated by having to attend to a girl silly enough to get into a car with a drunken boy on a Sunday evening. He examined the large cut on her left ankle and decided not to stitch it. The area around Janet's left knee looked like a badly skinned animal. The doctor poured iodine over the area wounds and wrapped them in bandages, he also left the cut above Janet's right eye unstitched. Several weeks later Janet sat in a bath for hours to loosen the bloody, dried skin and iodine and bandages around her knee.

After learning she needed to be kept in the hospital overnight in case she was concussed, Janet was wheeled into another room. She could hear a baby crying. The nurse told Janet they'd just delivered a newborn.

'All new babies protest like that when they're born,' she said, then switched off the light and left the room. The baby's high, excited, triumphant howl comforted Janet.

The next morning my parents returned to the hospital and collected me. I felt dizzy all the way home and braced myself each time we turned a corner. It took me years before I was a confident passenger in a car and I'm still nervous with unfamiliar drivers. I didn't learn to drive until I was a thirty-year-old mother of two, pregnant

with my third child. Throughout my marriage, my anxiety irritated Brian even though he knew about the accident. He couldn't help but know; its message was imprinted on my body.

A day or so later flowers arrived from Charlie. A week later Leo visited me. He told me he'd heard about the accident from someone who'd driven past the scene and saw us being helped into the car that took us to the farm house. Leo guessed it was Charlie and me, and drove to the hospital to sit with Charlie. The nurses wouldn't allow him to see me but while they waited for the doctor in the cubicle next to mine Leo overheard me say I'd lost my watch. After leaving the hospital, he drove to the site of the accident. Using a torch he picked among the broken glass until he'd found it.

Gloria made Leo and Janet a coffee then left them to talk while she worked in the kitchen, making sure the door was ajar. Leo told Janet the car was a wreck. He sounded almost proud when he said Charlie had rolled his Holden three times. Then he glanced at Janet and his tone changed.

'We don't know why or how you were thrown out of the car,' he said, 'but it was bloody lucky you were.' He looked down at the bandages covering Janet's knee.

'The car's passenger side was crushed. If you'd been sitting in the passenger seat, instead of right up close to … or if you'd been wearing a seatbelt, if you hadn't been thrown out of the car … you'd have been killed.'

While I was recuperating my mother cooked my favourite meals; meatballs in tomato sauce, shepherd's pie, and chocolate self saucing pudding. I was young and healed quickly, although for several weeks walking was painful. I sat on the couch reading, worked on an essay that was due in a few weeks' time and watched daytime TV. My little brother bragged to his friends that I was nearly killed in a car crash but when he came home from school, he sat near me, shy and quiet. One day I watched him playing with his toy cars. He let one of them slide too fast around an imaginary

corner and it rolled over and over again, before ending up on its wheels, as shiny and clean as when it started. My boyfriend finally visited me, bringing chocolates and saying he was returning to his base and he'd see me in couple of weeks. My girlfriends phoned and told me to rest, they'd take notes of my classes for me. It took two weeks for me to recuperate but it felt like a month. A month, no; surely it was only two weeks? I thought about the accident, and that other late September night when my boyfriend parked the car under a canopy of eucalyptus. I thought about my boyfriend and me together in the back seat of the now wrecked Holden.

Janet never had a regular 28 day cycle. Hers was around 30 to 32 days followed by nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, sore breasts and cramps that left her doubled in pain. But there'd been none of that for ... how long? Was it three weeks, or four? Perhaps it was five? She had suffered from slightly sore breasts for ... a week or two, maybe more. Was that a good sign or not?

Slowly Janet worked it all out, adding and calculating and worrying. Then she admitted it to herself. She was pregnant. She'd been pregnant for several weeks and not known. Once she knew, she became a different person.

I was someone's mother. I was having a baby. I allowed myself to be terrified by how I felt. I was not even half way through my first year at college. My boyfriend and I'd been going out for two months. He'd just returned to his base. But that's not what scared me. I was scared because I was thrilled. A baby. My own baby. I knew about babies. I had bathed and fed my little brother and played with him, although I resented it at the time because it was hard work and because he wasn't my baby, he was my mother's baby. But this baby – I dared to lay my hand over my stomach – was my baby.

I also knew my parents would be angry.

Janet told her parents. The next day Gloria took her to the family doctor and a urine test was arranged. Once Janet's pregnancy was confirmed she had her first internal examination. Still sore from the accident, still dealing with the idea of a car crash, Janet had another accident to cope with. A week later she returned to college, her mother's warnings ringing in her ears:

'You are not to tell anyone about this. Do you hear me? Tell no one about your condition.'

Charlie was contacted. He told his parents and they summonsed him back to Adelaide.

'You have a future to plan,' said the adults, 'you have decisions to make.'

Janet was utterly focused on her body, its puckered red scars and how clever it was to be marked and damaged on the outside, but working serenely to create a new and interesting being on the inside.

In 1970 the Premier of South Australia was an erudite politician with Mick Jagger lips. He was a symbol of change to the Baby Boomers who were just coming of age. I liked him and his politics. I couldn't wait to vote in my first election and make sure he was Premier again. My parents disliked him intensely; he'd worn pink shorts to parliament, oversaw Aboriginal land rights legislation and decriminalised homosexuality. He also created legislation that gave women the right to a safe, cheap means of terminating an unwanted pregnancy. My pregnancy was, of course, unplanned, but unwanted? Suddenly my parents became very interested in reforms they'd previously dismissed as dangerous.

Janet knew about abortion from the pamphlets she'd found at teachers' college. She believed it should be free, safe and available. She still does. She and her friends had discussed it, they'd attended student union meetings and abortion rallies and they understood no one should be exposed to the risks associated with a backyard

abortion. In late October 1970 legislation was passed ensuring a safe, legal termination was available to women who had to be examined by two qualified medical practitioners. These doctors judged whether or not the girl's, or the baby's, health was at risk if the pregnancy continued. Despite the car accident, Janet was a healthy young woman. Gloria decided to become conversant with the legislation and learned that the health clause didn't cover only physical health, it included mental well-being. If the two doctors judged that a pregnant woman was mentally unstable and carrying a child to term would result in further mental instability, the termination could proceed.

Let us stop here, reader, to register the magnificent irony of Gloria's scheme. She wanted Janet to avail herself of this brand new abortion legislation. Are we not awed by Gloria's treachery? Before Janet's birth, and certainly afterwards, Gloria consistently ignored her doctor's well-meaning suggestions she, Gloria, see a psychotherapist. Gloria refused to contemplate the need for her and Warren to have relationship counselling. Her bouts of depression were glossed over, they were justified by accusations that Janet, or her brother, were difficult, ungrateful and uncaring children. Gloria insisted that Warren didn't love her. Gloria maintained until she died that her family had rejected her. She resented the overseas holidays her friends took and berated Warren because they didn't travel. She swore a neighbour had snubbed her at the supermarket. A mark on the carpet was an occasion for a major emotional upheaval but it was her daughter whose mental health was about to come under scrutiny.

In our immediate and extended family my mother's rages were legendary but she was convinced the origin of her disappointments lay at our feet. No one dared question her mental stability, despite being jealous of my father to the point of paranoia and overly protective of my brother and me. She had threatened suicide more than once in my memory and attempted it when I was five months old. But no one dared hint my mother suffered from poor mental health, not in her company.

Janet wanted her baby. She imagined holding it in her arms, feeling the weight of it, the fluttering movements, the rise and fall of its breath. Now she knew she was pregnant she slowed her pace as she walked past shops selling baby clothes. She talked to the being inside her hoping it was a boy. She knew she'd never have it adopted once she'd given birth. She wasn't foolish; of course she knew her pregnancy was a bad idea. She knew her parents were justified in their anger but she also refused to be ashamed of her sexuality, nor of its obvious proof. After all, she was the daughter of a beautiful and alluring mother who clearly enjoyed sex with Warren. She'd heard her parents having sex when she was fourteen. Like most teenagers she was appalled, not because they did 'it' but because the movies she'd seen gave her the impression sex was about high passion, not the mundane private couplings of long time married, middle aged parents.

In the days and weeks that followed I tried to understand. I was a 'bonded' teaching student. The government paid me $15 a fortnight while I trained. I had agreed to teach for three years after completing my diploma and if I defaulted on my agreement, my father, my guarantor, would have to return the money I'd been paid. It wasn't a large sum but it was beyond my parents' means. But despite this, my focus was on my baby and my new identity; I was going to be a mother.

Instead of wanting to be rid of her 'problem', Janet dreamt of a contented baby sleeping in a bassinet decorated with tulle and lace. Gloria, on the other hand, wanted Janet to finish college, earn good money teaching, marry a teacher and have three children.

Forty years after she started teachers' college, and in the last year of his life, Warren told Janet how her application to teacher's college was accepted.

'Your mother,' he said, 'hounded the Education Department for weeks. She phoned anyone who would listen. She never gave up. She knew state schools were experiencing a teacher shortage back then and she read in the paper that students

from interstate had been recruited by the South Australian government to train as teachers. She was damn sure no kid from New South Wales was going to get a place if you didn't.'

'But Dad,' said Janet, 'I failed my Matric, I hated high school.'

'Yes, but you were bright,' he said, 'all your teachers said that. Every time we went to a parent teacher interview it was always the same …'

'Janet,' father and daughter chanted it together, 'is clever, but she must apply herself. She's easily distracted.'

They laughed although neither Janet nor Warren discussed why Janet had been an unhappy, dysfunctional teenager.

'Your mother kept at them,' he continued. 'She waged a one woman campaign to have you accepted. She insisted a young woman with your abilities shouldn't miss out on a place when so many interstate 'unknowns' were allowed in and would only bugger off home after they finished. I reckon…' Warren paused. They were sitting in his room in the aged care facility. Janet didn't visit her parents as often as she liked but when she did visit she went to her father's room first. After they had chatted for a while they walked together to Gloria's room. Gloria was pleased to see Janet, but peeved with Warren. He wasn't visiting her as often these days. Why not? Was he still meeting that woman at the coffee shop? When was he going to take her home?

'…I reckon there's some bloke in the education building who still has nightmares about Gloria Thomas and her phone calls. I think they finally accepted you so they could have some peace. You're what and who you are because of your mother.'

I didn't believe, had never been given to believe, I'd have a career. All I wanted to do was read and then maybe, just maybe, write a book. I had no other plans for my future. I wasn't interested in teaching. I liked children but I knew I wasn't a patient woman and anyway, I'd declared, when I was fifteen, never to marry and have children. Maybe I'd already sensed that writing and rearing children would be too difficult. Three years later I was pregnant and in love with my unborn child. I was

also aware that he depended on me for survival.

Any future Janet imagined was rendered in pale colours; its shape and outline were indistinct. Janet had no idea if she loved the boy with a cut on his ring finger but she thought that if Charlie and she had the baby, they'd learn to love each other. In reality, during November 1970, Janet was everything an unmarried pregnant girl should be. She was in shock. She was scared and she was incapable of making a rational decision. She needed support. She needed someone to talk to, someone who might help her grasp the reality of her situation and the impossibility of her dreams. But Janet was stumbling through these woods alone. Her aunts might have listened and told her what options were available but they were estranged from Gloria, and Janet dared not contact them. Gloria wouldn't let Janet talk to either of her grandmothers or to her friends. All Janet had were instincts floating precariously on a sea of emotions. She didn't want an abortion. It didn't feel right. Imagining her newborn baby, a son she would call Gavin, in her arms was what felt right.

In the first few days after learning they were to become grandparents, my parents' behaviour was rational and reasonable. They did not beat me. They did not throw me out of their house. They did not raise their voices. They looked at me with confused eyes. They said they wanted to understand. The three of us behaved the way I imagined a normal family might behave. But our wildly uncharacteristic, civilised approach to dealing with a crisis felt surreal. Yes, my parents remonstrated with me. They were, they said, disappointed. I was, I repeated, sorry. But I was also beguiled by the uncharacteristic calm and lulled into hope by their rational, controlled approach to the situation. I was grateful for their attitude and gentled into believing my future included my baby. Somehow the five of us, my parents, my brother, my baby and I, would become the happy and contented family my mother demanded we be.

One night Janet and her parents visited Charlie's parents. Beers were served to the men, sherry to the women and lemonade to the new parents-to-be. The discussion was civil. No one blamed anyone. The four parents were kind and solicitous but Janet was unable to decide. She dwelt in an Indian summer of light and warmth instead of the expected cold winds and dying leaves. She continued conversing with her baby. Here, at last, was a good and loving inside self.

The longer she prevaricated the stronger the recriminations became. Her parents raised their voices, hurling accusations at Janet that they'd been storing away in an effort to appear decent and well-bred in the eyes of Charlie's parents.

'How,' asked Warren, with Gloria standing to the right of and slightly behind him, 'do you propose to look after yourself and a child?'

'Where are you going to live?' accused Gloria. 'What about your diploma?'

Janet gave what she thought were reasonable answers to reasonable questions. It was the next set of questions that left her stunned.

'What,' Gloria asked 'will the neighbours think?'

'What,' added Warren, 'will our friends at the golf club say, and at the Lion's Club?' And, finally, 'How,' lamented Gloria, 'could you do this to us?'

Back with his unit, my boyfriend wrote a brief letter saying he would do what I wanted, that he would support me but ...

The doctor who'd confirmed my pregnancy was sympathetic but his skills were in medicine and not troubled teenagers. The pressure to abort my child became intense and despite myself I agreed to go to the only hospital in the state that catered for pregnant women and the first one licensed to perform abortions.

It was a hot and humid the day early in November when Gloria drove Janet to the hospital for her appointment. High above them, pale swirls of cloud melted into the

searing blue of the sky. Inside the hospital it was only a few degrees cooler. They were told to wait in a large room populated by women in various stages of pregnancy. Several women had both toddlers and swelling bellies, while half a dozen new mothers were either engrossed with their infants or looked shyly sideways and compared other newborns with their own. Gloria gazed distastefully at this sea of fecundity while Janet tried to read. Eventually she was called to a cubicle; she turned to Gloria and said she was going in alone. After another internal examination and questions about her periods and sex life—such as it was—Janet started to ask her own questions.

'I was in a car accident in the middle of October,' she told the doctor. 'Was I pregnant then?'

'Yes, given the dates and the progress of your pregnancy, you were pregnant.'

'I was thrown out of the car during the accident. Would the ... the foetus ... have been hurt during the accident? Is my baby alright?'

The doctor explained the intricacies of amniotic fluid and its protective virtues and assured Janet her child was safe. Gloria was invited into the cubicle. She sat on the steel framed chair and listened silently as the doctor told her Janet was healthy, would most likely have a trouble free pregnancy and carry her child to term.

'What about the abortion?' said Gloria.

'Given the questions your daughter has been asking, it is obvious she doesn't want an abortion. I would not, in that case, be able to recommend one.'

Was the doctor championing Janet's quest to have the baby? Was he secretly against abortion? Did he simply assess Janet's mental state as normal and therefore unable to fulfil the legal criteria? Did he believe Janet had sinned and the burden of unmarried motherhood was a fit and proper punishment? Was he, in his own way, trying to tell Gloria what she refused to accept: Janet cared about her unborn child, and as naive, unrealistic and foolish as that might have been, Janet had the right to choose for herself what she wanted to do. Of three bowls, three chairs, and three beds—which is just right?

Whatever his reason, the doctor handed my baby and me a lifeline. My mother sat rigidly in the chair, saying nothing. The cubicle and the waiting room thrummed with anger.

There is a kind of white heat that burns when you look at it; as Gloria left the hospital that day she was that heat. Her eyes were light-absorbing pits of ire in a face as white as a shroud. With each step toward the car, Janet's bones dissolved. When she was a child Janet sometimes missed the signals that presaged her mother's rages but whether she anticipated them or they fell on her without warning, she became habituated to them. She had learned to endure and occasionally deflect them, and as she grew she tried to stand up to Gloria, to fight back. This rage was one Janet had expected for weeks, but hoped would never happen. She was about to pay for her naiveté.

The heat of the sun was mortifying but my mother's heat exceeded even that. My time for having an abortion was running short and becoming a grandmother at forty was not part of her plan. By the time we climbed into the hot casket that was our car I was nothing but an easy target. I had no cover and I couldn't protect myself. Everything moved at an impossibly slow rate. Opening the car doors took an age, starting the engine, putting the car into gear, reversing, leaving the car park, were moments that stretched to a lifetime. It was late afternoon and the traffic was heavy but my mother turned onto the main road like a missile homing in on its quarry. The heat from within and without the car was unbearable. My mother rarely hit me, particularly now I was over eighteen, but she was about to unleash her rage on me using her most refined and devastating weapon.

The litany was familiar; this was my fault which, on this occasion, was obviously true. I was selfish, demanding and disobedient. I had destroyed everyone's lives. I was ungrateful … the words were familiar. Their vehemence was frightening. I

endured the prefatory onslaught as best I could. Emotionally abused children have few options because the abuse isn't obvious. One option is resilience but this doesn't stop our parent's jibes from penetrating more deeply that we imagine. They settle into the fabric of our being, enveloping the person we are and shrouding our potential beneath a welter of irrational, unfair accusations. I wanted, that day, to believe I was immune to my mother's ceaseless vituperation. I wanted to survive the emotional bombardment because by protecting myself, I was protecting my unborn child. But it was too late. The damage had already been done. No nascent, independent, confident mother-to-be sat in that car and fought for the right to choose her future.

Ungrateful little bitch how dare you after all we've done for you what are we going to do now how dare you do this to me how dare you humiliate me in front of those people Christ everything we gave you everything I had nothing you had everything you've thrown it away you little bitch you spoilt bloody little fool that was a waste of time and now where are we no better off nothing we are nothing you are nothing to me never never again nothing I will never again care for you love you call this love you don't love me I'm a nothing and a nobody you have brought me to this.

Gloria spat venom at her daughter who fixed her gaze on her mother's white knuckled hands strangling the steering wheel. She tensed as Gloria changed gears, accompanied by tympanic rage. It was over thirty degrees outside, and hotter in the car. Janet's thighs stuck to the passenger seat. The unhealed scars on her knees throbbed, the scar above her right eyebrow pulsated and she was certain that every car they passed, or that passed them, would hit, tip and roll her and her mother and the baby over and, for a second time in a month, Janet's blood, like shredded crimson silk, would decorate the road's edge.

Janet forced herself into sticky hibernation and silently bore the abuse. Finally, despite driving and screaming until hoarse, Gloria managed to get them home. Once in their driveway, she got out of the car, slammed the door, unlocked the front door and hurled herself through it. It was only then she lost her potency and vehemence

and staggered into her bedroom.

I sat in the car wondering what to do next. My brother would be home from school shortly. I couldn't phone anyone because my mother would have heard me. I was unable to walk anywhere in this heat. I climbed out of the car, went inside and sat on the lounge. My brother came home and I made him a cool drink. That was when I heard the noises coming from my parents' bedroom. I knocked on the bedroom door. No answer. I listened. It wasn't crying I heard and it wasn't screaming. My mother was groaning. I opened the door as quietly as I could and peered into the room. My mother was lying on the bed, curled into a foetal position and moaning. I went into the kitchen and tried to drink some water, but couldn't swallow. Every so often I heard her moaning and calling out. I went into the hall and stood before the closed bedroom door. Was she in pain? I opened the door again and asked if she was all right but she didn't respond. She looked semiconscious but as I watched she started to babble, rolling one way and then the other, calling out but refusing to answer my questions. This continued for what seemed like hours. My little brother tried to talk to her. She didn't recognise him. He was scared and I was barely able to contain my own – what – emotions? No, I was numb. Only my mother's emotions, her reactions, were allowed to blister the surface of our family. I retreated to the hallway and stood silent and helpless outside the master bedroom door. A counter melody played in my head, underscoring my mother's delirium: 'You are nobody. You are nothing to me now. I have no daughter, you're dead. I want no memory of the person I loved, that I did everything for, gave everything to. Now there is no one, nothing. You are nothing.'

My mother meant what she said and I believed her. I was nobody.

Janet walked into the lounge room and sat down on the couch. Her little brother turned on the television and sat on the floor watching it. Their father would be home soon, but Janet couldn't let him see his wife like this. She stood and went back into the hallway, opened the bedroom door and walked into the darkened bedroom.

Gloria looked at Janet as if she had no idea who stood before her.

‘I’ll do it,’ said Janet and walked from the room. Ten minutes later Gloria rose from her bed and started peeling potatoes for dinner.

‘I’ll do it,’ I said. I went to my bedroom and lay down on the bed. Ten minutes later I heard my mother’s bedroom door open and the sound of her footsteps as she moved around the kitchen peeling the potatoes for dinner.

Gertrude Gloria

> ‘I didn’t want to speak with that abstract voice which, whenever I heard it, failed to move me …. I wanted to communicate my experience…’

You wonder if I am sorry. You wonder if it is right to look for just right; if it’s selfish, or rampant perfectionism. Let me ask you: what is your just right? What would you do to gain and keep it?

It’s time you knew that Gloria isn’t her real name. It is Gertrude, an old German name pronounced GER-trood. It means strong spear, or spear maiden. Gloria hated it. When she was little the other children called Gertrude Gloria Gertie, ‘Dirty Gertie’, or sometimes just Gert. She fought them, punching and kicking until they relented and called her Gloria. How, I wonder, will she be named in her obituary? What will be written on her tombstone? Will she be remembered as Gertrude, named, Janet was told, for a beloved older sister Valentine Hamilton White left behind in Wales? Or will it be just ‘Gloria’? She doesn’t seem to care any more, and if she did she can’t find the words to say she cares. The ample vocabulary that Gloria once used to vent her anger, or her grief, was gone. She was alone and demented. The railway tracks of her mind had rusted; they no longer carried the right engine of thoughts to the proper station. There was, in fact, no evidence of a train, only the occasional bogie truck dragging a random collection of thoughts along behind it, offloading them at the wrong terminal, failing to come back and collect them. It didn’t matter anyway because what was left to say? Gloria, Gert, was gone. Her narrative was almost done. She was no longer a danger, just flat, rusted tracks heading for a horizon where all parallel lines eventually join and disappear.

