

Hooker

HOOKER



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Introduction

Why do hookers always seem to wait for someone else to speak for them?

Most hookers, in Europe anyway, are well above average intelligence, some are very articulate, many do a great deal in their local communities, animal rights, anti-drugs, you name it, When it comes to the issues around their own nightmare lives they are suddenly dumb.

They wait silently, and hope someone else will speak for them.

Unfortunately, many of those who do claim to speak for them are in fact only speaking on behalf of their own agenda. Riding an outsider horse towards political ambition would be a common one.

So why do they let this happen?

Simple answer: stigma.

Not just moral outrage, but a whole attitude of mind towards prostitutes that has been embedded in the subconscious of our culture for thousands of years is suddenly superimposed over their identity.

We have deeply felt common connotations for the word "dove", we have far more complex ones, just as hard-wired for words like "whore", "hooker" and "prostitute".

I had to do a lot of soul searching before writing this. I really do not want to be typecast as "an ex-hooker", because I do not fit the stereotype. When I think of it, I have never met anyone who did or even came near it.

However, I do not feel I have the right to stay silent.

I suppose the first thing for me is that I actually have managed to write some of this and write it coherently too.

I never could before.

I was all tied up in too much impotent rage and personal agony.

Sometimes, when you are out on the street it is hard to forgive the rest of society for leaving you there, and then punishing you, one way or another for it. It is a very primitive kind of rage. I think it took all my will to hold that rage in. After all I have seen, it still does.

In many ways, I am trying to accept that most people have no idea of the reality, and share the evidence of my own eyes to let them judge for themselves.

My point is actually very simple: there is no justification in trapping real innocent human beings in a nightmare, and then condemning and persecuting them for it.

The next step is to prove the aspects of that case:

- **That it is a nightmare.**
- **That it is a trap that exists in the framework of our society.**
- **That innocent people can be caught in that trap quite arbitrarily.**
- **That most of them would rather be just about anywhere else, but do not have enough real hope to dare to dream.**

I suppose it is all about *more* than just prostitution, it is about urban marginalization, sometimes better known as "the street".

When the words did finally start to flow from me I decided to turn this into a book, a project I felt I had a duty to attempt but could never face.

It is sometimes claimed that there are people who want to be prostitutes. I have chased those claims before, and found that all they amounted to was denial, and a striving to maintain a sense of personal autonomy. In many cases, they were literally no more than bravado, last remnants of personal pride.

My feeling was that if anybody actually wants to be a prostitute, let society decide, I could not care less one way or the other.

However, let me stand back from my own issues a moment.

Prostitution was imposed on me, and everyone I ever knew, much as all abuse is imposed, by

forces beyond our control and within the control of Society as a whole.

When I found a way out of prostitution, (though, seven years on, *still* no doorway into the mainstream of society, or a real life) I realized that this time I would take my life rather than go back to prostitution, and it *has* come very close sometimes.

- **I do not want to be mugged.**
- **I do not want to be raped.**
- **I do not want to be a prostitute.**

I have the same right as anyone else to the protection of society from such ordeals.

However, setting aside what I want to do with my body.

Do I want the state to dictate what I choose to do with my body?

I have to say that as long as I do not wish to impose my body (in the sense of some act of violence), then no, I do not want the state to dictate what I do with it.

There are informed perspectives other than mine. I spent a long time and a lot of determined effort on analyzing my experiences from every perspective, as objectively as I could.

Perhaps I had better give you my credentials related to prostitution.

For three months in 1982 I worked London's Park Lane, for another month I worked Paris, the Avenue de l'Opera and the Champs Elysees. Then I found a way out and never looked back. In 1987, I began to work in Dublin. I worked there until 1993.

I hated every moment. It was very like having to submit to rape as many times as possible in a night. The difference is that you had to submit to sex with a different person to the one who was threatening you.

I never had a pimp, I actually know very few people who did, so where did the threat come from?

The electricity company, my landlord, my car insurers (I lived 10 miles from any bus route), my local grocery store....

Money is as vital to survival as air is and I could not get enough to cover basic survival.

I did not have a hope of any other work, I was completely alone with no friends, family, or social network anywhere and I was living in a strange town. There was no familiar place for me to go back to and no money to find a new one. It was a deep recession in Ireland in 1987, there were no jobs, let alone for a reclusive, sociophobic stranger who came from nowhere.

As long as I lived as frugally as I could, had no car (and thus NO hope of finding work of any kind) and was prepared to hitchhike 150 miles to

Dublin and turn a few tricks to pay the utilities I could survive on welfare. However, that would leave me stuck on welfare indefinitely, on those same terms, still having to turn tricks for every emergency and living in fear of that.

That situation was bad enough until a welfare officer cut my rent allowance completely illegally (but in a way I could do nothing about) as revenge because I objected to him swearing at me.

No, I am not that prissy. However, he was drawing a good salary for dealing civilly with the public, and there was already quite a history of abusive behavior towards me.

I bring out the worst in all welfare officers. I am tall, attractive and very well spoken. They cannot relate to that. They assume I must be up to something and do everything they can to make my life as hard as possible.

Given the "discretionary powers" they have here that can be quite a lot. This particular welfare officer had previously "turned the screw" by leaving me to believe (falsely) that I could never get any welfare at all for an entire weekend.

That left me with only one option, prostitution, except I found another one and took 50 paracetamol tablets for preference with remarkably little effect. His behavior towards me amounted to mental torture, outright abuse of the power he had over my life, but I could not prove it.

The truth about me is that I left a very abusive home just before my 14th birthday in 1972, and was last at school on a State Scholarship to a prestigious British Public School six months before that. I never attended another class until I took a postgraduate Public Relations Diploma in 1996 (I passed all subjects and made an "A" grade in two of them).

I was a mother at 16 (predictable, I suppose?) and was hounded across two countries for custody of my son, by my own family, between the ages of 22 and 24. They wanted a "hostage", they had money and "connections". I had neither. I have never fully recovered from that, nor from my concentration camp of a childhood. I am only able to survive as a recluse. I never learned how to be anything else. Social situations terrify me.

I know many wonderful people on the net, but have only one close friend, my adopted Uncle since 1987. I genuinely would not know how to build or sustain a friendship with anyone else.

So to get back to the point, in 1987, I either sold sex, or I did not survive.

Yes, I suppose I could have been a high class "model" (the inverted commas are significant there) but to do that is essentially to pay money to a pimp of some kind, and become trapped in the infrastructure of the "flesh trade". The same is true of massage parlors and escort agencies, so I

went down and worked the streets, by myself, for myself, free and independent.

There were other advantages. The higher you go up the scale, the more the clients expect from you. In real personal terms "high class" whoring, while it may be safer, is far more degrading and traumatic than working the streets.

Dublin is probably very different to most American cities. This is a small country. Working on the streets here at that time was totally decriminalized and a lot nearer to acceptability than any American counterpart. They re-criminalized prostitution here in 1993, six months after I got out.

Since then, it has become far more dangerous and lawless.

I could not ever go back. At 43 I am getting a little old anyway. I have healed too much since; I am in too much in touch with myself and with my emotions to face it again. I would literally have to "mess my head up" and become estranged from myself once more just to be able to handle prostitution.

To be a prostitute you have to cut off or numb all non-essential emotions (love for your children is an essential emotion). You cannot afford full awareness of your own nature, needs and emotions. That is a long-term reality none of us are designed to handle, you have no choice but live in a constant state of denial. Not only must you live in a nightmare of constant trauma, but

you must also actively seek out that trauma, as a way of life.

It would require world-class mental gymnastics I am too long out of shape to undertake again.

The point I am trying to get across is that the approach to prostitution, worldwide, makes some very serious mistakes. It assumes that women in Prostitution choose to be there, and could choose to stop any day.

This mistake is founded on something called "semiotics", the cultural symbolism of concepts. The symbolism attached to the concept "Prostitute" is not hundreds but thousand of years old. It relates to times when Prostitution was conceivably the only option available to women independent of forms of marriage that amounted to slavery.

In the course of thousands of years, that symbolism has remained remarkably unchanged, and has wandered further from the reality than is acceptable. This is one of the reasons I avoid new "politically correct" terms like "sex worker". I am not talking about "sex workers" I am talking about the real people to whom the semiotic symbolism of words like "Prostitute", "Hooker" and "Whore", and all they connote, have been falsely applied for centuries.

Selling sex is an horrible experience, in the same generic way that cleaning a drain is an horrible experience. It is unlikely that many people choose it for aesthetic reasons.

In the beginning, hundreds of years ago, it was probably a straight choice between selling total control of your life and sexuality to a man you barely knew, if you knew him at all, and the softer option of "renting out" the use of your body for part of the time.

That is no longer the case. When you examine the underlying causes, most people sell sex because they are not being offered any valid or viable option. Sometimes the path you must trace back to that basic truth is complex and ambiguous. Nevertheless, at bottom, the root remains the same.

Here are a few common misconceptions I have encountered over time.

- a) *People who use prostitution as their trade are often disease stricken and in need of medical attention. They establish the spread of STD and AIDS.*

Wrong:

As a matter of statistics, non-IV drug abusing prostitutes (who are the majority) frequently test at a lower rate than the general population for STDs. The reason is simple, they are far more aware of, and focused on STD risks and safe sex practices than the general population. They use a condom as automatically as a construction worker dons a hard hat. Also the risk of genital aids transmission from a man to a woman is shown to be as much as *ten times* greater than

the risk of transmission from a woman to a man. Frankly, prostitutes have rather MORE reasons than the general population to consciously avoid AIDS and other STDs. IV drug abusers tend to test HIV+ at about the same rate as IV drug abusing non prostitutes.

b) *Prostitution plays a large part in drugs and fraud. Pimps often use their women to be involved with illegal acts such as robbery and fraud.*

Wrong:

In all of my experience in three European Cities the opposite would be the case. Women are usually Prostitutes because they have moral and ethical objections to committing theft and other crimes such as fraud. The opportunity to make a very good living from fraud instead was available to me when I first became a Prostitute. I could not have lived with my conscience had I attempted to take that far less unpleasant or traumatic option.

In many cities, the rates of muggings and burglaries are considerably lower in the red light districts. There are too many people around who are not morally comfortable with watching another human being get mugged, nor with watching another human being's home get burgled. One way to "Take back the night" in dangerous city areas IS to declare those areas "Tolerance Zones" for prostitution. Pimps (who I personally despise) make a great deal of money from their women, they have absolutely no need

to take the far greater risk of committing real crimes.

c) *The most common type of man who uses prostitutes is one who derives pleasures from controlling women. This leads to other sex crimes such as torture and rape.*

Wrong:

There are two most common types:

- Lonely men who are unable to develop relationships with women in the normal way.
- Men who can only really respond sexually in depersonalized situations.

In my opinion both types would be far better off to seek real help for the far deeper problems that place them in that position. However, in the real world, that is not always even available.

The controlling type you refer to is extremely rare. When one comes out of the woodwork, word goes out among the women like wildfire. After that, none of them will have anything to do with such a man. Often such men are reported to the Police as potentially dangerous in order to protect other women. Those who derive pleasure from controlling a woman need resistance and shock (much as an obscene phone-caller does) to arouse them. They will not get this from a prostitute.

Many rapists and sexual serial killers either begin or end with Prostitutes. There is a very simple

reason for this. They fear rejection and feel more confident about approaching them, ridiculous though that may sound. However, if there were no such thing as prostitutes they would just start, or end, somewhere else.

d) *Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse can also stem from prostitution and legalizing it does not mean it is regulated as to the uses and parameters that surround the act of sex. Do you believe that the government is going to set parameters that entail how rough the sex is to be, how much "bang for the buck" is allowed, etc?*

The idea of government regulated prostitution appalls me. Let me make my position very clear. No one should ever be forced to use prostitution as a means of survival. There should be realistic alternatives, but there are none. There is nowhere to go for real help when you cannot stand being a prostitute any more (usually by the end of the first night). As a society we do not actually allow women to stop being prostitutes. We will not employ them. We will not give them help or advice for the problems that forced them into prostitution. Often we refuse to acknowledge that the problems exist at all. We refuse to acknowledge the deficiencies in our childcare services that are directly responsible for a large proportion of the people who are forced to use prostitution as a means of survival etc., etc.

Make no mistake, I never want there to have to be another prostitute on the planet.

What I want is to see a situation where realistic, valid, workable alternatives are available to every person in prostitution, or who may be forced into it in the future.

Until they have a way to survive realistically without prostitution then society has no right to condemn and persecute prostitutes. As individuals, they have as much right to survival as anyone else, and if they have no other means available to them they have a right to survive by means of prostitution without let or hindrance from those more fortunate than themselves.

e) *Then there is the issue of pimps. Do we tax their earnings? What government institution is going to pay for the abuse and stress related infliction they put on their employees? Is sex with the pimp part of the screening process?*

My View:

Personally I would be in favor of something along the lines of the death penalty for pimps. In addition, let me also point out that for any government to tax the earnings of a prostitute (as some European Countries do) is for the Government to become a pimp and in countries where there are also laws against pimping (such as Germany) the Government is committing a crime in taxing the earnings of prostitutes.

f) *How perverted are the sex acts allowed to be? Do we set guidelines?*

My View:

The women set their own limits, as every human being has a right to do in any sexual situation. Those limits are generally a lot more restrictive than you would find in personal sexual relationships. Let me remind you that prostitutes are human beings, they do not want their lives to be any more loathsome to them than they have to be, much like anyone else.

People have a right to be appalled by prostitution. I am appalled by it myself. To see a working prostitute and be aware of her nightmare life and the pain behind her eyes, and the waste of who she is will inevitably make me break down and cry.

So, if you *are* appalled by prostitution, or find it offensive there is an easy way to end it.

By campaigning and pressuring for people forced to survive by prostitution to be given a real way out and readmission to society as full card carrying members of the human race. Prostitution hurts prostitutes far more than it hurts anyone else. Never forget that.

Fight to give them the means and the right to survive without being prostitutes.

Behind The Hedge

The following excerpt from my life is written as fiction. I have left it in its original form.

She collapsed behind the last dying tatter of hedge. Her breath came in ragged gasps, her heart pounded and an invisible knife stabbed at her side. She was safe, for a while at least.

Herbie studied her for a while. His big sad eyes spilling sympathy for a thing he was well used to and couldn't understand. He nuzzled into her while she buried her face and her tears in the friendly, meaty smell of his furry neck.

He was her best friend, her only friend. It was as if he always knew exactly the right moment to sneak out, over the field, across the building site, to a place where no-one could find her if they did not see her go and follow her.

She never knew what she had done. She did everything she was told, and she was always so careful to do it right. She must have missed something though, because daddy wouldn't get that cross for nothing. He never did, mummy said so. She must have done something, and if she didn't work it out herself mummy would have to take her to the doctor again to find out what was wrong with her. Why she imagined things and made daddy mad. Why she thought she had done it all right when she hadn't. Why she didn't work hard at school. Why she kept upsetting the whole family.

If they would only explain to her what she was doing wrong, so that she could understand it she would do it right. She did try at school, but everything always wound up seeming so far away, like in a dream. She always felt so tired, even though she couldn't sleep at night.

She still came out nearly top of the class at the end of the year, even if she didn't try.

At least Herbie was her friend. He went for daddy once when he got cross, he was only trying to protect her. Mummy said that if he did it again he would have to be taken to the vets and put to sleep. It was best to run with him and hide until daddy calmed down.

Herbie was the greatest.

He always loved her and followed her. Even if she was wrong and wicked and not right in the head like mummy said.

Mummy tried to say it as nicely as she could, but she meant it so it must be true. She never said the boys were wrong or wicked or not right in the head, and she never took them to the doctor unless they had a temperature.

She wouldn't mind daddy getting cross and hitting her if they would only love her like they loved the boys.

She wouldn't even run away, which upset him more because mummy said, and made him be

in one of his moods with the whole family. She had tried letting him hit her, she had even tried not to cry, but it didn't make any difference, and he still didn't love her, none of them did. Except Morgan, but he was only a baby and loved everyone. When he got older he would see for himself how bad and wicked and wrong in the head she was, then he wouldn't love her either.

He would be just like Jervis, tormenting her all the time, which was really her own fault because she couldn't take teasing, and getting her the blame for things, which were probably her fault anyway for not looking after him or watching him properly.

If she watched him, the way she was supposed to he wouldn't be able to do anything bad. She always wound up in a little dream world of her own, or with her head stuck in a book. He would break something, or do something bad, and she would be blamed.

He kept on reminding her that she was in dead trouble before they came home, sometimes she tried to hide or repair things, but Jervis would always tell, as soon as they were in the door.

They said it was her fault, because she didn't watch him properly. They would have to get a babysitter, and she wasn't a baby, and she couldn't stand that, so she begged for another chance. So far they had always given her one, which showed they could be kind, but what about next time?

Mummy said it was her last chance this time, she said it very quietly, when they were alone, after Jervis broke two dinner plates. She explained that it was causing trouble between her and Daddy, and it had to stop. She also said it was causing trouble between her and Daddy when she ran out and hid like this. She'd forgotten that, and now it was played together. So there would be another row, and it would all be her fault.

Everyone would be happier if she was dead. Sometimes she prayed to God to make her dead in her sleep so that they could all be happy. All she ever did was cause trouble, so if God couldn't make her stop why couldn't he make her dead? It would solve everything. She would be happy to make herself dead if she knew how, but when she offered to, Mummy told her that was very wicked indeed and said she would have to take her to the doctor's if she ever mentioned it again.

But it couldn't be wicked if God made you dead, could it? It would be the best thing really, except Herbie would miss her too much, he might even pine away, dogs sometimes did.

It was all so hard and confusing. Whatever she wanted was always wrong.

She had a good family and a good home so why couldn't she be a good girl, instead of such a disappointment?

Why did she keep spoiling everything for everyone and getting Daddy into a mood and making mummy take pills for her nerves?

She realized that she had stopped being a baby and lifted her head from poor old Herbie who must be sick of her making such a silly fuss.

Sometimes the fresh air on the face felt sort of safe, and cozy, and indoors. Everything would go hazy and she could slip into her own little dream world where she could just stay perfectly still and think of nothing, and rest there for a while, until somebody noticed, but nobody would, not out here, except Herbie, and he never seemed to mind, perhaps he lived in his own little dream world too? Perhaps dogs always did? Maybe that was why they curled up in corners and slept so much? But nobody slapped or shouted at Dogs for it, they just let them get on with it.

She honestly should be trying to think what she had done to start Daddy off this time. Mummy will expect an answer, but try as she might she could not think of an answer, it always seemed to her as if he just started for no reason at all, even though she knew that was not true. She often tried to notice and remember every tiny little thing, but whatever started him off she always seemed to have missed it.

Then mummy would think she was lying.

But it was the truth, she could not remember anything, if it was so important she ought to ask Daddy, he couldn't have forgotten too, then

Mummy could remind her and she would know not to do it again?

After a few minutes more, she stood up and started to walk further. She had to, just hiding in the hedge got too boring after a while, but she and Herbie could walk forever, she even knew exactly how far she could go to turn around and be back just in time for Mummy. He hardly ever hit her when Mummy was there, not unless she had done something so bad even she knew exactly what it was, like swearing, or lying, or ruining something, or getting into trouble at school. Really bad things she was usually far too frightened to do, but that sometimes happened anyway before she could stop them.

He would have hit her in front of Mummy if Mummy had told him that she told the doctor she was frightened of Daddy. But Mummy didn't tell him, because after Mummy had a little talk with the doctor the doctor knew she was just trying to cause trouble again and did not mean it, so that, as long as she never said anything so deceitful again, the less said about it the better.

She wished Mummy would explain to her why it was wicked to be frightened of Daddy. Everybody was, even though he usually did not hit anyone else, except Jervis sometimes. She had hit Jervis herself once or twice and couldn't blame Daddy for that. Jervis was such a spiteful little pig, even if Mummy did not believe he was. She had an idea that Daddy knew. Daddy never gave Jervis all his own way like Mummy did, which was a good thing.

Jervis was horrible. Jervis stole things. Jervis broke things on purpose. Jervis lied to get her into trouble. But whatever Jervis did, Mummy just could not see it. When she tried to tell her, Mummy just said she was jealous of Jervis, but she wasn't. She just wished he hadn't happened. When she was an only child, everything was much nicer. Then Jervis came, and it all went bad. Jervis was bad, much worse than her, she was positive about that, but Mummy always believed him, always made a fuss of him, always gave in to everything he wanted. She even went mad at Daddy if she found he hit him, when he hit her she said she must have done something to deserve it.

Morgan was gorgeous though, sweet and cuddly and tottery, she could play with Morgan for hours. She wished they would send Jervis to a child minder and leave Morgan with her. But Mummy said she couldn't be trusted to take proper care of him because he was so small, certainly not when she did not even take proper care of Jervis. But she could, she did a lot of the time anyway, while they were at home, because they both worked so hard for the whole family and were so tired. Especially Mummy, who worked on a Saturday as well, which was why Daddy was alone with them. She wished Mummy would stop working on a Saturday, then she wouldn't have to keep hiding from Daddy when she upset him. But Mummy said she could not stay at home because everything cost so much, especially her new school. She was the only girl in the school to get a scholarship, which was

supposed to pay for everything. But Mummy said it didn't, and she had no idea how many sacrifices they were making to send her. Nor how much trouble it was causing with Daddy, who wanted her to go to the ordinary school like everybody else.

She did not want to go to the ordinary school, the other children hated her, they teased her about being tall and skinny, about speaking in a different way and using too many big words. Mummy said she did not know where she got such a nice speaking voice from. She liked it though, even if it did sound a bit affected. It was just the way she spoke, she did not think about it at all, it just came out that way. She heard it on a tape once, and she was surprised at how nice it sounded. Mummy said she should stop trying so hard to put it on. But it wasn't put on, it just came out. She did not like the same things as the other kids, she liked books, grown up books, like "The Prisoner of Zenda" and "She" that Daddy got from the library. She read most of "The Devil Rides Out" and it didn't scare her a bit, but Mummy took it back because it wasn't suitable. The children's section was boring, she did not even look there any more. The other kids liked television, "Top of the Pops" (which she never saw because it was only a lot of rubbish and Daddy wanted to watch the other side).

She liked some television though. Some of it was really good, "Adam Adamant", "Virgin of the Secret Service" (which sounded a bit rude, but wasn't at all) and the horror films late on a Friday night she sat up alone to watch with Daddy. He

was really nice on Friday nights, making late night snacks and explaining grown up things, and making fun of the monsters. It was as if he was a different person on a Friday night, the Daddy she wanted him to be all the time, he was really funny, and just like a best friend, as long as she didn't push it. The other kids just like silly stuff, "Tommy Cooper" and "Benny Hill", stuff with cowboys and fighting and wars in it, deadly boring stuff. The whole family liked a lot of that too. So, as she was part of the family, she usually had to watch it as well, when she would much rather have been in her room with a book and the radio, but Mummy said that was selfish and bad manners, they couldn't afford to have lights on all over the house to suit one person. OK some of it was pretty good "The Man from Uncle", "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea", "Doctor Who", she quite enjoyed that stuff, but she dreaded having to sit through the rest. The other kids watched "Crossroads" and "Coronation Street" and sometimes talked about it as if it was real life, which was stupid. At least Mummy and Daddy did not watch rubbish like that.

The other kids loved pop music, she didn't even really know any. What she loved were Daddy's classical records, which she played to herself whenever she could. Wonderful soaring sounds that made you feel you could fly, or do just about anything, she knew every note of some of them, whole symphonies. If Jervis was out playing sometimes she would dance to them, like ballet, but different, these dances were all her own, a way of being part of the music. She asked for ballet lessons once, but Daddy laughed at her

and told her she was being stupid, because she was so tall that they would never let her up on a stage. She didn't want to be up on a stage, she just wanted to be a better part of the music, but she didn't know how to explain that.

The other kids at school hated her, and she never wanted to see any of them again as long as she lived. The new school would be different, the girls would be clever like her, and like the same things. They would be too clever to mind how tall and skinny she was, or how she spoke, most of them probably spoke the same way anyway.

She knew she would pass the exam, and if the same evening had not been the only evening Mummy could possibly manage to take her to have those two back teeth taken out she might have come top, but she was terrified of the dentist, and could not concentrate properly.

Mummy was really nice about it, and really sorry. She picked her up from the exam and even gave her 10 shillings to spend in town before the dentist.

Mummy understood how scared she was and did her best to help, she even gave her two of her nerve pills to take in the morning to stop her being too afraid.

She was not even cross when she told her that she must have dozed off in one of the exams. The teacher had to wake her up, and she was very pleased that she had been sensible enough not to mention the nerve pills. It hadn't got anything

to do with the pills anyway, they weren't for sending you to sleep. Mummy took them all the time and they didn't send her to sleep.

She had known that Mummy was not really supposed to give her nerve pills. Mummy was only doing what seemed best under very difficult circumstances.

She was very disappointed that she did not come top, but she expected to pass, and the dentist was so nice to her when she told him about taking the exam that she almost stopped being afraid altogether.

So it was all for the best really.

Now she would never have to see the other kids at school again, and she wouldn't have to go to the dentist for ages. She might even grow out of her fear in the meanwhile.

The Whore's Story

The following excerpt from my life is written as fiction. I have left it in its original form.

The traffic was grid locked as far as she could see. The fuel light had begun to flicker, almost shyly, but it would soon gain confidence. Looking closer, she could see that the needle on the temperature gauge had begun to rise in an alarming way.

Her head ached steadily, and her feet felt as if they were on fire.

Shifting the gears into neutral she carefully removed her shoes, switching feet on the brake pedal, one shoe still half on when the car in front of her moved forward a few yards, a horn blared behind her.

It was too much.

She had really expected a door to open this time, but instead she had been forced to endure the simpering patronization of an idiotic woman who appeared to have doubts about her literacy, that no amount of polysyllabic language could shake. Another bleeding heart whose core identity seemed to depend upon establishing her as mentally sub-normal.

God Almighty! Whose woodwork did these creatures crawl out of?

Who did they think they were?

More to the point, who on earth were they trying to force her to become?

What kind of unthinkable and unendurable future were they trying to impose upon her?

A council flat perhaps?

A man to go with it? Equipped with the IQ of a termite and a level of moral and hygienic development that would make a maggot shudder?

A nice steady income? What was left of his dole after the nearest Publican and Bookie had taken their cut?

How generous, considering she was the one they expected to screw him!

Still there were always intellectual distractions, Like a "D" grade Junior Cert if she really applied herself for the next 5 years.

If they were just a little more reasonable she would have been prepared to compromise on a nice strong rope and the loan of their top landing for five minutes to solve the problem.

After an episode like that, she always found herself trying to snatch glimpses of herself in the rear view mirror. No vanity, just reassuring herself that she did not actually look ignorant, cheap, or pathetic. It always made her feel like going back

to that hell on earth, just to regain her self-esteem. At least there were people out there who offered her some realistic recognition and respect.

Never, never again! Starvation in the gutter looked far more appealing, if frighteningly close.

Shame about her nasty little ethical problems, without them she could turn her hand to contract killing, there would even be a way to use the silly blind bitches to "improve her work skills" in a positive and meaningful way.

She had so much to give, if only the very thought of her contributing anything did not give so many of these useless wittering ninnies an attack of the vapors.

Still just because she did not need remedial education it did not mean that she did not need anything. They never seemed to offer anything anybody needed. They never offered, for example, a sense of being a full, card-carrying member of the human race. Preferring to brand you as a lesser species with whatever level of provisional admission did not threaten their essential sense of their own superiority, and bring them face to face with the reality that it could have been any number of them just as easily, and could be tomorrow. Although today's specimen of particularly bone dry spinster did not have much to worry about on that score.

Then she had not even noticed that the tape in the cassette deck had ended, until it clicked

back to the radio, half set on a faded station full of static, and for a long poignant moment it all happened again.

Smiling, like a burst of sunlight through storm clouds, she reached for the dial and tuned the radio in properly.

She had not heard that song in years, and now it was almost over, even her headache had receded.

First love.

Ian.

She shook her head in bittersweet delight.

The hell with it, she had to hear it again, she pulled in to the kerb, despite the clearway sign. The tow truck could never get through all this, and she might have some money to pay a ticket before it went to court. There was a record Store down the street and she still had a small safety net in plastic, they must have it on cassette, they just had to.

The Gods that were usually so mischievous with her must have been having a nap because she found the song in a bargain bin, on an old compilation of other songs she had not heard for as long, and a few she could manage to wait a lot longer to hear again!

Nap? They must have been in a coma, no ticket and the traffic was finally starting to break-up and develop gaps and serious signs of mobility.

She found herself happily immersed in Ian again, sufficiently carried away to allow two drivers out of a side road ahead of her.

She had all but forgotten for so very long.

The first thing she noticed about him was that he never took his eyes off her, the second was that he looked like a green eyed, pale skinned Cherokee.

Was it really that corny? Did their eyes really lock at the top of the steps of the bus and just refuse to part?

She had been so young, still only 13, he was older, a university fresher. Maybe youth and time romanticized it?

No, it must have really happened that way, there is no other way she can remember it.

He must have made some remark, and it must have been funny, because she remembered laughing.

He joined her, hand in hand through the park and into the museum, as fascinated as she by the Egyptian exhibit. Listening intently to all that she knew or could surmise about the various items on display, sharing all he knew with her.

Chaperoned by the withered head of a woman of some Pharaoh's household, and a well bandaged merchant, he finally took her in his arms, tentatively, slowly, as though afraid she was not quite real, and brushed her lips with his own. It was so brief, so respectful, all the while staring into her eyes, no innocent she, even then, but awe-struck, she kissed him back and the kiss went on, until a voice called out to them to "cut it out, or take it out side". They collapsed against each other laughing, and ran hand in hand to another room, full of Stone Age implements and kissed again, behind a case, for sheer joy and defiance. A brief backward glance seemed to tell her that the Pharaonic Lady remembered and approved, while her companion saw no reason to rise from his slumber in indignation.

They kissed many times between the Museum and the stop for her second bus, and just once more at the stop before it came, but it was a very late bus and a very long kiss.

On the bus she was in a daze, suspecting, for the first time in her life that she might not be ugly, ungainly and useless after all, that she might even, in some ways, be beautiful, and that life might be wonderful, and the world a joyful place.

Next day she broke the rules and sneaked out to meet him at lunchtime. He begged her to. He could not wait until evening, neither could she. Older girls were allowed out anyway, and she could not bring herself to tell him how young she was, nor anyone else if she could avoid it.

Such risk for a few short minutes, shyly holding hands and talking into each other's eyes. Later, he was waiting for her by the gate. There was no arrangement, there did not need to be, she knew he would be there, if he had not been she would have waited, knowing that she would not have long to wait. Such total trust, as she had never once known since. She knew how much he hated to be away from her, as certainly as she knew how much she hated to be away from him. She got her coat and got out faster than she ever did before, not wanting to waste a moment, or make him wait. She knew that he would, she just did not want him to have to. There was nothing to prove. It was all too self-evident for that.

It was a dream come true, and dreams that come true are easy to believe in, especially when your life consists of very real nightmares. A dream come true may be unexpected, but it is still a logical progression.

Whenever she looked at other girls of 13, they always seemed to be 10 years younger than she was at the same age. She was not even a virgin by the time she met Ian.

It was incongruous that she was suddenly allowed to go out with young men of Ian's age, on condition that they presented themselves every Sunday for inspection, which was mortifying.

Looking back, she realized that her parents must have been running scared at that time.

First, there had been a summons to her headmistress's study. She could never remember the conversation, but it was warm and reassuring. What she could remember was Mrs. Cawley asking her and the end of it, to promise not to mention that they had spoken until she had a chance to see her parents. She was always so proud of the way she kept that promise. The request arrived on a Friday morning, the appointment was for Tuesday evening. But whatever they did to her, said to her, or threatened her with, she never even gave a hint of knowing what it was about. With hindsight it became obvious to her that someone must have noticed something was wrong, and Mrs. Cawley was being very clever about trying to establish the facts.

She had often wondered whether Mrs. Cawley had realized enough to know what her family would put her through if she kept that promise. She couldn't have realized, people never did.

The notion of a girl of thirteen being put through two days of abusive and often violent interrogation by her own parents, over a promise to say nothing, was unthinkable.

There were battered baby's then, deprived slum children, but there were no middle class scholarship girls who spent most of their time being somebody's punch bag, let alone their own father's.

There was no incest outside of social classes 5 and 6 either. It had surprised her when one or two of the women she knew confided it to her over the years, because her father never did that.

They should write that on his headstone when he was finally gone "At least I never fucked her".

But he had wanted to, she knew that then and, if anything, realized it more as the years passed.

If she had not got out he would have got around to it, and it would have been very violent rape. The final consummation of her years of surrogate battered wifehood, and when it was done, he would probably be so far out of control that he would kill her.

The beast might have even found a way to get away with it too, and pin the blame on her.

They came back after speaking to Mrs. Cawley, full of smiles and plastic affection. She was silly not to have told them, whatever Mrs. Cawley wanted her to promise she had not expected her to let them think she had done something wrong and get into trouble. (Trouble? Out on the street, they would have called it systematic torture and interrogation.) They packed her off to an elderly psychiatrist who specialized in "adolescent troubles". Claiming Mrs. Cawley had only wanted to see them to suggest it. Now that seems unlikely to be the truth, but then she had swallowed it whole. It was only years later that she realized

how many lies they told, and how plausibly, as a way of life. How they regularly, subtly turned their own sick behavior against her to their own advantage, in her own eyes as well as in the eyes of everyone else they knew. Tricking her into becoming an accomplice in her own abuse, until it was all too firmly established for her to have any hope of contradicting or denying it.

They presented her as "imaginative" and defended her for it, then led the world make its own decision that she was a liar, and that they were kidding themselves.

More likely, they send her to a psychiatrist to convince Mrs. Cawley that she was mentally ill, to prevent her from realizing any more, and deny what she already did realize.

The Vicar had noticed something too. He kept her back after choir practice one night, or was it confirmation class? All she could remember of that conversation was that he told that he could not possibly confirm her, not because she did not know enough, but because she honestly did not believe any of it. Looking back it seemed strange how faded her recollection of these extracts of conversations had become. Usually she would remember every word of any significant conversation for many years.

The Vicar had also told her that there was nothing to worry about, because he would explain to her parents for her. It had certainly been a very long conversation. She must have either cried, or almost cried, at one point. The

Vicar's wife had brought cocoa and biscuits. She remembered that part clearly enough. She could also remember the anxious glances exchanged between the Vicar and his wife. She could remember that the Vicar kept looking sad and stunned, and tried to hide it.

She could remember that, ever after, both of them always hugged her whenever they saw her, but the words are lost, like a tape accidentally erased, they will not replay for her.

Another change at that time was that she was suddenly allowed to go ice-skating with one of the neighbor's daughters, a girl two years younger than her. The skating was fun. It also explained a lot of bruises and sprains.

She collected some injuries on the last day of the family holiday that summer which could not be so easily explained away.

After that she was allowed to go out on a Saturday evening with a much older girl from school, to pubs, rock venues, anything. When that slimy little creep Clive asked her out, with one thing, and one thing only, on his mind, she was allowed to go out with him.

He was 19, working, and attractive (as well as being a totally selfish user) so he was a great status symbol. When he finally got what he wanted (something it became very obvious later he had never had before, the Casanova he claimed to be would have realized you have to get an erection first) and did not get the hang of

it the first couple of times, he decided it was her fault and dumped her. This callous attitude shattered her fragile, budding, self-esteem.

Then less than a month later Ian put it back together with interest. Just about overnight.

Every moment she could she spent with him. They touched all the time, kissed and hugged and held each other, wherever, whenever. But, unlike the way it was with Clive, it was not just a means to an end, but an end in itself. A vital expression of youth, joy and that special kind of love that belongs only to the very young and innocent, and is intense enough to charge the very air around them.

When the traffic finally broke up completely at the beginning of the dual carriageway, she realized that there really had been more to it than youth.

It had been a deeper thing than that.

Running free at last, after a very close-run race with the petrol tank, (She had almost forgotten to replenish it a little, so caught in another time and place, she had to turn around and go back for petrol.) singing snatches of a song along with the tape, knowing all the words, even after all that time. She could see it all as sharp, clear, and impossible to contradict as the road in front of her.

Ian had been one of three motherless boys raised in boarding schools, she was a girl raised

without even a taste of love or affection. It was so obvious, something in them had connected and all the emotions locked up inside them just burst out in a flood all over one another.

The family would never let her keep something like that, something so precious and vital, something they could not control at all. Something that set her free of them, by feeding her where they had always starved her into submission.

Of course, after a while they found a way to scare Ian off. She never found out how, no one would tell her, not even Ian. He just looked scared to death and avoided her eyes if she tried to push for a reason why. She had seen him once or twice afterwards, secretly, when she had begged him to. She was shut off from the light and yet no longer able to live in the dark.

Except that he seemed so scared, he was no different. Not distant or awkward at all. She only had to touch him and he would respond just as he always did before.

He did not find it any easier to turn away and leave her.

The golden dream had tarnished but it did not die. Not then.

Even when she had finally left, months after the last time she saw Ian, the police had hounded him, blaming him, trying to force him to admit that they had been lovers. They were lovers

enough to satisfy anyone, but not in the carnal sense, not in the sense that they wanted to charge him with.

They saw Clive, however, exactly once, but they hounded Ian into a breakdown. Mother told her, but someone else had confirmed it, so it must have been true.

Why had the police hounded the one person who really cared about her and left alone the one who only used her, unless someone had persuaded them to do that, someone who did not mind telling a great many lies. Someone who was very like her Mother.

Ian had paid a terrible price, only he knew how much, just for allowing her to matter to him.

How many more had paid the same price since? She had always blamed herself, seen herself as a taint and a curse upon anyone who cared about her.

In the end, she had learned ways to make the worthless ones who wanted to use her, or who needed something from her, matter just enough to fill up the vacuum in her heart for a while.

At the same time, she shunned all that she most needed and valued, for fear of the damage that she would do, just by responding.

She had spent half a lifetime of running from love, and even friendship, instinctively in the end, never questioning the choice, just making and

effecting it as fast as possible, before anything could happen.

All the time it had never been her doing, she did not hurt Ian, she could not have done it, and she could not have prevented it.

She was shaking so much that she had to pull in to the side of the road and sit for while to collect herself.

All this time there was nothing wrong with her at all, and the same probably applied to the rest of it.

How could people be that monstrous, that freakish? Even if they could, how could they have the same genes and chromosomes as herself?

She who could not bear to hurt, or even affect, anything?

She who hated herself for every single time it might have happened?

Why would anyone hate her that much?

What had she ever done to them?

All she was guilty of was refusing to make it easy for them to destroy her, and placing herself as far out of their reach as possible at every opportunity.

Was it a crime to try and protect yourself?

Was it a crime to survive at all if those who brought you into the world did not want it?

The woman she saw today made her feel that her very survival was, if not exactly a crime, then at least a serious imposition on the world.

She had made her own way through the world in the end, using no resources but her own, however painful that had become, taking nothing from anyone, not even the state, hurting no-one even if it meant getting hurt herself.

She had denied herself even the most fundamental human rights if there might have been a tiny risk of hurting someone else.

She had done all this without realizing that as soon as she removed her life from their reach, many of those risks did not exist. Not outside of the nightmare program, they had imposed upon her to wear her down, and grind her into submission.

Why had they wanted that so badly?

Besides, submission was not the substance into which she had been ground. To submit to them would be to become a willing accomplice in their cruelty. Theirs was a cruelty that demanded more victims than herself alone.

Submission had been unthinkable for as long as she could remember.

She would die a thousand times before she would let them force her to become just like them. Which seemed to be ultimately what they had wanted, either that, or they wanted her dead.

The only substance they had ground her into was a bleeding pulp, unable to move or stand, or even cry out. Every molecule vibrating with pain, sometimes not recognizable as human, not able to fight or even defend herself.

They had left her able to do no more than lie where she was, and, very slowly, bleed to death in silence, repulsive to any rescuer. A puddle of gore that no one wanted to examine, from which all averted their eyes.

Fair enough.

"But spare me at least those who demand of me that I live as something so far from myself that I do not even know how to pretend to it!"

The Hell to Pay

Once I had a long involved flashback.

Blame it on Mozart.

I have not watched an opera in over 25 years.

Nor sat in a theatre.

Suddenly, for a part of me, those 25 years never happened, because that part stayed cryogenically frozen.

The part that somehow existed independent of the family from middle class, respectable hell.

I loved theatre, opera, music, literature, architecture, and figure skating.

That part of me was not very happy, but it had hopes, dreams, and ambitions.

That part had preferences, tastes beyond survival.

That part could use leisure to advantage.

That part could and would listen to opera or choral work and soar with every note, learning to fly slowly on the same wings, aided by an alto/mezzo voice that had world class potential. I was marked as "gifted" intellectually, but the voice was the gift I had that was just for me.

The "world class potential" was not interesting to me, the possibility of perfecting it, and pushing the range into full soprano, with the power to fill an auditorium was.

It was the power to fly.

Now all that is left is like a scratched 78-rpm record. Choked and cracked, for almost all the time between, it is mostly a mental block, I have come across it in one other person.

Last night even snubs and faux pas (I had many) over a quarter of a century old, were as fresh as yesterday, things any other middle aged woman would not even remember, still crushing and unresolved.

For all the time in between, I have been thrust behind the glass wall, into the world best described by author Andrew Vachss. Where the only aspiration is survival, and there are no rules and no shelter, except from those who draw close to you, yet, for me, made worse by a complete lack of the interactive skills that would have drawn anyone close.

From there, I was allowed no way back, because there IS no way back.

I do not care who wants to try to contradict that I have been there, and spent a quarter century looking for a way back, and I know.

No way back to the world, no way back to my self, no way back to my potentials, hopes, dreams.

Why?

Because I left, aged almost 14 I broke all the rules and rejected the "respectable, middle class family" who destroyed me slowly as part of their way of life.