Shrivelled and wizened Gloria, like a witch from a Grimm fairy tale, sat in her room at the residential care facility and complained. Magnificent, crazy, powerful Gloria with her broken, yellowed teeth, her fingers like dried twigs and her still brown hair like rusted wire. Where was Gloria’s beauty now? Where her glamour? Gone, and gone with it the elegance, the sexual glow that had, so many years before, trapped Warren.

Gloria never wanted to be ‘glamorous’. Perhaps, maven of words that she was, she knew *glamour* once meant to cast a spell or set a hex. That’s what Gloria did to Warren, that sad tired old man who walked out of his home and left his daughter

alone to decide what of his life he might keep and what to discard. Despite her cruelty Gloria continued to bewitch him. Even with her beauty lost, when offered the chance to be with her, he accepted eagerly and let his daughter shift furniture from room to room so she could vacuum and scrub and clean away the smudges, streaks and smears her parents had left on the world.

The lives we create are embossed with the created lives of those who came before us. These lives are as fictitious as the stories we read but harder to adapt than the narratives we find in books. And yet, a story is simply that, a story, and even a life narrative can be changed. As Janet rediscovered, and discarded, the trappings of her parents' lives, she decided to change her story. As she tore open her parents' cupboards and wardrobes and slid her fingers into the grit they had left behind she became a decision maker, a Wise Woman, a Story Teller. It had been two years since she left her marriage, but she finally left MarriedWorld behind that November. She found a voice to commemorate the facts of her life and the metaphors, allegories and parables that had furnished it with subtle richness. She phoned Bear and told him not to visit her again, she made sure she wrote every day, and it wasn't in her personal journal, it was in her writer's journal.

One early September morning, ten months after Warren followed Gloria into residential care, Janet woke, as she often did late in 2010, thinking about an idea she had for a story. She was also looking forward to meeting her new friend, Patrick, later that evening. When the phone rang, interrupting her thoughts, she wondered if it was Bear. He'd called her once or twice, early in the morning, even though he knew she'd fallen in love with Patrick. She considered ignoring the call, but thought, at the last moment, it might be important.

'Hello,' she said, using her friendly, not too encouraging, voice.

'Janet?' A female voice; deliberate, solicitous.

'Yes.'

'Janet, it's ….' A name Janet can no longer remember, a name, like so many details of that day, lost. 'From the residential care home.'

‘Oh, yes.’ Janet couldn’t believe it had finally come. Her father would be inconsolable.

‘I’m sorry Janet but I’ve called to tell you that at approximately five-thirty this morning your father was found dead in his room.’

The world can change on a sentence, but this sentence can’t be true and therefore the world cannot change. Janet had talked to her father the night before. The last thing he told her was to go and mark her students’ exams.

‘Are you sure you have the right person?’

‘I’m sorry, yes, we have.’

‘You mean Warren Thomas, my father?’

‘Yes. I’m so sorry, but yes, your father died this morning.’

Warren had been taken, fifty eight years earlier, in the prime of his youth. Love had ripped him from the bolt of his being, dipped him in the boiling cauldron of lust and hung him on the line to dry. The sheen in his fabric remained, oh, he was a handsome and charming man, but he invested his passion in the wrong stock then wasted the last months of his life on his beloved, crazy wife. He ended his life alone, on a cold bathroom floor.

Gloria had survived him; haggard and reduced but alive and a widow. Glorious Gloria; that’s what they called her, the men who lusted for her, in the 70s, when Janet was growing out of her girlhood. The businessmen in the service clubs, the righteous neighbours, Warren’s work colleagues, all of them called her Glorious Gloria. She’d walk into the room, glossy and slim, her breasts, even at thirty and forty, still perky, her lips still red. The men would glance, just a glance they’d tell themselves. After all, Warren, he’s a good bloke, a mate, they wouldn’t want to … but no, one glance and they were done for the night. The other women in the room were weary, plump, overripe housewives alongside the woman that was Gloria White Thomas. And now there was only Gloria and Janet left.

Janet hung up the phone and steadied herself against the kitchen table. She was alone

in her eyrie. No one witnessed her dawning grief. He was gone, her father, gone. Janet bent double in her kitchen by the window overlooking the gulf and the early spring sunshine glistening on the flat blue water. Then she dug deep inside herself and straightened. She had things she must do; phone calls to make, people to organise. Her son's partner arrived twenty minutes later and made Janet toast and coffee. Brian arrived and drove her to her mother. It was a long trip. She leaned her sobs against Brian's implacability where they stilled, just as they always had. She walked into a residential care facility empty of life. Clusters of nursing staff and carers approached her with tears in their eyes. They looked as if they knew Janet needed comfort, but it was she who comforted them—they loved her father, he had been such a wonderful old man, he had such a wicked sense of humour and gentlemanly manner, but laugh, he always made them laugh. He will be missed and he loved Janet's mother so deeply. Janet hugged the people who gave Warren his last glass of night-time milk, who shared his last joke and then she left them to their grief and walked into her mother's room. She sat at her mother's feet and told a barely comprehending Gloria that Warren was gone. She and a nurse wheeled Gloria to Warren's room. She watched as Gloria stroked Warren's dead cheek and kissed Warren's cold lips.

Janet wrote and delivered the eulogy for Warren. She chose photos from his life to display on a screen above his coffin and music to play at the service; Glen Miller, Bing Crosby, and his favourite, *Golden Wedding* by Woody Herman. While she did these things, while her children came to her side and held her together, and her new love, Patrick, reached out a steadying hand, Janet thought about the choices her father made and the choices she made. There are three ways to make a choice: doing right, being right and just right. How you weigh the three depends on context and situation. Warren was a hero because he did everything he could to make Gloria's life just right.

Epilogue

‘Only one dream is true, and that makes the other dream impossible…’ The Bears must have felt Goldilocks’ presence as soon as they re-entered their cottage. Discovering the half eaten bowls of porridge and the broken chair was merely a charade. Goldilocks’ dreams interrupted their day as much as the empty bowl of porridge, the broken chair and the strange body in the smallest bed.

How sad it is that our dreams disturb other people.

I picture Goldilocks running from the cottage the way old women run: cautious, uncoordinated, arms held away from her body, stumbling slightly. I can’t imagine her retracing her steps and returning to where she came from. I don’t think Goldilocks is the kind of woman to go back to what was. No matter how many times the story is adapted or rewritten, she is true to her original trajectory. She found a different path into the forest, running, then trotting and finally walking deep into its embrace and resting at last on a fallen log. I imagine it was the middle of the day and everything was still. The sun was hot but the forest canopy protected and concealed her. I picture her sitting for a long time in dappled sunlight, watching the creatures of the forest emerge and assess the old woman who had come to rest in their world. She spent the afternoon with them; the insects and birds, the small and medium sized beasts, the leaves, flowers and herbs. By the time the sun set Goldilocks felt as if she had lived in the forest all her life. She knew she would never be alone again.

I was in bed when I received the call. Patrick was out and it was just after 10:00 pm. The screen on my mobile told me it was the residential care facility. It might be an idea if I came, said one of the night staff’. I asked how long and received the usual answer.

‘We don’t know,’ said the voice, ‘we cannot tell these things.’

I called Patrick. Half an hour later he pulled into the drive. I was dressed and ready. We headed north, towards the Barossa Valley, driving together into the drizzle of my mother’s last night.

For weeks afterwards the peculiar, piquant smell of death stayed with me. Perhaps death sickens us because it is the smell of decay and a terrible, unfathomable

sweetness. Syrupy and rancid, Death was, that cold May night, a woman gathering the wasted husk; a housewife cleaning up the mess life had left. Patrick and I whispered to my mother, we soothed her and held her but my mother fought us, straining from her bed, pushing blanket's tangle away from her body and trying to wander once more out into the dawn. Perhaps I was really only trying to soothe myself, to assuage the anguish of one about to lose the flesh that bore her flesh. Whatever my motivation, Death took over and unarranged everything. All that was left for me to do was mind the terrible faintness of my mother's heart that was finally beating too slowly to remember me.

How to say, without sounding specious, that somehow, in a room that smelt of death, forgiveness strayed like the fogged breath that rises from a river's heart at the close of day?

I was purposeless for weeks afterwards. I could not read. I could not write. I didn't want to teach. I felt as if I'd put something down and couldn't remember where I'd left it. Where she had been, was now only space. No more the heartbeat that my heartbeat echoed and mocked. What now, I kept thinking. What now that the body so radically familiar, and yet utterly unfamiliar, was gone? What was left for me to pitch myself against? Where was the ground of my stories, now my wellspring of words was gone? It was as if I only ever existed to struggle against her and having won the battle, nothing was left for me to fling myself against. Worse still, the promise I'd made to my mother, to write a book for her, remained unfulfilled. I never placed my book in her hands and now I had nothing to say because she wasn't there to hear. My mother was dead and my voice was still; the ears that might have listened had gone.

My mother had made a blue and white quilt for the last bed my parents shared together. We draped that quilt over her coffin. I asked that *Fix You* by Cold Play be played at the end of the service because my father had tried to fix my mother. I asked friends to bring flowers from their garden because my mother was a gardener.

Gradually the silence receded. I cannot place my book in her hands, but our story pulls me along and I need to follow it. I started writing again; a short story, the opening scenes of a play; a memoir.

Eight months after my mother died my eldest son phoned me. Could I, he asked, come to his unit that afternoon? He was on edge when I arrived, fussing about my comfort, asking if I wanted a drink of water, tidying up around me, unable to sit still. His partner would be home soon, he said, how long could I stay, could I stay until she arrived home? How long could I wait?

'As long as you need me,' I said. 'I can wait as long as it takes.' His partner arrived a few minutes later. They embraced and whispered together while I sat on their couch, pretending not to notice.

'Can I get you a drink?' she asked.

I held up my glass. 'Thanks, but I've got one.'

Eventually they settled next to me, cool drinks at their elbows. The air buzzed with anticipation then they finally told me; a few weeks earlier a new story had begun. I was one of the first to know. Could I keep the news to myself for a while, before they shared the news with others? It was still such a new story, it needed to form before they shared it with the rest of the world. 'Of course I will wait,' I said.

Stories, I read recently, are essential to the evolution of our species. They're not just for entertainment, they're inherent; our meaning is in their existence. My son and his partner aren't married and the world doesn't care. They live in a small two bedroom unit, they don't have a lot of money and he recently quit his job. These are all good, sound reasons for not bringing a child into the world. But their families are delighted with the news of another story to add to the family collection.

The baby is due the week I turn sixty. The ultra sound indicates a little girl is on her way. The new parents have chosen her name but I won't share it yet. It is, however, an elegant name and the story of how they chose it is just right.

I think my mother would have approved.

WRITING ‘READING GOLDILOCKS’

Interrogating the Relationship between Therapeutic Life Narrative and First and Third Person Narrative Voice

Introduction

> In the silence of primary consciousness can be seen appearing not only what words mean, but also what things mean: the core of primary meaning round which the act of naming and expression takes shape.[1]

In 1997, James Pennebaker published an account of a decade or more of work investigating the positive health consequences of 'expressive writing.'[2] Since then, a large body of research has confirmed that writing can be therapeutic. The aim of this project is to investigate and describe the potential therapeutic benefit of writing a memoir using both first and third person narrative voice and narrative point of view.

There are many labels for the facility of writing to achieve healing. The term *therapeutic writing* is used throughout this exegesis to mean literary writing that is, among other things, a deliberately crafted narrative written for the purpose of healing trauma, depression, anxiety or illness so that insight is gained into the mental, emotional and physical consequences the condition has on the individual involved.[3] Therapeutic writing can address the health condition, reinforce individual agency, affirm and enhance self-belief and help the writer conceive of a more flexible sense of self.[4] Therapeutic writing, like other forms of therapy, aims to eliminate, or at least contain, mental, emotional and behavioural distress. This type of therapeutic writing follows Sophie Nicholls' notion of Developmental Creative Writing (DCW),[5] a technique that transcends cathartic writing and Pennebaker's 'expressive writing'. Following the precepts of DCW, therapeutic writing encourages therapeutic writers to employ the elements, conventions and strategies of narrative[6] and to critically analyse the finished product. The term 'Developmental Creative Writing'

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. xv.
[2] James. W. Pennebaker, *Opening up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, rev. ed (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).
[3] These criteria have been adapted from John McLeod, *An Introduction to Counseling*, 2nd edn (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), p. 8.
[4] Fiona Sampson, 'Writing as Therapy', in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, ed. by Stephen Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 312-319 (p. 312).
[5] Sophie Nicholls, 'Beyond Expressive Writing: Evolving Models of Development in Creative Writing', *Journal of Health Psychology* (2009), 14.2, 171-180 (p. 172).
[6] These are: plot, characterisation, setting, dialogue and theme. Given the present writer's interests and the constraints of space associated with an exegesis, only the elements of narrative point of view and narrative voice were examined. It would also be beneficial to research the relationship between any one of the other narrative strategies and efficacy of therapeutic writing.

is, however, problematic. To develop something implies advancement or growth. This is not the same as *healing*, hence the use of therapeutic writing throughout this document.

The motivation for research into the technique of writing a life narrative in two different narrative voices stems from the following proposal:

> that writing in first person narrative voice and narrative point of view is therapeutic, as is writing in third person narrative voice and narrative point of view, but writing in both first and third person narrative voice and narrative point of view is more effective when accompanied by a reflexive account of the lived experience of shifting between the two narrative voices and points of view.

For the purposes of this project 'lived experience' refers to:

> our encounters with the world and … the correlative ways in which the world, situations, objects, others etc., appear to us in experience and … the meanings which we give to those matters.[7]

The goal of this study is to examine the lived experience of shifting between two narrative points of view and narrative voice, and to explore the potential of this technique on therapeutic writing.

There are several extant texts written in first and third person narrative point of view.[8] Jill Golden's *Inventing Beatrice*[9] was an initial model for my memoir. Golden tells her and her mother's stories using first and third person narrative point of view respectively, as does Francesca Rendle-Short,[10] although her 'Glory' is a fictional figure. Doris Brett's *Eating the Underworld: A Memoir in Three Voices*[11] narrates her struggle with illness and includes a fairy tale figure. Janet Mason Ellerby's *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Woman's Memoir*,[12] also a model for my memoir and the accompanying exegesis, reveals a long kept secret at the same time as it explores and analyses women's memoirs. Mason Ellerby doesn't use different

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[7] Wendy O'Brien, 'Introduction', in *The Existential Philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir*, ed. by Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).
[8] James McBride, *The Color of Water* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), and John E. Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984).
[9] Jill Golden, *Inventing Beatrice* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2006).
[10] Francesca Rendle-Short, *Bite Your Tongue* (North Melbourne, Victoria: Spinifex Press, 2008).
[11] Doris Brett, *Eating the Underworld: A Memoir in Three Voices* (Milsons Point: Vintage, 2001).
[12] Janet Mason Ellerby, *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women's Memoir* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

narrative voices in this text but she went on to produce her own memoir, *Following the Tamborine Man: A Birthmother's Memoir.*[13] Both Mason Ellerby's texts demonstrate an awareness of the difference between the formal, academic voice and the personal narrative. She and Golden, Rendle-Short and Brett all acknowledge that writing their memoirs was healing.

This study is not, however, a literary comparison of other examples of therapeutic writing. Despite their intentions concerning the production of a text, writers cannot know if what they write heals their readers, only that the experience of *writing* the text heals the writer. Nor can a reader know if writing a text is healing for the writer, unless the writer makes that outcome plain. Likewise, a reader may read a text and find it alleviates his or her suffering (a phenomenon known as bibliotherapy, and a very different field of research), but there is no guarantee that this is what the author intended when the book was written. Treating a text as if it is therapeutic does not yield information about the experience of writing a therapeutic text.

This study stems from an assumption that, as a therapeutic tool, first person, autodiegetic narrative is unrewarding. An autodiegetic narrator is limited to describing only his or her experiences and the contents of his or her own consciousness. He or she is unable to know the contents of another person's mind. The difference between 'Reading Goldilocks' and the works mentioned above is that it is envisaged that *conscious* reflection on the shift between different narrative points of view and narrative voice is a useful and valuable method because it encourages the writer to imaginatively enter into the world of another individual and reflect on making the shift between first and third person narrative point of view and narrative voice.

Throughout this exegesis the term 'therapeutic writer' is used to refer to the person writing for the purposes of healing, but who is this therapeutic writer? Pauline Cooper, in her study of the different outcomes for participants involved in 'Creative Writing' (CW) compared to 'Using Writing as Therapy' (UWaT), applied the following criteria when choosing the study's participants: enthusiasm for the project;

[13] Janet Mason Ellerby, *Following the Tambourine Man: A Birthmother's Memoir* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

verbal communication skills; writing skills; 'reasoning skills'; and 'potential for insight'.[14] Individuals who were suffering psychotic episodes were excluded, as is the case for most therapeutic writing groups. To this list of attributes of the therapeutic writer I would add: willingness to try a different form of healing; an interest in writing (where prior experience is valuable but not important); a willingness to learn the basic elements of the craft of writing; and an interest in publication as a possibility but not a priority. The therapeutic writer can be found on hospital wards, in residential care facilities, in community or mental health groups, writing alone or online. He or she may have been referred to a therapeutic writing program or are self-selected.

What kind of writing does the therapeutic writer do? In his 'Foreword' to *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities*, Blake Morrison writes:

> the process of articulating painful truths can be restorative, healing, even life-saving. And there's no reason why writing produced at moments of crisis or distress can't be good writing, especially if the writer has some guidelines to work with.[15]

Putting aside the vexed question of what constitutes 'good' writing, Morrison adds that:

> the link between literature and healing goes back to Aristotle and his notion of catharsis (or 'purgation'). Shakespeare, too, understood the importance of self-expression: 'Give sorrow words', he wrote, 'the grief that does not speak/Whispers the o'er fraught heart, and bids it break'. Giving sorrow words needn't mean pouring things out in a torrent; even confessions have to be shaped.[16]

In the space of less than a page Morrison makes three statements concerning the field of therapeutic writing: written expression is healing; confession and catharsis can—indeed need—to be shaped; and a writer needs guidelines if the first two conditions are to be achieved.

Since Pennebaker's early research, therapeutic writers have been exposed to a huge

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[14] Pauline Cooper, 'Writing for depression in health care', *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76.4 (2013), 186-193 (p.188).
[15] Gillie Bolton, *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities* (London: Jessica Kingston Publishers, 2006), p 9.
[16] Bolton, 2006 p. 9.

variety of exercises and activities designed to help them write in order to achieve well-being. While a comprehensive body of research has established that writing is therapeutic, a clear understanding of how and why written expression is healing remains elusive. Nor is there any conclusive evidence concerning the real value—or otherwise—of the numerous writing exercises available to facilitators of therapeutic writing groups.[17] What needs to be addressed is the efficacy of these exercises. The present project will do this by focusing on one of the many narrative techniques used to produce a work of fiction or creative non-fiction: narrative voice and narrative point of view. It will examine the lived experience of shifting between two different narrative voices by emulating phenomenological, inductive, descriptive, qualitative research methods associated with 'practice-led' research. Reflection on the lived experience of writing a therapeutic narrative is crucial for the present study as it will provide an understanding of therapeutic writing as a genre in its own right and not as an inferior form of literary or creative practice. A secondary aim of this study is to ratify writing for the purpose of healing through consciously reflecting on, and being reflexive about, the lived experience of writing. While the present research is based on a novella length memoir most therapeutic writers are usually expected to produce pieces of short prose writing only.

Therapeutic writing is best facilitated through the professional services of a skilled counsellor who is also a capable and practised writer. The counsellor/writer's role is twofold. First, he or she must attend to the mental and emotional needs of the writer as that writer experiences the process of remembering and healing from a trauma or ongoing mental or physical distress. Secondly, the counsellor/writer encourages, when appropriate, the writer to develop the skills required to produce creative, innovative and original texts. Bolton, however, believes that this role, while significant, is not a major issue:

> doctors, nurses, therapists, writers, counsellors, social workers, occupational

[17] See, for example, Gillie Bolton, *Write Yourself: Creative Writing and Personal Development* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011); Gillie Bolton, The Writer's Key: Introducing Creative Solutions for Life (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014); Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field, and Kate Thompson, *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006); Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field, and Kate Thompson, *Writing Routes: A Resource Handbook of Therapeutic Writing*. (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2011); and Jeannie K. Wright, *Writing Cures: An Introductory Handbook of Writing in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge, 2004).