I left because I would not have survived another summer there and I knew it.

Which rather negated the scholarship education and the singing lessons?

How much I had wanted those things did not count, because the price would have been my life.

I tried to do it legally, asked for help, even ran into a police station distraught one night, genuinely too scared to go home, and asked to be taken into state care for my own protection.

I was all but laughed at.

People knew, I was seeing a psychiatrist who knew enough, and covered it all up.

My father beat me up every Saturday, without fail, and as I grew older it was escalating, it was not just Saturdays, but the Saturday beating was one I could count on (the ice skating on Sunday covered much) and in the time in between...

I never knew what it was to be loved, cared about: the quantity and consistency of the verbal abuse, lies and mind games was awesome. There are forms of brainwashing, and psychological interrogation techniques that are kinder and milder, most cults are far more rational.

Yes I have explored some strange avenues try to find an equivalent as a jumping off point from which to unravel the mess and undo the damage.

Trust was unthinkable in that house, a form of self inflicted injury.

Underneath the appearances, in that house I was a servant to be used and abused, a whipping boy to be punished and ultimately sacrificed.

Moreover, I was acutely aware of it.

So I left...

...and the system "processed" me...

By stealing my life, my identity and thrusting me behind that glass wall with no way back.

The fact that my family were "connected" enough to cost a Social Worker his job, and determined enough to try, sealed my fate.

My family went on using "the system" as a tool of abuse for decades, remorselessly, as for some time before they had used it as a threat...

...and the system was easy to use that way. Even without the "special circumstances" of my family, I watched helpless as that same system ground one young innocent life after another into dust before my eyes, as an inevitable by product of it's modus operandi.

I never found anyone who came through the system whole, or came out at the adult end without terrible damage.

So I paid, and I go on paying...

For the sickness and callousness of others.

There is no excuse: not for abuse, nor for callous indifference.

There is no excuse for anyone who makes generic claims that the victims are, in effect, as bad as the perpetrators.

There is no excuse for those who understand our damage and vulnerability and exploit it.

There is no excuse for claiming that we seek and crave that exploitation.

Does it occur to anyone that from outside the social networks into which humanity pours the best of itself there IS no perceptible difference between the psychopath and the normal?

They refuse to see beyond or outside the "charmed circle" they live within.

We are not disordered, we are clinging by our fingernails to a partial survival, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual, as the only way of life we are allowed.

There is not enough room to maneuver to allow for anything as complex as a pathology.

The theories consider every factor except reality.

Implied stigmatization is an effective and impenetrable shield against any attempt reality makes to intrude, whereas we, the victims, pariahs and outcasts, can never hope to escape reality.

We pay, and we go on paying...

A Swallow Falls Softly

Concorde came down, within 9 miles of Paris. 113 people lost their lives in seconds. It was not real was it?

Did you ever see that Lightning Lady take off?

I did in 1976, entering the flight queue at Heathrow, in between the 747 Jumbo jets, swallow in a flock of pigeons. The 747s take off and gradually recede into the sky. Concorde simply swoops up, and vanishes.

In her 30-year history, that swallow never came down before.

I should not have read the witness reports.

They took me straight back to another place and time:

18 June 1972

Staines Air Crash.

BEA Trident One crashes alongside A30- 118 passengers killed

Duncroft Hall, was the lodging of King John the night before he signed "Magna Carta" (23 June 1215). The Manor was conveniently equipped with a tunnel that ran right under the Thames to the Island of Runnymede, where he signed the charter. An effective insurance against any last minute bids towards freedom and further tyranny he might feel moved to make.

By the time I was there in 1972 it was considerably rebuilt, and a "Reform School" for girls between 14-17 of above average intelligence (who seemed rather confined to middle class origins).

Duncroft Hall is a very beautiful house, perhaps the place where I first learned to derive sustenance from my surroundings. A capacity to isolate the setting from the misery and pain of the people and events they contained and enjoy it in its own right, as though quite alone with it.

There is no question about it, I loved Duncroft Hall, it was the only thing in that time of my life I had to love or enjoy.

So there I was, 14 years old, being punished for the crime of not wanting to be beaten up any more. Within those lovely walls, was a thriving hotbed of emotional abuse and cruelty. The staff were cruel to the girls, the girls were cruel to the staff, everyone was cruel to each other. There were no exemptions or escape routes. Half the girls there were being "punished" for being the victims of sexual abuse (the "crime" of having sex under age, as we thought of it). There was no love, no caring, no justice and not even any privacy. That last, for me, was perhaps the worst torture of all. I have been acutely sociophobic since I was a child.

A detail, that perhaps conveys the irrationality of the place, was that there were a few priceless antiques and paintings. Most of them were confined to the smaller, and older, staff only areas. A Sheraton sideboard that was simply too

big was left in a corner of the girls' dining area, its priceless rosewood veneer slowly warped and destroyed by being the repository of catering containers of hot food. For the want of £10 worth of Formica, I shudder to think of the value of the beauty that was destroyed. It also set a bizarre example to the 40 or so disturbed girls who watched it happen every day.

Other pieces, mostly paintings, were stored down in the cellar for the damp from the tunnel to eat. By the time I was there, I was reliably assured that they were past salvage. I asked why on earth they had been put there to rot in the first place. I was told the girls would only vandalize them. What difference would that make? Except that, at least someone would enjoy them first.

It was a perfect parable of the place. Nothing, and no one, within those walls, was to be cherished or nurtured. But, by God, all would be slowly decayed, hidden away from any eyes that might perceive their worth or take joy in them. This would be done, without variation, at the behest of the system. Any individual extemporization on the overall theme of destruction would be prevented or severely punished.

Sometimes I wonder if they were more afraid that the girls would not destroy these things, but rather respect them, and in so doing hold up a mirror to the reality of the majority of inadequates who staffed the place, and acted out their personal control fantasies, with the girls as counters. At

very least it would make it harder to dehumanize the girls to the extent they did.

A few years later I heard a staff member from a similar place rant on and on about the girls. She called them loathsome, disgusting animals. I asked her why she felt that way. She replied that they were so disgusting that they always had to be taken to an STD clinic on arrival.

It was a strange thing to say, because in those days, STD testing was compulsory, by law, in such institutions. I do not know if it still is. Even if you were still a virgin, you were tested. I recall one girl, in a far more Dickensian place. She was being held in protective custody as witness and victim in a rape trial. The place she was being held was a very punitive remand center that must have damaged her far more than the original rape.

What sense did any of it ever make?

The only crime you had to commit to be sentenced indefinitely this way, to total dehumanization and fewer rights than an animal, was to come from an abusive family.

As far as I know, very little has changed about the system since then. Sometimes I cannot sleep for thinking of it, and for remembering how little I fought to try and change it. Most people can be excused their blind eyes, they do not know, I do. I have no excuse.

My family came to visit on Saturday 18 June 1972. They always kept up the right appearances. They were very good at that.

I remember begging them to do just one thing for me. Take me out of that place (as was permitted) and turn a blind eye while I ran for it. It never occurred to me to want to go "home". I had no plans to ever set eyes on them again. I did not want to bother, or trouble anyone. I just wanted a chance to hide where no one could hurt me again, and where, some day, someone, might actually care about me.

They refused, though they could have done it easily enough, and claimed I gave them the slip.

I was in the most terrible distress. I was 14 years old, I had never hurt or harmed anyone, I had been beaten, lied to, lied about and now it was I who was being punished for it. My id was entitled to an opinion on that, and chose that day to express it.

In 1972 there was a plane taking off almost every 30 seconds from nearby Heathrow, only a few miles away. If you did not learn how to zone it out, it would have driven you mad. There was no double glazing in a house like that, and no escape from the noise.

I cannot remember the exact sequence of events, but however it happened, my father was in the front passenger seat of the car, threatening me with the dogs slip chain, I had the chain lead to defend myself. Or was it, in a

desperate, once off, bid to assert a little justice, almost the other way around? I cannot remember. I do remember that I was finally angry enough to kill him that day.

It was a day much like this, over cast, heavy, pregnant with a promise of thunder to come. My father and I facing each other, in a stand off, with chains, was another kind of impending thunder.

Even so, I heard that plane. It penetrated the automatic muting in my head, as well as all the other tensions.

There was something wrong, it sounded sick. Reading an accident report for the first time, today I realize that was neither imagination in retrospect, nor precognition. It was only flying at 75% of the speed it needed for the climb. When I remember the sound, and the way the planes usually flew there, it seems to me that as it tried to bank steeply it literally fell from the sky.

The engines did not cut out; there was just a soft but penetrating "thump". Then a quality of silence I have never heard before or since.

It was as though time had been suspended. I do not know how long it lasted, the spell was only broken when all hell broke loose, as the emergency vehicles from three counties sped past the gate, yards away, sirens blaring.

We were well under a minute in the direct projected flight path. Only just outside the range of the aerial photographs in the papers.

It was never real that day. Events in my own life erupted, too fast and furious.

On 18 June 1997, Irish Television made a documentary to commemorate the 25th anniversary of that crash. Most of the passengers were Irish; I had never known that, or anything about them. I remember very little else about that documentary, because it was finally real after all those years. That soft "thump" was the sound of 118 real people dying.

While I was in Duncroft Hall, I made one very dear friend.

Her name was Aline, she was beautiful inside and out. Whenever I hear the phrase "Pocket Venus", I think of Aline.

She had a strange family of origin, her mother abandoned her to her father, and then he took a new partner and abandoned both of them. I recognize that alone should have left her with a touch of several personality disorders.

However, it did not, just take my word for it. Aline defied every aspect of human psychology, as we know it. She was kind, warm, honest, funny and very intelligent.

Another strange thing is that Aline got clear of heroin at the age of 13, after 2 years. She was a hooker at the age of 11. If she had one psychological issue, it was co-dependence. Her step mother was "sick" and needed drugs

(heroin), so Aline, reasoning like a child-mother, went and got them for her.

I believe that is exactly the way it was. I have met Aline's stepmother briefly, there was a lot of love between them, real love, and you cannot get away from the fact that Aline must have learned all the healthy stuff in her heart SOMEWHERE.

There were worse things too.

The day before I got there a 15-year-old girl died. She had come back after absconding, tripping on LSD, so, as was standard, they made her take a shot of the thorazine linctus that was doled out like medicinal brandy on a regular basis, without medical supervision, or prescription. She was locked down in a vaguely padded detention cell, and choked on her own vomit in the night. It was all hushed up as "misadventure".

They also had a system for dealing with girls who became pregnant. (In case you are wondering what the Holy Spirit was actually up to, let me clear his name and say that absconding from this wonderful place was ungraciously frequent and you have to sleep somewhere.) Any girl who was pregnant would be brought to a lovely place in Chelsea, rather a treat if you looked on the positive side, without anybody's permission being sought let alone hers. She would come back "unpregnant".

I was there for the crime of refusing to appreciate the regular beatings and other abuse that came packaged as a "good home". Aline was there

related to prostitution and drugs. About half of the girls were there for minor drug offences (cannabis and LSD, as this was 1972). Another third were there for the crime of having sex under age. Of those, I do not recall a single case where the man involved received any kind of sentence. I remember one man in his 30s was let off because the judge could "see there had been considerable emotional involvement" the girl did not get off so lightly.

Aline and I absconded together, rather ingeniously. That was the only time in my life I EVER climbed over an 8-foot, brick wall! I am not the wall vaulting type so I turned my ankle, painfully.

By that time, Aline had already attempted suicide to avoid offending anyone by escaping, I had cracked up completely, and was close to the same thing.

You see we were far from fools. We knew we needed and deserved far better than the way we were being treated. We knew that we were right and the system was very sick and wrong. We also knew that we would be taken far better care of if we took care of ourselves.

So we went to London.

This was easy for Aline, there was a nightclub on the edge of Soho called "Le Kilt". All the absconders headed there if they could. Everyone knew about it, you could make plenty of money in "Le Kilt". Get yourself a place to live,

eat regularly. "Le Kilt" was not an option for me, for one simple reason, I looked 22, at least 6 years too old for the clientele, and they were not running a charity.

Aline could not go there because she was too well known. Too many pimps wanted Aline, and Aline wanted no pimps. She had a traumatic experience at the age of twelve when one "expressed his anger" with a broken bottle, as a result she would never be able to have children.

Aline survived on her old clients, I slept alone in the ground floor of a derelict house with no utilities beyond cold running water. For two weeks not one scrap of food passed my lips. There was no money to buy it with, I did not have the nerve for shoplifting, could not cope with begging in the streets, and I certainly was not going to live off Aline.

She found out and came round with a tin of Oxtail soup. She then sat me down firmly to examine my options. Eventually I managed to con the state into paying me welfare.

Going back was never an option. You have to know what it is like to be imprisoned and disempowered in a cold blooded and abusive environment indefinitely, without ever having committed any crime or harmed anyone to understand why. The nightmare we lived was heaven compared to the one the state imposed on us.

What did all the old history, have to do with now, today?

A great deal, because I have yet to see any evidence that things have changed for abused and out-of-home kids except to get worse.

If you are not issued with a functional, nurturing, family at birth you are thrust into a parallel universe to those who are.

At their best, the childcare systems are, of their very clinical nature, emotionally abusive. At their worst, they are a gross injustice imposed upon innocents.

That is not the worst of it. For several years, in the UK, even the child-care system (unofficially) would not house HIV+ out-of-home children in many cases, turning away and washing it's hands, leaving them to live, or die as best they could on the streets.

Did those children (some of whom contracted HIV at birth, or through pedophile abuse) deserve to be shot like rabid dogs? Or incarcerated in near prisons for their, certain to be short, lives?

Children like that are owed the BEST any society can give them, in terms of life, quality of life, and joy. Many were not going to live long enough to be adults who could "put it all behind them". Society was not prepared to pay what it owed, and I am sure that attitude was not exclusive to Britain. Should those children have sacrificed

themselves for a society that denied them every basic human right that way?

Since the world adapted to AIDS and decided to cope with it rather than become paranoid or deny it, that situation has improved, but there are others.

The children of a variety of heroin epidemics started to reach puberty a very few years ago, children whose parents were BOTH active junkies, in some cases both HIV+ too.

Could you live with two active junkies who were bigger than you?

Dublin dealt with this in an intriguing way.

There are very few child detention facilities in Ireland, let alone childcare facilities. Of the few there were in 1980, sex, and other, abuse scandals closed many down permanently. The courts often have a choice between sending juvenile offenders to the Mountjoy Prison, or turning them loose on the streets.

The Eastern Health Board, which administers child protection services, claimed to provide adequate hostel facilities for out-of-home kids. Twenty-eight beds I think, in various parts of Dublin. Investigative journalists discovered a FAR greater number of out-of-home children on the streets of Dublin in a single night.

They also discovered Police stations that automatically let them have any empty cells to sleep in after about 4am.

Some hospitals broke regulations and made similar provisions. *Both* had constantly complained to child welfare services about this situation, only to have their complaints ignored. The Eastern Health Board went to court to deny this, the case cost them about £2.5 million. (How many kids could have had a home for that?) They won their case.

Then more, new evidence was unearthed, proving the original claims made against the Eastern Health Board beyond question.

Compare this with an excerpt from a pedophile organization's manifesto that deals with the rights of boys. (If this shocks you, I would hope that is for the same reason as me, in how far short of this standard child welfare services often fall, including the areas of sexuality, in some cases.):

"First and foremost it is the right of the boy to develop his personality and his sexuality freely. This rule must govern every boy love relationship and it does. Any physical or psychological pressure inherently infringes upon this precious right. Further, any restrictions that may interfere with the development of his personality may also be considered an infringement of his rights. It is the boy lover's responsibility to shape the relationship in order to comply with the wishes and needs of the boy. It is also his responsibility to ask questions and listen carefully. Most

importantly, the boy lover must not interfere with the autonomous development of the boy.

The boy has the right to be protected against physical or psychological abuse. It should also be considered a form of abuse when a boy is prohibited from exercising his rights to experience a loving relationship. The rights of the boy should be respected in this regard, too."

Other similar manifestos also recognize a child's right to warmth, clothing, food and a roof over his head.

My temper is barely controllable around pedophilia; it escalates proportionately around Child Protection Services abuses.

One dark day, at about that time, the Program Manager for Child Care Services announced to a European Conference in Dublin that a certain place was a pedophile red light district, replete with kerb crawlers. I know people, some of them hookers (who tend to be FAR harsher about pedophilia than the rest of society, perhaps because so many of them had sexual abuse as a factor in the destruction of their own young lives) who were raised in that particular area. They spent some time there every day, and not one of them had ever heard or seen a trace of pedophile prostitution before that announcement, however a week later it existed.

It is a fact that if you declare a red light district of ANY kind exists in the Media, within a few days one will form. I know the Program Manager

concerned; he was sufficiently streetwise to be aware of this.

After considering this for a very long while I came close to screaming, because I realized the Dublin street children were actually better off with a ready supply of pedophiles than left as they were. At least they would eat, have some shelter...just basics like that.

I suspect the Health Board's agenda was to divert hostility towards those kids. They had already consistently tried to cover themselves by claiming that the children were too unmanageable and violent to cope with. Cynically, I wonder whatever could have brutalized them so much?

To an extent, the Health Board succeeded.

I am certain these attitudes are not unique to Dublin.

Even at best, children in care are cut off at the age of 18 with no back up or support systems, sometimes without even a home to go to. It is a very different world if there is no support system to turn to in a crisis.

In the early 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's Government changed the law to refuse welfare to anyone under 23 (effectively unless they lived with their parents, as I recall it) during a recession when there were no jobs (that law was rescinded within a couple of years). So, a lot of young people started living in cardboard boxes and begging on the streets...or working as prostitutes.

I can imagine the effect that Clinton's "Welfare Right's Bill" has had on many young people (especially single mothers) with no safe home to turn to. I would appreciate any information on this.

Mature Prostitutes in Dublin do everything they can to keep young girls out of Prostitution. They lecture them, give them money, put them in taxis. Some go too far and threaten them.

At the end of the day, there is only one way to keep young girls or boys out of prostitution.

Take away the factors that drive them there in the first place.

When I Refused to Be a Hooker

I suppose I always used to wonder exactly how a person became a prostitute. I had known many over the years, but I did not know them to formula. Their role in my life had not accorded with any stereotype.

When I was 15, and pregnant, the prostitutes, who were my neighbors in London's Notting Hill, were my wise women. The older women, who took care of me, lectured me firmly, for my own good, and for the good of my baby.

I looked up to them, ruefully, as we do when we are young and run into a wall of something too real to rebel against. They were too "old fashioned", too "conventional", like all wise women, like all the good influences of youth.

I suppose that never learning the stereotype made me immune to it.

Maureen, Sheila, they were good women, wonderful mothers, who tried to teach me the rudiments of how to become like them.

They found excuses to give me money, food, at every turn.

I needed it, badly.

The father of my child was a chronic alcoholic, and addicted to prescription drugs too, at the age of 23.

He was not glamorous, far from it. Even that young most of his teeth were missing, not rotted, but pulled by an over-zealous dentist due to some kind of gum disease a couple of years before.

Strange, because I have had every gum disease known to man and a couple no one ever saw before, and no one ever suggested pulling my teeth.

However over-enthusiastic this dentist was, he was not responsible for the stubborn refusal to wear the false set, which left my son's father looking like an elderly man.

What had attracted me?

As Jim Morrison was singing "Summer's Almost Gone", winter was coming on. I had nowhere to go. Going back was not an option of any kind, it never was.

This ugly, toothless, early developing loser wanted me. I rather fear more for the want of other options than for any other reason.

That was enough, I settled in and decided to be "in love" with him.

Life fell into a pattern: between three people, we almost managed to get an adequate supply of the prescription drugs he was addicted to from local doctors, a heavy sedative called "Doriden" (glutethamide).

I still feel bitter about that, although he had considerable talent as a loser, he also had plenty of help. He was in a rehabilitation center, they suddenly decided to switch all the inmates to Doriden as a sleeping pill. It was supposed to be the "New, Safe, Mandrax" (much as morphine was supposed to be "safe" laudanum"). By the time he became addicted to it, Doriden had already been pulled from the market, at least once, and had its component chemicals altered because of serious addictive properties. So this rehabilitation center decided it was the best thing for recovering addicts. Everyone who did not palm it to trade with others became addicted; it was as simple as that.

However, we could get almost enough for him. The only time that was not covered was one weekend a fortnight, when he would use his disability benefit to drunk himself vicious and senseless. This left no money for food at any other time.

He used to deal in marijuana in a very small way, but if he did that, he smoked more than he sold. Additionally, a stream of rather odd and inadequate people beat a path to our door, and stayed for days.

There was nothing resembling privacy. When these people were around he treated me like a servant for their benefit. They brought their own philosophy with them and tried to force it upon me.

I was sick for believing it was wrong to steal. Only

a twisted mind would have too much dignity to "panhandle", beg in the streets. I was so unreasonable for my aversion to dealing in harder drugs, or fraud, lying for a living. There was something congenitally wrong with me for believing women were equal human beings and not objects. Trying to keep the father of my unborn child away from drink, and drugs was possessive of me.

Through all of this, the father of my unborn child, raised as a Jehovah's Witness, was now a "Born Again Christian" who declared me "Demon Possessed" if I did not affect to believe everything he told me to. At first I did. After a while, the demands became too unreasonable and intrusive to go on.

The smoke from the drug hung constantly in the air, a sickly sweet miasma. To this day, the smell of Marijuana upsets my stomach.

One day the drug dealing stopped and the odd people stopped living with us. It did not stop to please me. What I did not know was that the father of my unborn child had formed a relationship with a woman in rehab. He was discharged before she was, and had come to live in her old flat, until she could join him and arrange to give it up (along with the terrible memories it held for her) so that they could start afresh together.

Did I mention that the father of my son was a compulsive liar? Alcoholics often are, but even so, he was an unique extreme.

She was discharged suddenly and came home with a few friends. There was mayhem; it lasted for a couple of weeks. Fortunately, these people knew the father of my child well and bitterly had to accept my innocence in this. I forget the details, but they would not see me on the streets. This woman, went to the local council who owned the apartment, and got new accommodation by claiming we were squatting. We all knew this would give us a few months grace to find a home for the baby and ourselves. However, drug dealing was no longer viable. Not with an eviction order hanging over us. It was quite common then for squatters to be evicted by drug raids rather than the courts.

Malnutrition is a terrible thing. Have you ever wondered how women gave birth to live babies in famine? I know.

The unborn child takes all the nutrition first. There is even less left for the mother. There are times when you would take human life for a sandwich. You become less than sane. The need for food is beyond anything you could imagine. It ceases to be hunger, a sense of "running on empty" and becomes a blind craving, like an addiction. I developed terrible running sores all over my body, some the size of a small coin.

You may wonder why I was not desperate enough to turn myself in to the authorities. There could only have been two results:

- A mother and baby home where either abortion or adoption would have been imposed on me against my will.
- I would have been returned to my family with similar results, in addition to life threatening abuse, unless my father kicked the child out of me first, the last being the most likely option.

I wanted my baby. Maybe that does not sound rational, but I was only 15, and there was no one but myself I could trust to make important decisions for me.

The wise-women told me I had to leave him, and when I would not, they told me that for the sake of my unborn child I should stand on my doorstep for a single evening, and the money for the food I needed. They begged me to see the sense of it with tears in their eyes. When I would not they shared the little they had with me as often as they could.

The women of Notting Hill Gate were not "Poule de luxe" they were desperate, making money for a basic standard of living for themselves and their children.

The idea of selling sex repelled and scared me. I also lacked confidence that anyone would pay for a hugely pregnant girl who felt uglier than she ever had in her life.

So, I did not become a hooker then.

I must admit though, looking back, as is often the way when we are young and think we know everything. The wise-women around me were right, and I was wrong to ignore their advice. As wrong as any other 15 year old girl.

Abuse by Demon

A friend showed me a song she had written "My Mother Works for God".

At the time I was inspired to remark "I think mine works for the Competition".

I do too. However, if there is one thing I cannot fault in her time as the Mother from Hell, it is her originality. No way was she constrained by the bounds of conventional methods of abuse.

She was truly innovative.

When my son was about to be born, I was given Public Housing, for all three of us, including my son's father. I had tried to get housing in London (at a safe distance from my family) and failed, so I wound up within 10 miles of my family. I have to say that the "Fairy Godmothers" who piled on the pressure to get me housing were a Journalist from the area my family lived in, and a Lady detective from London's Notting Hill. Without them, I do not know where I would have been.

I was still very naive regarding my mother. I cannot say I ever felt much for her; I certainly did not respect her. She was too shallow to have that kind of regard for. Nevertheless, I was still so gullible. She always deferred all blame to my father and his violent, unreasonable temper. I simply assumed, in every other sense, that pathological lying and trouble making was a common trait in suburbia, rather than peculiar to

my mother. I did not like it, but I assumed it was something I would have to learn to live with.

For some reason she got on very well with my son's father (though she never had a good word to say about him). They had birthdays within 3 days, and a remarkable amount of similar tastes, quite genuinely, in spite of considerable ideological and cultural differences.

Away from the prying eyes of the world, they were usually "as thick as thieves". In any matter where their accounts contradicted each other I long ago resigned myself to never knowing which of them (if either at all) was telling the truth. Another thing the father of my son shared with my mother was a refusal to give any automatic preference to fact over expediency.

When my mother discovered my son's father was a "born again" Christian, (in whichever way suited him best on the day) she determined to make him feel at home. She "discovered" a Pentecostal Pastor "Dave". An unusual man, a former "bouncer" with the broken nose to prove it, who had another distinction in the form of a white "Hot Gospel" group considered to be of professional standard. (My mother had problems distinguishing between "Soul" and music like "Pink Floyd" and mistakenly thought this alone would impress us.)

Dave simply never impressed me.

I had long since abandoned all pretences at humoring my son's father over religion. I was

agnostic (I am now firmly atheist) and that is all I would ever consent to be. I make no comment on any individual faith, except to say that no person of sincere religious faith would recognize my son's father's rather individual version.

Nor, I think, Dave's.

Dave entered our lives pleasantly enough, as I recall he was in our house almost daily. Dave was a very funny guy, also very charming, easy enough to tolerate, except for his intrusive demands that I "be born again in the spirit of the Lord". It is simply not what I believe in, and I have the right to follow my own conscience without let or hindrance. Dave, apparently, did not believe in personal autonomy in matters of the spirit.

The father of my son recognized his addictions, and with our wonderful supportive Doctor, Chris was seeking treatment for them, but there was a waiting list. Dave had a better alternative. The father of my son was not an addict he was *Demon Possessed*. Only Dave, prayer and faith (I suspect in that order) could save him.

It seemed harmless enough at first. Until I began to hear hints from my son's father, that Dave had denounced me as "possessed of the Devil" too. I assume by a far greater Demon, because he convinced the father of my son that unless I was forcibly exorcised, or he left me, he would never be cured.

My mother, a lifelong Episcopalian, was more aware of all of this than I was at the time.

The Church of England, to which she actively belonged, is not noteworthy for its support or recognition of "Demon Possession" issues.

My son's father was quite an ingenious soul, his fevered brain cooked up a scheme to convince me he had been buying street barbiturates, so that I, 16, pregnant, and still covered in malnutrition sores that refused to heal, would persuade our doctor to provide him with a maintenance dose until he could get treatment.

This our Doctor did, for the sake of my well-being and sanity. So, the father of my son succeeded in being prescribed seconal to become addicted to, in addition to the Glutethamide. He was subject to frequent, apparent bouts of psychosis, as well as very convincing "petit mal" fits.

The psychosis made him very suggestible and with my mother's covert encouragement he finally soaked up every insane word Dave told him.

When our son was only 5 weeks old, the most bizarre week of my life began.

The father of my son entered a full-blown psychosis, (or gave an Oscar Winning performance, I don't think even he is sure which) becoming, for hours at a time the demon Rantallien (apparently "Lord of the Trolls" in the Cornish Tin mines).

This was not a good time for controlled paranormal investigation. "Rantallien" and his threats to harm me, my baby and himself were

terrifying. One night (of which I now have absolutely no memory) he tried to strangle me, there was other violence too.

When my mother called I got her alone and asked her to help me.

She told me I was being silly and had an overactive imagination and left me, and my tiny baby alone with him.

I called Dave, who started it all. I called him in desperation. I had no sleep but catnaps for days, I did not dare. I wanted him to come and sit with him for a few hours so it was safe for me to sleep, so I could have a straight head to think with. He refused, with relish, on the grounds that I "would not approve of anything he would feel obliged to do". I replied that all I needed him to do was sit on him so I could sleep, to no avail. I never find it hard to imagine Dave instead of Jim Jones, grinning in Guyana while 900 followers drink Kool-Aid laced with cyanide.

You cannot just call the Doctor, the Neighbors, or the Police and tell them your partner is giving every appearance of being possessed of the Devil and can they please help.

Especially not when you are sixteen, Post Natal, and have hardly slept for a week.

Finally, I phoned a dear friend, who said the right words, she told me I was too soft hearted to ever leave him.

I returned to the house (we had no phone, I had to get out to a callbox, somehow, with my son, to call anyone) got the pram, and left, in the pouring rain.

I called my mother to fetch me. Half an hour later, she had not even left the house. A policeman saw me in the rain with the baby and insisted I come and wait in the warmth of the station house until she came for me. I remember she was a long time, how long, with so little sleep? I have no idea.

The father of my son was fond of dramatics and lost without an audience. He had himself brought to a local hospital by ambulance. When he was discharged next day Dave accommodated him until a bed was available in a psychiatric hospital. That was the end of our relationship.

My mother visited him in hospital, I did not. Even years later he still insisted that even while he was heavily drugged she tried to persuade him I was insane and needed to be committed. But the only way to know who is telling the truth between those two is to bug the venue in advance.

Later I was told Dave tried to convince my father I was so possessed of the Devil that the only way my soul could be saved was if I should die. Dave had spent a lot of time talking with my mother. Apparently this was going too far for my Father, he lost his temper with him and barred him from the house.

The source of this last, being a family member is unreliable. However, if it is the truth, I hope there is a hell, and I hope Dave rots in it one day.

Furthermore, I hope my mother is waiting to keep him company.

Words Every Hooker Needs to Hear

"There is no way somebody like you should ever have to do that, I'm sorry I just can't let it happen"

Where did I hear those words?

From a social worker?

From a Doctor?

From a member of the clergy?

From a politician?

Nope, none of the above, I tried them all, I know. They just shrug, avert their eyes and let it happen, if they say anything at all it's:

"What do you expect me to do?"

Or worse:

"You must stop doing that AT ONCE" (Without suggesting alternatives).

Where I heard those words was in an all night fast food cafe on May 1st 1987.

I had gone to Dublin, checked everyone I knew, asking advice.

I went to a social worker who had made me promise to come to him 5 years before, if I was desperate.

He was prepared to see me until he heard my name.

I did not know until a few years later that the actual reason why he suddenly could not see me was that he had done something highly questionable that caused great harm in my life. He was my first social worker in Dublin.

My family wanted my 6-year-old son as a "hostage" to impose control on me with. They had money and connections, I did not have a hope. So, I fled from the UK to Ireland desperate to protect both of us.

Two months later, they located us.

Irish constitutional law meant we could not be forced to return, and he became our Social Worker.

Looking back, I suppose I was a complete fool. I trusted the soft-spoken, bearded man with my life. If he said a thing, I believed him. I wish I had not. The only contact my family had was through him. That Christmas somebody told my mother where we lived. She went and had a "little talk" with the landlord. We were evicted the day before the 12th night. We did not find out until after 5pm on a Friday, when we got home to find all our property out on the road. We had been with this social worker all that afternoon. So many little things like that that made no sense at the time.

If I had ever confided the whole story about the nightmare that was my family to anyone at that time, it was this social worker. If necessary, I was willing to allow my son to be adopted and never see him again rather than let him fall into the hands of my family. It was inconceivable to me that once a person knew the whole story they could not be trusted with my son, if not with me. I was very naive.

Looking back, everything was made as hard as possible for us. I was in a kind of cryogenically frozen nervous breakdown. After 18 months, left entirely alone with my son, my mind snapped under the strain. I spent two weeks desperately trying to pull myself out of it, all to no avail. I was not in a fit condition to have a pot plant let alone sole care of a child.

It had always been explained to me that as long as I signed my son into voluntary care he could not legally be taken from the country. So I decided to do this and vanish, dead or alive, leaving my son to be raised by normal people in foster care, which I had been told was already arranged in case of any kind of accident, breaking every tie that bound him to the family from hell for good.

Unless you have been inside a nightmare like that it is impossible to conceive how much love and stone cold realism it takes to make a decision like that. I knew I wasn't going to recover any time soon, and I also knew that there would be little or no help to build a life for my son even after that.

It was the best I could do for him. I did not intend to stay alive any longer than I had to anyway.

I left him asleep at 7:00am and got to this social worker in Dublin to sign the papers. He seemed to do all the right things. He got me the fare to London (the easiest place to "vanish") and a few pounds besides. He got in touch with the authorities concerned. Took and witnessed a power of attorney for the local Social Worker to dispose of my property on behalf of my son. We filled in the voluntary care form.

At the last minute, he decided we had used the wrong form and brought me another, that looked identical, he asked me to sign it and said he would fill it in.

Years later I found out the whole story, this social worker seems to have made himself responsible for the highly irregular, and totally illegal, removal of my son out of the State and straight back to my family.

This was blatant.

I challenged it.

To be told that there was a voluntary care order but for some reason it had never been signed. The original, filled in but "wrong" form that was never signed in the first place?

All property vanished without trace.

Whoever is responsible stole it from an 8-year-old boy.

Almost 20 years have passed, my son is a complete sociopath. That is not a subjective opinion.

He has a long record of arrests for violence and domestic violence.

He does not seem to have a conscience.

His ex girlfriends (often my age) seem to move and leave no forwarding address, or send men with shotguns to talk to him about leaving them alone.

He is actually barred from one police station because of his violence.

He has at least one conviction for burglary. My family used their "connections" to save him from a few others.

He is a pathological liar. My family is either "wonderful" or "monstrous" depending on which is most to his advantage on the day.

He is also charming, highly qualified and has cold, dead eyes.

I do not believe my son would ever have been normal, but given the chance to be raised in a more normal environment he might have been harmless at least.

When he was a child, like any mother, I simply believed he would grow up to be a wonderful human being.

This, now promoted, Social Worker thought I was coming to see him to enquire into that. Innocent me, I did not even know or suspect. I had trusted this man as he had told me I could.

I was very gullible when I was younger. I was a complete fool for anyone who seemed to show me a little kindness.

I went to other places, social workers, organizations; even "The Samaritans" but nobody said those magic words. Nobody seemed to think along those lines at all. There was not one alternative offered to me.

I went down to the Red Light District. I just could not face it. I had worked as a hooker briefly before; I suffered from informed revulsion.

I am one of those people who are not even very comfortable with touching or being touched.

Whatever it took to go through with it, I did not have it.

I needed the money in a life or death way. There were essential bills I had no chance of paying in any foreseeable future. I had also done a little work and bought a small car for £100. It was worth nothing, but 10 miles out into the country it was my only chance of getting any kind of work. I could not meet the insurance payments. I had

already tried everything else.

I went down to an all night Cafe, I had maybe £7 left in the world, but I was cold, I wanted to warm up. I knew what I was going to do, the only thing left I could, I was going to calm down and go over everything in my mind. I wanted to make sure I had not missed anything, make sure I was not applying an unreal negative perspective. I wanted to be very sure I was looking at reality.

If, after that, I could not find some hope I was going to become very calm, dissociate as far as I could, mesmerize myself. Then I was going to get in my car, find the right wall and put my foot to the floor.

I do not believe suicide is a valid choice until you have ensured the balance of your mind is in no way disturbed or distorted. If you cannot go through with it in cold blood, aware of the primal terror of death within yourself, then you should not even consider it. Because that means there is still another option available even if you cannot see it.

I was sitting there that night, with half a cup of cold coffee when I saw the most beautiful face I have ever seen in my life. Not attractive, beautiful as a work of art is. It was no illusion born of despair, I saw him again a couple of years ago suddenly, at a cash desk, in a shop. If anything, age had enhanced that face.

He looked like a ravaged archangel, his jaw and teeth had been shattered and put back

together badly, but the face still showed through, even more arresting because of the damage as though it left some part of the beauty to imagination.

I found myself staring, spellbound, wishing I could paint well enough to capture that face.

I caught myself. Looking at the rest of the man it was obvious that extraordinary face belonged to a common bum, and a drunken one at that.

That seemed to me a strange and exquisite irony.

It also seemed a good idea to stop staring before he landed on me with his drunken, semi-literate advances, as habitual drunks are wont to do if you give them the slightest encouragement.

Too late.

He left his seat and imposed himself opposite me, speaking with a broad and slurred inner city accent.

There are certain procedures you learn to ward off unwanted attentions without incident.

My chosen defense was to talk pleasantly as far over his head as I could. Usually they get bored and move on.

This man was different; he looked straight into my eyes and answered me in kind.

That interrupted my process of dissociation!

I fell into conversation with him; we were discussing a favorite book and author we had in common. It was Leon Uris in general and "Trinity" in particular, with a lot of focus on his remarkable ability to emotionalize sexuality.

His life story came out; he was from the inner city, 36 hours out of prison, a petty crook who made a fairly steady income from shoplifting. He used to do armed robberies (but then they all say that) and had stopped out of a personal determination to avoid the high risk of violence. He felt the risk of hurting someone was not necessary to making himself a reasonable living and thus not justified. When I came to know him better I can assure you that "not risking hurting people" had a very high and sincere priority with him.

What impressed me was the way he just explained his life, exactly as a salesman or a car mechanic would. No excuses, no justifications, no glamorization's, just "This is who I am. If you don't like it I'm sorry".

As I recall once that was out of the way, and I had not run, he assumed we could leave together. I must have blurted out something bitterly, because that is when he said those magic words:

"There is no way somebody like you should ever have to do that, I'm sorry I just can't let it happen"

It wasn't a line either.

When I look back, I realize he would have made a wonderful therapist in another life.

He galvanized into all the right action, if anything so gentle could be called "galvanizing". First, he worked on my self-esteem. He must have recognized the kind of traumatic shock state I was in. He just took charge, as you would of a small lost child.

He lead me by the hand reassuringly, one small step at a time. He tried to find a place to stay, when he could not he made it seem as if he had expected that, but had tried anyway. He gave me the feeling that he had everything under control on my behalf, just as you would to a small child.

That night in the back of my car a man just out from a 2-year prison sentence held me all night as innocently as if I were a child.

The next day he sat in a bar, and casually, without even looking at me directly, explained everything he had learned about himself in prison. As though it were an objective thing, he explained to me what he had to offer emotionally, and what he was looking for in a relationship.

He was so objective I honestly never suspected he was speaking in any other way than the abstract.

In the immediate sense, he wanted to know

exactly how much money I needed. He was going to get it for me, so I would never have to do "that".

He was for real.

To be honest, so genuine, so determined not to manipulate that when he turned to me 10 days later, after I asked him if something was bothering him, and snapped:

"For fucks sake, I'm in love with you aren't I?"

I got the shock of my life. I had never even suspected anything of the kind. He was wonderful company. If we were out anywhere he would sit with me making the kind of conversation that causes people to turn to their partners and say sharply:

"Why don't YOU ever talk to me like that?"

He was a fantastic lover. Quiet, gentle, he washed up voluntarily. He made dinner for me. He purged my refrigerator of all the way past "sell by" items I tend to accumulate, with looks of absolute disgust and a very firm lecture topic: "Food poisoning".

If he had a fault, it was that he seemed sullen and distracted a lot of the time, which was actually *why* I had asked what was wrong.

I learned a very sad truth in the month we were together. There is a certain type of man and alcoholic who is at his very best in Prison, and just

after he leaves it. That kind of man's "best" can be truly extraordinary, and very real.

On the outside, drinking again, he deteriorates rapidly, all the usual features of alcoholism reassert themselves. The best of him is buried once again, in a place where you have no hope of reaching him.

That is what happened. I also discovered that I could never square living off the proceeds of petty, harmless crime with my conscience.

In the end, I wound up alone, with no way to survive but the streets after all. I was the one who asked him to leave.

By then I was stronger, I could face it. He gave me that within myself at least.

There is no question that he saved my life that night with those magic words:

"There is no way somebody like you should ever have to do that, I'm sorry, I just can't let it happen"

Over the years sometimes those words were all I had to cling to as self respect, a claim on a place in the human race.

More people should say those words to more hookers more often.

Not only that, they should mean them.

How Streetwalkers Are Made

I would be a very wealthy lady if I had a dollar for every time someone has told me, with the best of intentions, that hookers would be much better off if they came in off the streets and worked in a:

- Massage Parlor
- Brothel
- Other controlled environment

The only kind of people I never heard that from at all are streetwalkers.

Let me go through some of the common arguments in favor of this.

a) *It would be safer.*

I wonder? Certainly in Dublin and London massage parlors and similar are regularly targeted for armed robbery that is almost never even reported. Usually nobody gets hurt, unless you count the trauma of having to hand over your hard earned money at gunpoint, and on some occasions, jewelry or other items of personal value. Most TRY to ensure that there are at least two women covering every shift, but like anywhere else, it does not always work out that way.

b) *The working conditions are better.*

Warmer in winter I will grant you, certainly better toilet facilities. Apart from that though, what does "better" mean?

You are committed to certain hours whether you feel up to filling that commitment or not (and often you don't). You have to hand over a portion of your earnings to someone else. In my mind, anyone who knowingly takes money a woman has earned by having sex is a pimp.

In effect, most parlors have a cover charge, that covers basic massage, and the woman often never sees a penny of it. Certainly, for me, there is not much difference in the way I feel about massaging someone, while half naked, and the way I feel about having sex with them.

c) *It would be more respectable, less degrading.*

I am inclined to ask, "on which planet"?

I have seen state controlled prostitution in Germany.