> therapists, etc. are potentially excellent writing facilitators. Personal experience of writing as a living life element is the vital training they need.[18]

On the other hand, therapeutic writing needs facilitators capable of exploring new ways to think about the creative process, the writing process and therapeutic writing. Kathleen Quinlan[19] supports a client-centred (or, more appropriately, *therapeutic writer*-centred) approach. Sue Joseph has also addressed this issue and its ramifications for academics working in the area of therapeutic writing:

> What, if any, are the safeguards and support systems in place, for both student author and supervisor? Unless due concern is formulated throughout [sic] process, it is unethical to expose both student and supervisor to a potentially harmful creative, albeit literary, practice.[20]

One study that partially addresses this issue is Cooper's[21] examination of writing workshops for people suffering from depression. Participants were divided into two groups; the first, known as the 'Creative Writing' (CW) group were given warm up and then writing exercises. The members of this group were encouraged, but not expected, to share and discuss their writing and encouraged, but not required, to provide feedback to other members. None of the members were encouraged to edit their work although they were not stopped from doing so. The CW sessions were conducted by a 'non-therapist facilitator'.[22] Members of the second group ('Using Writing as Therapy' (UWaT)), were exposed to more structured activities including reflection (using a scale numbered 0-10) on how they felt before and after the writing session. They were also asked to discuss their feelings. This group was conducted by a therapist. Cooper reported that the CW group, as well as tending to 'lose focus, obstruct the task and search for a leader to demonstrate authority', experienced 'non-engagement with exploring emotion [that] increased the repetition of harmful

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[18] Gillie Bolton and Juhani Ihanus, 'Conversation about Poetry/Writing Therapy: Two European Perspectives', *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 24.3 (2011), 167-186 (p. 176).
[19] Kathleen M. Quinlan, 'From Therapy to Poetry and Back Again: One Writer's Journey', *Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research and Education*, 26.2, 2013, 115-125 (p 124).
[20] Sue Joseph, 'Supervising Life-writing of Trauma in a Tertiary setting', *TEXT* 15.2 (2011) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct11/joseph.htm> [accessed 14 December 2013].
[21] Cooper, pp.186-193.
[22] Cooper, pp.186-193 (p. 186).

narratives.'[23] By contrast, members of the UWaT group were, among other things, able to 'turn the past around using reflexivity'.[24] This was achieved because group members shared their work, reflecting on what they found in their writing and conceiving, through their writing, different ways to address their problems.

It seems that an important adjunct to writing a therapeutic narrative is learning to critically analyse the writing. As mentioned above, Nichol's DCW[25] is a method that encourages writers to develop a critical approach to therapeutic writing, a technique not generally used in expressive, cathartic writing that cognitive researchers such as Pennebaker privilege. Brett Smith's 'The Abyss: Exploring Depression through a Narrative of the Self' is an example of Nicholls' method. Smith's text is composed of sections of his personal diary, free writing *and* reflections on both of these techniques.[26] He believes his text is a 'cultural resource',[27] a claim for ownership of his life, and an elaborate metaphor for narrative voice:

> the power of telling (emotional) stories of illness cannot be ignored. People need to become storytellers if they wish to "recover" their voices and repair the damage that illness has done.[28]

Nichols claims that DCW helps individuals '"let go" of unhelpful "autobiographical" (conceptual, learned and imposed) ideas of ourselves in order to reconnect with the more bodily, felt aspects of our "core" experiences.'[29] She believes writers need to write about what they feel rather than what they think; they need to invoke the senses when recounting a scene; and they need to let the scene evolve into a story. These techniques help the writer gain 'initial release from writing her feelings out onto the page'.[30] As writers 'begin to shape [the] material, learning to construct and redraft it',[31] a distressing scene becomes a story and this helps the writer to heal.

This is reinforced by Y. T. Seih et al., who write that:

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[23] Cooper, pp.186-193 (p. 191).
[24] Cooper, pp.186-193 (p. 190).
[25] Nicholls, pp. 171-180 (p. 172).
[26] Brett Smith, 'The Abyss: Exploring depression through a narrative of the self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5.2 (1999), 264-279 (p. 266.) See also Kathleen Quinlan's article, at n. 28.
[27] Smith, pp. 276-277.
[28] Smith, 264-279 (p. 277).
[29] Nicholls, pp. 171-180 (p. 173).
[30] Nicholls, pp. 171-180 (p. 174).
[31] Nicholls, pp. 171-180 (p. 174).

> it is important for emotional writing to have a designated mechanism to simultaneously avoid one from being entrapped in one's own emotional experiences and to promote emotional support as well as objective insights.[32]

This means that, when writing a memoir using first and third person narrative point of view and narrative voice, the therapeutic writer must be asked what she learnt from the experience of narrating parts of her life from a different perspective. She also needs to reflect on the meaning she assigned to her encounters with these narrative positions, as well as how the experience of alternating between the two different positions was healing. By analysing the therapeutic writer's experience of this process, the efficacy or otherwise of this technique can be assessed.

'Reading Goldilocks' is a purposefully crafted therapeutic narrative that describes the consequences of being declared, when I was eighteen years old, mentally unstable and unable to bear a child. 'Reading Goldilocks' employs an important element of narrative—narrative voice and narrative point of view—to address the trauma occasioned by that declaration. As the creative component of a piece of practice-led research, it connects creative and academic endeavour in order to articulate the relationship between narrative point of view and the practice of therapeutic writing.

'Reading Goldilocks' is also a literary memoir, the production of which is described and analysed in 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'', a text that answers Nicholls' call for a therapeutic writing that includes 'first-person accounts of what the experience of writing *feels* like' (italics original).[33] 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' reflects on: the technique of writing a life narrative using first and third narrative points of view; the relationship between two different narrative voices and therapeutic writing; and on the therapeutic benefits of shifting between the different narrative points of view. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' other purpose is to describe and analyse the research that informed, shaped and contextualised 'Reading Goldilocks'. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' describes how women's life narrative, fairy tales, the character of Goldilocks, narrative point of view and narrative voice provided a context for and

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[32] Y. T. Seih, and others, 'The benefits of psychological displacement in diary writing when using different pronouns,' *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 13.1 (2008), 39-41 (p. 41).
[33] Nicholls, 171-180 (p. 117).

shaped ‘Reading Goldilocks’.

‘Reading Goldilocks’ is a testimony of resilience[34] that also bears witness to trauma and suffering. While trauma is neither the focus nor the major research interest of this study, trauma studies are relevant to the production of ‘Reading Goldilocks’. Defined as an event or situation that results in disconnection and alienation from the traumatic experience, trauma leads to an inability to trust one’s perceptions and other people.[35] Whether acute or chronic, trauma undermines the ego; it can leave an individual at the mercy of others, helpless to change his or her situation let alone comprehend or influence it. As a result, the person experiencing the trauma can feel like ‘a nobody’.[36] Conclusive statements concerning how to respond to trauma or what kinds of trauma are ‘worse’ than another, risk undermining the survivor. This may cause the survivor of a trauma to believe her story is not worth telling because she hasn’t ‘suffered enough’. Ultimately, the individual is the final arbitrator of whether or not what she experienced caused her to suffer, feel diminished, stressed, aggrieved or damaged.[37]

Gillian Whitlock and Kate Douglas argue that the re-emergence, during the 1990s, of trauma studies is a result of the ‘vigorous and widespread turn to the practice and theory of life writing’.[38] Trauma studies have played an important role in the analysis of many life narratives. Whitlock and Douglas also define trauma as an ‘overwhelming and shattering event that is frequently theorised as unspeakable, resistant to representation’.[39] There are two consequences of this claim. The first is that it positions a survivor of trauma as unable to ‘speak’ and therefore deal with, or learn from, the trauma. Second, as Deborah Staines notes, ‘[t]rauma experienced by the few, but represented to the whole, can become incorporated into the dominant

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[34] Derived from resilient, the term resilience refers to an individual’s ability to withstand, or recover from, difficult situations.
[35] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery from Domestic Abuse and Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 2010), p. 52.
[36] Janet Thomas, ‘Reading Goldilocks’ (unpublished memoir for doctoral thesis, Flinders University, 2014), chapter 17.
[37] Stephen K. Levine, *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), pp. 38-41.
[38] Kate Douglas, Gillian Whitlock and Bettina Stumm, ‘Trauma in the Twenty-First Century’, *Life Writing*, 5:1 (2008), 1-8 (p. 1).
[39] Gillian Whitlock and Kate Douglas, ‘Trauma Texts: Reading Trauma in the Twenty-First Century’ in *Trauma Texts* ed. by Gillian Whitlock and Kate Douglas (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1–8, (p. 1).

viewpoint as a cultural trauma'.[40] This risks privileging trauma as the major component of cultural and individual identity; it endorses individuals, and entire cultures, as victims with no agency and no language to write as an agent, let alone a 'healthy' agent. This may also foreclose the potential to heal from a trauma.

Leigh Gilmore argues, on the other hand, that textual representations of trauma question restrictions previously placed on life writing.[41] Is this, however, enough to counter the negative impact trauma studies could have on the discourse of healing? Emily Ashman's 'Psychic Resilience in the Fragile Images of *A Petal*: A Post-Jungian Perspective on Retraumatisation'[42] is a rare examination of 'the transformative potential of trauma itself and the possibilities of psychic regrowth that may emanate from traumatic individual and collective processes.'[43] The impact of trauma on the individual must be recognised and understood but, as Gilmore also admits, we need to understand how people heal from trauma.[44] For Gilmore, autobiography cannot create a sovereign self, but it may create a knowing self, who asks 'how can the relations in which I live, dream, and act be reinvented through me?'[45]

For Steven K. Levine the answer to this question lies in focussing on an imaginative concept of the phenomenon of trauma, one that acknowledges the 'fact' of the trauma, while fostering a creative response to it. Levine believes healing is an act of survival, something made possible through art:

> expressive therapy teaches the art of survival, survival through the making of art. Why art? Because nothing else is strong enough to contain the destruction of the self.[46]

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[40] Deborah Staines, 'Textual Traumata: Letters to Lindy Chamberlain', in *Trauma Texts*, ed. by Gillian Whitlock and Kate Douglas (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp.109–122 (p.122).
[41] Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 3.
[42] Emily Ashman, 'Psychic Resilience in the Fragile Images of *A Petal*: A Post-Jungian Perspective on Retraumatisation', in *Trauma Narratives and Herstory*, ed. by Sonya Andermahr and Silvier Pellicer-Ortin (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 171-187.
[43] Sonya Andermahr and Silvier Pellicer-Ortin, 'Trauma Narratives and Herstory' in *Trauma Narratives and Herstory*, ed. by Sonya Andermahr and Silvier Pellicer-Ortin (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 1-12, p. 7.
[44] Gilmore, p. 15.
[45] Gilmore, p. 148.
[46] Stephen K. Levine, *Poiesis: The Language and the Speech of the Soul* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers 1997), p. 120.

Levine warns that the usual response to trauma is to regain control but:

> such a response would mean that we have remained ignorant, that we have learned nothing from the experience, and therefore will be likely to repeat it, either to ourselves or to others.[47]

The 'art of trauma' is not meant to, 'restore a preexisting harmony, nor to master the event and therefore overcome it, but rather to remember it by imagining it more deeply.'[48] Levine also claims that trauma 'cannot properly be grasped in a purely cognitive manner',[49] which is where art, by allowing us to represent trauma 'true to its chaotic and meaningless character' is so important.[50] To remember an event is to 're-create' that event, which, as Ashman notes, can result in 'retraumatisation'.[51] But if, as Levine claims, memory is a process of 'selection, emphasis and amplification', recreating the event implies exercising a degree of agency.[52] Encouraging the therapeutic writer to ''repeat [the trauma] differently' by shaping it in another form',[53] can assist the therapeutic writer with the task of recovery.

T. R. Johnson agrees, but he wonders whether therapeutic writing should be called 'creative':

> Whether about memories of combat, rape, or child abuse, writing that heals is often writing in which the writer names, describes, and takes control of experiences in which the writer's powers of naming and controlling have been explicitly annihilated. To call this writing "creative" in the traditional sense of the word is to risk undermining or trivializing its extraordinary "real-life," nonfiction relevance, the truth it seeks to generate. If we intend to take the notion of healing seriously, we must problematize the easy line between "creative" writing and writing that purports to be "factual"; we must understand both more complexly.[54]

In order to achieve this, and if, as mentioned above, therapeutic writing is to become a new literary and creative genre, further research is required into how therapeutic writing, with the assistance of the counsellor/writer, can help the therapeutic writer

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[47] *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy*, p. 53.
[48] *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy*, p. 50.
[49] *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy*, p. 17.
[50] *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy*, p. 19.
[51] Emily Ashman, pp. 171-187.
[52] *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy*, p. 50.
[53] *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy*, p. 86.
[54] T. R. Johnson, 'Writing as Healing and the Rhetorical Traditions: Sorting out Plato, Postmodernism, Writing Pedagogy, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder', in *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, ed. by Charles M. Anderson and Marian M. MacCurdy (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000), pp.85-114 (p. 86).

recognise the effect a trauma or malady has on his or her personal well-being. Which writing strategies and practices will develop resilience and which will help name and access the therapeutic writer's personal and interpersonal strengths[55] also need to be explored.

Both 'Reading Goldilocks' and 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' contain comments about my writing process,[56] making this project an example of Bolton's 'process of enquiry into what we think, feel, believe, dream, remember'.[57] The concepts of reflection and reflexion[58] are integral to understanding practice-led research but in 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'', reflexivity is the key to understanding why shifting between two different narrative voices and narrative points of view can be therapeutic. This is because the nature of the shift, and articulating the lived experience of that shift, is:

> a *response* to critical reflective engagement with situations, events or relationships, it is a dialogue with the self: an enquiry into our own thought processes, values, prejudices, and habitual activity and how they influence our actions.[59] (Emphasis original)

The underlying model that 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' adopts is practice-led research, which:

> [b]ecause it situates creative practice as both an outcome and driver of the research process, […] is a unique research paradigm, and the exegesis is, necessarily, a new form of academic writing.[60]

This creates, as Jeri Kroll states, some problems:

> a higher degree thesis that requires self-reflexivity, creativity and experimentation as well as scholarship is a fascinating hybrid creature with a

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[55] Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 5th edn (Pacific Grove CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing company, 1996), p. 409.
[56] Thomas, p. 6.
[57] Gillian Bolton, 'Boundaries of Humanities: Writing medical humanities', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 7.2 (2008), 131-148 (p. 136).
[58] Bolton continues to explore the significance of reflexivity in: Gillie Bolton, 'Who is telling the story? The Critical Role of the Narrator in Reflective and Reflexive Writing', *Educational Reflective Practices*, 35-54 (2012).
[59] 'Boundaries of Humanities', pp. 131-148 (p.136).
[60] Jillian G. Hamilton and Luke O. Jaaniste, 'Content, Structure and Orientations of the Practice-led Exegesis', *Proceedings of the Art. Media. Design: Writing Intersections Conference and Workshop*, Swinburne University, ed. by Gavin Melles (2009), <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/29703/> [accessed 10th November 2010].

> claw firmly embedded in two bodies—the arts and academia.[61]

It can be difficult, despite numerous attempts, to come to a clear understanding of the nature and function of the exegesis that not only accompanies the creative artefact, but informs and is informed by, it. [62] As a result, the authors of the recent report into the examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts have made the following recommendation:

> That the peak bodies and the ACDDCA work together to establish agreement on a preferred term or terms for the critical essay, one that more precisely denotes the role and function of this document[63]

Until this happens, a creative practitioner must, as Kroll says,[64] choose the form of the exegesis, whether that be examining and accessing any antecedents of the research; employing ficto-critical or autoethnographic techniques that insert the writer into the text;[65] or creating a 'self-consciously referenced, un-spontaneous, servile product of a demanding system'.[66]

The relationship between 'Reading Goldilocks' and 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' can be compared to the process of making a patchwork quilt. Different squares of

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[61] Jeri Kroll, 'The Role of the Examiner: Scholar, Reviewer, Critic, Judge, Mentor', *TEXT*, 8.2 (2004) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct04/kroll.htm> [accessed 9th April 2011].

[62] See, for instance, Josie Arnold, 'Practice-led Research: Creative Activity, Academic Debate and Intellectual Rigour', *Higher Education Studies*, 2.2 (2012), 9-24 (p. 19); Sally Berridge, 'What Does it Take? Auto/biography as Performative PhD Thesis', *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 9.2 (2008) <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/379/825> [accessed 9th October 2011]; Sandra Burr, 'Whoa! Reining in the Research Doctorate in Creative Practice', *TEXT*, 11.2 (2007), <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct07/burr.htm> [accessed 18th December 2012]; Jeri Kroll 'The Exegesis and the Gentle Reader Writer', *TEXT Special Issue Number 3 Illuminating the Exegesis*, (2004) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/kroll.htm> [accessed 18th December 2012]; Jeri Kroll, 'Living on the Edge: Creative Writers in Higher Education' *TEXT*, 14.1 (2010) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april10/kroll.htm> [accessed 18th December 2012]; and Andrew McNamara, 'Six Rules for Practice-led Research', *TEXT Special Issue No 14 Beyond Practice-led Research*, (2012) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue14/McNamara.pdf> [accessed 18 Dec. 2012].

[63] Jen Webb, Donna Lee Brien and Sandra Burr, *Examination of Doctoral Degrees in Creative Arts: Process, Practice and Standards Final Report*, (Sydney: Office for Learning and Teaching Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education 2013) <http://aawp.org.au/files/PP10-1801_UC.Webb_Final%20Report.pdf> [accessed 20th December 2013], p. 27.

[64] 'The Role of the Examiner', 2004.

[65] Steven Pace, 'Writing the Self into Research: Using Grounded Theory Analytic Strategies in Autoethnography', *TEXT Special Issue No 13 Creativity: Cognitive, Social and Cultural Perspectives*, (2012) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue13/Pace.pdf> [accessed 18 Dec. 2012].

[66] Nigel Krauth and Donna Lee Brien, 'Creative Writing Under the ERA: Writing Under Duress, but Relatively Happy', *TEXT Special Issue No 7 Creative Writing as Research II: The ERA era: Creative Writing as Research*, (2012) <http://www.textjournal.com.au> [accessed 18 Dec. 2012].

fabric are joined together to create a 'block' that is, in turn, joined with other blocks to form the quilt. 'Reading Goldilocks' is constructed from 'strips' of narrative joined and cut and stitched together again to form contrasting 'narrative blocks' (or chapters) that are joined to form the 'comforter' that is the complete therapeutic narrative. Every quilt has a border, made from either one of the fabrics that comprises a block, or from a third contrasting fabric. The border frames and stabilises the quilt. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' is that contrasting border. It completes 'Reading Goldilocks' and articulates the experience of piecing together the narrative of my life.

'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' is an exegesis that reflects on the research undertaken while writing a memoir. It delineates what informs the writing, why that information is relevant and how material gleaned from the research is used. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' is also a *reflexive exegesis*. The experience of writing and shifting between two different narrative voices had a positive therapeutic outcome for this writer, but why this happens requires careful deliberation. The research reveals that by switching between two different narrative voices and narrative points of view I *became* a reflexive, practised and confident writer who, prior to undertaking the research, doubted both her skills and abilities. Simply asserting this outcome is, however, not enough.

What is already known about the relationship between writing and healing and how does this relate to the present study? The following is a brief summary of the quantitative and qualitative research into therapeutic writing that confirms that it is a valid field of inquiry. The initial research began with a study, conducted in the latter half of the last century, of what was then called *writing as therapy* or *expressive writing.*[67] Randomised and controlled trials[68] affirm the efficacy of therapeutic

[67] James. W. Pennebaker, and Sandra Beall, 'Confronting a Traumatic Event: Toward an Understanding of Inhibition and Disease', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 95 (1986), 274-81.
[68] For example, see: James W. Pennebaker, 'Putting Stress into Words: Health, Linguistic and Therapeutic Implications', *Behavioural Research Therapy*, 31 (1993), 539-48; James W. Pennebaker, ed. *Emotion, Disclosure and Health* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association 1995); James W. Pennebaker, *Opening up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, (New York: The Guilford Press (1997/1990); James W. Pennebaker, and J. D. Seagal, 'Forming a Story: The Health Benefits Of Narrative', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55.10 (1999), 1243-1254; James W. Pennebaker, 'Telling Stories: The Health Benefits Of Narrative', *Literature and Medicine*, 19.1 (2000), 3-18; James W. Pennebaker, 'Writing About Emotional Events: From Past to Future', in *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-being*, ed. by S. J.

writing as a method of relieving stress, addressing trauma and grief, and easing health problems. Between 1998 and 2006, four meta-analyses of a range of studies conducted into writing as therapy were produced[69], along with one review of the literature[70] and, in 1999, a separate review of a 'decade of research demonstrating the efficacy of writing about past traumatic experiences on mental and physical health outcomes'.[71] Literary and qualitative explorations of therapeutic writing support this finding but also challenge empirical research by valorising the role of creativity and imagination in the production of therapeutic texts.[72]

Although research into the efficacy, or otherwise, of therapeutic writing is comprehensive, neither qualitative nor quantitative research has articulated a meaningful theory of why therapeutic writing is helpful.[73] Informed clinical, creative and pedagogic application is therefore limited. Inquiries and subsequent reviews into therapeutic writing demonstrate, as Brian A. Esterling et al. suggest, that '*writing* about upsetting experiences can improve mental and physical health'.[74] Despite this, and despite the research and meta-analyses into this 'fascinating challenge for the discipline of creative writing', the subject remains 'a field of practice and theory that

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Lepore and J. M, Smyth (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2002), pp. 281-91; James W. Pennebaker, *Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications 2004); James W. Pennebaker, and C. K. Chung, 'Expressive Writing; Connections to Physical and Mental Health', in *The Oxford Handbook of Health Psychology, ed. by* Howard S Friedman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 417-438.

[69] See Joanne Frattaroli, 'Experimental Disclosure and its Moderators: A Meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 132.6, (2006), pp. 823-865; Pasquale G. Frisina, Joan. C. Borod and Stephen. J. Lepore, 'A Meta-analysis of the Effects of Written Emotional Disclosure on the Health Outcomes in Clinical Populations', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 192.9 (2004), pp. 629-634; Alex. H. S. Harris, 'Does Expressive Writing Reduce Health Care Utilization? A Meta-analysis of Randomized Trials', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74.2 (2006), pp. 243-252; Joshua M. Smyth, 'Written Emotional Expression: Effects, Sizes, Outcome, Types, and Moderating Variables', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, pp. 174-184; and Jeannie Wright and Man Cheung Chung, 'Mastery or Mystery? Therapeutic Writing: A Review of the Literature', *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 29.3 (2001), pp. 277-291.

[70] Wright and Chung, pp. 277-291.

[71] Brian A. Esterling, and others, 'Empirical Foundations for Writing in Prevention and Psychotherapy: Mental and Physical Health Outcomes', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 19.1 (1999), 79-96.

[72] Wright and Chung, pp. 277-291 (p. 281).