I have managed to perform brief sexual acts in near darkness with most of my clothes on. I have managed to dissociate enough to perform them naked in a private place, I have, in earlier years even sunbathed topless, but *nothing* on earth would make me able to face posing in provocative lingerie in a window.

That is not a moral thing, I simply could not do it, and I am not the only one. Needing money

desperately enough to sell sex does not automatically adjust your identity to make these things possible.

Taking it a step further, if you work on the street most of the sex you sell is fast and furtive, in a car, in darkness. It pays less but it is all that is required of you. If you can steel yourself to unblock a drain, then you can steel yourself to have fast sex in a car.

However, when you work indoors the clients expect a great deal more, and are not always prepared to pay more. They expect you to "talk dirty" (something I can only do in the appropriate place, stuck in rush hour traffic), sit and watch pornography with them, pose as live pornography for them. They expect you to encourage them to touch you in any way they wish, and show convincing evidence of arousal.

I am sorry, but that is far harder to endure and much more degrading than "fast sex".

In practice, many massage parlors pressure you to perform domination. There is nothing wrong with that, if you are comfortable with it, but many people, like me, are not. Others expect you to participate in lesbian scenes. In some places, or on some days, making money at all is dependent on your willingness to do these things.

Not everybody can. Would it surprise you if I told you that though I *have* sold sex I could not do a striptease? Not just me. I remember on one occasion, a regular safe client was begging for

two strippers for a stag party. No one would do it. In the end, a friend and I dared each other into it. We were not scared at all, no one is with *that* amount of whiskey in them (considering both of us made it a rule never to drink when working??). When it was cancelled at the last minute, it was like a reprieve from execution.

Most of the arguments why hookers would be better off in a controlled environment would only apply if the desperation to earn money that drove you to prostitution automatically transformed you into a stereotype prostitute.

It does not. Most of the people who can do that are not stereotypes either, they are simply great natural actresses.

There are deeper more complex reasons why many women, like me, chose to be streetwalkers and could not tolerate a controlled environment.

If I could have been a prostitute in a controlled environment, I would never have needed to be a prostitute at all. I only believed that was unique until I got close enough to some of the women I worked with to know their stories.

Almost all hookers come from some kind of dysfunctional background. Remember only a tiny minority of people are hookers, we have about 1,000 in Ireland, a country of 3.5 million people. It takes an unusual combination of problems, not a single problem, to drive anyone to prostitution. However, a dysfunctional family is the most common factor.

Many complex theories have been floated around this, but I think the obvious has been ignored. If you come from a dysfunctional background, you *have* no "last resort", no home to run to, for help or shelter. For the rest of your life, no matter how desperate you are.

Often all that is left is the Street.

Children of dysfunctional or abusive backgrounds have tremendous issues with control, socialization and the group dynamic. If they have also been through the state system that can be compounded many times over.

The most basic aspect of that is that they have never experienced anything that could be trusted to have any control over their lives. The result is that in any situation that is under the control of another they are in a constant state of anxiety and stress. Add that to the other stresses in prostitution and it can easily become unendurable.

So far, I have never personally been able to function in any group situation on a day-to-day basis in my life. I never learned the "normal" rules so I cannot play the game. This is disruptive to the group, and ultimately devastating to me. My reaction to giving anyone any effective control over my basic needs would amount to a phobia. It was not always quite that bad, but it got worse the hard way.

I am intellectually aware that is only one side of

the world, but I have no significant experience of any other aspect to balance it with. When we are afraid we often unconsciously precipitate the very thing we are afraid of, more to "get it over with" than for any other reason.

I am far from alone in being trapped in THAT particular loop tape, worse, not everyone trapped in it is a prostitute. I am afraid it represents a far larger "market sector". It also represents near insurmountable social alienation.

In real terms there do not seem to be many remedies which are accessible to those who suffer from it.

Many of us became prostitutes because we could not find a way to function or be accepted in any conventional working environment. We could work for ourselves of course, but that takes time, and often the bills will not wait that long. Many women get into prostitution to either "tide themselves over" or establish themselves as self employed, only a minority ever get out again. The stress of prostitution just about paralyzes all but essential aspects of life, and the lingering stigma, and the damage to self-esteem that possibly was not very strong in the first place crushes motivation and opportunity.

For people like us, the "controlled environment" of brothels, massage parlors and escort agencies is as intolerable as any other "controlled environment", in addition to inflicting the same ongoing damage as any form of prostitution.

To all intents and purposes, it is unthinkable to us.

While well intentioned, any move to drive us into regulated and controlled environments is just about our worst possible nightmare, and for some, truly the end of the line.

I think that aspect of prostitution is one of the most denied and misunderstood. Until that changes it is a permanent barrier to effective solutions.

As a society, we NEED to find a way to prevent our abused children from becoming so crippled by alienation. When that fails, as a society we need to take responsibility for finding a way to heal it.

Why?

If not for the sake of Justice and Humanity, then because our inner cities become more like war zones every day, surely the rest of society cannot benefit from that?

Just Another Whore

Lisa was human sunshine.

Lisa was also very plain, and very fat. Nevertheless, she had a dazzling smile and sapphire eyes that could light up the night.

She never drank, smoked or touched drugs, she was just too sensible, too healthy, too wholesome.

Some people naturally exude goodness, like a scent, Lisa was one of them.

Her favorite flowers were freesias, which seemed a strange choice to me.

Lisa was also a common prostitute.

She did not really have any other options. Her mother, big and brassy, with a halo of heavily bleached and lacquered hair framing her wrinkled panda eyes, was a prostitute too, far away, in another place.

Lisa was raised between children's homes and friends...she had plenty of friends. There was never a stable home for her, or a regular education. She was bright though, far brighter than she thought.

She deserved everything in life, truly. No one ever heard her say a mean spiteful word about anyone.

The last time I saw Lisa was initially from a distance, I mistook her for someone else, another prostitute.

A beauty who looked exactly like Julia Roberts.

She was also a lovely person. The heroin she was fed by a middle-aged pimp since she was seventeen had to fight for five years before it warped her mind or changed her nature. That day, it still had a year or two more to go.

I had not seen her for some time and rushed over. I was floored when she turned around and I realized it was Lisa instead.

Barely recognizable, in a few months all the fat had gone, her hair was restyled, and was it possible she was actually wearing subtle, understated make up?

Lisa, the sunny ugly duckling had finally become a swan.

Still the same person to talk too

I left her that night bubbling over with joy. Lisa was not long for those streets, she would find a real life, she had always had plans, sensible, determined, reasoned plans.

Two days later I opened a paper and found out that apart from the cab driver who took her home I was the last person to see her alive.

Hard-bitten women collapsed crying in the street

over that girl. Most of them had never even seen her transformation. They just the loved person she was, her kindness, gentleness and sheer goodness.

I went to the Police to make a statement, for the sake of her mother more than anything. Of how wonderful she looked that night when I last saw her, and her positive frame of mind. Her death was rather ambiguous, at least to anyone who had not seen her that last night.

I had a very good address at the time, so I said she had done some work for me (not that Lisa had anything in the world to be ashamed of, nor that anyone in their right minds should be ashamed of Lisa).

A sad faced police officer showed me what killed her, two black plastic bags of empty butane canisters they had found under her bed, some, inexplicably, smeared with blood or something like it.

Inhaled butane is, among other things, an appetite suppressant. Lisa loathed drugs, or getting "high", god knows what personal despair she must have been concealing under the sunshine she gave to others without stint. To have resorted to such desperate measures, so far against her nature, just to be thin.

If you knew Lisa, you would know that WAS the only possible explanation.

I went to her funeral with the largest bouquet of

freesias I could find.

My heart ached to realize that it was only the previous time I had seen her, a few months before, when we had talked about flowers. No one could have dreamed I would have such tragic use for the information so soon.

I signed the card with the name of every prostitute I could think of who had known and loved her. They would all be too ashamed to attend the funeral, but I was not so sure what her mother did, or did not, know. If she knew, then a dozen names showed that she was well loved. If she did not, then what are a dozen names? Workmates perhaps?

People who loved her.

The funeral was huge, friends, neighbors, everyone who ever knew her (and was not a prostitute) must have been there. A trickle of children filed past the coffin, each leaving a single red rose.

Not just another whore, but a wonderful human being the world is a little worse without.

What About the Wives?

Often I was asked. "What about the wives? What would you say if you came face to face with one of them?"

I suppose the stock defensive answer is to say, "They aren't my concern."

As a prostitute that is true, when survival takes everything you have, you cannot expend any emotion on people who would show you no mercy.

As a general rule, nobody seems prepared to show any whether their husbands are clients or not.

However, prostitutes are human beings, at least in their own time.

A friend of mine and I actually found out how we would feel if we came face to face with one of the wives.

I will call my friend "Rose" because that is the alias she chose for herself, for a newspaper article at one time because "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet..."

Rose is an amazing character. She must be sixty now...but if she asks, I said "forty", unless you want my slow lingering death on your conscience!

She is tiny, and extremely well spoken, like a dame of the British Empire. She could wither a

regiment over an intercom. She wears *far* too much make up (trying to chase her fourth decade rather than men!) and actually *does* look better and younger without it.

Rose is *very* intelligent indeed, but thinks of herself as a dumb blonde who has a weird aversion to stupid people.

She also has a transvestite cat.

He is a tom the size of a small Puma, who is always referred to as "she" or "my little girl" and has a girl's name.

One day Rose called in a complete panic: a strange woman had phoned her having found her number in her husband's wallet. The woman believed Rose was his mistress. She was really nice and gentle, she just wanted to know the truth. Rose felt she had a right to the truth and I was inclined to agree. We both felt a lot of empathy. We know what it is like to be lied to, cheated on. We are both absolute truth freaks and go crazy until we know where we stand. We thought she should know the truth too, but what was the truth?

There are some moral issues around this.

People would say, "Well it is the same thing".

I can relate to that...except that Rose did not have a clue who this woman's husband was.

He had her phone number though.

Proof?

Wrong.

Rose is usually pretty agoraphobic and shy, except in two situations:

- a) When she needs a little liter of gin to settle her nerves.
- b) When her love for animals overcomes her to the extent that she feels compelled to spend the day donating money to three legged horses.

At those times, she would give her number to ANYONE whether they asked for it or not.

The phone number was no proof he was a client.

Even if he was a client, according to his wife he had been acting *really* strangely for a month or two. It was possible that he was under some kind of stress. Sometimes guys like that would turn up, maybe drunk, maybe sober. Really looking for someone to talk to, or not even to talk, just to make contact, often they would pay you, and do absolutely nothing.

So, it was not as simple as saying "Yes I am a prostitute and he is a client".

He could have just been some guy she was talking to in a bookies.

She could not take responsibility for that.

After a few conversations, it was obvious this guy had a serious problem of some kind and his wife was desperate to find an answer.

The impression we got was that if Rose *had* been his mistress it would have been a lot better for everyone.

I talked to the wife myself once. Mainly I was trying to subtly identify this man. If Rose could have been *sure* she would have told her the truth, and anything else she knew besides. But, between us we still couldn't figure it out.

It was not possible to say "I'm a prostitute, if you describe your husband exactly I will be able to tell you more" because the minute the "P" word was mentioned the wife was going to assume the worst, whatever you said after it was not going to make any difference.

"I am a prostitute but I gave your husband my phone number because he was interested in buying my old refrigerator" was *not* going to fly, even if it was true!!

It IS different when a man is with a prostitute, he is not having an affair, there is no emotional involvement and no threat to his marriage. It is not personal.

Yet perhaps for those very reasons a man might confide problems to a strange prostitute he was scared to tell his wife, problems his wife really *needed* to know.

When a man uses the services of a prostitute he is usually trying to sustain his marriage, not lose it or abandon it.

Several times, I have had men come to me *just* once, who had been totally sexually rejected because of postnatal depression. Just to release the tension actually seemed to help them see things objectively. Usually they would *want* your perspective and any information you could offer on postnatal depression.

On one historic occasion, a very nice man I never saw before or since wanted to give his newly circumcised (for medical reasons) member a trial run so that he could feel confident enough to approach his girlfriend with it. It is not something you would ever think of, but once you are confronted with it that was probably very wise. If the renovated body part needed a little "running in" then the disruption to the notoriously delicate balance of male sexual confidence would be *far* less than if it happened with his girlfriend.

Bluntly, if it failed he had an option on telling himself that "Hookers don't turn me on".

I do not think *any* responsible person would tell the wife or girlfriend under *those* circumstances.

We never did find out whose wife was calling Rose, we counseled her as we would each other, said a lot about confronting him firmly, but gently, supported her need to know the truth

whatever it was.

It was the best we could do.

How did we feel?

We felt empathy, the same as we would for anyone else who was confused and desperate just to know the truth.

Whatever it was I hope she found out and that they resolved it.

This Hooker and Sex

Now I add it up, sex has been part of my life for almost 30 years.

I disposed of my virginity when I was only 13.

I certainly did not lose it, it was MUCH more deliberate than that.

Though strangely I did not explore the "art and science" of masturbation until two years later. I think that may begin to tell a part of the story for me.

I was tall, slightly overweight, and prone to socially terminal acne (these days it is still a distinct departure from etiquette, but I have no wrinkles "no pain, no gain").

I had no friends, abused kids attract bullying, they do not ever learn how to deflect it, and big as I was I had more than my fair share. In the "intellectually elite" school I went to at that stage the bullying was more psychological. The cruel ingenuity of pubescent girls most of whom were close to the "genius" range could be awesome.

Thinking back, many of them must have BEEN the targets of bullies themselves in previous schools, simply because of their intelligence. "Swots" are the bully's favorite target. They must have had a lot of buried pain to act out, and there I was the perfect target, not only conditioned to accept bullying, but also 6 feet tall, and prematurely

developed.

My 13th summer was the year I discovered two useful tools:

- a) The archived failures from my father's homemade wine collection. This remarkable medication got me through the day, (As maid and nanny combined, I was personally answerable for *anything* either of my brothers did during that time. They however were not. The elder of the two had a lot of fun with that aspect of life.) it also kept the fear of "them" coming home to a manageable level. Strangely, since then I hardly ever drank at all, a couple of Irish coffees at Christmas maybe. I think getting "alcoholically annihilated" never meant any more to me than a "coping skill" for surviving my family of origin.

- b) Another archive, this time a set of lurid paperback novels a rather prim Aunt had sent to my mother for a jumble sale. My mother was too embarrassed to send them, so she had just stuck them in a closet. These books (some of which were written by a guy you might have heard of, Harold Robbins) opened my eyes to a possible solution to my alienation. They explained that sex, like American Express, is universally accepted currency.

I needed those tools badly.

That summer my mother screamed at me to "Go away" because she could not stand the sight of me, until I started running, my father responded (perhaps considering more calmly the additional cost of hiring a maid and a nanny?) by chasing me and breaking my nose, quite publicly. No one heeded my pleas that they call the Police.

That is not the part that chills me, I never had a nosebleed in my life before or since, this one was Niagara falls in red, yet my parents put me in the car and drove me nearly 300 miles home without medical treatment or examination.

It could have been *far* worse than a broken nose. I was never allowed medical examination at all, until 3 weeks later for something else.

I also began to notice that older boys, 18+ did not seem to think I was even slightly repellent.

So, all I had to do was pull out my Universal Currency and I was IN.

Unless they found out how young I was.

Two or three separate experiences of myself as desirable in 3 months were more than I ever had in 13.5 years. I was *on to something!!*

The following January I finally left.

I tried going to the Police, no one would listen. One day I just could not take anymore.

I left a note with a girl I knew, and started

hitching up the motorway to Scotland (a place I love). I am going to draw a veil over the lurid details, but before I left I had figured out that sex was another kind of tool too. As long as I (aged 13 and looking at least 20) had sex with a man, there was *no risk* of him handing me to the Police and thus back to my family. Sex was a powerful protection against my family of origin. I think, like many new to self-defense, I may have begun with a little overkill.

Sex bought me safety from my family of origin. Sex bought me a little affection, company, an illusion of love.

Sex bought me food to eat and a bed for the night.

I grew up with sex representing the safety I should have had from my family, and failing that, should have been able to expect from the state. I never got a chance at either.

The state does not care for abused or neglected kids, it just contains them, and hides them from society so society does not have to feel uncomfortable about them.

There ARE good people in Child Care services, but that goodness had to be weighed against the very real possibility of my family using a lot of determination and influence to cost them their jobs. Overall, career won every time.

My surrogate mother Flo (Area Head of Homes, long dead, far too young, only in her fifties) was one of them. Scottish, and one of the first ever

"lipstick feminists" she really *dripped* glamour, and sincerity. I realize now, she would have taken on the Devil himself for me, but at the time, nothing had ever taught me that I could trust her, or even believe I was not an unwanted nuisance to her.

I never knew how much she loved me until I discovered the complex chain of personal friends she had set up so that I could always contact her, whatever happened, for the rest of my life. I never knew how much I loved her until I followed that chain and found she was dead, only a few weeks earlier. I was 26 and I had not seen or spoken to her in almost 10 years, but the chain had been left there for me anyway.

So, sex was the only safe harbor I knew. It is not so very strange that I never sold sex in any form until I was 24, and not regularly until I was 28. To me sex was currency, to buy things with, not something to sell.

With hindsight, I realize I never had anything you could describe as "a personal relationship with sex".

I used to think of sex as my "only effective social skill".

I could never feel safe or relax with a man until I had sex with him, and I could never relax, or feel safe with a woman at all because I am not bisexual. An old redundant pattern kicking in from the time I ran from the nest as fast as my legs could carry me, and had to weave webs of careful watertight lies to prevent me being sent

back, except with the men I had sex with. With them, I could be less hyper-vigilant, though never entirely honest.

I also assumed that men had a right to sex as compensation for spending any time with me.

I gained one extremely valuable and healthy thing from being a prostitute. I came to value my own body and sexuality far more than that.

Genuinely nice men (some of them kind of tastefully designed too, I have to admit) felt sex with me was worth money, and often, even with *that* out of the way felt my company was worth trying to hang on to, or even going so far as to pay for it.

There is no question that my clients had a lot more respect for me, and my sexuality, than the men I had spent ten years giving free sex on demand. A lot of them were more attractive too.

In those days, on the rare occasions when I visited the night-clubs like the ones I had once used to haunt every weekend (just desperately seeking company, affection, an illusion of love), any guy who sidled up to me with any of the old lines was going to wish he had stayed home.

I would consciously look at these petty predators (who will say just about *anything* you want to hear, just to get naked and rude with you) and think:

"Are you nuts?? I could have better than you,

with better manners, two streets away *and* get paid for it!!"

Sometimes I said it out loud.

It may be a little crude and basic, but it was great therapy for that kind of low sexual self-esteem. It worked so well for me that you can see it in my eyes these days. Just the way you would have done if I had grown up healthy, whole and cherished.

So how did I feel about sex with clients?

I did not, it was not sex as far as I was concerned.

I was providing a facility for other people to have sexual release.

To have orgasmed, or even become aroused, would have been the ultimate betrayal of self, an abandoning of all personal boundaries.

There were one or two exceptions. Men I would have considered exceptionally promising material for depersonalized sex. (Yes, I had picked up a habit on that somewhere along the way, predictably enough, long before I was a hooker. It seemed to be the best I was likely to be offered by life. A safe oblivion to hide in is a powerful drug.)

There were other clients who became friends, I could never have become aroused with them and often I genuinely could not continue to have any kind of sex with them at all.

Keeping my boundaries intact, I suppose.

In retrospect, it was all abhorrent, but I could not afford to be aware of that. You have to get out there with something resembling a positive attitude to make any money. Now I honestly have no idea how I ever managed a single night.

Six years must have locked away a lot of trauma inside me that I am only beginning to look at now.

I had a few "relationships" through those years too, not many. Dysfunctional relationships with dysfunctional people, though never violent: six foot redheads do not really attract violence very often. I think all of them were alcoholics, I cannot think of an exception. None of them had any real emotional significance beyond establishing me as co-dependent. All of them ended as soon as they cost me money (it never took long).

Looking back, those relationships were lost causes before they began. I have to admit I had *two* relationships with the worst of them 3 years apart. When I say "worst" I don't mean in terms of abuse, I mean that I had no real attraction to this guy, no interest in him, under normal circumstances I wouldn't even have him as an acquaintance.

A Prostitute cannot afford an healthy emotional life.

Whole literary genres are based on it in several different cultures, "La Boheme", "Manon Lescault", "Irma la Douce", legions of real life "Musume" immortalized as heroines in Old Japan. It is possibly the root of the famous "Willow Pattern" story, well sanitized for western ears.

Most of these stories come from cultures where prostitution is tolerated, and even honored.

The ideal "prostitute friendly" cultures that many activists tell us would solve the whole problem.

By far the most of these stories have a common feature: the heroine dies tragically young because of self-destructive behaviors, up to and including suicide. This last is more common in the half true Japanese legends than in European Fiction, the hero sometimes accompanying her in this last journey.

In the film Mayerling, the hero Crown Prince Rudolf (played by Omar Sharif) demands bleakly of his mother (played by Ava Gardner):

"Pray for me mother that I never fall in love."