[73] Ffion Murphy and Philip Neilson, 'Recuperating Writers – and Writing: The Potential of Writing Therapy', *Text*, 12.1 (2008), <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april08/murphy_nelison.htm> [accessed 25 April 2009].

[74] Brian A. Esterling, and others, pp. 79-96 (p. 92).

is still under construction'.[75]

It is possible that an answer to why therapeutic writing is effective is linked to the practice of Narrative Therapy. This is a clinical therapeutic technique where clients narrate stories that reveal 'underlying, unconscious 'relationship themes''.[76] The clinician's role is to uncover the *dominant story*, a life-long narrative that purportedly shapes and limits an individual's behaviour. Narrative therapists encourage the client to share occasions when the dominant story is resisted, and to describe strategies the client used to resist the dominant narrative.[77] The goal of Narrative Therapy is to replace the dominant story with a more personally satisfying narrative. Individuals are encouraged to record the dominant narrative—and narratives of resistance—but this is not the same as therapeutic writing as defined above. Narrative therapists do not encourage their clients to edit or shape their narratives, nor do they encourage the client to employ characterisation, plot, dialogue, symbolic language or metaphor. Narrative Therapy has its detractors,[78] but, like therapeutic writing, it recognises that we think, make meaning and know our world through narrative.[79] Narrative therapy and research into the narrative construction (and reconstruction) of the self, plus recent work championing narrative from an evolutionary perspective,[80] tends to affirm that therapeutic writing which employs a range of narrative techniques represents an ancient need to 'understand ourselves, to think—emotionally, imaginatively, reflectively—about human behaviour'.[81] Therapeutic writing may be

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[75] Ffion Murphy and Philip Neilson, 'Recuperating Writers—and Writing: The Potential of Writing Therapy', *Text*, 12.1 (2008), <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april08/murphy_nelison.htm> [accessed 25 April 2009].
[76] John McLeod, *An Introduction to Counseling*, 2nd edn. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), p. 159.
[77] See Michael White and David Epston *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: Norton, 1990) and David Epston and Michael White, *Experience, Contradiction, Narrative and Imagination: Selected Papers of David Epston and Michael White 1989 – 1991* (Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications, 1992), pp. 121-136; and Michel Foucault, Donald F. Bouchard, and Sherry Simon, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).
[78] Scott D Churchill, 'Stories of Experience and the Experience of Stories: Narrative Psychology, Phenomenology, and the Postmodern Challenge', *Constructivism in the Human Sciences*, 7.1/2, 2002, pp. 81-93.
[79] Jerome Bruner, 'A Narrative Model of Self-Construction', *The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 818.1 (1997), pp. 145-161.
[80] Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction* (Cambridge, Ma: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).
[81] Boyd, p. 208.

an effective healing modality because it generates life-enhancing stories[82] that have the potential to override, or at least question, gendered, cultural constructions of the self.

Not everyone, however, is comfortable about combining therapy with creative writing. Nancy Kuhl, for example, is not certain that writing can be tied to personal well-being, and believes the idea of personal self-expression in the classroom is problematic for writing teachers. A 'productive literary creative writing workshop' is, she admonishes, not the place for 'personal exploratory writing', though she does agree that 'good literary writing can rise out of exploratory personal writing'.[83] Kuhl is correct in noting that material from private journals must be heavily revised before publication but she appears to assume that therapeutic writing does not involve crafting, shaping and editing the text. Kuhl also reinforces 'academic/personal, political/solipsistic, self/other and postmodern/romantic'[84] binaries, as well as failing to address the need (and practice) of many emerging writers to write about trauma (or even 'ordinary' difficulties) and then turn their rough drafts into publishable texts. The aim of a literary text is to appeal, through plot, characterisation, dialogue, image, metaphor and symbol, to an individual's aesthetic and intellectual proclivities. Many artistic works, created during periods of chaos and confusion, nevertheless provide readers with moments of peace, enlightenment and clarification. They can also throw life, the way we live, and our assumptions, behaviors and prejudices, into sharp relief.

It must also be noted that organisations such as *Lapidus* and *The National Association for Poetry Therapy*[85]address, through their websites, professional journals, workshops, courses and social media pages such as Facebook, the benefits of therapeutic writing and the issues involved in working with therapeutic writers. Both organisations have members who are doctors, nurses, occupational/recreational

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[82] McLeod, p. 146.
[83] Nancy Kuhl, 'Personal Therapeutic Writing vs Literary Writing', in *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom: The Authority Project*, ed. by Anna Leahy (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2005), pp. 1-10, page 4.
[84] Charles M Anderson, with Karen Holt and Patty McGady 'Suture, Stigma, And the Pages That Heal', in Charles M. Anderson and Marian M MacCurdy *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* (Urbana, Illinois, 2000), (pp -58 82) p. 80.
[85] See: *Lapidus Homepage* [online]. Available from: <http://www.lapidus.org.uk> [cited 7 December 2013]; and *The National Association for Poetry Therapy Homepage* [online]. Available from: <http://www.poetrytherapy.org>[cited 7 December 2013].

therapists, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, educators and poets, people who write journals, novelists and storywriters. Numerous courses have emerged in universities, including the Metanoia Institute's Master of Science in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes[86] and, in Australia, Edith Cowan University offers a course in 'Writing Therapy'.[87]

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' is composed of four sections. The first, ''Reading Goldilocks': Methodology, Context, Fairy Tales', outlines the influence of phenomenology on this study. A philosophy that connects the description of lived experience, bracketing, intentionality and intersubjectivity, phenomenology has helped to fine-tune crucial components of this study. These include the notion of the writer as first reader of his or her text; the relationship between therapeutic writing and narrative voice; and the potential relationship between the therapeutic writer and her third person narrator. Much of 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' responds to the question, 'What is the lived experience of encountering two different versions of one event?' In order to answer this question a therapeutic writer needs to bracket prior knowledge and assumptions about writing, reading and editing a text. The ramifications of the process of writing their narrative using different narrative points of view; the intersubjective relationship between the therapeutic writer and his or her third person narrator; and the process of reflexion crucial to that relationship, must also be considered

This section also contains a discussion of women's life narratives from a feminist perspective. It suggests that the large body of qualitative or quantitative research concerning therapeutic writing has not been fully addressed by feminist scholars. It is

[86] Validated by Middlesex University, this course combines, 'insights from creative processes, literary theory, poetry therapy and psychology' with 'an integrative model of counselling based on humanistic, narrative and psychodynamic models.' *Metanoia Institute Homepage* [online]. Available from: <http://www.metanoia.ac.uk/post-qualification-doctorates/> [cited 7 December 2013].
[87] The course is described as follows: 'This unit explores the concept and practice of writing therapy and its relation to discourses of psychology, psychoanalysis, literature and history. Writing has sometimes been regarded as a symptom or cause of mental illness and pain as a source of creativity, but there is some evidence to suggest that writing improves physical and mental health, alleviates stress, and helps people to cope with grief and trauma. Students engage in and evaluate various kinds of writing therapy as well as competing ideas about creativity, illness, writing and memory. They also consider the related fields of testimonial life-writing and testimony studies that have arisen in response to major traumatic events of the twentieth century.' *Edith Cowan University* [cited 7 December 2013]. Available from: <http://www.ecu.edu.au/future-students/our-courses/disciplines-overview?id=Y43&unitset=MIAAHP>.

also suggested that therapeutic life writing as both an individual and a cultural phenomenon be investigated. This section ends with a brief discussion of fairy tales and how reading and researching the role and character of Goldilocks informs the development of Goldilocks in ‘Reading Goldilocks’.

The second section, ‘‘Reading Goldilocks’: Why Goldilocks is ‘Just Right’’, discusses why the character of Goldilocks is the third person narrator of the memoir. Apart from reasons related to my personal history and characteristics, Goldilocks represents a maligned character ripe for literary reclamation. The contrast, in most traditionally rendered versions of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, between Goldilocks and the bears, the concept of counter control (where a child behaves inappropriately in order to wrest back some ‘control’ of his or her life), and the puzzle of why Goldilocks fell asleep after her socially unacceptable behaviour, are all addressed. Much of this discussion is intended to direct the reader back to ‘Reading Goldilocks’ in order to demonstrate how the production of both the memoir and the exegesis informed and illuminated each other.

In section three, ‘‘Reading Goldilocks’: Narrative Point of View and Narrative Voice’, the focus turns to the distinction between first and third person narrative voice and narrative point of view. This includes comparing the benefits of therapeutic life narrative using only a first person narrator with the benefits of using first and third person narrators. A writer’s active participation in the construction of a text is also discussed. Recognising that narrative voice is a purposefully constructed literary and cultural metaphor acknowledges the potential degree of control a therapeutic writer can have over how she or he narrates the trauma that she or he has experienced.

This leads to section four, ‘‘Reading Goldilocks’: Shifting Voices and Therapeutic Writing’. It discusses how shifting between different narrative points of view and narrative voices can provide a therapeutic writer with fresh insight into his or her trauma, how he or she coped with the trauma and how he or she might deal with any future trauma. The nature of the intersubjective relationship between the therapeutic writer and her third person narrator is explored. The experience of writing the dual (or split) narrative and the potential inherent in making the shift between the two is also examined. The metaphor of a threshold is used to describe the experience of

crossing from one voice to another and the nature of the void or caesura that is found when a writer moves into the space between different narrative perspectives. My own personal insight into this technique is offered as an example of what might be gained by a therapeutic writer seeking to move beyond the limits of first person narrative voice. It is suggested that the relationship between narrative voice and therapeutic writing is that of imaginatively experiencing the world of another.

‘Writing ‘Reading Goldilocks’’ concludes by admitting that the proposal that writing in both first and third person narrative voice and narrative point of view is more effective when accompanied by a reflexive account of the lived experience of shifting between the two narrative voices and points of view is not conclusively established. The conclusion does, however, outline the implications of this research for therapeutic writing, the therapeutic writer and the counsellor writer. It also calls for further study into the use of a range of narrative elements for therapeutic writing.

‘Reading Goldilocks’: Methodology, Context, Fairy Tales

I Methodology

This section briefly introduces the phenomenological research method used for this project. It will also outline the idea of intersubjectivity, its influence on the final drafts of ‘Reading Goldilocks’, and how a therapeutic writer, as the first reader of his or her own text, engages in an intersubjective relationship with a character that they have created. This leads to a brief discussion about the author and his or her right to claim authorship of a text and concludes by noting that, as a result of this insight, the process of writing ‘Reading Goldilocks’ had therapeutic benefits.

Phenomenology is the study of subjective meaning and the significance of our experiences. It describes how an individual perceives objects, his or her thoughts, memories, imagination, emotions and desires, and our perceptions of others and social interactions with those others. Phenomenology is used in this study because, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out, both art and the philosophy of lived experience have:

> the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to seize the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being’. [1]

Phenomenological and other qualitative research methods, such as ethnography, autoethnography and hermeneutics, attempt to describe rather than explain phenomena. Because phenomenology is the study of an individual’s lived experience, research proceeds only after the researcher has examined and then set aside, or ‘bracketed’, any assumptions or partialities associated with the phenomena being studied. If any assumptions or biases exist, they must be made clear.

Intentionality describes:

> [t]he simple “giveness” of the situation of the subject’s experience to a reflective apprehension of that situation’s meaning as having been co-constituted (“intended”) by the subject’s consciousness or “existential

[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. xxi.

presence".[2]

These objects of consciousness—be they physical objects or dreams, fantasies, abstract thought or the contents of the imagination—do not simply refer to the things we think about but to *how* their properties are expressed and the 'self' awareness associated with an object's expression. This concept becomes important when the therapeutic potential of a writer's intersubjective relationship with the third person narrator is considered.

Various inductive, exploratory and descriptive methods are used in phenomenological and qualitative research,[3] many of which relate to the 'practice based', exegetical method of creative research. In the present project, the research subject is the same person as the researcher. While this is admittedly a difficult position to be in, it does not negate the methods used. In health studies this involves gathering data through 'interviews and observations, creative media and group work.'[4] Research questions may include, 'How did you experience this situation and what does the experience mean to you?'[5]

A key component of phenomenological or qualitative research is description. Research participants are encouraged to articulate their subjective perceptions and experiences, a move that contests empirical research methodology and the resulting knowledge and assumptions of that method. If it is accepted that the objects of our consciousness are apprehended through describing their properties,[6] then qualitative and phenomenological research provide rich material to examine. It must be understood, however, that all data is provisional and contingent.

An example of such research involved ascertaining how participants coped with a loved one experiencing a serious illness. Participants were asked about their lived

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[2] Scott D Churchill, 'Stories of Experience and the Experience of Stories: Narrative Psychology, Phenomenology, and the Postmodern Challenge', *Constructivism in the Human Sciences*, 7.1/2, 2002, pp. 81-93 (p. 88.)
[3] Linda Finlay, *Phenomenology for Therapists: Researching the Lived World* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
[4] Linda Finlay, p. 8.
[5] Linda Finlay, *p.* 8.
[6] Merleau-Ponty, pp. xvi-xviii.

experience of 'being there' for the person who is ill.[7] The responses were recorded and transcribed and the researcher read the transcribed text several times, searching through the participant's responses for overall themes. During this phase of the research the researcher is 'in active dialogue with the interview text'[8] as he or she reads, rereads and asks question of the text. Sections of texts that contain similar themes or 'units of meaning' are linked together so that the researcher can glean an 'essential general structure of the phenomenon of the text'.[9]

This process is used by most writers, although they would describe it in different terms. A very similar method is used for the present project, chiefly as a way to prompt self-reflection. This is not unusual for writers who continually read and reread their work: deleting, adding or rearranging material; correcting errors; searching for metaphors and symbols; and seeking connections and meanings embedded in the text. Writers can also discover something new in the text or can be gratified by finding that what they intended, and hoped was in the text, is actually there. For the therapeutic writer, a professionally trained writer/counsellor, familiar with both the process of writing and editing a text, as well as with phenomenological and qualitative research methodology, could help the writer interrogate his or her text. As I worked on the final drafts of 'Reading Goldilocks' I did this, asking: 'What is the lived experience of writing this piece? What is the lived experience of shifting from one narrative point of view and narrative voice to another?' This was done in addition to the usual redrafting, editing, polishing and further rewriting that is the writer's lot. There are, however, additional questions crucial to my research: 'What is the lived experience of encountering two different versions of one event? What is the lived experience of conducting a relationship with my third person narrator? How has that character reshaped the trauma I experienced into 'another form?'[10] These questions are associated with the notion of intersubjectivity which, in turn, leads to the significance of therapeutic writers being reflective first readers of their own text.

Intersubjectivity is generally perceived as an occasion for ambiguity. It is what

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[7] See Barbara E Champlin, 'Being There for Another with a Serious Illness', *Qualitative Health Research* 9.11 (2009), 1525-1535, for an example of one qualitative study that describes this method.
[8] Barbara E Champlin, pp. 1525-1535 (p. 1527).
[9] Barbara E Champlin, pp. 1525-1535 (p. 1527).
[10] Stephen K. Levine, *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), p. 50p.

happens when a subject conducts a *subjective* consideration of another person while at the same time, being aware that they are the *object* of the subjective awareness of the other. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty: '[s]olitude and communication cannot be the two horns of a dilemma, but two "moments" of one phenomenon'.[11] Sonia Kruks suggests Merleau-Ponty's statement encapsulates the nature of intersubjectivity. [12] It seems these two moments occur because of the embodied experience of being always and only the self but, at the very same time, never fully the self as we perceive it, because we are a self as perceived by others. In other words, we are at the same time subject and object. For Paul John Eakins, this is an essential facet of life narratives:

> First, *all* identity is relational; second, narrative is a—if not *the*—principal mode in which relational identity is formed and transacted; and third, the definition of autobiography, and its history as well, must be stretched to reflect the kinds of self-writing in which relational identity is characteristically displayed.[13] (Italics original)

Awareness of one's subjectivity ensures the reciprocal awareness of the subjectivity of others, which indicates that phenomenology is not solipsistic, as is sometimes thought; embodied awareness of the world is always located in a particular time and culture and is always intersubjective. When a writer constructs a text, they construct a potential intersubjective relationship between a *reader* and a character portrayed in that text. But well before a reader engages with the text the writer, as noted above, is the first reader of the text.

Merleau-Ponty has pointed out that:

> Each time I find something worth saying, it is because I have not been satisfied to coincide with my feeling (sic), because I have succeeded in studying it as a way of behaving, as a modification of my relations with others and with the world, because *I have managed to think about it as I would think about the behaviour of another person whom I happened to witness*.[14] (Emphasis added)

This implies that if a therapeutic writer is encouraged to *reread* and be reflexive

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[11] Merleau-Ponty, p. 418.
[12] Sonia Kruks, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Difference in Feminism', in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 25-47 (p. 41).
[13] Paul John Eakin, 'The Story of the Story', in *True Relations: Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern*, ed. by G. Thomas Cousner and Joseph Fichtelberg (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998), pp. 63-81 (p. 63).
[14] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 52.

about a text they have deliberately rendered in third person narrative voice, they can gain an enhanced awareness of *their* perceptions of the world by experiencing 'another's' perceptions, even though they created that 'other'. In other words, the writer experiences intersubjectivity with a character they have created, even if that character is loosely based on, as with autobiographical texts, that writer. It is suggested that the therapeutic benefits of this method are enhanced if the third person narrator is modelled on a 'fictional' character that appeals to, or interests, the therapeutic writer.

'Reading Goldilocks' explores the phenomenon—the lived experience—of a therapeutic writer conducting an intersubjective relationship with a fictional character. Having researched phenomenology and worked on successive drafts of the Goldilocks chapters (in other words, being the first reader of my own text), I (re)experienced significant periods of my life told from two different perspectives, composed in different voices and often using different images. In other words, I experienced Merleau-Ponty's two 'moments' of one phenomenon, through an intersubjective relationship with Goldilocks.

'Reading Goldilocks' also tests the lived experience of shifting between first and third person narrative voice and narrative point of view. This is conducted through a process of reflexivity which, as Sue White, Jan Fook and Fiona Gardener point out, involves 'understanding the process by which knowledge gets made about an individual's practice in the process of producing a reflective account.'[15] Bolton takes this further, claiming that reflexivity is:

> a dialogue with the self […] a critical enquiry into our own thought processes, prejudices and habitual assumptions about such as power and authority, professional role, diversity and the match between values and principles (sic).[16]

This has implications for the therapeutic writer and the critic of therapeutic writing; being reflective of, and reflexive about, an intersubjective relationship with a character created as a means to a therapeutic end implies that the notion of authorial

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[15] Sue White, Jan Fook and Fiona Gardener, *Critical Reflection in Health and Social Care* (Maidenhead, England: Open University Press, 2006), p.77.
[16] Gillie Bolton, 'Who is Telling the Story? The Critical Role of the Narrator in Reflective and Reflexive writing', *Educational Reflective Practices*, 2.1, (2012), 35-54 (p. 46).

manipulation of a text and as such must be accepted. Postmodern discourse on the author does not encourage this type of authorial intent. The artist is no longer thought of as having 'privileged access to their works' meaning'.[17] As Jeri Kroll argues, however, the relatively recent appearance of the writer/academic in universities, and his or her participation in discourse about writing, narrative voice, narrators and, ultimately, authorship, reinstates the author as an agent who has 'moved beyond the invisibility of post modernism'.[18] Kroll also claims that:

> texts are determined by myriad factors, and that they [authors] function as a nexus, not only between theory and practice, but between the interiority of the individual, the academic ethos of the scholar or critic and the exteriority of the culture. Authors may be planets ringed by a series of subject positions, each modified by and modifying the others, affected by gaps and silences between, but they are certainly visible on the horizon.[19]

This means that Kroll's 'hybrid creature',[20] the Creative Arts exegesis, refuses postmodern thinking; it recognises that it is the author who creates narrative point of view, narrative voice and the third person narrator. The rehabilitation of the writer makes it possible to investigate how, by creating a third person narrator, a therapeutic writer can seize one 'moment of time' and convert it to two moments of one phenomenon experienced and perceived by two different 'characters'. This, in turn, elicits conjecture about how this phenomenon can contain mental, emotional and behavioural distress.

Merleau-Ponty has asserted that:

> [b]efore expression there is nothing but a vague fever, and only the work itself, completed and understood, will prove that there was something rather than nothing to be found there.[21]

'Reading Goldilocks' describes the experience of suffering, for much of my life, from this 'vague fever'; the desire to be creative, to write, to make art. 'Reading Goldilocks' is also the text that assuaged that fever. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks''

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[17] Monika Langer, 'Making the Phenomenological Reduction Experientially Real', in *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy*, ed. by Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Cornell University Press 2000), pp. 138-153 (pp. 143-144).
[18] Jeri Kroll, 'The Resurrected Author: Creative Writers in 21st-century Higher Education'. *New Writing*, 1.2 (2004), 89-102 (pp.100-101).
[19] Kroll, pp. 89-102 (pp. 100-101).
[20] Jeri Kroll, 'The Role of the Examiner: Scholar, Reviewer, Critic, Judge, Mentor', *TEXT*, 8.2 (2004) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct04/kroll.htm≥ [accessed 9th April 2011].
[21] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 6.

is where I employ phenomenological methods to help me think about therapeutic writing, reflect on an intersubjective relationship with Goldilocks, and claim my position as an author. Lodged within the pages of 'Reading Goldilocks' is a woman who wrote as a testimony of her resilience, who will continue to write and who will add to current knowledge about therapeutic writing. Before expanding on this claim, however, this study must be briefly located within the context of women's life narratives and the problem of authorial intention.

II Context

In *Following the Tamborine Man: A Birthmother's Memoir*, Janet Mason Ellerby writes:

> I was fascinated by first-person narrators who harboured secret traumas that could not be healed unless they could tell the story that would assuage their pain. [22]

This section situates Ellerby's memoir, and 'Reading Goldilocks', in a long academic tradition of analysing life writing and life narratives. It also proposes, however, that this tradition may have a negative influence on the reception of therapeutic life narratives such as 'Reading Goldilocks', *Following the Tamborine Man* and Ellerby's earlier text, *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women's Memoir.*[23]

According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, life narrative refers to 'many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography'.[24] Life writing, on the other hand, is any form of writing that 'takes a life as its subject'[25] although life writing can include an 'explicit self-reference to the writer.'[26] 'Reading Goldilocks' is a life narrative in the form of a memoir, which is, according to Helen Buss, a 'discursive practice in which material realities and imaginative possibilities coexist…

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[22] Ellerby, Janet Mason, *Following the Tambourine Man: A Birthmother's Memoir* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 199.
[23] Ellerby, Janet Mason, *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women's Memoir (*New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001).
[24] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 3.
[25] Smith and Watson p. 3.
[26] Smith and Watson, p. 3.

[to]…accommodate both the factual and the theoretical'.[27] Memoirs, like all life narratives, are constructed and identity is constructed through life narratives.[28]

Feminists have analysed theories concerning women's life writing and life narratives by building on and contesting the work of Paul De Man, Paul John Eakin, James Olney and Phillipe LeJeune.[29] In addition to Smith and Watson, Shari Benstock, Bella Brodski and Celeste Shenk, Helen Buss, Leigh Gilmore, Carolyn Heilbrun, Cynthia Huff, Estelle Jelinek, Marlene Kadar, Jeanne Perreault, Nancy K Miller, Domna Stanton and Carolyn Kay Steadman have all contributed to a large body of work focusing on women's autobiographical texts, letters, memoirs and dairies. Within this discourse, only a few scholars have acknowledged the rigorous and comprehensive body of quantitative and qualitative research that supports the notion that writing, like other forms of art, is therapeutic.

There are several possible reasons for why this has occurred. The first is related to Domna Stanton's ground-breaking examination of gender and gender positions portrayed in life narratives, and her notion of 'graphia',[30] or the *text* that represents a life. Prior to this, engaging critically with the 'life' narrated in a life narrative was not a problem; autobiographies were assumed to portray exemplary, heroic or successful individuals, usually men. Feminist scholars then discovered that exemplar women had written letters, diaries, journals, autobiographies and memoirs that narrated their contribution to society. A method of reading and acknowledging these women's contribution to the genre, as well as their oppression within and lack of access to the genre, was needed. The challenges women's life narratives posed to male dominance was also acknowledged. Commenting on the life being represented was therefore acceptable, particularly when a woman's life could be lauded as 'heroic' as could a

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[27] Helen Buss, *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (Toronto: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002), p. 2.
[28] See, for example, Dan P McAdams, *The Stories we Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow & Co. 1993); Dan P McAdams, 'Personality, Modernity, and the Storied Self: A Contemporary Framework for Studying Persons', *Psychological Inquiry*, 7.4 (1996), 295-321; and Jerome Bruner, 'A Narrative Model of Self-Construction', *The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 818.1 (1997), 145-161; and Jerome Bruner, 'Life as Narrative', *Social Research*, 71.3 (2004), 691-790.
[29] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Woman's Autobiographical Practices', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 4-52.
[30] Domna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

man's. The problem was that this legitimised white, middle class, educated women, while black, disabled and lesbian life narratives were overlooked. Concerns regarding masculine models of reading women's life narrative, and the accompanying gender bias of many male literary critics, contributed to the tendency to read women's life narratives as texts *accounting* for women's oppression rather than as exemplary (or otherwise) lives.[31] It is therefore possible that early reception of women's life writing, combined with the concept of 'graphia', which focusses exclusively on the 'text' and not on the female subject's lived experience, has negatively shaped discourse about therapeutic life narratives.

In addition, experience itself is problematised. Joan W. Scott, for example, comments that: 'Experience is so much part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives, that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion'.[32] Scott then goes on to argue precisely that. She insists on experience's 'discursive nature' and the 'politics of its construction' adding that it is 'something which we want to explain'[33] rather than the origin of knowledge.[34] There is a danger inherent in denying 'experience' as a legitimate site of knowledge; individuals may be reduced to merely *constructed*, rather than *constructing*, agents[35] constituted by language instead of constituting language.

A second possible reason for the lack of feminist scholarship concerning therapeutic writing may be due to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's concept of the narrative voice. For Smith and Watson narrative voice is a combination of the 'narrative "I"'[36] who (re)produces the life narrative of an 'historical "I"' and an 'ideological "I"'[37] that together result in a fragmented 'narrated "I"'.[38] Stanton, Scott and Smith and Watson all seem, therefore, to negate experience, a move which significantly undermines women authors who are restricted to using a 'contaminated' phallocentric language that places them on the margins of a culture they are powerless to resist because they are made up of disparate 'I's' jostling each other for

[31] *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, pp. 4-10.
[32] Joan W Scott 'The Evidence of Experience' in *Critical Inquiry, 17* (1991), 773-797 (p. 797).
[33] Scott, 773-797 (p. 797).
[34] Scott, 773-797 (p. 797).
[35] Meili Steele, *Theorising Textual Subjects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 6.
[36] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 59.
[37] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, pp. 58-63.
[38] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 61.

attention. In 'Reading Goldilocks', Goldilocks states that her 'banishment is a blessing'; she uses her position to dwell: 'on the verge of civilisation' where she 'savour[s] the space between ambiguity and certainty where I'm free to test the philosophy of just right and its endless opportunity to dialogue with dogma.'[39] Goldilocks appears to understand that current feminist life writing discourse no longer operates as a site of liberation, transgression and resistance. Instead, it risks reinscribing women's repression and appears unconcerned by whether or not a woman can find time to write, and what that experience teaches her about her gendered, social, cultural and personal limitations or the systemic societal and cultural barriers to women's textual production. Instead, post-modern feminist criticism focuses on how women express themselves using a 'voice' that is split three ways. The narrated 'life', 'bios' or 'I' is 'never fully realised', and life narratives become 'stories of failure to achieve fullness or closure'.[40]

This sounds uncannily similar to the experience of traumatised women or those suffering from depression, anxiety, ill-health or a disability. In 1998, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson acknowledged that 'writing and reading autobiography have long been regarded by psychoanalytic practitioners as instruments of healing', adding that the emerging 'therapeutics of writing autobiography … calls for further theorizing'.[41] In 2001, however, when they revisited 'the histories of autobiographies and autobiography criticism'[42] they devoted only a few pages to a discussion of life narratives as therapeutic, focusing instead on narratives of trauma.[43] Is this because the idea of a split subject actually impedes women's access to the very therapy that might heal the split and the trauma they have experienced?

Another possible reason for feminism's apparent lack of interest in therapeutic writing could be connected to Suzette Henke's *Shattered Subjects*. Henke concludes that 'translating confessional speech into written language may profoundly expand

[39] Janet Thomas, 'Reading Goldilocks', (unpublished memoir for doctoral thesis, Flinders University, 2014), p. 17.
[40] Linda Anderson, 'Autobiography and the Feminist Subject', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 119-35 (p. 119).
[41] Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, p. 40.
[42] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. xi.
[43] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 22-24.

the healing potential embedded in testimonial discourse'.[44] Working from James Pennebaker's *Opening Up*[45] and Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*[46] Henke calls therapeutic writing 'scriptotherapy'; the 'process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment.'[47] Henke is one of the first to claim that 'much of the impetus behind women's life writing in this century has been connected by emotional webs and filaments to a wide range of traumatic episodes'.[48] The problem with this trend is that focusing on trauma and its role in the construction of female subjectivity risks fetishising trauma rather than addressing its causes and treatment. As noted above, in the introduction, if trauma, but not the means to prevent or assuage trauma, continues to be culturally constructed and validated the result may be a culture that affirms disconnection and alienation. A more positive approach is to conceive and validate healing as a cultural, and not just an individual, construction. As Ffion Murphy notes, therapeutic writing:

> makes therapeutic culture explicit, it also equips individuals with ways to negotiate and contest it. Writing therapy might imply a ubiquitous, vulnerable subject, but this figure, *by writing*, alone or online or in groups, demonstrates, not passivity but agency; the aim of writing therapy is to harness creativity, emotion and reason to produce more constructive stories of the relational self; the writing self, in other words, is necessarily imagined as resourceful even if it is also a multiplicity of other things.[49]

A feminist theory of therapeutic life narrative that articulates the processes of healing and valorises this relational, resourceful subject is sorely needed. The subject of 'Reading Goldilocks' is not trauma but the healing power of a creatively rendered narrative. Smith and Watson note that 'more nuanced readings'[50] of life narratives are made possible by inviting sociology, psychology and anthropology and other disciplines into the conversation'.[51] 'Reading Goldilocks' and 'Writing 'Reading

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[44] Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), p. 141.
[45] James Pennebaker, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1997).
[46] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 2010).
[47] Henke, p. xii.
[48] Henke, p. xxii.
[49] Ffion Murphy, 'Writing Therapy in the Academy: Risks and Challenges', *Ethical Imaginations: Refereed Conference Papers of the 16th Annual AAWP Conference 2011*<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks2011/428/> [accessed 20th November 2012].
[50] Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, pp. 39-40.
[51] Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, pp. 39-40.

Goldilocks'' is an attempt to do that.

To return to Janet Mason Ellerby, neither of her texts is a simple first person narrative. *Intimate Reading* is a fascinating and courageous academic treatise that blends the personal and the academic, emotional and intellectual, and private and public realms. It contains a detached authoritative, academic third person narrative voice that is attended by a less definitive first person narrative voice. This contrasts with *Following the Tamborine Man*, which is a 'story of losing Sorrow' (her daughter), and not a treatise 'about women who decide to stop telling secrets'.[52] But while Ellerby's books move in the direction of combining first and third person narrative voice and narrative point of view, 'Reading Goldilocks' intentionally employs both first and third person narrative voice. While the work of the last four decades is important, memoirs like 'Reading Goldilocks' and Ellerby's two texts require new and different readings, ones that can meaningfully interpret writing that has therapeutic outcomes and that require specific and rigorous analysis.

III Fairy Tales

Another area of feminism and feminist literary criticism that has had a significant impact on 'Reading Goldilocks' is how contemporary readers experience fairy tales.[53] Life narrative, like any narrative, is never free of the 'mosaic of references to or quotations from other texts'.[54] As will be seen, Goldilocks' enigmatic, transgressive nature has long been mined as a site of potential creativity. *The Three Bears* is a potent site of theoretical conjecture, creativity and play. In 'Reading Goldilocks', the story has a major influence on the memoir's narrative trajectory. In order to understand this influence, the following section outlines the publishing history of *The Three Bears*, provides a brief survey of interpretations of the character and role of Goldilocks and outlines my interpretation of the character's role and critical reception.

A genre that is more complex than first imagined, fairy tales have been described as

[52] Ellerby, *Following the Tamborine Man*, p. 6.
[53] Donald Haase, *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 28.
[54] David Macy, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 203.

instruments of acculturation[55] but their reception falls into two broad categories. They either reinforce dominant gender stereotypes, particularly those of passivity, martyrdom and victimhood, or depict, in older and lesser known tales, powerful and resourceful[56] female characters. Fairy tales are also considered in light of their sociocultural contexts.[57] Research has been conducted into how fairy tales are edited; attitudes toward oral story tellers; mythmaking; and women's subjectivity within the tales. This has provided a better understanding of fairy tales' diversity, variation and potential as sites of 'imaginative power'.[58] Interpretation and close reading of fairy tales reveal that they invite 'thematic instability and contradictory impulses,' as well as the 'ambivalence with which women writers and other creative artists … approach the genre.'[59] This is confirmed through a range of structuralist, psychological, ethnographic, semiotic,[60] Marxist and deconstructionist readings of fairy tales[61] and demonstrates the potential for a rich mix of opinions concerning fairy tales' inherent instability, ambivalence and contradiction.

The first published version of *The Three Bears* is believed to be in Robert Southey's 1837 anonymously published collection of stories, *The Doctor*.[62] The fairy tale is of uncertain origin; Southey is reported to have heard it from his uncle, 'a fluent exponent of the traditional tale'.[63] It is possible Southey may have told the tale to his children as early as 1805,[64] but it is unclear whether he was aware of a manuscript version of the story written by Eleanor Mure in 1831.[65] Both Southey's and Mure's[66] versions feature an old woman as the intruder, and the bears are not portrayed as a

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[55] Marcia R. Lieberman, '"Some Day My Prince Will Come": Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale', *College English*, 34.3 (1972), 383-395.
[56] Haase, pp. 5-6.
[57] Haase, p. 13.
[58] Haase, p. 5, citing Karen E. Rowe.
[59] Hasse, p. 30.
[60] Steven Swann Jones, 'The Innocent Persecuted Heroine Genre: An Analysis of Its Structure and Themes', *Western Folklore*, 52.1 (1993), 13-41 (p. 15).
[61] Vanessa Joosen, 'Fairy Tale Retellings between Art and Pedagogy', *Children's Literature in Education*, 36.2 (2005), 129-139 (p. 131).
[62] David Bruce, 'The Publishing History of the Three Bears,' *Book Collector* 44.3 (1995), pp. 318-338.
[63] Bruce, p. 319.
[64] Bruce, p. 320.
[65] Eleanor Mure, *The Story of the Three Bears* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). This text is a Facsimile of a MS in the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books in the Toronto Public Library. The original title page reads: 'The story of the three bears, metrically related, with illustrations locating it at Cecil Lodge in September 1831, by Eleanor Mure.'
[66] Bruce, p. 321.

family. In Mure's version, the old woman enters the bears' house because they rebuffed her during an earlier visit. Southey, by contrast, claims the old woman was an unsavoury character who leapt from the window at the end of the story and:

> whether she broke her neck in the fall, or ran into the wood and was lost, or found her way out of the wood and was taken up by the constable and sent to the House of Correction for a vagrant as she was, I cannot tell. But the Three Bears never saw anything more of her.[67]

David Bruce suggests both Southey's and Mure's versions could have been derived from two earlier versions of the story. One of these may have been William Caxton's 1489 translation of a series of Dutch tales that included a tale of a fox and three bears.[68] This leads to conjecture that the term 'vixen', in Caxton's translation, resulted in later story tellers creating a villainous old woman as the antagonist due to the association of 'vixen' with a 'spirited or quarrelsome woman'.[69] Ultimately, however, Bruce decides '[t]he origins of 'The Three Bears' may remain elusive'.[70]

A fictional narrative set in a fantasy world at an unspecified time, the tale's plot is simple and entertaining. It has, like most fairy tales, changed over time although the most significant change has been to the representation of Goldilocks. In his 1849 *Treasury of Pleasure Books for Young Children*, Joseph Cundall made the intruder a little girl called 'Silver-Hair',[71] also known as 'Silver-Locks'. She became, in 1868, 'Golden-Hair' and finally, in 1904, 'Goldilocks'.[72]

Surlalunefairytales.com[73] provides a brief history and annotated version of the tale. It also lists numerous publications, adaptations and versions of it, including novels, collections containing the story, poetic adaptations, a link to music from various films and stage shows, and a list of films (many of them animations), and plays based on the tale. Clothing and tote bags may be purchased from *Surlalune*, all of which are

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[67] Robert Southey, 'The Story of the Three Bears', in *The Doctor, &c*, ed. by John Wood Warter, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1856), <http://books.google.com.au> [accessed 21 November 2013], pp. 327-329.
[68] Bruce, p. 346.
[69] *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[70] Bruce, p. 325
[71] Bruce, p. 322.
[72] Bruce p. 323.
[73] *SurLaLune Fairy Tales: Annotated Fairy Tales, Fairy Tale Books and Illustrations [online]*, updated 12 February 2013 [cited 21 May 2012]. Available from: <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>.

emblazoned with 'Just Right'. Goldilocks' quest for 'just right' is also a metaphorical reference to the concept of adequacy, suitability and even perfection. This is illustrated by Paul Davies' *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why is the Universe Just Right for Life?*[74] A well-known cereal manufacturer markets a brand of cereal called 'Just Right', indicating that Goldilocks' search is a motif that has endured beyond its original manifestation. Part of the popularity of the tale may also be explained through Roy A. Freedle's 1996 study of recall accuracy.[75] This is enhanced by the tale's 'redundant episodic structures' (the repetition of the bowl, chair and bed motifs), its 'causal connectedness', and its 'illogical assertions'[76] such as the bowls of porridge being either too hot, too cold or just right even though they were all served and left to cool at the same time.

Given the original title of the story, the reader's sympathy generally goes to the little bear cub deprived of his porridge and chair. It could be argued, however, that Goldilocks is the tale's chief protagonist. The reader's attention is directed towards Goldilocks through her name, appearance, behaviour, and the bears' re-iteration of her actions ('Somebody's been eating my porridge.'). She could also be called the antagonist because she enters, unbidden, an unfamiliar cottage, eats a bowl of porridge intended for another, breaks a chair and sleeps uninvited in a—to her—strange bed. What is clear is that her story usually begins in *medias res*; there is no reason, except when the story is changed, why Goldilocks is walking alone through the forest. Unlike her fictional cohort, Little Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks has no goods to deliver, there is no mention of her being on a quest, nor is there a sense of her having run away, either from home or from a foe. This depicts Goldilocks as mysterious and unknowable, a view that, in early versions, is reinforced when she disappears back into the forest. The children's book *Each Peach Pear Plum*,[77] a simple, rhymed picture book told in the form of the riddle 'I spy' features, among other well-known fairy tale characters, the three bears who are dressed in English

[74] Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why is the Universe Just Right for Life?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).
[75] Roy A. Freedle, 'Recalling the Three Bears after 10 Years: Exploring New Vistas for Discourse and Text-Processing Models through the Study of Folktales', in *Empirical Approaches to Literature and Aesthetics*, ed. by Roger J. Kreuz and Mary Sue MacNealey (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1996), pp. 157-177 (p. 176).
[76] Freedle, p. 175.
[77] Janet and Allen Ahlberg, *Each Peach Pear Plum* (London: William Collins and Sons, 1980).

hunting tweeds and carry hunting rifles. Goldilocks does not appear in *Each Peach Pear Plum*, affirming an absence which, despite numerous reiterations of her story, is an integral part of her identity.

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim appears perplexed by the story. He claims it lacks many essential features of a fairy tale[78] and is, instead, a cautionary tale involving intrusion into the 'basic family constellation'.[79] Bettelheim's Goldilocks is an outsider in search of personal and social identity, particularly within the family. By sampling each chair and bed she attempts to find an appropriate role for herself. Entering the bears' bedroom alludes to a child's interest in the mysteries of adult life, including his or her parents' sexual activities. Eating Baby Bear's food and sleeping in his bed indicates that Goldilocks reclaims—or wishes to reclaim—her role as the child of the family; running away instead of facing up to the outraged bears is an indication of her failure to achieve independence and maturity.[80] Bettelheim also believes the story raises issues of sibling rivalry. Read from the perspective of either Baby Bear or Goldilocks, the tale describes how children come to terms with being replaced by a newcomer.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Goldilocks is the archetypal, censured, banished girl struggling to negotiate her way through the world while learning to trust her perception of *just right* but forgetting, on one occasion at least, to respect other creatures' rights. She is also a delinquent; from the Latin *de*—off or away, and *linquere*—to leave, abandon. Goldilocks abandons her moral and social obligations and responsibilities. She is fussy about what she eats, where she sits and where she sleeps. This is not without its consequences. As Anne Cranny-Francis points out, 'active female roles almost always signify evil',[81] and it may well be that critical little girls are likewise perceived as 'difficult'. It could also be argued, given the history of the tale, Goldilocks' behaviour and her (usual) 'disappearance' at the end of the tale, that she is more persecuted than persecuting. This is particularly so in Mure's version where, reminiscent of the punishments once meted out to heretics,

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[78] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 215.
[79] Bettelheim, p. 217.
[80] Bettelheim, p. 221.
[81] Anne Cranny-Francis, *Engendered Fiction: Analysing Gender in the Production and Reception of Texts* (NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1992), p. 75.

she is burned, almost drowned and thrown from a church steeple, a punishment surely incommensurate with the ‘crime’.

While Goldilocks’ function as third person narrative voice will be discussed in more detail later, the choice of Goldilocks as narrator came from my early childhood association with the tale, Goldilocks’ ongoing popularity and the creative potential of her misrepresentation as a wilful, selfish, destructive ‘bad girl’ archetype. She is, therefore, a perfect representation of how I was often labelled and I interpret her very differently from the commentators discussed thus far. She is a feisty, assertive, determined, resourceful contrast to the more acquiescent traits I describe myself as having in ‘Reading Goldilocks’. By choosing Goldilocks to tell parts of my story I sought to ‘harness’ my creativity, share experiences of my ‘relational self’ and explore a character who I believed was very resourceful. In the memoir she represents the power of choice, of deciding whether to ‘do right’, ‘be right’, or to choose according to the dictates of ‘just right’, and of the consequences of such a decision. These, however, are not the only reasons why Goldilocks is ‘just right’ for my memoir.

‘Reading Goldilocks’: Why Goldilocks is ‘just right’

This section discusses why the character Goldilocks narrates parts of the memoir and why, based on Goldilocks’ characteristics, that choice is therapeutic. Creating the Goldilocks found in ‘Reading Goldilocks’ was initially a form of creative experimentation and play. Narrating her ‘life’ alongside mine stimulated conjecture about our lived experience, and what drove and motivated our choices. Exploring and answering such questions are part of the problems and rewards of creating a fictional character, but by answering these questions the therapeutic writer opens themselves to a deeper understanding of how the third person narrator is a significant source of healing.