Everyone trapped in prostitution could echo that plea. The situation is a parallel. Emotion is not something to be disposed of easily, for expediency, or duty, it goes where it will.

Prostitutes, clients, and indeed Hapsburg Crown Princes, have the same emotional imperatives as anyone else. Their circumstances demand those be constantly controlled.

Not just in terms of "Grand Passion" but even attraction, especially if it is not mutual, on either side.

Neither a hooker nor a client is, by definition, seeking a partner in any personal sense. That confers no immunity whatsoever to personal response, nor to emotional pain.

It is painful enough to develop an inappropriate attachment to someone you cannot easily avoid, how many times worse is it to develop a similar emotional attachment to someone you cannot easily avoid having sex with?

Of course you have a choice, but would someone please explain to me how you explain making the choice?

Every conceivable honest permutation of explaining it is potentially mortifying.

In real terms a hooker is outside the glass wall, a pariah in our society, even given mutual attraction there is no open option on a "happy ending".

The unspoken contract is that, in return for money, you surrender the right to subjective expectations of every kind.

There are plenty of cold-blooded people who could handle it, easily and consistently. However, those people are unlikely to ever be sufficiently

desperate for cash or repelled by less ethical options to ever become prostitutes.

They are however, sometimes clients.

The barely suppressed emotions of prostitutes make irresistible and available toys for the truly warped and reptilian to play with.

One of the ploys involves another taboo, that rape and prostitution have in common, imposed orgasm.

Nobody talks about it. The trauma is just too great. Nevertheless, it can be done, and once done is the worst of the sense of violation any prostitute, or rape victim, experiences, the deepest wound of all.

It is a total desecration of the most intimate parts of self, the ultimate "control abuse".

In the long term, that is as nothing compared to dehumanization of the emotions of prostitutes far too many feel to be legitimate entertainment.

The shell prostitutes build to protect them is often brittle and paper-thin. Underneath is a repressed and emotionally frustrated human being with no outlets, a very emotionally vulnerable person indeed. A sealed pot, boiled and ready to explode.

To the abusive, this is a prime, helpless, emotional torture toy.

All the legalization and social acceptance in the world would do nothing to lessen the ongoing trauma of that. Hundreds of years of suicides and suicide attempts as a regular feature of life in Japan's legal and honored Yoshiwara are the proof.

"Domination", referred to here as "Discipline", is the clean, easy, end of prostitution.

Obviously, in Ireland it is pretty basic and very much the country cousin of the commercial "Scene" in Europe or the States. Even so, the principle is the same.

Many perfectly ordinary "vanilla" ladies I have known found it invigorating. They used it as a release valve for their tensions and aggressions.

Before anyone from the "Scene" jumps on that, let me say I'm not sure that is a wise arrangement either, (What would happen to a sub if the lady involved was having a *really* "bad hair day"?) but nobody was complaining, and they came back for more.

I am six feet tall, I have a rather "upper crust" accent, many people commented that I could make a fortune caning bottoms and correcting people in general. If I tried to work in a brothel of any kind the management would invariably try to pressure me into doing that.

I could not do it.

The very suggestion freaked me out.

I was not the only one, a few of us just could not handle performing "Discipline" or even watching it at any price. I am not going to jump on to any "moral high ground".

A moral choice of any kind gives warm, fuzzy, sanctimonious feelings. What I got from refusing to perform discipline was relief from something that resembled a phobia.

I condemn, without reservation, anyone who tries to pressure another person into performing a sexual act they are not comfortable with under any circumstances. Regardless of how commonplace or strange that act may be. The aversion is all that counts, and the damage of pressure against it can go too deep.

However, my aversion did seem to be an oddity within myself. I am not a narrow minded or easily shocked person. If a man hits me, he gets hit back. Unfortunately, the occasion has arisen a few times, so it was not a trigger to the violence of my childhood that I could not face. I knew it was a trigger of *some* kind.

I made a friend on the Internet, a couple of years ago. A lady I respected, who told me she was a submissive. Partly because she wanted me to understand that part of her, and perhaps because she sensed some part of myself I needed to understand, she suggested I look into some of the "Scene" on the web.

There was a more personal side, something of a voyage of discovery over about a year.

As I got to know the subculture, I realized something quite chilling.

The most commonly "accepted rules for the training of slaves" bore an uncanny resemblance to my father's stated attitude to child rearing in general and me in particular.

Now whatever my family of origin may be, I do not think they would even know what "BDSM" (Bondage, Domination and Sado-Masochism) is, any more than parents in the "BDSM scene" would raise their children the way I was raised. A lot of them do actively campaign against children being raised that way, far more of them are privately sickened by it, a few or more, like me, lived through it.

I was taught that I was the property of my father, in accordance with a "Goods and Chattels Act" that was, in fact, rescinded in the time of Elizabeth I, the 16th century. While I was told every other detail of that act, which accorded me the same human rights and status as the stereo system, that it was rescinded 400 years earlier was never mentioned at all.

Not only was I the property of my father but also, I would remain so until my marriage, when I would become the property of my husband. This was something of an anomaly in a household where I was constantly pushed to achieve academically and seek a career that would

"glorify the family" rather than any more social or emotional pursuits.

The premise was that "while I was under his roof I must accept his discipline".

If he HAD read the rules for the "Training of Slaves", my life would have been considerably better. Within the world of BDSM to lash out at a slave in anger for no rational reason, as part of no clearly defined structure is considered abusive.

My father believed very differently. He also failed to note the "Safe Sane and Consensual" aspect.

My father would regularly drag me to a place where he could throw me on the floor and lash at any part of me he could reach, often my head, whipping himself into a terrifying frenzy of rage. I was honestly afraid for my life many times.

Then suddenly he would just stop, get up and walk off as calmly as if it had never happened.

My mother told me when I was at the ripe old age of 12 that the reason he beat me was that she did not like having sex with him.

I was 39 before I dropped the denial and faced the reality of those beatings. I cannot convey the sickening horror I felt. It was as though the fact that he had never tried to have sex with me was the only trace of "Normality" I had ever had to cling to, the last vestige of anything resembling a reason to excuse either parent.

When that penny dropped there was nothing left but the stark truth.

A truth that absolutely vindicated me within myself, but would never undo four decades of damage.

My exploration of BDSM taught me more. To all intents and purposes, I was raised to be a submissive. Which is why the idea of dominating someone was so disturbing. It contradicted my deepest conditioning. The cognitive dissonance was too much for me.

There were deeper imprints on my psyche. Remember I was raised to believe that I would be my father's property until I became the property of my husband?

Deep inside I was programmed to find my emotional satisfaction in submitting myself to total dominance by a man. I was conditioned to seek out very deep and cruel abuse.

There is no point in denying that spontaneous sadism (mental, emotional or physical) aroused me more than anything else. I loathed that aspect of myself, denied it, fought it, but it was there. An undercurrent in every emotional choice I made. The results were predictably disastrous, though mercifully, never long lived.

There is no question in my mind that I would have had a far safer and healthier life in the BDSM scene than I did out of it.

When I did explore I found plenty of people who were either like me, or counterparts. In preference to denying it, they were recognizing and sublimating that part of themselves in a structured, positive and benign way.

Those people liked and accepted themselves, I certainly did not.

Some of them definitely do regularly engage in some bizarre edge play, but is that bizarre at all compared to being drawn to cruel and psychopathic personalities and aroused by their crueler aspects as I was?

I was drawn to them against my will, against my ethical system, against my very nature. I despised myself for that attraction.

The minute the sadistic mind games began, I got hot and interested. I did not want to, but that is what happened.

My childhood "slave training" was controlling me and my choices, my counterparts in the BDSM Scene were controlling and channeling their damage, turning it into a positive part of their lives, rather than the blight it was in mine.

Close to the BDSM scene I learned to stop being ashamed of that part of myself and hide from it. I learned to see the positive aspects of it and be proud of them.

There are *many* positive aspects to submission, it requires great inner strength, courage and commitment. It requires a strong "other" focus rather than a "self" focus.

I know what you are dying to ask, has it gone beyond fantasy for me? Have I become a submissive?

The answer is both yes, and no.

I did try taking it beyond fantasy, but no, I have not become a submissive and never plan to. There are many reasons why people are involved in BDSM, not all of them are sublimating deep scars, but even of those who are, for some it becomes a way of life, for others a place to pass through on their way to themselves.

I was in the last category.

By the time I discovered BDSM and the things I could learn from it, other parts of me were ready to move past it. If I had discovered that Scene years earlier I would have stayed with it longer I think, because I was not ready for the next phase of my life until now.

The fact remains that I am ready. At this time in my life, I only want sex as an expression of an emotional connection between "similar equals".

I have arrived at my personal emotional balance, and submission is not part of that now.

An amusing thought occurs though...

Yes, I probably could handle giving a willing submissive a spanking (if there really was no other solution to hand).

I think that, in me, is a sign of great healing

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When I pulled out of prostitution, I realized for the first time in my life I could discover what I wanted from my own sexuality and then hold out until I got it.

As a result, with the exception of the last six months of '99 I spent having an intense refresher course in my old patterns of dysfunctional relationships, I have been celibate for the last seven years.

Now that is not because I discovered that what I wanted from my sexuality was to be a Nun (but was unfortunately too much of an atheist to get through the selection process).

I most definitely *want sex*.

However, it needs to be a certain kind of sex, perhaps a rather rare kind.

I want sex that is part of communicating a real emotional connection.

Apart from that I really would rather read my library book, scrub my kitchen floor or study the SPAM in my inbox intently.

This is not a moral judgment. Whatever anybody else wants to do with any number of consenting

partners is fine by me.

I just do not have the slightest interest in anything but learning what it is like to really make love, as an ongoing part of an ongoing relationship. Anything else would be meaningless and faintly repellent to me, even, ultimately, traumatic.

I am also sure that is exactly how I would have felt if I had the good fortune to be issued with a loving nurturing family at birth.

It is not "right" or "wrong" it is just who I am. I did not get a chance to even begin to become me until now.

The Dreams That Died

Perhaps the problem is that to get out of prostitution, in many cases you have nowhere to turn for help but the system that put you there in the first place.

Because of that, the system cannot afford to acknowledge your real needs or limits. Because of that, it cannot offer you any real or valid help.

When I left prostitution in late March 1993, there was nowhere to go for any help. My Uncle gave me every last penny he had. A handful of old and treasured clients suddenly developed sex drives they had not had since they were 18, and a deep need to pay extra money. They maintained my self-respect along with my survival.

A well known credit card company marketed its services for the first time in this country by implying that accepting their services was vital to retaining a department store account I, and many others, had. They gave me a £1,000 limit I had not even asked for. It was six years before I finally had no choice but to renege on the payments.

Apart from that, I had no income. I could not apply for unemployment benefit because I had not claimed it while I was a hooker. Even Policemen on the beat told me I should. I believe that money is for people who need it, not for people who have an adequate income, even if they only have that adequate income out of

sheer desperation because welfare payments were inadequate in the first place. After all, is that not the principle behind ensuring welfare payments are set at inadequate levels?

I would support that, if there were sufficient structures to enable people to enter into the workplace at a realistic level of payment. Structures that would make it possible to work round the problems that kept them out of it in the first place. As it stands using inadequate welfare payments as pressure is just another way to force the most vulnerable members of society into a wall.

When I left prostitution, I also had some serious outstanding debts. Maybe £2-3,000, which was £200 a month that had to be found, and I had day-to-day living expenses as well.

There was absolutely nowhere to turn, not for advice, not for support, not for the help I badly needed, and still need, with the emotional and psychological problems that have crippled me all my life.

Those problems make working in a normal situation impossible to me. I have tried, I disintegrate very fast, and when I do, there is no help available to help me rebuild myself from the ruins. Apart from that, how much chance did I have with no resume? An ex hooker in a country of 3.5 million people where everybody knows everybody?

I tried many other things. I tried to buy items in

flea markets I could repair or restore and sell. I got absolutely nothing out of that. I advertised to run up soft furnishings and curtains. I taught myself to do that years before, absolutely hate it. I have no talent for it, grim determination, and taking as much time as I have to, yields the right results.

Within three years, I was working an 18-hour day, and usually a seven-day week (when there was work at all). Running around an entire county picking up what little work I could get, undercutting everyone so that I could get *some* work (one of the disadvantages of being unable to participate in Social Networks). I was making nowhere near enough to live on, with no hope in sight. The most I ever made, when there was work, was £150 in a week, and there was not always work.

In the down time, I campaigned at my own expense, against decriminalization and for the rights of women in prostitution.

Which ran me headlong into a couple of organizations that had sprung up and began to ride to prominence on the issues around prostitution?

At first, I felt grateful for *any* support at all, but over time, I changed my mind.

These organizations seemed geared to distorting the issues to suit their own agenda. The first signs were the lengths they went to persuading the women not to even try and speak for themselves.

They played on their fears, their low self-esteem, and the reservoir of learned helplessness in many of them. They did this at a time when some of the women were ready (and well able) to stand up for themselves and make their case, as they had done in the past. The overall message was "You cannot speak for yourselves, you need us to speak for you".

The same women, who had gone to court ten years earlier to obtain a degree of decriminalization in the first place, became silent.

These organizations also promoted the notion that if there was a chance of a forum of any kind, the women must be paid to take part in it.

To pay someone for standing up for their rights and truth is to disembowel them in a very final way. No hope of putting their case, as equals, to equals, but on display, as hired help. No one could take them seriously, least of all themselves.

The only time I took money from these people was when it was handed to me in a stiff white envelope, and I assumed it was some kind of card. When I opened it the £20 inside felt like a slap in the face, even though, that week my ability to buy food was in question.

After that, despite numerous firm but polite statements, that as an independent activist I would pay my way like other conference delegates they used attempting to pay me as a way to try and keep me "in my place".

On one occasion quite publicly, I walked away from it quite publicly too. It was not offered as recognition, more in a way that looked like a pay off.

It was quite horrible.

I investigated the main organization and discovered it appeared to be connected an EU initiative to collate data on prostitutes all over Europe, including the migratory prostitutes who were flooding in from the East. The objective would appear to be legalization and state control throughout Europe. On the surface, this sounds like a good thing. However, underneath the implications are terrifying.

- **One declared agenda is the legalization of pimping.**
- **Another agenda is taxation.**
- **Another is that all prostitution be confined to brothels.**

The women were *not* told this. None of them were likely to see the places where it was declared, and few would understand the language used to state it.

If they knew this, none of them would support it.

Few of them do as it is.

Nowhere in the agenda is there any provision for trying to find ways to enable women to leave prostitution, nor of exploring ways they could be prevented from getting into it.

The eventual outcome could be a situation of total acceptance for State controlled prostitution, including blanket acceptance that people should have to survive by that means.

If that does not sound so bad, then let me tell you about some former neighbors of mine in another country, where prostitution is legal. There was a brothel within half a mile of me. They are currently offering anal sex (among other things) for £50.

If that is so comfortable and acceptable to women in prostitution, (including the wide variety of health risks, *and* the pain of such an act when not in a state of arousal) then how can it be that no woman in Ireland was prepared to offer this facility at any price, before decriminalization?

In an atmosphere of total acceptance of prostitution, (and denial of your right and needs as an human being) you sometimes cannot make money unless you are prepared to submit to such acts.

The brothels, cushioned in pseudo-respectability become selective. It requires the mentality of a pimp to run a brothel.

In a brothel it is harder to get work unless you are very young, very attractive, and prepared to submit to any act required of you.

Desperation is not confined to the very young, very attractive, and very submissive. In real terms,

men are quite happy, and sometimes prefer to pay for older, less attractive women.

However, the brothels only want the guaranteed big money spinners, the younger, and more compliant, the better.

My neighbors from the brothel were recognizable on sight. They had the same dead eyes as any prostitute.

In the spring of 1997, a few months trying to work with others, on a government scheme I was over skilled for, to the point of insanity, resulted in a nervous breakdown.

My background and upbringing was too alien. I literally do not know how to interact with people in a normal setting.

Being a former hooker makes that worse again.

Certainly in this country to admit to that would be a disaster. You would be surprised how few things you can speak openly about if you have to edit the main focus of six years of your life out of them first. Just "being yourself" is not an option. I have found that in many settings. Lying does not come easily to me, even if it did, what lies should I tell? I know nothing of what I should substitute for the truth of my life.

The stress of the hyper vigilance, essential for me in any ongoing interaction, would crush anyone. I doubt if my presence is beneficial to a group situation either. Every sword cuts both ways. It

had happened before, in exactly the same way, years earlier. I tried to find a way to work through it. I failed. I knew there was no point in attempting to face it again.

So, I asked to be fired, as simple as that.

I sat at home for many weeks, often unable to open the curtains, with the phone unplugged because I could not even handle picking up a call.

When I bounced back, I did it very suddenly. I decided to use every last resource I could lay my hands on to go into business selling reconditioned computers to families for their kids.

I love computers, I did not know that until I discovered them in 1996, but as soon as I did I had "found my calling" .

To me ,the boring little circuit boards that add speed, color, music are real life magic spells to be woven together.

Incredibly, it all started to work out, beyond any dream I ever had. Between September '97 and March '98, my income steadily climbed.

Disaster struck.

In early March, I went to bed with a cough and slight flu, and woke up with pneumonia. I have never been so ill in my life. It took about three weeks to begin to be able to work.

Disaster struck again.

The world markets in components shifted dramatically and suddenly.

I feel no shame, that shift came close to demolishing the giant "Intel". Prices dropped alarmingly. In the end, the Big Companies were offering whole systems that cost less than the components to build them would cost people like me.

Many of us were crushed under that market shift. I was a newcomer, but a man I know, who had worked with computers for 15 years, wound up as an employee and an electrician again.

The dream was over.

I tried everything to recover it, digging myself deeper and deeper into personal debt, my health never fully recovering from the first serious, physical illness of my life.

It was useless. Again, there was no help, no advice, nowhere to turn.

I still find that incredible, but I spent whole days calling everywhere I could think of, without finding a ray of hope.

I suppose it was inevitable that my mental and emotional state would deteriorate further. I could have collected unemployment, but that would never have covered the loan payments that had resulted from my attempts to build, and then

save, the business. So, I stayed with the, smaller and depreciating, "start up" allowance that still left me free to earn, if I could. The truth is that I could not. Whatever I tried failed, and I tried everything I could find. Advertising became a literal waste of money 4 months before I could face that reality enough to cancel it.

I felt as though the world around me had no more connection to me than the pictures on a TV screen.

The last remaining resources were about to run out. There was nothing I could replace them with. When the next phone bill could not be paid, my last link with the world, and finding any kind of hope would be gone.

I have never even been able to socialize as "normal" people can. I would not know how. I live in a remote place: without the phone or the Internet there would be nothing left to try.

There is something called "Battered Wife Syndrome" "a pervading sense of hopelessness and no escape".

I seemed to be suffering from something like it, "Battered Outcast Syndrome".

I was looking at two remaining options:

- Back to Prostitution, which was unthinkable, I have a phobia of it, aside of all personal loathing.

- Suicide as a last mercy to myself, otherwise the end would be inevitable and agonizingly slow. If there was no hope while I still had contact with the world, when I lost that contact there would be even less. I would just be left here to rot slowly.

If there was no help while I could still ask for it, there would certainly be none when I could not.

At the Eleventh Hour

Like a fool I believed I had really fallen in love at the eleventh hour. I met him through a personal ad I placed on the Internet. I had not intended to meet anyone. I was just trying to assert to myself that I was still alive.

I am barely able to leave the house, much less socialize. The Internet *is* my gateway to a brave new world I could never reach for before.

He was the first to respond and I was amazed by how nice he seemed and how much we had in common. He was in Switzerland, which, in terms of the Internet, seemed almost local.

He spent five days here in early May '99 (against an apparent curse my life is under that anything that happens on May 1st is doomed to failure) and after that, we spent at least 3 hours on the phone every night.

This placed me in something of a predicament. I could not tell him how bad things really were, because of the pressure it would place him under. Yet I believed he loved me, I did not feel I had the right to say nothing and let the end come as a shock to him.

I discussed it with a trusted friend by email, she told me that I *must* tell him, he had a right to know.

So, reluctantly, I did.

The next day he called me and asked me to come to him. The impossible had happened.

Suddenly in the last few minutes of the eleventh hour, every impossible dream was handed to me at once, to love and be loved, to have a future and a life somewhere other than "the valley of the shadow of death".

We realized permanent residency in Switzerland might be a problem. In 30 minutes, early one morning, we resolved it by agreeing to get married, though neither of us particularly wanted to marry anyone at all. It seemed we just wanted to be together.

The nightmare was forgotten, we joked about it all as being no more than a sensible "economy measure" compared to the 2 or 3 hours we spent on the phone every day at European International rates.

A bit of a "whirlwind romance" but I had no time left for anything else, so I took the chance, gladly and confidently.

Everything has its price; of course, so I accepted the location of the rest of my life must be Switzerland. I assumed it would be one big alpine suburbia. It was not a place I had ever had any interest in. I was braced for my personal definition of "the worst".

In those last days before I left for my new, real life, I came to realize how much I wanted to leave

here: there was not an everyday route that did not have bad memories for me.