As signalled in the prologue of ‘Reading Goldilocks’, the initial reason for choosing Goldilocks as the third person narrative voice is the close association of the tale with my initiation into the mysteries of the printed word. The prologue also introduces the tense relationship that existed, even then, between mother and daughter (‘I read you that story every night. I want this story. We’ll have this story if you read it to me’[1]). Another reason for choosing Goldilocks is that, when the story of *The Three Bears* was first published, Goldilocks was Silver Hair, a difficult old woman, not a young child. There is something circular in this that suited my purposes: I began writing the memoir in my middle 50s, although my ‘relationship’ with Goldilocks began in my youth.

A further reason is the various names ‘Janet’ and Goldilocks were given by those who ‘name us at their whim’.[2] This positions Goldilocks as compatriot and friend, although one nevertheless willing to admit that ‘Janet’ can be ‘boring’.[3] When, for example, Goldilocks describes MarriedWorld—borrowed from Ira Levin’s book *The Stepford Wives* and the two film adaptations[4] of the novel—I was, as a writer, able to distance myself from my marriage and gain insight into it as a cultural, social and political institution. Goldilocks is somewhat scathing about the marriage, while

[1] Janet Thomas, ‘Reading Goldilocks’ (unpublished memoir for doctoral thesis, Flinders University, 2014), p. 10.
[2] Thomas, p. 16.
[3] Thomas, p. 17.
[4] Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000, c1972): *The Stepford Wives* dir. by Bryan Forbes (Colombia 1975, Paramount, 2004); *The Stepford Wives* dir. by Frank Oz (DreamWorks, 2004).

'Janet's' memories of the marriage[5] are positive and nostalgic. By recalling the marriage from two different perspectives I understood that neither was correct. Goldilocks furnished a different version of the experience and allowed me to understand the part I played in the relationship.

On the other hand, Goldilocks' history and 'characteristics' contrasts with my history and characteristics. Goldilocks has, to me, always seemed enigmatic, transgressive and marginalised; although I am sure my three-year-old self would not have used that terminology. Goldilocks does not appear to prevaricate or postpone: she is curious; she is sensual; and she appears, as she indicates in chapter fourteen ('Perspective'), of 'Reading Goldilocks', to harbour no regret or guilt concerning her actions. Goldilocks is bold and adventurous where I was a timid child. Goldilocks explored her world. I have stayed close to home. Goldilocks did not just knock at the door of the three bears' cottage; she opened the door and crossed the threshold without waiting to be invited. I have always hung back. From exercising choice concerning my first pregnancy, my career, or whether or not my new spectacles were faulty ('Perspective', chapter fourteen), my 'just rights' were questioned or ignored. Goldilocks is alone, she makes her own choices, she eschews company and, as demonstrated by her behaviour in *The Three Bears*, she appears to have a positive self-perception born of her strong adherence to 'just right'.

The characteristics Goldilocks exhibits in 'Reading Goldilocks' also contrast with my perceived lack of agency, autonomy and independence. At the beginning of her chapters, Goldilocks re-tells her story, illuminating the risks she took, justifying some of them and admitting responsibility for others. This is done in order to portray Goldilocks as courageous enough to accept the consequences of her actions. As a result of writing Goldilocks this way, I could re-view the mental, emotional and physical consequences of my abortion and accept my personal responsibility for those consequences. On the other hand, as a third person narrator, Goldilocks is free to criticise my mother's behaviour, something I felt unable to do.

By recreating Goldilocks, I pursued the idea that an essentially 'invisible', maligned character can be reconstructed. W.F.H. Nicolaisen believes tales of innocent and

[5] Thomas, pp. 96-98.

persecuted heroines demonstrate it does not pay to stand out, although the social disruption and inevitable re-establishment of order narrated in most of these tales forces these heroines to be resourceful, overcome their tribulations and free themselves of suffering.[6] From this perspective the Goldilocks found in 'Reading Goldilocks' is an example of an unjustly persecuted woman/child who challenges normative behaviours. Goldilocks tries things out, she tests her perceptions and her responses and she bases her actions on experience. In 'Reading Goldilocks', she describes herself as shunned due to her wilful corporeality and materiality, but she welcomes her ostracism: 'I'm soothed by night forest sounds and I honour the shifting slant of light as each season is born, evolves and dies. I'm nourished by the forest's wildness. My banishment is a blessing. I am where I belong.'[7] Goldilocks is steadfastly of the body; she knows and understands its needs and dictates. In contrast, I grew up learning to neglect my needs and focus on other people's needs. Writing 'Reading Goldilocks' allowed me to identify, understand and focus on my needs and to adopt Goldilocks' personal and interpersonal strengths.

The contrast between Goldilocks and the bears is a curious feature of the tale, one that is also appealing. As a little girl, Goldilocks is logically assumed to be civilised and domesticated. The original Goldilocks, the one described by Bettelheim in particular, is, however, an outsider in search of a role and identity. This Goldilocks challenges domestic order, social mores and conventions. Her apparent lack of manners and tentative grasp of right and wrong contradict the bears' civilised domesticity. Goldilocks is a wild creature who wanders alone into the forest. She enters, unbidden, someone else's dwelling, eats their food, and breaks an article of furniture. She is capricious, confident, assertive and fearless, qualities that earn her—as well as others of her gender with similar characteristics—criticism and censure. That her actions might also be those of a wayfarer searching for safety, comfort and shelter is ignored. She is read and positioned as greedy, wilful and selfish instead of a lost child seeking asylum.

In early versions of *The Three Bears* the bears are depicted as wild,[8] but by 1878 the

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[6] W. F. H. Nicholaisen, 'Why Tell Stories of Innocent, Persecuted Heroines?', in *Western Folklore*, 52.1 (1993), 61-71 (p. 67).
[7] Thomas, pp. 16-17.
[8] See, for instance, *The Three Bears* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1867).

'Great Huge Bear, 'Middle Bear,' and 'Little Small Wee Bear' became 'Father Bear,' 'Mother Bear, and 'Baby Bear'[9] typical of most modern versions. These naturally wild creatures have come to represent accepted civilised and domesticated attributes. They live in a cottage, eat from a table, sleep in a bed and appear to have a clear sense of right and wrong, albeit with a degree of moral turpitude when it comes to assisting those worse off than them. This, however, contradicts the historical association of bears as fierce animals, mythologised and worshipped in ancient cultures. Barbara G. Walker[10] relates how wearing a bear Sark, or bearskin shirt, gave rise to the term 'berserker'. Marina Warner likewise reminds us that, '[t]o the earliest audiences of fairy tales' ancestors, the medieval romances, the bear figures as the totem of the wild man, the dweller in the untamed forest, all natural appetite and ferocity'.[11] This image has been superseded by cuddly, stuffed 'teddy bears whose continuing popularity seems assured.'[12] Warner also adds that Goldilocks' tale reinforces 'the specific lesson against curiosity in little girls.'[13]

Both the bears and Goldilocks contradict the norms associated with their species. They have switched places. The bears are outraged at the girl's behaviour, and do not stop to consider that she is simply following her instincts and finding shelter and food. Given this, there is no need for her to feel any remorse for her actions. Yes, in one sense there is something monstrous about her behaviour, but there is also something monstrous about bears in human clothing who refuse to provide a child with asylum. As the history and interpretation of *The Three Bears* reveals, the story demonstrates that being a 'good girl' is the only option available to little girls who wish to be accepted by society, even if that means starving. By trying to discover her 'just right' Goldilocks is assumed to have committed an act of transgression. She is banished, but the bears' behaviour attracts little attention. As I worked on drafts of the memoir I reconsidered my own transgressions. I also contemplated how my mother was often shielded from the worst consequences of her behaviour while I was

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[9] Edward H. Corbould, Alfred Crowquill, and W. McConnell, *Mother Goose's Fairy Tales* (London George Routledge and Sons, 1878).
[10] Barbara G Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 263-264.
[11] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), p. 300.
[12] Warner, p. 306.
[13] Warner, p. 381.

punished for my actions. Writing 'Reading Goldilocks' allowed me to challenge both my and Goldilocks' punishment, reclaim my own 'wildness' and access the resourcefulness and resilience I displayed when dealing with a difficult and capricious mother.

It can also be argued that Goldilocks represents the phenomena of symbolic exchange, counter control, just rights, and moral rights. To begin with symbolic exchange, Goldilocks' behaviour in *The Three Bears* is focused on her relationship with the material objects—bowls of porridge, a chair and a bed—that are a major feature of the story. Rom Harre states that '[m]aterial things can serve as carriers of meaning',[14] which suggests that Goldilocks' 'appropriation' of the porridge and Baby Bear's chair indicate that she is attempting to understand what they symbolise.[15] The food and furniture featured in the story carry meanings salient to young children: porridge represents sustenance and nurture; chairs comfort and social exchange; beds represent either rest, dreams or sexuality. It is a difficult task for a young child to manage and negotiate these goods, let alone grasp their symbolic meaning. Even well-meaning adults, as they loom over a child and instruct him or her in the complexities of personal possession and sharing, can appear 'bear like' and aggressive, particularly if that adult enforces *their* meaning concerning symbolic exchange on the child. Goldilocks' attempt to negotiate her 'just right' in terms of nourishment, comfort and rest suggest that *The Three Bears*' message is that 'one can expect parental approval and security from controlling oneself'.[16] Little girls must, it seems, be passive and giving when it comes to exchanging goods. There is, however, another way of looking at Goldilocks' inability to comply with the dictates of society and her apparent lack of control that is particularly significant to my story.

Timothy Carey and W. Thomas Bourbon believe Goldilocks is a symbol of children's chronic behaviour problems (despite the fact that one known instance of misbehaviour does not a chronic problem make). These children tend to exercise what Carey and Bourbon call 'counter control': they behave so as to produce 'anger,

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[14] Rom Harre, 'Material Objects in Social Worlds', *Theory Culture Society*, 19.5-6 (2002), 23-33 (p. 25.)
[15] Harre, p. 32.
[16] Alan C. Elms, '"The Three Bears": Four Interpretations', *Journal of American Folklore*, 90.357 (1977), 257-273 (p. 271).

frustration, despair and stress'[17] in the person (attempting) to control them. Most forms of control exerted on children, particularly arbitrary, external and enforced control, occur at the cost of the child's freedom of choice and this may result in the child attempting some form of counter control. Goldilocks personifies counter control by directing attention to societal norms of orderliness, rigid routine and conventionality, all of which undermine freedom of choice. The paradox inherent in this idea is that Goldilocks has also entered western consciousness as a symbol of 'just right', a concept that implies informed choice as indicated by her tasting or testing, throughout the tale, each of three options available to her.

However, as Carey and Bourbon explain:

> when we speak of *just rights*, we do not use the term "right" in any moral or absolute sense, … [because] …*just right* is a perception, not an objective condition of the world outside us. (Italics original)[18]

As phenomenology teaches, we experience, perceive and comprehend through our senses. Goldilocks uses her senses to find what is 'just right' for her, and Goldilocks' just right, when it comes to choosing a bed, is not the same as, for instance, Mother Bear's 'just right'. Carey and Bourbon explain that:

> When people keep their *just rights* the way they want them, life transpires satisfactorily. When people cannot experience their *just rights*, or when they are impeded from restoring a damaged *just right* to its intended condition, problems occur. The more that our *just rights* depend on how other people behave, the more likely it is that sooner or later while we maintain our *just rights* we interfere with the *just rights* of others. (Italics original)[19]

In 'Reading Goldilocks', 'just right' is explicitly contrasted, in the chapter entitled 'MarriedWorld', with 'Brian's' insistence on 'being right'. As unsubtle as this chapter is, 'Brian's 'being right' is later juxtaposed with my parents' insistence, in chapter seventeen ('Nobody'), that I '*do* the right thing' and agree to an abortion. Although it is a central theme of 'Reading Goldilocks', the issue of moral right or wrong is not the remit of this exegesis. It must be noted, however, that prefacing, throughout numerous adaptations of the story, the word 'right' with the adjective

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[17] Timothy A. Carey and W. Thomas Bourbon, 'Is Countercontrol the Key to Understanding Chronic Behaviour Problems?', *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 45.5 (2006), 5-13 (p. 6).
[18] Carey and Bourbon, p. 11.
[19] Carey and Bourbon, p. 11.

form of 'just'[20] does imply that Goldilocks' choices have a moral, as well as a solipsistic, component. Of course an individual's actions must be governed by moral right and moral good but the three forms of right, 'just', 'be' and 'do', articulated in 'Reading Goldilocks' demonstrate that complex choices require a careful consideration of all three 'rights'.

I once believed the source of my lifelong anger and grief was the loss of my first pregnancy. Writing 'Reading Goldilocks' allowed me to finally bear witness to that pain and recover from it. But my grief and my failure to negotiate and manage my unborn child's 'just right' was only part of the problem. As I wrote about the events preceding the abortion I was able to conceive 'more deeply'[21] the trauma of having two doctors determine that, because there was nothing wrong with me physically, my pregnancy constituted a 'risk of injury' to my 'mental health'.[22] Although, throughout my life, my mother's behaviour was, at best, an indication of mental instability, I was legally declared mentally unfit to carry a pregnancy to full term. As Goldilocks commented, 'Are we not awed by Gloria's treachery?'[23] 'Reading Goldilocks' afforded insight into the mental, emotional and physical condition of the girl who acceded to that decision and suffered its consequences. Writing 'Reading Goldilocks' gave me an opportunity to accept that this experience:

> belongs to me. Whatever my responsibility in bringing it about, it is now mine, which means that it is subject to the character of my experience as a human being – in fact it is made possible by this character.[24]

Over the last 43 years I have written numerous versions of the events of November and December 1970. Discovering the notion of 'counter control' while writing chapter seventeen alleviated an ancient pain. It is possible that my first pregnancy was an attempt at counter control, a way to arouse 'anger, frustration, despair and

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[20] Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[21] Stephen K. Levine, *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy; the arts and human suffering* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), p. 50.
[22] *South Australia Abortion Regulations 1970 Regulations under the Criminal Law Consolidation Act,* 1935 Abortion Regulations, 1970 Gazetted 8 January 1970. [cited 24th June 2013]. Available from: <http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/R/Abortion%20Regulations%201970.aspx>.
[23] Thomas, p. 155.
[24] Levine, p. 85.

stress'[25] in my mother. It was probably also a cry for help, an indication that something was wrong with my seemingly stable and loving family. As the 'hero' of her story, attempting to negotiate the construction and management of symbolic exchange in terms of her 'just rights', Goldilocks' behaviour is interpreted as intransigent and selfish. It is, at the same time, valid: Goldilocks is a lost child trying to survive in a strange environment. Although, as I admit, in chapter seventeen ('Nobody') of 'Reading Goldilocks', getting pregnant was irresponsible, I was not a 'bad girl'. I was, as Goldilocks says, 'often scared [and] consumed by the force of someone else's telling … buried in stories that were a simulacrum of the truth.'[26]

This discussion of counter control leads to speculation concerning Goldilocks' innocence surrounding the events related in *The Three Bears*. Assertions of her innocence, I would argue, can be supported by her falling asleep after she has eaten the porridge and (unintentionally) broken the chair; how else could a child who has behaved, according to social norms, 'atrociously', feel safe enough to fall asleep at the site of the 'crime'? Udo Kulterman may have an answer. His survey of artistic representations of women as they sleep establishes that the sleeping form of a female was initially employed as a ritual of healing and spiritual contemplation. These images later became titillation, invoking feelings, most often in men, of both power and pleasure. Kulterman believes feminist performance art[27] re-establishes the idea of the sleeping woman as an image of healing and prophecy instead of passivity and vulnerability.[28] Goldilocks falls asleep in the 'just right' bed of a small bear, a compatriot in terms of shared immaturity, perception and comprehension of the world of adults. It could be argued that by sleeping in Baby Bear's bed Goldilocks symbolically heals the 'rift' between the civilised and animalistic realms that she and Baby Bear represent. It also affirms their shared experience of a world where 'adults' control material goods, children's behaviour and children's 'just rights'.

Her falling asleep represents more than her innocence, however. In chapter six of 'Reading Goldilocks' ('Hospitality'), Goldilocks is tired from her walk through the woods, replete after a bowl of porridge and in need of rest. Conscience does not prick

[25] Carey and Bourbon, p. 6.
[26] Thomas, p. 35.
[27] Udo Kulterman, 'Woman Asleep and the Artist', *Artibus et Historiae*, 11.22 (1990), 150-159.
[28] Kulterman, 150-159 (p. 135).

her, she does not berate herself and she falls asleep after choosing the 'just right' bed. What does the act of sleeping represent? The reason for Goldilocks' ability to fall asleep so quickly has always eluded me but, in 'Reading Goldilocks', I decided to use her slumber as a device. Entering a 'dream-like' state[29] is often cited as a method for accessing one's creativity. The sleeping Goldilocks represents the courage required to surrender to, and enter, the dream world/artistic world and expose one's self to the gaze of others. While Goldilocks sleeps she dreams 'Janet's' dream of being a writer.[30] In other words, an independent, autonomous agent willingly renders herself vulnerable so she can describe the life I would have attempted to live, had I the courage to fight for my first child and my art.

In chapter sixteen, 'Dreams', Goldilocks has two dreams. At the end of the second dream, just as she is woken by the bears, a woman appears and says: 'Only one dream is true. That dream made the other impossible.' The first dream is a narrative of the trauma my mother experienced when she was twelve years old, an event that ricocheted, like a recurring dream, throughout both our lives. It is, however, not a dream—it is a *story* I grew up with, a story that shaped my life because it shaped my mother's life. By relating that story as one of Goldilocks' dreams I understood the needs and fears of a troubled and fragile human and the connection between her loss and my ongoing fears and insecurities. Relating a second, impossible, 'never true' dream sequence about the girl who lived a life devoted to her art taught me that creativity requires one to 'fall asleep', or cast off, the dictates of one's daily routine and one's fears. In chapter seventeen ('Nobody'), both Goldilocks and 'Janet' narrate the story of my abortion. This is deliberate. Narrating Goldilocks' dreams was a profound source of healing because it allowed me to narrate the story of the abortion: to be creative is to be unmasked, vulnerable and brave at the same time.

Having cited Goldilocks' characteristics, her critical reception and her dreams as a source of healing, the following section will examine the concepts of narrative point of view and narrative voice before discussing the ramifications of shifting between the two.

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[29] See, for instance: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).
[30] Thomas, p. 144.

‘Reading Goldilocks’: Narrative Point of View and Narrative Voice

In both *Writing Routes* and *Writing Works*,[1] there are several examples where therapeutic writers are advised to use third person narrative point of view. What is missing from these texts is a clear explanation of the first and third person narrative point of view, their differences, possible effect on the reader and on the narrative itself. What follows is a brief definition of both first and third narrative point of view and narrative voice and how both were employed in ‘Reading Goldilocks’.

When creating a text a writer chooses from a range of narrative tools including plot, character and theme, narrative point of view and narrative voice. The choice of narrative point of view is dictated by the needs of the narrative and the writer’s skills and experience. It is determined by the answer to a question most writer’s ask themselves when they begin working on a new piece of prose: ‘[w]ho speaks … to whom … in what form … at what distance … and with what limitations?’[2] The options available to a writer are one, or a combination of, the following: first, second or third person point of view; omniscient or limited omniscient; distanced or close; reliable or unreliable. The decision is also contingent on genre and the effect the writer wants the text to have on the reader.[3] For a memoirist, the conventional choice is that the main protagonist, ‘Janet’ in the case of ‘Reading Goldilocks’, is an autodiegetic narrator restricted to first person, past tense or first person, present consciousness, present tense. Memoir is generally, but not always, written in a reliable, limited, intimate voice where the narrator is also the fixed, internal focalizor. As a first person narrator ‘Janet’ is the main focalizor of the text; readers have access to other ‘character’s’ behaviour and actions only through her impressions. Strictly speaking, focalizors see and perceive,[4] directing the reader’s ‘vision’, while the narrator tells the story. In internal focalization, the viewpoint is

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[1] Gillie Bolton, *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities* (London: Jessica Kingston Publishers, 2006); and Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field, and Kate Thompson, *Writing Routes: A Resource Handbook of Therapeutic Writing*. (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2011).

[2] Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2000), p. 197.

[3] I wish to acknowledge that this construction belongs partly to the reader as well. I have, however, neither the space nor need to examine reader-response other than to say that the gender of the reader may also affect the reception and constructed gender of the narrator.

[4] David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Chichester, U. K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 191.

restricted to a particular observer or *reflector*, whereas in zero focalization the viewpoint is not anchored in a localised position. Focalization can be fixed, variable or multiple[5] and is the 'lens through which we see characters and events'.[6] As Mieke Bal has noted, it is necessary to 'make a distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements [of a narrative] are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision.'[7]

As a therapeutic tool, autodiegetic narrative is unrewarding because the autodiegetic narrator is limited to describing his or her own experiences and the contents of his or her own consciousness. They are, therefore, unable to reliably know the contents of another's mind. Despite wanting to write a life narrative rather than autobiographical fiction, the autodiegetic narrative mode felt personally limiting and inhibiting as a writer and, given the events I wished to narrate, unsatisfactory. A writer has more choices with a homodiegetic narrative point of view compared to an autodiegetic one, which is restricted in terms of grammar, time and perspective. A homodiegetic narrative point of view is one where the narrator is present as either a protagonist or a character in the story, carrying out, witnessing and submitting to the action at the same time as they narrate the story using first person pronouns. The narrating-I homodiegetic narrator, like the autodiegetic narrator is (often but not always) an 'older, narrating self who tells about the situations and events experienced by the younger experiencing-I'.[8] Autodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators are the protagonists of his or her own story, unlike a third category of narrator, the heterodiegetic narrator who is not a character in the story but simply reports events.[9] A homodiegetic narrative voice or point of view can also slip into third person narrative point of view and narrate events, thoughts or actions they 'cannot possibly know'.[10] As noted above, this is unlikely to occur in an autodiegetic narrative. Goldilocks is a fictional character whose homodiegetic narrative point of view

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[5] Herman, p. 186.
[6] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 238.
[7] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) p. 145.
[8] Herman, p. 189.
[9] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 213.
[10] Henrik Skov Nielsen, 'The Impersonal Voice in First Person Narrative Fiction', *Narrative*, 12.2, 2004, 133-150, p 133.

contrasts with, and provides additional information to, the autodiegetic narrative voice found in 'Reading Goldilocks'. Compared to 'Janet', Goldilocks is able to shift her perspective. As well as providing another 'vision' of the events narrated in 'Reading Goldilocks', Goldilocks represents a second 'identity' who voices that vision.

As a homodiegetic third person, past tense, omniscient narrator, Goldilocks is free to refer to different characters in 'Reading Goldilocks' and to expose the reader to other characters' perceptions and impressions of the world, particularly 'Gloria's'. In addition, Goldilocks also has 'access' to 'Janet's' thoughts. Goldilocks' chapters, therefore, constitute a shift in narrative point of view and focalization. Their intended purpose is to (re)narrate Goldilocks' tale and (re)tell parts of the protagonist's story. While I experienced writing my life narrative using a third person narrative point of view as liberating, I found I could also speculate about my mother's drives and the reasons behind her behaviour. In other words, I gained, through Goldilocks, a much needed alternative perspective.

Third person autobiographical narrators[11] are not rare in life narratives although Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson read them as 'ironic and self-deprecating, rather than heroic', wondering at the same time if 'the third person narrator of an autobiography is merely 'ventriloquising the "he" or "she"' of the 'narrated I'.[12] As I demonstrate, however, the use of a third person narrator to narrate parts of a memoir calls for a less conventional approach to this phenomenon.

Narrative point of view has been associated with a grammatical 'mode of action'[13] and refers to, as has been discussed above, not only, 'the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person, (the same one or another) who reports it'.[14] This is the narrator, the one who 'speaks' the text and therefore has a 'voice'. Narrative *voice* as a concept is more flexible, enigmatic, and open to change than

[11] A partial list includes: J.M. Coetzee, *Boyhood* (London: Vintage, 1998); *Youth* (London: Vintage, 2003); *Summertime* (North Sydney, N.S.W.: Knopf, 2009); Antonia Fraser, *Must You Go*? (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010); Christa Wolf, *Patterns of Childhood* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984), bell hooks, *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).
[12] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 185.
[13] Genette, p. 213.
[14] Genette, p. 213.

narrative point of view. Narrative voice implies a narrating personality[15] or even a narrative agency.[16] This concept of narrative voice is also connected with embodiment, the physical act of speaking. This, in turn, implies a degree of (inter)subjectivity because to have a voice is to speak to, and be heard by, another individual.

Although it is not essential that this 'personality' is lifelike, detailed or active within the narrative, the utilisation, or otherwise, of this agency[17] is accomplished by a writer—the author of the text—who makes certain choices about the narrative voice based on his or her skills, experience and the needs of the story. With this in mind, an initial definition of narrative voice is that it is a narrative (or narrating) agency, an imprecisely understood 'presence' that accompanies a reading of a text. This presence is neither the author (nor 'implied author'[18]) nor the protagonist of the story, although in the case of an autobiography or memoir it may well be both. Eudora Welty describes this phenomenon as follows:

> Ever since I was first read to, then started reading myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't *hear*. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't my mother's voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. I have supposed, but never found, that this is the case with all readers – to read as listeners – and with all writers, to write as listeners. It may be part of the desire to write. The sound of what falls on the page begins the process of testing it for truth for me. Whether I am right to trust so far I don't know. By now I don't know I could do either one, reading or writing, without the other. My own words, when I am at work on a story, I hear too as they go, in the same voice that I hear when I read in books. When I write and the sound of it comes back to my ears, then I act to make my changes. I have always trusted this voice.[19]

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[15] Susan Snaider Lanser, *The Narrative Act Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 40.
[16] Steven Cohan and Linda M Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 89-90.
[17] I use this term to refer to the capacity of individuals to exercise choice and be self-governing.
[18] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1983; and Wayne C. Booth, 'The Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?' in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 75-87. This is not a concept I intend to use in the present discussion.
[19] Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 11-12.

Many writers have similar,[20] though less detailed and mystical,[21] beliefs when it comes to describing narrative voice. For some,[22] narrative voice is not only a presence, but an authorial one that will be heard even if the writer attempts to conceal it; a notion which parallels the assertion that a story always has a narrator.[23]

There is resistance to this idea however. Glenda Adams dispels the notion of a narrator's subjective 'presence' in the text, or that the narrative voice is composed of some 'mystical force'.[24] This may be due to the postmodern suspicion that narrative voice contradicts narrative theory's usually objective, rational approach. As Andrew Gibson claims, positing the narrator's presence privileges a 'subjectivity intimately inhabiting a text, a communicative human presence as source and origin which, in the shape of the author, narratology was precisely concerned to reduce or avoid'.[25] The notion of a narrative presence also risks inserting a resurrected author into discussions of literature,[26] rendering the use of Goldilocks as an alternative narrative voice little more than a writer's longing for a unified, stable narrative entity. On the other hand, if 'voice' is thought of as a 'set of signs characterising the narrator',[27] then, as Jeri Kroll claims,[28] someone, operating through 'the linguistic medium of the narration'[29] must write the text, put the 'signs' in place, and construct the narrator and narrative voice.

Working from a pedagogical perspective, Melanie Sperling and Deborah Appleman confirm that the concept of 'voice' is 'fuzzy, slippery, hard to define, and nearly

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[20] Kate Grenville, *The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers* (Sydney,: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p. 80.
[21] Cathleen Rountree, *The Writer's Mentor: A Guide to Putting Passion on Paper* (Berkeley, Calif.: Conari Press, 2002), p. 179.
[22] M. H. Abrams (with contributions by Geoffrey Galt Harpham), *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 8th edn (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), p. 288.
[23] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1983-2001, 2002), p. 89.
[24] Glenda Adams, 'Voice', in *The Writer's Reader: A Guide to Writing Fiction and Poetry*, ed. by Brenda Walker. (Sydney: Halstead Press 2002), pp. 36-42 (p. 39).
[25] Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 143.
[26] Gibson, p. 143.
[27] Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) p. 102.
[28] Jeri Kroll, 'The resurrected author: Creative Writers in 21st-century Higher Education', *New Writing*, 1.2 (2004), 89-102 (pp. 100-101).
[29] Cohan and Shires, p. 89.

impossible to teach'.[30] They nevertheless describe how constructing a narrative voice requires a series of conscious decisions contingent upon the author's historical, cultural and ideological position.[31] There are, according to Sperling and Appleman, a number of techniques to help a writer construct a narrative voice. These include understanding the influence of voice(s) from home, school and the media; the practice of reading out loud or performing certain texts; exposure to exemplary poems, prose or drama and developing the ability to 'hear' the narrative voice contained in those texts; and appropriating and 'revoicing' narrative voices found in such texts.[32] Certainly the construction of Goldilocks' voice was helped by my mother having read *The Three Bears* to me when I was a small child; she also read poetry to me and encouraged my interest in Shakespeare. Exposure, in my late twenties and early thirties, to feminism and the feminist re-evaluation of fairy tales helped me perceive Goldilocks as an alternative, feisty and assertive narrative voice. This accords with Sperling and Appleman's claim that the techniques listed above will ensure 'previously unheard voices can be encouraged to speak',[33] and demonstrates that there is no 'singular individual voice' but a 'chorus of voices'.[34]

This is confirmed by Nedra Reynold's suggestion that one of the three forms of rhetorical persuasion, ethos,[35] the personal appeal, nature and credibility of the individual orator, is etymologically related to communality.[36] In other words, ethos has a social context; one's ethos is a product of the character of one's community whether one colludes with, or works against, that community. Culture creates and shapes the ethos which an individual then expresses[37] to a listener who likewise participates in his or her culture's dominant discourse.[38] This leads to the idea, proposed by Susan S Lanser, that:

> [t]he condition of being a woman in a male-dominant society may well

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[30] Melanie Sperling and Deborah Appleman, 'Voice in the Context of Literacy Studies', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46.1, (2011), 70-84, (p. 71).
[31] Sperling and Appleman, pp. 70-84 (pp. 71-72).
[32] Sperling and Appleman, pp. 70-84 (pp. 77-78).
[33] Sperling and Appleman, pp. 70-84 (p. 78).
[34] Sperling and Appleman, pp. 70-84 (p. 82).
[35] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. by W. Rhys Roberts (eBooks@Adelaide 2007), <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle> [accessed 7th April 2012].
[36] Nedra Reynolds, 'Ethos as Location', *Rhetoric Review* 11.2 (1993), 325-338 (pp. 327-329).
[37] Sperling and Appleman, 70-84 (p. 72 and p. 73-75).
[38] Reynolds, pp. 325-338 (p. 333).

> necessitate the double voice, whether as conscious subterfuge or a tragic dispossession of the self. ... A narratology adequate to women's texts ... would have to acknowledge and account for this polyphony of voice, identifying and disentangling its strands.[39]

Lanser's comment ratifies my decision to narrate my memoir using two different narrative voices and indicates there is no guarantee of a coherent, rational, unified, stable 'narrating agent'. The *existence* of an agent, stable or unstable, who constructs the narrative voice, is not, however, automatically negated. This is further supported by Kroll's assertion concerning the visibility of the author,[40] which, in turn, reinforces the notion that the narrator and the narrative voice are artefacts, a set of manoeuvres utilised by an author[41] who chooses, defines and shapes the narrative voice they believe best suits the story.

As well as defining narrative voice as an imprecisely understood, embodied narrative agency, it can now be claimed that it is also a literary and cultural metaphor purposefully constructed by the writer. Goldilocks, the third person narrative voice in 'Reading Goldilocks', is both a cultural metaphor and a personal icon. The voices of Goldilocks and 'Janet' alternate, resulting in a contrapuntal narrative. In the following section I equate the act of shifting between the two narrative voices to stepping across a threshold and examine the consequences of taking that step.

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[39] Susan S Lanser, 'Towards a Feminist Narratology', *in Feminisms An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticisms*, ed. by Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), pp. 674-693 (p. 681).
[40] Kroll, pp. 89-102.
[41] Porter Abbott, p. 68.

‘Reading Goldilocks’: Shifting Voices and Therapeutic Writing

In the following section, the experience of alternating between two different narrative voices and narrative points of view is analysed. It suggests that the benefits of therapeutic writing are enhanced by being reflexive about shifting between the two different narrative voices. This section also describes the meaning I assigned to my experience of writing a memoir using different narrative voices. Drawing on the concept of intersubjectivity, this section addresses why shifting between two different narrative voices and two different narrative points of view enhances the therapeutic outcome. It suggests that as one moves from one space—or state—to another, a hiatus, break or interruption occurs revealing an open space where new associations and ideas about the therapeutic writer and the value of therapeutic writing might be found.

Previous sections of ‘Writing ‘Reading Goldilocks’’ have related that, while researching the publishing history of *The Three Bears*, I discovered a mature, feisty, female comfortable with breaking the rules. I decided this character could represent the lost boldness of my three-year-old self searching for the ‘just right’ paper, pen and thread to bind her words. I have also suggested that the renewed visibility of the author legitimises a writer’s active participation in the creation of a narrative voice and narrative point of view. I have noted the differences between narrative point of view and narrative voice and define narrative voice as an imprecisely understood, seemingly embodied cultural and metaphorical narrative presence within a text.

Alternating between a homodiegetic and autodiegetic narrative is a move similar to that made by my mother when she created her patchwork quilts. By stitching two pieces of narrative ‘fabric’ together I created one narrative ‘comforter’. By having two narrative voices proffer disparate and contradictory stories, I have created a narrative quilt from materials that complement each other and throw into relief their individual markings. Laying the narrative depth of a third person homodiegetic point of view alongside a first person, intimate, but limited, autodiegetic narrative point of view, granted access to hitherto unseen inherent behaviours of both Goldilocks and my teenage self. Because, as has already been established, the homodiegetic narrative is allowed to be ‘fictitious’, I could, through Goldilocks, legitimately

narrate stories about my mother, father and grandparents—stories I heard when I was a child but can no longer verify because the people who told them are dead. By re-imagining those stories I entered my 'character's' world and tried to experience it the way they did. In particular I began to understand my mother's perspective of life. Her suicide attempt, when I was four months old (chapter eight, 'Across the Threshold'), points to the very real likelihood of undiagnosed postnatal depression resulting from the trauma of my birth and my mother's near death in labour. This probably compounded the trauma of my Uncle Huw's death when she was only twelve years old. Narrating, in third person, the circumstances of my uncle's death enabled me to experience my mother from 'another's' perspective and therefore understand her ongoing anxiety and emotional instability. 'Fictionalising' my mother's loss allowed me to imaginatively enter into her suffering. The craft of therapeutic writing is an attempt to creatively express one's experience of the world and gain insight into one's specific illness, condition or situation. As Curtis W. Hart notes:

> Forgiveness and reconciliation are the potential outcomes of the therapeutic process. They are gifts of hard won struggle and honesty with the self and others. They are not "creative" in and of themselves but can become *one* outcome of the creative process. [1] (Italics original)

I found, while writing 'Reading Goldilocks', the kind of forgiveness of which Hart speaks, but the deeper I moved into writing *the memoir*, the more significant *shifting* between the two different voices became.

The meaning gained from constructing my memoir in the same way my that mother constructed her quilts—joining carefully selected fragments of my life together—allowed me to articulate the events of December 1970. Remembering my own loss and imagining my mother's loss helped me to, figuratively at least, rebuild the relationship I once had with my mother when we first read *The Three Bears* together. This confirms my thesis that writing creatively to achieve healing involves writing one's story using two distinct narrative points of view and narrative voices.

Simone de Beauvoir says that by 'writing a work based on myself I would recreate

[1] Curtis W. Hart, 'Creative Nonfiction: Narrative and Revelation', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 48.2 (2009), 217-223 (p 223).

myself and justify my existence',[2] and avoid speaking 'with that abstract voice which, whenever I heard it, failed to move me …. I wanted to communicate my experience.'[3] According to Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree, Simone de Beauvoir's work 'is replete with descriptive analyses of lived experiences' that use the 'particular' to illuminate the universal.[4] Drawing on de Beauvoir, whose memoirs I read when I was in my late teens, my art is an attempt to describe my experience of an unwanted abortion and facilitate a new understanding of therapeutic writing. This was achieved through articulating the potential of an intersubjective relationship between the writer and her third person narrator.

Simone de Beauvoir's representation of temporality in her novels and memoirs is, according to Ursula Tidd, situated in both the 'narrative present' and the past where a character's 'past selves' are located.[5] This is similar to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's notion of the narrating, narrated and narrative 'I'.[6] The reader, however, is situated only in the text's 'narrative present'.[7] Language, the 'keystone of intersubjectivity',[8] and the tool a writer uses to construct narrative point of view and narrative voice, is used to elicit the reader's consent to the writer's present, past and to the writer's experiences. Mary Sirridge, in her discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's conception of literary fiction, confirms that literature:

> allows us to bridge the singularity of our experience and relationship with the world by providing an opportunity to grasp at the truth of an other who nevertheless will continue to be other.[9]

This reiterates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the potential for reciprocity that occurs when an experience is shared. This idea implies that, through the combined

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[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch and Weidenfeld Nicolson, 1959), p. 143.
[3] de Beauvoir, p. 209.
[4] Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree, 'Introduction', in, *The Existential Philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir*, ed. by Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 1-15 (pp. 4-5).
[5] Ursula Tidd, 'For the Time Being: Beauvoir's Representation of Temporality' in *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone De Beauvoir*, ed. by Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 107-126 (p. 121).
[6] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p 59-61.
[7] Tidd, p 120.
[8] Tidd, p. 121.
[9] Mary Sirridge 'Philosophy in Beauvoir's Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Claudia Card (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 129-148 (p. 130).

devices of language and creativity, individual subjects are able to embrace two world views. This does not mean that one individual experiences the same phenomenon in exactly the same way as another individual. It does mean that two people are able to share one phenomenon and anticipate that their individual perceptions will be recognised and accepted. Sonia Kruks[10] suggests this is the nature of intersubjectivity; the opportunity to experience another's subjectivity *as if* it were our own.

In terms of therapeutic writing, what does this mean? I wish to connect the idea of intersubjectivity between the reader of a text and the writer of that text to the unique position of the writer during the process of reading, redrafting, revising and editing a text. As previously mentioned, Sophie Nicholls comments that as therapeutic writers we need to 'become a reader of our own work' because this helps to 'develop a more reflexive, dialogic and fluid relationship' with the self.[11] This is supported by Mike Harris who says that:

> if the author is dead, and it is therefore the reader who writes, then it surely follows that if the writer is a reader he (sic) must still be 'alive', or at least as alive as the reader–as–writer, and just as much, if not more in charge of creating the meanings in his or her own writing.[12]

Being 'in charge' means the therapeutic writer can explore the implicit and explicit themes, symbols, motifs and meanings contained within his narrative. As the *first reader* of a narrative conveyed by two narrators using two different narrative points of view, the writer can adopt the perspective of a reader willing to experience the third person narrator's world. In other words, the therapeutic writer can enter the lived world of the character they have created and be reflexive about those two moments of the one phenomenon.

I achieved this when Goldilocks narrated my mother's experience of her brother's

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[10] Sonia Kruks, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Difference in Feminism', in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 25-47 (p. 41)..

[11] Sophie Nicholls, 'Beyond Expressive writing: Evolving Models of development in creative writing', *Journal of Health Psychology* (2009), 14.2, 171-180 (p. 176.)

[12] Mike Harris, 'Are Writers Really There When They're Writing about Their Writing? …and Can We Theorise About What They Say and Do?' The *Creativity and Uncertainty Papers*: *Refereed Conference Papers of the 13th Annual Australian Association of Writing Programs,* (2008) <h*ttp://aawp.org.au/files/Harris_2008.pdf* >[accessed 18th December 2012].

death and again in chapter seventeen ('Nobody') when, breaking with the pattern of alternating Goldilocks and 'Janet's' chapters, Goldilocks and 'Janet' co-narrated the circumstances of November and December 1970. As I wrote, rewrote and edited this section of the text I experienced an 'intersubjective relationship' with my third person narrator. This is not to suggest every writer does this when writing a novel or short story. It could, however, be the express goal of the therapeutic writer. Reflecting on the third person narrator's 'lived experience', the similarities and differences of that narrator's experience to the therapeutic writer's experience, may open the writer to perceiving the experience differently.[13] It may even be, as Bolton claims, that simply '[b]eing aware of, and even at times choosing, the narrator of life stories both written and told is also a powerful reflexive process.'[14] I believe that in order for this to occur it is important the therapeutic writer create a character/third person narrator who experiences either the same, or similar, trauma, or mental or physical health condition as that of the writer, or express similar reactions to the trauma or malady. The therapeutic writer can then explore the idea of intentionality, or the notion that the character they have created experiences and responds to a situation in a manner that is, and always has been, part of the writer's consciousness.

Therapeutic writing, then, does not just involve writing. The therapeutic writer must learn to perform as a reader, to reflect on the process involved in writing and in creating a third person narrator. The therapeutic writer must consent to the perceptions of another and reflexively respond to the intersubjective relationship between he and his third person narrator. The therapeutic writer needs to be encouraged, indeed trained, to do this, which is why a skilled counsellor/writer should be present to assist the therapeutic writer to reflect on the third person

[13] See, for example, Kathleen M. Quinlan, 'From Therapy to Poetry and Back Again: One Writer's Journey', *Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research and Education*, 26.2 (2013), 115-125. In this article Quinlan reflects on her experience of writing about a family member with mental illness. She outlines three 'phases' of writing: 'private writing, done as a form of self therapy'; polishing and rewriting so that the piece can be shared; and delineating, the pathway she took 'from therapy to poetry and back again'. Quinlan did this in the hope that both the finished poem and a description of the process might help others suffering from similar problems. Although this is poetry as therapy, the same process is possible for prose narratives. The other significant aspect of Quinlan's article is that Quinlan is 'a social scientist, an adult educator and a published poet', indicating that the nexus between literature and the health and social sciences is a rich site for those researching therapeutic writing.

[14] Gillie Bolton, 'Who is Telling the Story? The Critical Role of the Narrator in Reflective and Reflexive writing', *Educational Reflective Practices*, 2.1 (2012), 35-54 (p. 46).

narrator's experience, role, motivations and choices. The counsellor can point out the narrator's attitude toward the trauma or illness, or the strategies the narrator employs for overcoming their distress.The counsellor can also help the therapeutic writer articulate the differences between the writer's and narrator's strategies for coping, and the counsellor can help the writer to respond, if appropriate, in a similar manner.[15]

As the first reader of successive drafts of 'Reading Goldilocks' I experienced, in the narrative present, an ongoing intersubjective relationship with Goldilocks. She 'offered' me an alternative version of my narrated past, particularly the events narrated in chapter seventeen. This meant I was compelled to suspend my lived experience of those events and to consent to Goldilocks' perceptions of that period of my life. As first reader of my own therapeutic text I was required to experience, through a character I had created, that character's subjectivity. Sustained readings and edits of 'Reading Goldilocks' caused me to question and challenge my perceptions and consider Goldilocks' perceptions. When I alternated between the two 'characters' in my memoir, when I compared and contrasted my response to being called a selfish, bad person with Goldilocks' response to being similarly labelled, I understood that my response was not the only one possible. Initially challenged by this experience, I became curious: in my attempt to find distance from my past and from my mother, I found contiguity with a fictional character who provided insight into my own attitude, beliefs and perceptions.