Everything I might do, everywhere I might go, was haunted, and not kindly, by the ghosts of nightmares, not so long, past.

I can remember driving into Dublin, for almost the last time, looking down on the approaching city, thinking:

"Yes, when I escape this I will be able to sit down and write my story, and I will start at this moment, right now, and tell it in retrospect".

I even had the words of the introduction in my head. Now they are all forgotten.

We decided to freight what I could and travel by train as far as Calais. He would meet me there with the car.

It seemed too momentous a change for a sixty minutes flight. I wanted to be aware of the distance, experience the change.

I was also taking my old collie dog with me. He had insisted on the grounds that I needed him for company.

In the end, it cost well over £1000 to take him. A week before I left we realized he could not enter Europe without having a rabies shot 30 days before the date of entry.

We arranged hastily for him to have the shot, and stay in a kennel in Dover to be fetched a month later.

My ten-year-old collie (previously assumed to be sedate as well as elderly) had taken on an astonishing new lease on life after surgery for an acute hernia.

He was as frisky as a pup. He loves change, new places, and new faces. He had regarded his stay in the Veterinary Hospital, as the "holiday of a lifetime" so trauma was not exactly a problem.

Nothing was as ready as it should have been in time to leave.

My Uncle brought us, and a ridiculous amount of hand luggage, to the ferry port.

There was a drama, I had not thought, my collie had never seen a staircase before in his life. Most Irish houses are bungalows, this one is no exception. He was absolutely petrified and too big to carry.

We were late for the ferry, but it did not matter, because of a coincidental variety of mechanical failures in three other ferries, it was the only ship leaving Dublin that day, and standing room only.

There was once a custom, when emigrants left the port of Dublin. The family and friends would drive out to the South Wall and flash the car headlights as a farewell.

A few years before, during the recession, when emigration was common and unavoidable for many, my Uncle and I had often watched them.

As the ship sailed out into the lavender aftermath of a perfect sunset, I stood on the rail, wondering if my Uncle would remember. I saw a car much like his drive down and waved frantically. The lights never flashed in return, as it turned out later he had simply forgotten about that part.

I had tears in my eyes as I left. My Uncle and I "adopted" each other in the late '80s. He is the only real, loving family I have ever had; this was my first experience of moving on towards happiness with regret for someone I must leave behind.

I was worried about him. How lost would he be left all alone once more. I felt guilty too. I had everything now, and was leaving behind the one man family who had kept me alive, with almost nothing. Some things just are not transferable.

I had not been in England, the country of my birth, in more than ten years. Even to travel through it is traumatic for me. The memories there are far worse than any others.

It was easier than I thought, by popular demand the regulation that insisted dogs must be muzzled on British trains was set aside for my old Collie. Who had acted like one betrayed to the inquisition from the moment I had put it on him.

The train glided across England through a perfect summer dawn.

I remember being amazed at the speed of the train, faster than the cars on the M1. Last time I was in England, on that rail track, the cars were always the faster by far.

I had to cross London to change trains. London was far cleaner than I ever remembered it. It looked as though it had all been renovated "as new".

I lived in London for several years, but it was a foreign place to me that day.

I found hot croissants in a big central station, and coffee (much needed, I had not slept on the train as I had expected), then a local line to Dover, where I handed my collie over for his second "Holiday of a Lifetime" that year.

The to face the struggle with luggage I could not actually carry, on to the channel ferry to Calais, two hours earlier than expected.

I changed on the Ferry. I had traveled through the chilly early summer night well wrapped in woolens, but it was afternoon by then, on a scorching midsummer's day, far warmer than any day in Ireland.

I glamorized myself a little, after all, was I not going to my own true love, and my own true home, forever?

I was very early, so I settled into the Ferry Port cafe to wait, rather astonished that I could still remember enough French to joke with the woman behind the counter.

After a while, I decided to look for a vantage point to watch the car park, and I found him instead. He was wandering round with his jacket hooked over his shoulder, looking lost, and worried to death.

Raised on islands all my life I had a very poor grasp of the landmass of Europe, I had tended to assume everywhere was an afternoon drive away. It was in this spirit I had assumed he could just "pick me up from the ferry".

He had driven 500 miles since early morning and was more than a little disorientated.

We drove about 200 kilometers before we stopped to eat. Fast exhilarating kilometers on near empty toll-auto routes, through the same Northern France my Grandfather had marched in the Great War, more than eighty years before.

I was just lying back in the seat, getting high on the Techno music I came quickly to love, drinking it all in.

This was France. Even in an autoroute service chain, the food was fresh and wonderful.

As we left the building, a summer thunderstorm broke, drenching us in a very short distance.

Somewhere near, I think, the forest of Ardennes, night began to fall and, incredibly, he insisted I drive.

He had driven about 700 miles since morning, but I had not slept for 36 hours, and had never driven on that side of the car, or the road, in my life before.

To make things a little more interesting the car had the infamous European "manual transmission".

My left hand melds naturally into a manual transmission after years of driving.

My right hand regarded one as an alien object.

I managed, 275 kilometers and the Strasbourg Peripherique, on a Saturday night, just as all the Strasbourg revelers were going home.

We had to go through a few miles of Germany before Switzerland, so he took over before the border, which, apparently, no longer existed anyway.

He took a few wrong turns and lost his temper with me over them. It was too late to look for warning signs anyway.

Because of this slight detour we crossed the dreaded Swiss Frontier near a part of Basel he had never seen before.

It was easy, he put my passport inside his and waved them at the border guard who smiled and waved.

We had dreaded it, because I still had to divorce a husband I had not seen in almost twenty years before we could marry and I would have right of residency.

Yugoslavs crossing Swiss Frontiers have been fired on, as Jewish refugees once were attempting to cross Lake Constantin. I, however, was driven through in an old Renault 25 without a raised eyebrow.

My first sight of Switzerland was of a series of building sites and road works that eerily resembled Glasgow in the early '70s, and appeared to be just as hard to escape from.

Once free of them, I entered utopia.

Even in the false dawn, there is nowhere like Switzerland. Nothing prepares you for it.

Everything is a drug imbibed by sight. Not even picturesque, just as beautiful, and as beautifully presented as it could possibly be. Switzerland remains a "Fortress State" within Europe for good reasons.

It was only eighty miles to home, a short drive.

Just as the dawn was breaking, we passed the Schloss I already knew of, and expected, and turned into a lane of real Chalets.

It was like entering a dream and knowing you will never be likely to wake from it.

Only a few yards from the widest river I had ever seen, I can remember opening the flimsy front door of my home and climbing the narrow covered staircase (the covering and the door were an afterthought, it would originally have been open to a balcony) for the very first time.

I could have cried with sheer joy.

My life had been a nightmare I had never seemed able to wake up from, but now, at last, it was truly morning and I was fully awake in a different, kinder world.

I should have heeded the Mayday curse on my life. Seven months later, loving my home even more, on a dull January morning, I closed that same door behind me for the very last time.

As I had believed Switzerland was the price I had to pay to have a life with the man I loved, in the end the Switzerland, and the home I came to love with my whole heart, became the price I had to pay to escape from a new kind of nightmare.

For six years, I rented out the use of my body as a hooker, from the moment I arrived in Switzerland the freehold was sold. The difference is I did not know that, and would never have consented to it.

I am not young any more. The one thing I wanted most to know is what it is like to love and be loved, for real. Not some great romantic "falling in love" but the stuff that happens after "THE END" comes up in the movies.

I want to know what it is like to grow with someone, to be "at one" with someone.

I am a realist. I know how screwed up I am, and how unusual.

In a culture where joining hands and jumping into Mount Fuji together is not generally regarded as a healthy way to relate, I recognized a long time ago that, for me, a permanent relationship was more or less a lost cause. Not something to spend too much time thinking of anyway.

When I arrived in Switzerland, I really believed I had achieved that impossibility.

What I did not know is that my ex had finally achieved his lifelong ambition to buy a wife, and not only a bartered bride, but also incredibly a Western European one.

My value as a status symbol could threaten the 1992 Cadillac Eldorado, that mostly filled garage space, but it was a close run thing.

I do not think he has ever been honest with himself about that.

He tells himself that what he wants is to love and be loved.

He tells himself a lot of lies about what love consists of. I honestly do not believe he knows the difference, or is capable of experiencing it.

He honestly believes "sex makes emotion". He also believes that intimacy can be defined as a combination of appearances, and getting plastered together. I have come to believe he cannot help it. He was born that way.

The question I must find the right answer for is whether I really loved him, or just desperately needed to believe I did?

I am still very confused about that. However, I am certain I do not love him now.

My heartbreak is all for my unexpected true love, Confederation Helvetica, Switzerland.

We were living in the Bern Mittellands.

Quite hilly, but no mountains (except for the fairly low Jura Range, in the distance), this is rich, intensive farming country.

The first thing I awakened to was the bells. They are everywhere. Sheep bells, cowbells, church bells, it took time to adjust to not hearing bells on the breeze any more when I got back here.

It is quite usual to graze a handful of sheep, or a few cows on any tiny empty space in a village. So there were always bells. The sound is like part of the air.

So, in summer, is the scent of geraniums.

Sometimes I would find myself getting high on it. Switzerland never felt strange to me; it was as though I had simply come home at last.

I never had a car of my own to drive there. I was promised one, but then I was promised a lot of far more important things I never got either.

He had two cars but only one license plate. This is not as crazy as it sounds, parking space for the Cadillac was not something you could ever take for granted, and it drank gas.

If I wanted a car to drive, I had to go in to work with him, thirty miles away, at 6:30am. For short trips, it was not worth it. There was the "small train" at the end of the road anyway.

The small train was an experience in itself. It was like a surface branch line of the London Underground that actually ran through and alongside forests, villages. It was fun. It also ran, as reliably as clockwork, every eight, and thirty-eight, minutes past the hour.

There are far more pine trees here in Ireland than in Bern. I had not seen a hardwood forest since I was a child, I do not think I had ever seen hardwoods forests like those I saw in Switzerland. I was enchanted, by everything I saw; every day I was there.

Even in the first week, I knew it would break my heart to ever have to leave it all, which was something that did not bear thinking about. One thing I learned very quickly was that my ex was almost always in a bad temper.

He hardly ever smiled.

The first Saturday we went to Interlaken. If you are ever within a hundred miles of it get there, even if you have to hijack something to do it. Interlaken is a small town between two lakes in a bowl in the mountains.

The lakes joined by a river, are two distinctly different colors, because of mineral deposits in the water. One of them is actually called "The Green Lake".

I had never known dry heat before. Yet in the heat you could smell the snow in the peaks, feel a touch of the ice, like pure oxygen.

I discovered an "old friend" of sorts. The "Funiculaire" Railway my deeply spoiled cousin Elizabeth used to constantly boast about visiting when we were small children.

My Uncle, her father, was very keen on making tacky home movies.

I remembered the Funiculaire vividly.

It climbs a low mountain to a restaurant built on an outcrop. There is a terrace looking out over

the Jungfrauoch, and the whole valley, laid out like a model village, below.

There the smell of the snow is far stronger, and the faint ice chill comes in waves.

I would give almost anything to be there once again.

Back in the town, we strolled and watched the crowds of Jet Setters gathering for a Gala in the Hotel Victoria Jungfrau.

I had never seen anything like it, even in London, yet Interlaken is, at heart, simply a country town, very near to where we lived.

We had a little iced tea in a cafe that looked over the green. I remember a charming deaf mute was leaving small soft toys at every place setting, with a note asking that you should pay him whatever you thought right if you wished to keep the small toy.

He was clever too; he placed a little bear in front of me that bore an uncanny resemblance to my ex. I insisted on keeping him.

I treasured that little bear until the day I left. A last reminder of the wonderful illusion of a love that never was, and never would be.

Many times, weeks later, I clung to him crying desperately, hysterically, for the dream that was promised and the snatched from my hand, as

though the small bear could somehow give it back to me.

My ex watched, quite unmoved, even smiling faintly with something that grotesquely resembled satisfaction.

I left that small bear behind.

If I had not I do not think the wound would ever have healed. I would never have been able to give up on the dream.

It was as though I had somehow walked away from my nightmare life, into a Hollywood Movie, where my co-star was horribly miscast.

I would not even want to speak to my ex now.

I find I do not care how he is, or what he is doing. I am not even interested.

He does not matter: in truth he repels me.

Though I would sell my soul a thousand times over to go back to those days when I still believed the dream was real, and nothing would ever take it away again.

Crying to the Music

How do you begin to tell a dream that begins rationally enough, then fragments into a nightmare you cannot even begin to make sense of, or put a shape on?

Recently, I began to find the music.

There were five or six tapes in the car, they were the only music we ever really played.

They were tapes of European Techno compiled by a friend of his who would decorate the cases, but never write a play list. I had no idea what any of this haunting music was, or who wrote it. After I left, I never thought I would hear any of it again.

I began to find odd pieces here and there in MP3 format. Each one feels like discovering an old friend I had thought was lost. One name leads to other tracks, a recognized run-on into the next track leads to an album name and number.

Slowly I am piecing together the soundtrack of a beautiful nightmare.

It was my worst nightmare. Being told you have everything, you have always needed and lived without, and knowing for sure the telling was a lie.

He would never hurt an animal, but deep inside he hated people, all people, and particularly women.

Everything but that hate was just well trained "good behavior" in him, no deeper than appearance.

I am not sure where that hate came from, more than one place I think.

Most of it seemed to relate to perceived rejection, again, perceived, as being in favor of lesser men. He did not dehumanize women, I do not think he had ever really grasped that they had any humanity at all. It was as though a part of him was stuck in an adolescent groove of "woman as sexual objective".

I was not there to be loved, certainly not to be me. I was just there to fill a vacant, predetermined role in his needs.

It was like living with a stranger who would never be anything but a stranger, and a stranger who was far from attractive or appealing.

I get the impression he had decided who I should be long before he ever knew I existed. A fantasy I was to abandon my personality and fulfill. Yet I never heard of a fantasy so rigid and predetermined before, nor so unreasonable.

A late developer in terms of relationships, his formative years were spent in the Thai beach culture. Little known, overshadowed by the more loathsome forms of sex tourism, the Thai beach culture is sex, drugs, rock 'n roll tourism, empty hedonism given a kind of "substance" in the form of heroin or ecstasy.

The young and footloose, on a sybaritic orgy that only ends when the money runs out.

He learned his notions of "love" from submissive Thai and Laotian girls, with the guile of slaves, who had only one card to play for a real future, their youth and sexuality, tailored to appeal to western egos enough to attract a wedding ring.

He intended to impose this same squalid unreality on an educated, cerebral European, with every intention of living the opium dreams of Bangkok into his old age.

I was not a person; I was a prop, a toy. Just as the desperate Thai and Laotian girls, who once made a gauche and sullen young Swiss feel like a "real man", once were.

He wanted to be idolized without having to deserve it. He wanted to be irresistibly desired, without being desirable, and, perhaps more important, without feeling equal desire in return.

He wanted the lies the Thai girls had sold him to buy their future, sustained for the rest of his life, by someone, and I don't think it really mattered who that "someone" was.

He never once recognized how empty and intolerable that would be, much less, that it was never real in Thailand, and could certainly never be real in Europe.

He would talk bitterly of the Thai women in a certain bar/restaurant, which used to be in Bern,

under the arch just before THE clock, the one that is not so much a timepiece as a delightful puppet theatre.

Divorced, separated, or living in a personal cold war, they spent all their money and their time (so he claimed) drinking, gambling, soft whoring.

This seemed sad to me. I was too aware of the reality of spending even one night with an unloved unwanted man to condemn them, and thus too aware of how driven they must have been to escape by that means.

If they drank, gambled and soft whored, what tale of disillusion and depression did it tell?

My attention was drawn to these Thai women everywhere, beautiful for the most part, slender lithe with two or three immaculate smiling children, and often the obligatory fat bald Swiss (eerily reminiscent of the one I had at home) often so many years older it seemed obscene.

Their dead, scared eyes haunted me.

They had not sacrificed love and life for this, it was not offered them as an option in the first place, but had used their youth and beauty to buy a realistic standard of living, freedom from fear, hunger, prostitution. In so doing had found them in a world surrounded by this hitherto unsuspected element of love and life...it must have seemed as if everyone but them was awash with it.

The final cruel irony, in achieving one Nirvana at great cost they also opened a window on another that rendered it cruel, cold and gray.

I knew how they felt.

I never sought what they sought at any time in my life, but I am sure I actually got what they got anyway.

I was dealing with a man who developed his ideas of and aspirations to relationships in Bangkok, in the same market where they peddled their youth. When he found the merchandise not entirely to his taste, he assumed that the same price would buy similar goods elsewhere on the same terms, and any suggestion to the contrary could be politely ignored.

I remember one Thai girl in Zurich particularly.

She was beautiful as a reed is in water.

But cold, so cold, not there at all. She was with a party of two couples. Her partner was not unattractive, but no match for her heart stopping beauty, pasty faced, thickening, balding. They never talked TO each other, never looked AT each other.

She seemed completely unhuman, locked inside herself forever.

It chilled me.

With hindsight, I realize that she and I (a carthorse by comparison) were both no more than ornaments, neither of us entirely voluntarily.

I had gone there choosing another quite different option to find myself trapped in this one, she had never known other options existed until she arrived there.

With hindsight, my heart, once chilled to permafrost by her, thaws and grows tender.

A prison can be judged by the determination with which people attempt to escape it.

The pain that lingers and crushes if they succeed can judge the damage it has done.

If only the stage for his proposed lifelong, theatre of inhuman, unreality had not been so beautifully designed.

The little storybook village by the river, the apartment in an old wooden chalet that was all but in the shadow of a castle that appeared unusual, sinister and romantic in equal parts. Having belonged since it was built, to the bailiffs of Bern it had a remarkably unromantic history.

The Schloss was a glorified treasury and prison for securing both tolls and felons collected from the road and river traffic.

Und die musik...

Always the music, he used it as a kind of drug while driving, and genuinely would never recognize individual pieces.

He wrote music as calculus is written, sometimes I wonder if he would recognize his own music out of context.

The music crept into my soul, became as much a part of the landscape as the Jura Mountains in the far distance. It brings it all back in flashes now, as vividly as photographs.

A strange memory occurs, of racing the "small train" up the village street where it ran along the middle for a while. I do not believe one was supposed to actually race it, but that day I did, more in panic, unsure of the protocol. I learned to drive in places where trains do not run along the middle of the main street.

Facing the inescapable truth, late in October, was like being hit by a cannonball. The first thing I realized was that if he ever faced himself honestly he would know he had never loved me, and that until he faced himself the nightmare would go on, nothing would change. The dream was dying and the home I had come to love so dearly would be taken from me either way. There was nothing to hope for.

There was nothing I could do to save it for myself, only try to find a way out that was bearable, to leave everything I had fallen in love with there did not seem to be in the bearable range.

Besides, there did not seem to be anywhere left to run to. I had no money, whatever other hope of a future I might once have had, ran out slowly like grains of sand in an hourglass in front of my eyes before I ever left Ireland.

All that seemed to be left was maybe a life on the streets of some European city...Paris? Zurich? I could not face it again. Not even if it was the only way to stay alive. I was *beyond* terrified, still trying to buy into the dream a few hours at a time just to stop myself screaming, or going mad.

I often felt I was going mad.

There are days when I wish I had died there rather than be left to long for it all so bitterly and poignantly. At the time, I wanted to. I was just gathering my courage to do that for the last few weeks I was there.

When I knew I could not stand much more. I do not know how many times I walked out of that house with my little cache of pills to try to find the courage to make it easy on myself.

I could not find the courage, and instead kept clinging to false hopes, or just to one more day.

It was not about him any more. Soon after seeing the truth about him, I saw a second truth.

I did not love him; there was nothing in him to love. I had fallen in love with a lie he had told me, a part he had played. I had been desperate enough to believe in almost any hope.

Sometimes I wonder if it is the same for the Thai girls. Do they believe that they love as they sell themselves into slavery in desperation, because under it all they cannot be any less human than I?

I never saw a human being so indifferent to the pain of another human being in my life, even to a stranger. If I had not seen it, I would not have believed it was possible.

That was when I realized how genuinely cruel he was at heart, he was *enjoying* the way I was hurting. Partly I feel, because he saw my pain as progress towards having his demands met, but with growing horror I also realized, under his harmless, animal loving act, he just enjoyed the pain of others for it's own sake.

As soon as I calmed down and played my allotted part, he expected me to carry on as if nothing had happened, as if nothing was wrong. Play "perfect couple" for the audience. I just could not do it.

If only it had all been real, but it was not, and it never would be.

Once in my life, many years ago, I had to choose to leave everything I loved in a single moment, when the options ran out.

That moment will always haunt me. To have to do the same thing again must have been beyond a worst nightmare. Perhaps that is why I

evade the issue so skillfully. Even inside my own mind. I certainly did at the time.

By the end of November 1999, I knew there was no way to stay.

I tried to talk to him, many, many, very long, times. It became a regular thing. He would sit in silence waiting for me to finish, as though sitting stoically through my words were some kind of down payment on a right to continue in the same way. While I would try to find something, *anything* that would reach him and draw a response that could at least pass for communication.