As a writer, I expressed, through a fictional character, an alternative perception of my suffering and became capable of comprehending my suffering 'differently'. This made it possible for me to respond differently to those events. As I revised and redrafted 'Reading Goldilocks' I made conscious, 'just right', choices about the shape, tone, theme and direction of the narrative. By the time I had completed several drafts of the memoir I had re-evaluated my experience of my trauma and exerted a degree of control over it. I did not have this kind of control over my 'narrative' (using the term in the way Bruner uses it[16]) in December 1970. But while this is a

[15] The counsellor can also discuss any maladaptive coping strategies articulated by the narrator with the writer.
[16] Jerome Bruner, 'Life as Narrative', *Social Research,* 71.3 (2004), 691-790.

major therapeutic breakthrough, it is not enough to talk abstractly of catharsis, gaining distance from events, or even intersubjectivity. There are, as I suggest below, additional insights afforded by this technique.

Moving from one narrative point of view and narrative voice to another felt like stepping across a threshold. Thomas More has written that: 'A mode of entrance is crucial. A door. A window. We need a chink in the otherwise unbroken surface of what we consider real'.[17] My thesis that the writer experiences intersubjectivity with a character they have created implies a need to imaginatively step from one's own perceptions and experiences to another's and, perhaps, to radically shift one's perceptions. The significance of Goldilocks is, of course, that she willingly steps across the threshold of the Bear's cottage. In the moment required to step across a threshold a break or an intermission occurs. A lacuna opens when Goldilocks is, for example, no longer outside the cottage but not yet inside the cottage. More claims that:

> Standing in a doorway, you are forced into the imagination, wondering what you will find on the other side. It is a place full of expectant fantasy […] Anything of moment takes place in these intercises.[18]

As the writer/reader of one's therapeutic text, this caesura, this moment of having ceased writing/reading the *autodiegetic* narrative point of view or narrative voice, but not yet started writing/reading the *heterodiegetic* narrative voice, can be a site of speculation: what is the lived experience of being in that liminal moment?

I experienced this gap as an open, creative fissure: a place where I was neither the child nor the adolescent 'Janet' my mother had conceived and shaped, the 'Janet' of many names who lacked an independent identity.[19] Nor was 'Goldilocks', conceived and continuously recreated by 'those fabulists, deceivers, false witnesses and name changers who are otherwise known as story tellers',[20] found in that open space. There were no voices to tell me how to choose (by either 'doing right', 'being right' or what others thought was my 'just right'), an action or behaviour. If the therapeutic

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[17] Thomas More, 'Neither Here Nor There', *Parabola*, 25.1 (2000), 34-39 (p. 34).
[18] More, pp. 34-39 (p. 36).
[19] Janet Thomas, 'Reading Goldilocks' (unpublished memoir for doctoral thesis, Flinders University, 2014), pp. 10-11.
[20] Thomas, p. 10.

writer can step into 'nowhere', this place that is no place, he or she may experience a change of state; a way to change his or her maladaptive mental and emotional responses into a functional and adaptive response to his or her situation. This is the goal of therapy. This sensation, however, like the experience of sharing two moments of the one phenomenon, cannot always be 'grasped in a purely cognitive manner'.[21]

My personal 'shift' involved moving away from anger and bitterness to accepting responsibility for my part in the drama of December 1970. By writing 'Reading Goldilocks' I stepped across the threshold and, no longer a woman who *wants* to write, I became a woman who writes a narrative of trauma and healing in *two* different narrative voices. Having spent most of my life keeping silent about the circumstances surrounding my abortion, and my desire to write, I became a writer who filled that absence, that space between, that silence, with my voice.

Jill Hackett claims that silence is: 'an important language. Our voice is shaped by what we do—and do not voice, and by when we choose to speak and when we choose silence.'[22] Unlike Simone de Beauvoir, I was reluctant to communicate my experience and risk exposure, derision and censure for my life choices and for my writing. I chose silence as way to communicate. Merleau-Ponty, however, points out that: 'To have lost one's voice is not to keep silence: one keeps silence only when one *can* speak' (Emphasis added).[23] The use of 'keep' here implies an act of will and it affirms that I silenced myself: I hid my journals in boxes at the back of my wardrobe; I never completed a story; I stopped, during my early forties, telling people I wanted to write; I even, at one point, denied it to myself. I was, however, unable to keep silent. The desire, the need, to write would not leave me alone. Obstacles to self-expression are meaningless if a person desires to express herself[24] and imagines doing so. I was frustrated because I wanted to express myself through the written word but a loss of potential, of possibility, is mourned only when that

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[21] *Stephen K. Levine, Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009),* p. 17.
[22] Jill Hackett, *I Gotta Crow: Women, Voice, and Writing,* (Waukesh, WI: Kalmbach Publishing Co, 2002), p. 33.
[23] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. xv., p. 143.
[24] Suzanne Laba Cataldi, 'The Body as a Basis for Being: Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty', in *The Existential Philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir*, ed. by Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp 85 – 106 (p 93).

potential is desired. If I were not a writer I would not lament my squandered creativity. The repression was as internal as it was external. I spent most of my life pregnant with ideas, images, characters, and symbols, but instead of birthing my ideas and characters I terminated them before they saw the light of day. As I wrote, and read, Goldilocks' comments about my writer-self I realised the frustration and dejection I experienced by not writing was possible only *because* I am a writer. The act of writing about, and as, Goldilocks meant that I crossed a threshold where there was an absence of imperative voices, an experience vastly different to the fearful silence I had imposed on myself.

Shifting between first and third person narrative point of view and first and third person narrative voice was like crossing back and forth over the fault line that constituted the negative, destructive narrative my mother and I created. Once again this shift between the different narrative voices became an absence of angry and hurt voices. But while that silence healed the long-term dislocation between my mother and me, to more fully describe the lived experience of making that shift between first and third person narrative point of view and narrative voice I must cross yet another boundary; the one that exists between academia and creative practice.

There are so many pieces of fabric floating and swirling and falling around her. This is not what she wanted to do. This is not her task. The blue, blue-grey, pink and cream squares and rectangles of fabric dive and flutter then drop to the floor. She bends and picks them up, placing them on the table before her. There are the scissors, there is the thread, but how to stich the pieces of material together; how to create a pattern; how to understand the pattern once it has been created?

She sighs, sifting through the scraps of material. Finally she chooses, taking up the scraps and laying them down again, first according to their colour, then their pattern and finally their texture. No, that will not do. She arranges the pieces again, this slip of material here, another next to it. No, these don't go together. If only she had more material to work with, more colours, more textures; but she knows she must work with what she has. She tries again, sliding the rectangular scraps of fabric around the table. Finally they seem to fit together. The cobalt scrap complements the china

pink cotton fabric with its tiny white flower print and they both contrast with the creamy, self-embossed chintz.

She has made a panel. One panel. She'll need another, many more. Once the panels are complete she can stitch them together and she'll have a comforter, something to warm her in her final years…

… 'It's just right.' A voice behind her. She turns around. It is her mother. She is holding two books. Once is a crumpled, tattered conglomeration of pages with indecipherable lines scrawled across them. The other is an old copy of the Little Golden Book version of The Three Bears.

Her mother smiles. 'You were never silent', she says, 'you always said exactly what you thought, felt and believed. Look.' Her mother points to the table where the first quilt panel lies. 'Just right,' her mother says again. And then she smiles her beautiful smile.

The woman turns back to the table. Instead of the quilt panel, a book sits on the table. She stares at it, unbelieving, then realises. 'You taught me so much', she says, turning back to her mother. But her mother is gone.

Conclusion

The role of therapeutic writing is to alleviate a trauma or health related malady, and to help the therapeutic writer cope with the consequences of that trauma or condition. As a result of, and in response to, several decades of quantitative research into the benefits of writing, facilitators of therapeutic writing have developed exercises that encourage the use of narrative techniques such as plot, setting, character, dialogue and theme, to improve outcomes for therapeutic writers. The present research investigates the nexus between creative writing and therapeutic writing through the application of one narrative element—narrative voice. 'Reading Goldilocks' and 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' contribute to knowledge about therapeutic writing by investigating the lived experience, for the writer, of shifting between different narrative points of view and narrative voices and whether those shifts are more healing than writing a narrative using either first person or third person narrative voice and narrative point of view. This facet of the study draws on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who believes that knowledge of the world can only be achieved through describing one's experience of it. The idea that the therapeutic writer be reflexive about making the shift between narrative voices resulted in comparing the shift to stepping across a threshold, an idea that is crucial to this research.

This study has revealed several issues that deserve further scrutiny. The intersubjective relationship I experienced with Goldilocks, for example, the process of reflecting on her essential 'properties', and how to convey those properties in the memoir, prompted the idea that many of those properties were already a part of my consciousness. In other words, the third person narrator that a writer creates is personally significant because that character has always been an inherent part of the therapeutic writer's consciousness.[1]

'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' does not, however, establish that shifting between narrative voices, and being reflective about that shift, is *more* effective than writing

[1] For a discussion of creativity and the notion that writing: 'involves travelling toward the artwork, seeking it out across a chasm of sentiment, cant, self-preoccupation, and falsity', see Sheree Dukes Conrad, 'Toward a Phenomenological Analysis of Artistic Creativity', *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 21.2 (1990), 103-119.

exclusively in either first or third person narrative voice. Unless all three methods of writing a memoir—dual narrative voices, first person narrative voice, third person narrative voice—are tried together it cannot be claimed that shifting between both first and third person narrative voice is *more* therapeutic than writing either first or third person narrative voice. Confirmation of a hypothesis is also difficult when the evidence is based on the experience of one individual. Writing 'Reading Goldilocks' was personally therapeutic but this does not indicate that everyone will experience the same benefits that I did. There will always be questions about the validity of using personal experience as a form of research. Phenomenology, however, accepts the notion of the subjective that is crucial to creative endeavour. Art is not made by a committee, by consensus or as a result of empirical, measurable, repeatable methods. Artistic endeavour is experimental in its original use of the word: to try, to test, without being sure of the outcome.[2] What this study indicates is that this method requires further testing. It may be revealing, for instance, to ask other writers—not just therapeutic writers—if they experience an intersubjective relationship with their characters. In the field of medical humanities, the art of therapeutic writing is already taught to professionals who write narratives about healing their patients[3] or about the illness from the patient's perspective. Further study, using empirical and qualitative methods, into the efficacy of professionals' reflections on the experience of shifting between two different narrative points of view could prove useful. Phenomenological research methods that interrogate the impact of plot, symbol, metaphor and imagery may provide valuable insight into the therapeutic benefits of using these narrative elements, as well as a more complete understanding of those strategies. More research is also needed into the effect of reflection on the lived experience and process of therapeutic writing. The potential of the writer as first reader of his or her text also needs to be researched and understood. Professionals involved in the art of therapeutic writing need to continue with the work of creating a theory of therapeutic writing, although I suspect that, like most artistic endeavours, the practice will never be entirely codified.

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[2] Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[3] For information about the relationship between the arts and medicine, see, for example: *Durham University Centre for Medical Humanities* [online]. Durham University, 2013, updated 12 November 2013 [cited 12th November 2013]. Available from: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/cmh/>.

The implications of this study are also numerous. They can be read as applicable to therapeutic writing workshops or as recommendations for the developing best practice based on further research. The first implication, gleaned from the section covering phenomenology, is that claiming authorship of a text is itself healing. As I wrote 'Reading Goldilocks', I constructed a testimony of resilience articulated by a woman who chose to write about a distressing experience while adding to existing knowledge of therapeutic writing.

The second implication stems from the survey of feminist literary criticism of women's life narratives. Healing, not trauma, needs to be conceived and validated as a cultural, as well as an individual, construction. Associated with this is the idea of refocussing on the healing power of women's voice. Both these implications need to be investigated and trialled with a view to their becoming a part of the writer/counsellor's methodology when facilitating a therapeutic writing workshop for women. This is particularly necessary given Reynolds' notion that voice is a cultural rather than a personal phenomenon.[4]

A third implication hinges on research into the Goldilocks found in the children's tale, *The Three Bears.* This demonstrates that a therapeutic writer needs to thoroughly investigate the character he or she wishes to employ as his or her third person narrator. The character must be 'just right' for the life narrative and for the therapeutic writer so maximum benefit can be garnered from the technique. Having researched his or her character, the therapeutic can reflect on and articulate the connections they have with his or her character. The therapeutic writer needs to think about the similarities and differences between themselves and the third person narrator. How might these similarities or differences be important? What attracts the therapeutic writer to the character? The writer/counsellor can help the therapeutic writer articulate what he discovered but more importantly, the counsellor/writer needs to help the writer purposefully place these attributes into the narrative or, once the narrative is written, check the text for instances of these characteristics and reflect on the implications of that material. The benefit of therapeutic writing not

[4] Nedra Reynolds, 'Ethos as Location', *Rhetoric Review* 11.2 (1993), 325-338 (pp. 327-329).
[4] Melanie Sperling and Deborah Appleman, 'Voice in the Context of Literacy Studies', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46.1, (2011), 70-84 (p. 72 and p. 73-75).

only derives from understanding the use of narrative voice and the third person narrator, but also from reading, editing and analysing the text and how the third person narrator and narrative voice are constructed.

While researching the publishing history and various versions of *The Three Bears,* my intuitions about how Goldilocks has been represented over the years were confirmed. The lesson that the Goldilocks found in 'Reading Goldilocks' teaches is that what constitutes civilisation, as represented by the bears, and what personifies wildness, represented by Goldilocks, are two very different things. Goldilocks eschews the trappings of civilisation because she suspects that appearing to do the right thing has replaced moral right and good. The research also exposed me to the phenomena of symbolic exchange and counter control, which led to my choice of Goldilocks as my third person narrative voice. I wanted a dissenting, authoritative and proactive voice to contrast with 'Janet's' more passive and detached voice.

The effort of creating a fictional character and writing a memoir using two different narrative voices can provide insight into how an individual habitually responds to pivotal life events and the people around them. My experience of this is related in the chapter entitled 'Perspective'. As the third person narrator, Goldilocks became an objective observer who challenged my acquiescent behaviour. On the other hand, a third person narrator could reinforce the perspective of the therapeutic writer/first person narrator, supporting her choices and validating the tactics the therapeutic writer used to survive and heal from a trauma. For example, throughout most versions of *The Three Bears*, Baby Bear speaks and Goldilocks acts but says little or nothing. Having Goldilocks narrate a part of my story provides her with an opportunity to speak, but it does not mean she speaks *for* me; she shows me *how* to speak. She is a conventionally silent character who voices her opinions and is, therefore, a metaphor for the idea that silence is a problem only if one can speak. There are currently many people in the world who suffer untold trauma; given the ability of the arts to heal trauma, resources need to be provided to writers who can help the disenfranchised find metaphors for their presumed, but false, inability to voice, and heal from, their pain.

A fourth implication of the research into narrative point of view and narrative voice comes from the importance of understanding narrative strategies and the particular

narrative element the therapeutic writer wishes to use. In a therapeutic writing workshop, for example, several participants may wish to explore narrative voice, but others may find focusing on plot, symbol, metaphor or theme is more useful. Knowledge of the narrative element and how it is used can give the therapeutic writer confidence. The research need not be as comprehensive as conducted for the present study, but by discussing and sharing knowledge about the narrative element and applying it, the therapeutic writer can develop a degree of mastery over his or her healing process.

The fifth implication of the present research is the understanding gained by reflecting on shifting narrative points of view and how it provides an alternative perspective on a significant incidence in the therapeutic writer's life. I experienced this when Goldilocks narrated the chapters entitled 'MarriedWorld' and 'Gertrude'. I combined the metaphorical intersubjective relationship I experienced with my third person narrator with questions concerning my perceptions of the events of December 1970. As a result of having Goldilocks narrate my mother's story of loss, I gained a deeper understanding of my mother's behaviour. Creatively rendered, language allows us to imaginatively enter the world of another; it is a powerful vehicle for the intersubjective sharing of two moments of one phenomenon. Such sharing needs to be encouraged in order to heal individual and communal suffering. The revelations concerning creative endeavour and falling asleep confirm that creativity occurs when an artist is liberated from the needs and dictates of the ego resulting in an enhanced ability to understand, articulate and address the suffering of another.

A sixth implication of the research stems from the discovery that to move between two different narrative voices is like stepping across a threshold. This experience was conceived as leaving one 'place' and, before arrival at another 'place', stepping into a gap, a caesura, or open space. While writing 'Reading Goldilocks', I experienced this void as an unexplored site, the epitome of phenomenology's notion of the 'reduction' or 'bracketing'. To be in a place where one's prior knowledge or preconceptions are suspended is to experience wonder. Stepping into this place is like stepping into silence. In this void, the voices that shaped and formed me, the stories and names that framed me, dissolved. It is no coincidence that the chapter entitled 'Moments', written as the memoir was being completed, addresses 'the void,

the emptiness, which cannot be filled'.[5] This was a silence into which I spoke, and from where I heard my voice. This gap is where the memoir and exegesis reveal—implicitly perhaps—my view of what it means to be human and to be a writer. This is epistemology and ontology wrapped together in two manuscripts and informed by mindful reflection on the experience of writing as therapy. To step outside of the known, to leave behind the voices that may be wise, but are not your voice, is an important facet in producing and disseminating knowledge about the nature of suffering and the processes of healing.

A seventh implication of this study involves the role of the therapeutic writer, as well as the writer/counsellor. The emerging phenomenon of writers who are also academics has prompted a review of the role of the author in the construction of texts. This has an impact on understanding the role of the therapeutic writer. The writer's role as the first reader of her work must also be made more explicit. Practice-led research that depends on the quality of the exegesis demands author reflection and comment on the processes involved in creating a collection of short stories, a novel or a play. The kind of reflection required of a therapeutic writer could be modelled on the exegesis, albeit a simplified version of it.

In 'Reading Goldilocks', the first person narrator comments that writing is a process of making choices. One of the benefits of therapy is that it empowers an individual to make his own choices about his life. As Goldilocks attests, making a choice is an act of agency. This leads to the eighth implication of this study: writers who are also trained therapists or counsellors are crucial if therapeutic writing is to be implemented in clinical situations. As previously noted, Pauline Cooper's[6] study supports the belief that therapeutic writing groups need to be properly facilitated by a trained therapist who is also a skilled writer. The writer/counsellor must be experienced with, and sympathetic about, the problems writers face and he or she must be a trained counsellor in order to effectively support a writer who experiences distress when narrating a trauma. It is admitted that this issue is only briefly alluded to in 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'', primarily because it is beyond the scope of the

[5] Janet Thomas, 'Reading Goldilocks', (unpublished memoir for doctoral thesis, Flinders University, 2014), p. 104.
[6] Pauline Cooper, 'Writing for depression in health care', *British Journal of Occupational Therapy,* 76.4 (2013), 186-193

project. Having a qualification in counselling has, however, alerted me to the fact that therapeutic writing workshops risk falling into disarray if the facilitator is unable to help a participant deal effectively with distressing material.

The ninth and final implication of this research is that a coherent theory of writing as therapeutic is overdue. As was suggested in the introduction to ‘Writing ‘Reading Goldilocks’’, if written expression is accepted as a viable therapeutic technique, more than just exercises to encourage writers to narrate their trauma or distress are required. Clear, workable, tested methods that assist the therapeutic writer to reshape his raw material are required. Exploring why these methods work is crucial. This research could be conducted using either evidence-based, quantifiable methods, or inductive, exploratory, descriptive methods, or a combination of both. Practice-led exegetical methods of creative research, such as the present document, may result in a revitalised understanding of how writing is therapeutic and encourage recognition of therapeutic writing as a genre in its own right, not an inferior form of literary or creative practice. One of the ways to achieve this is to enunciate the aims and outcomes of therapeutic writing. I suggest that the main aim of therapeutic writing is to either contain or eliminate mental and emotional suffering. The desired outcomes of having written either a short story, poem, play or novel is that the writer recognises she has experienced—or is experiencing—difficulties; the writer acknowledges the effects of that problem; and the writer detects and uses strategies and practices she and the writer/counsellor believe will alleviate her suffering and enhance her personal and interpersonal strengths. In other words, therapeutic writing is a technique that demonstrates, on the page, that the author has healed, or has begun to heal, what ails her.

One means of addressing this issue is in the classroom. While I have demonstrated that therapeutic writing workshops exist, and that more academically focussed courses are appearing in universities, all tertiary writing classes need to address the phenomenon of therapeutic writing. This is not because all students should be encouraged to write in order to achieve healing, but because they need to be aware of research conducted in this area in order to make informed decisions about its efficacy or otherwise and to explore its potential as a career—or as an adjunct to a career as a professional writer.

One of this study's strengths is that it is driven by the principles of practice-led research which valorises play, conjecture, intuition and moments of serendipity. When a researcher is able to move beyond the known and challenge accepted paradigms, it is possible to reveal hitherto unforseen meanings. The word *stitch* denotes the portion or loop of thread that is left in the fabric after a single, complete movement of a needle.[7] To create a stitch that fastens two things together necessitates stabbing or piercing the cloth, or in the case of surgery, the two sections of skin that are an open wound. In 'Reading Goldilocks', Goldilocks stitched together the story of my mother and me. In order to do so, Goldilocks had to pierce through two life narratives, close a wound, and create one fabric from separate and disparate pieces. This is an image of narrative voice as a thread; a fine cord composed of two or more filaments spun together to form one long yarn.

The relationship between therapeutic writing and narrative voice is one of imaginatively experiencing the world of another. Realising, on the page, either a fictional or a non-fictional character, and understanding that character's responses and strategies for coping with a crisis, is a form of atonement and propitiation that occurs when a therapeutic writer reads her text and is reflexive about his or her writing process. In the process of reflecting on the third person narrator that she created, the therapeutic writer can understand there are alternative ways of perceiving the world, even a world of pain. Goldilocks spoke for me and Goldilocks spoke with me, but ultimately Goldilocks' voice is *my* voice. I created her and I (re)read her and in the process I discovered another way to experience the world. This idea, I admit, is as elusive as the forgiveness which ascends 'like the fogged breath that rises from a river's heart at the close of day,'[8] but it is also as powerful.

[7] Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[8] Thomas, p. 170.

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