If I asked for an apology, I got one, but nothing ever changed, I think apology was another down payment on continuance.

This man had claimed to love me so much, the same man had cried until 5am (his time) on the phone when I had last minute doubts about joining him. I could not believe that was not real.

Only very slowly did I realize that the tears had only been for himself, and his horror of being left alone, with no cast and no audience to give his life a semblance of substance, and with no one to control to make him feel adequate.

I realized something else. He needed me more than I needed him, in many ways. To find a victim is quite hard, but predators are ten a penny if you really want them, and nobody really does.

I realized he was not normal, that something was very wrong.

Only after I had left him did I put the pieces together. There is something called "Asperger's Syndrome". It is a very high functioning form of autism. It was discovered in Austria in 1944 and consequently, is quite well known in the German-speaking world, but only just becoming known outside of it.

People with Asperger's Syndrome are often highly intelligent and vocationally functional, with an aptitude for music. However, they are almost incapable of empathy and have a kind of "interactive dyslexia". To be honest, he fitted the profile for Asperger's Syndrome so exactly there is no question in my mind.

There would still be no doubt if I had never known that his strange behaviors, at the age of three, lead to him being tagged as, what he expressed to me as, "Retarded" and almost sent to a special school. A retired schoolteacher had intervened and insisted he be sent to a normal school.

The word "Retarded" made it seem like a simple misconception that had mercifully been ignored.

However, Asperger's Syndrome is *not* any form of retardation, often the contrary.

People with Asperger's Syndrome are not particularly abusive; his capacity for abuse was probably a dysfunctional coping skill. It is, however, recognized that people with Asperger's

Syndrome, without the right kind of help and intervention, cannot usually form healthy relationships.

Until I knew about Asperger's Syndrome, I simply assumed he was a functional Psychopath, much like my mother and my brother.

Until I knew about Asperger's Syndrome, I honestly wanted to kill him for what he had put me through in such chillingly cold blood.

As soon as I knew, I felt no more rage and quite a lot of pity. He was never given the extra help he needed to have a chance of a full social and emotional life. In Switzerland that would have been abundantly available. I suspect the reason he was not given that help is that one, or both, of his parents refused to accept the truth of his "imperfection". It is certainly not that they were not told.

People often seek comfort in telling themselves that their abusers really live miserable lives. As far as I can see, that comforting "natural justice" doesn't usually exist outside of the minds of their victims, but in this one case I am sure his life is miserable, and always has been. However, abusing me and deriving a moment of two of "pleasure" from my pain was not going to make any real difference to that.

I did not know all of this then. I think if I had, it would have made it harder to actually leave, with no tide of pent up anger to ride out on, but just as inevitable that I must.

As it happened, it was very easy to leave him, and almost impossible to leave everything else. The weeks leading up to Christmas were all-out cold war, with polite, amiable, appearances kept up at all times in public, of course.

The end came very suddenly, almost from nowhere.

"Going through the motions" was all that was left. I was not thinking about it, there was no "us" to think about, just a few scenarios to walk through, that preserved the illusion. He was happy with that.

It was not going to develop or change at all, that was as good as it would ever get.

Like a fool, I did not know that. I tried to talk to him, while we were walking the dogs, pleasantly enough too. I tried to talk about the separate lives we were slipping into, in the same home at the same time. I committed a crime. I tried to communicate.

He ignored me completely, as though I had said nothing. It was incredible. I tried again, to be ignored again. Back at home, I insisted. It was a polite, but completely insane, conversation.

I remember asking him to either get on with the paperwork for our marriage, or admit he did not want to go through with it. I honestly did not mind which. Marriage was essential for residency at

this stage (though I had found out there would have been other options).

Marriage as an institution honestly does not have any significance to me beyond that of any personal commitment. He hated the very idea of marriage, and yet had, incredibly, almost cornered me into it to meet residency requirements. Even so, I had serious doubts about the propriety of two people who, very probably, hated each other's guts, getting married.

He thrust a set of meaningless papers under my nose. I do not know how stupid he supposed me to be, but I can read basic German pretty well and recognized them for FAQ sheets he had picked up in Bern on foreign marriage in the first week of December.

He also announced he would be making the final arrangements the next day. The archaic bureaucratic problems involved would be another story in themselves.

Within 45 minutes he also announced that there was no relationship left between us, he had no feeling left for me as a woman, and he would not be back that night.

I know that sounds as if there must have been some kind of heavy row in between, but there was not. All that happened were a few terse remarks, and an Internet search concerning marriage in the Channel Isles, which might be an easier option in the end.

He just announced these things. I have no idea what was going through his mind. I stood up, eye to eye with him. I asked:

"So you are going to arrange our marriage tomorrow?"

"Yes"

"And you claim to have no feeling left for me?"

"Yes"

And I hit him...*hard*.

He knew how close to the edge I was. He knew I had nowhere to go back to. He knew I was close to suicidal and even closer to a breakdown...and he walked out...

Leaving me alone, with the pills, in a strange country where I knew no one and could not speak the language, for twenty-four hours. It does not sound so bad when you tell it, but if you had been there, it would have been so obvious. He was literally setting me up to take my own life. I am certain of it.

Why?

I suspect because if I did that he would get a lot of sympathy, instead of having to admit he "screwed up" again (all he would ever explain of any of his past relationships to me).

There was something calculating about everything he did and said that day, as if he believed I would finally either live the lie he wanted, or take my own life. No other explanation fitted.

It was not about whether he cared about me or not it was about whether he was human or not.

Nobody human could have known the state and circumstances I was in at that time, and walked out and left me alone with as much ambiguity as they could serve up, for 24 hours, knowing me well enough to know how fast I would disintegrate into blind pain and panic.

I am far from normal; I am agoraphobic and chronically sociophobic. Even to walk to the corner store is too much for me unless I am in pretty good shape.

It was so obviously monstrous I never wanted to lay eyes on him again. I was angry enough to kill him, for all of it, but most especially for that last, cold-blooded calculation with my life and my fear.

I drank several large mugs of coffee heavily laced with his 22-year-old Islay Malt and felt a little better.

I e-mailed a friend in Germany who got on the phone straight away...he actually offered to drive 500 miles to fetch me.

I could not allow that, so I arranged to meet him in Cologne. He assured me he could put me up, and find me somewhere to live. This was a dear friend, and adopted small brother I had never physically laid eyes on before.

He put everything in perspective for me, disempowered the terrifying potential in my immediate future. He gave me a piece of solid safe ground to stand and catch my breath on.

My Uncle could help me with a little money by then, if necessary. My ex mailed me "did I need anything" so I said "money".

He left an obscene amount, 2500 CHF, (about \$1,400) and 200 cigarettes in the mailbox.

It was not generosity. He knew I was probably walking out to nothing, not even hope, it was a last turn of the screw, a reminder of the material safety I was leaving behind.

The thirty-six hours it took me to pack and get out are something I could never live through again.

When the cab came, I said a brief goodbye to my ten-year-old collie dog. I could not bring him back because of quarantine laws; he had *insisted* I bring him with me.

At the time, I mistook it for kindness and sentimentality (I had a place to leave him).

Only later did I see it for what it was, another bar in the cage he intended to keep me in. He is kind

to animals; my old dog Blue will be better off there. He made quite a few friends of his own, including the animal besotted ex of my ex who would frankly kill him if anything happened to Blue.

The last sight, from a train, of my beloved Switzerland was pain I do not even have words for. At least I had somewhere to go, to collect my thoughts, and work out what to do next. It was the end of the first week of the new millennium

Quo Vadis?

So where do I go from here?

After I left Switzerland, I spent a week with my dear friend in Aachen (Aix la Chappelle), the city of Charlemagne.

It is in Germany, but almost straddles the Dutch and Belgian borders.

The Cathedral is the most remarkable building I have ever seen. The "modern additions" are Medieval Gothic, the real thing, hundreds of years old, but still as incongruous as any tacked-on structure of glass and steel.

The core of the cathedral is older, Byzantine. A timeless classic, that is very old indeed, more than 1,000 years, and yet not even slightly dated.

I could not stay there, much as I would like to believe I would be able to: I was no more capable of living a normal life among people, then and there, than I ever was.

All I could do was come home to my Uncle and the ramshackle house I had abandoned six months earlier. He had kept it on until my residency in Switzerland became legal.

I was lucky that when I left Switzerland I had a good, caring friend to go to for a week or so and collect my thoughts, because as far as I could see or still can, I have no future as such.

This, considering I have not really had a life yet, seems a tad unfair.

The family that raised me was respectable, middle class and totally psychopathic.

There have been more violent, dramatic and terrifying childhoods than mine, but few as devastatingly alien, in so many covert ways.

In that house the conventional language was used to describe emotion but with very different meanings and connotations. Empathy did not exist, it was regarded as an aberration, a mental defect, from which only I suffered. It was held to be a taint of madness.

I never heard the word "empathy" until I was 15 (though I had an highly sophisticated vocabulary long before then) when it was, perhaps significantly, explained to me in great detail as a concept by a Social Worker who was rather more aware than most of what was actually happening.

I was raised in entirely psychopathic terms, the only social skills I had the opportunity to learn from birth were psychopathic, dependent on a complete lack of empathy for others and the absence of a conscience beyond appearances.

The only social skills I learned rely on objectifying people and total moral nihilism. My innate nature renders those skills worse than useless. I know I am in the presence of a psychopathic personality or

agenda by the pervasive fear that I am under pressure to act against my conscience.

Like all traumatic triggers, this is hypersensitive. As a result, I cannot tolerate control games or power exchanges in a fairly normal range either.

The only coping skill I was ever taught was to assume control myself by any and every means. My conscience and nature could never allow me to do that. Yet I know no alternative so I become paralyzed, stressed to the limit until I can escape and hide.

In any social interaction, my learned coping skills are extremely abusive and impossible to me, I have no others and to date there has never been an opportunity to use them.

As a result, even the best of company is traumatic for me, too traumatic. Over time, I learned how to manage superficial encounters but any ongoing interaction in a social situation will inevitably result in a complete breakdown. Since I was a child, I became ingenious at avoiding ongoing social interaction. I had no choice.

But, how would I ever learn that way? I hear you ask.

How would I ever have survived any other way, is my only answer. Life, for me, is one social, emotional and psychological "catch 22" after another. I cannot hope to function among people, the stress is far too great, my

concentration deteriorates, my identity fragments and I become quite paralyzed because I *have* no learned coping skills for even the simplest situations. I live in dread of anyone "reaching out" or "trying to make friends", the more I like that person, the crueler the irony.

The much-vaunted strategy of "just being yourself" assumes that "yourself" possesses unconscious, learned, interactive skills I do not have and have never had. Common sense dictates that there is no way to replicate all the rich complexity of a normal range socialization process at the age of 43, having spent those 43 years living from a totally different perspective.

A lot of the damage in me is, in realistic terms, permanent. However, I have never known anything better, I am in far better shape than I have ever been as I am, so that I have no reason to feel any great distress.

My only real distress comes from the constant struggle to find the means of survival within the limits of my functionality. If that were solved I would probably be as content as anyone else and more than many.

This must be hard to believe, but most learned socialization happens on an unconscious level. Put simply, you do not know it is there, or how complex it is, unless it is not and you have to duplicate its function consciously. That would be a great deal easier without empathy or conscience, but I have both and both highly developed.

Empathy is innate, but conscience is in many ways a learned application of empathy. I have no choice but err on the side of caution in terms of how my choices and behaviors affect others. I could not be *blamed* if I did not, but I can never see how that would help or comfort anyone who suffered harm.

At best, the overall effect is often a kind of personal atrophy, a fear of making either one move or any other. Abusive people seem to pick this up like radar and are invariably adept at exploiting it to the hilt. I deal with that by consciously exempting those demonstrably abusive or destructive of others from considerations of conscience. I have no idea how normal, or not, that is, and if not, how close it comes to replicating normality. All I know is that it is the best I can currently do and without it, I would simply become an human doormat perhaps to the point where my survival ceased to be viable.

I have serious doubts of my own right to survival anyway.

Rational or not?

I have no way of knowing, that is how alien the world is to me.

I have never come across another human being with an equivalent background unless they found a way to reduce the huge levels of

cognitive dissonance by muting their own empathy and suppressing their own emotions.

Perhaps the main reasons I never did this are far from moral caliber. I have a violent adverse physical reaction to all forms of narcotics so they were ruled out, and alcohol upsets my stomach to the extent that I think alcoholism is pretty biochemically impossible.

However there is a core in me that refuses to become brutalized, and demands to assume responsibility for the consequences of my own actions. This might be virtue, it might be abhorrence of the family I was raised in acted out as total rebellion, or it might be some of both?

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that very few like me survive. The reason I did is probably that I was classed as unusually intelligent in the "gifted child" range, and throughout my life, that intellect has been deployed on very little apart from my survival.

How far this differs from normality is for you to judge. I can assure you it has more than a passing resemblance to living in a nightmare from my point of view.

There has been absolutely no research into people like me, the adult children of specifically psychopathic families. It is possible that not enough of us survive to warrant it? Some of the approaches that apply to other adult children of abuse are helpful but they do not allow for the

incredible level of social alienation that being raised in a psychopathic family creates.

Many Schools of Psychological Thought actually dismiss significant amounts of the things I never had the chance to learn as innate, or at least virtually so.

They are wrong. If those things were innate, I would have them. I have had to accept that the only chance I have of improving the very limited quality of my life depends on what I can discover for myself.

So that I have become my own Lab Rat. Far from ideal, but it is that or nothing.

I have tried to "get help": very hard but it remains fact that there IS none applicable to me or realistically available to me. More than one prominent psychiatrist here agrees that my only hope of any help would be to find someone researching these specifics.

So far, no dice.

Another wonderful "catch-22" is that the *wrong* help could destabilize me beyond recovery. I do not think I would help myself very much by kidding myself about that. I do however make progress alone, quite a lot really, it improves my quality of life immensely but will never be enough to render me capable of "normal" life.

In another way, I have lived too long outside "normal" life to have any reason or wish to aspire

to it, if that makes any sense at all? It has nothing to offer me.

From the outside looking in there is nothing to soften or mute the corruption and the cruelty within society. I cannot be a part of that and I cannot enable it by silence, denial or acquiescence.

Sometimes I think that all I know about the world outside my door is "where the bodies are buried".

All this and more flashed through my head in the train on my way from Germany to Ireland. I knew I was falling apart, I also knew I had been falling apart since the day I was born.

It was a nightmare journey.

I remember changing trains in Belgium, for the "Eurostar" that runs *under* the English Channel.

Changing a little money, buying envelopes and a stamp to post the spare keys for the Renault and a piece of my mind to my ex.

For six months he had ensured I was dependent upon him for everything. Yet there I was, in an huge Belgian Railway Station, all alone, bewildered, in shock too deep to panic, posting the keys of a car I had come to feel was mine, back to the man I had believed I would spend the rest of my life with.

I knew I was having what they now call a "Stress Syndrome" (it used to be called a "Nervous Breakdown").

I knew there would be no real help for me in Ireland, so I stopped off in London for a few hours (I still have a British Passport) to see if I had any better chance there.

I would have had to be in far better shape to take any chance there might have been. It would have involved waiting weeks in lodgings in a country that is strange, alien and repellant to me, a country that scares me, even though I was born and raised there. England is also a country where I genuinely do not know a living soul.

My family are dangerous and destructive, the soulless "undead", and they too are total strangers now.

My survival depends on having a place to hide from the world. I think it always has.

That leaves me forever caught between "a rock and a hard place".

Anyway, very early (three hours earlier than expected, because of mixed up connections) on a dull, windswept January morning, I arrived back in the same Port of Dublin I had left from, for a new life, almost seven months earlier.

I just wanted to crawl back into my little hole in the middle of nowhere, hide and sleep forever.

I could not believe the state of the house. The only decent shrubs and trees had been blown over in a storm. Inside, it was like a garage, only colder, and damper...

The bed (still unchanged since I had left, in the *worst* way) was actually wet in places.

I called my Doctor and told him about the pills I had stored over a year before and told him I needed real help.

Oh he gave me great help.

An emergency appointment with a genuinely very decent man, who happened to be a psychiatrist in the "receptor blocker" phase, the last stage before burn out, where all you are capable of is writing a prescription for a pill you have convinced yourself will cure everything, without even trying to hear what is actually wrong.

My Doctor then excelled himself, he began to write me regular sick notes I could not claim benefit from, refused to sign me as fit so that I could claim unemployment, and refused to sign the claim for Disability suggested by psychiatric services for 5 months. He left a suicidal and financially desperate woman without any income apart from a £35 weekly residual payment from another allowance. This seems to me to be considerably at odds with the Hippocratic Oath. It is also the Story of my Life:

- Because I have a "commanding presence".
- Because I am extremely intelligent.
- Because I speak very well.

No-one from any of the "caring professions" has ever been prepared to accept that I need any kind of help, let alone accept the truth, that I am often almost helpless human road kill. I have been left to flounder, cope as best I can, or live by my wits for all of my life. For the crime of being born into a cruel and psychopathic family who integrated my ongoing destruction into their way of life.

I was raised to see Doctors, Social Workers and the system as the "bogey-man", to preserve the family's desired façade of respectability. Yet, in real terms the system lived up to that once too often for me.

If I intellectualize it, I can understand how that works overall. This usually gives me an overwhelming urge to take off and tilt at windmills to bring it all closer into line with sanity and reality.

That does not help me very much, does it?

When I came back from Switzerland, my own Doctor strung me in a position where I could not claim welfare benefits, of any kind, for 5 months. His original reason was that he thought I would be able to live a normal life in a couple of months. He did not specify by what supernatural

means this would occur, considering I have never yet been able to live a normal life in forty years.

He was, in truth, the first General Doctor I had in 20 years, since I was pregnant. The Doctor I had when I was pregnant was fantastic, but he was picked for me and it was sheer luck that he was so good. I lost him when I had to move out of the area and never replaced him until 1997.

To an extent, I do not blame him. I cannot get myself near a Doctor at all without psyching myself up to the point where I appear to be "on top of the world".

There is, of course a reason:

When I was 15 years old, in 1973, I was involuntarily committed to one of those Victorian Asylums for 28 days, under the old UK Mental Health Act.

This was decided and signed by;

- The Social Services area Psychiatrist who had seen me for about 20 minutes some three months prior to signing the order, and never saw me again until after it was signed.
- A young locum General Practitioner who had seen me in considerable distress for no more than half an hour the night before.
- A social worker who had only met me once in his life, six months before when he was called out over Christmas to bring me from one place to another place, he had

then passed the journey by subjecting me to considerable personal abuse in front of his two small daughters who were on the back seat.

I am sure it will come as no surprise when I assert that there were other reasons entirely unconnected to my mental condition for this order.

Those reasons do not matter here, they could have been anything. The fact remains that the mechanism existed to imprison me, without trial for 28 days without even an attempt to establish real cause.

Once inside that Mental Hospital I discovered that such arbitrary orders were far from unusual. An attempt WAS made to extend that order to an indefinite order with three monthly reviews, the potential for life imprisonment.

An unknown Psychiatrist, who appeared from nowhere, saw me, questioned me a length. Over the years, several people who wanted to detach themselves from responsibility for that travesty have claimed the initiative for his appearance.

Afterwards he said in my clear hearing:

"I cannot agree to the order, if I were to do so I should be committed myself, there is nothing wrong with her".

That sentence was the only thread from which my perception of myself as sane hung for many years. The system taught me two things:

- That Doctors and Social Workers have the power to imprison without trial.
- That some of them are prepared to abuse that power without a second thought.

As a direct result of that experience, I have been terrified of Doctors and anything connected with them since. At one time, I made it a hard and fast rule never to see more than one Doctor in the same 12-month period even if it were a matter of life and death.

Of course until I finally escaped to another country, seven years later, where they have no influence, my family held the threat of involuntary committal over me as a means of imposing abusive control.

As far as I know, to this day they use that one episode as a means to conceal the abuse they subjected me to.

I learned, for my own protection, to hide any trace of distress or "instability" from a Doctor as a natural default. Now to try and express those things would just be an act, however real they are inside.

So, I do understand, to an extent, why this Doctor refused to admit to himself that there was anything wrong with me. However, when he was finally persuaded of the reality of my situation he

held the whole thing up for another two or three months for no rational reason at all. He just "did not get around" to two or three lines of paperwork, in spite of a psychiatric social worker calling on my behalf constantly.

I could not bring myself to face someone who would put my survival down on the line that way for any reason.

In one sense, that is rage at the casual way he left me to live with no income. It is rage I do not know a civilized way to express.

In another sense, it is fear. Fear of someone so far removed from the reality of my needs as to place me in a position that actively jeopardized me. Wondering how on earth you are going to survive for five months is not very good for the stress level.

I do not even know how to find another Doctor who will be any better, and I must soon, because there is something badly wrong with my lungs.

My adopted Uncle spends the weekends here, I pop to the village shop. That is my life; it is all I can handle now.

I had some marvelous support from the ladies of the Carlow Money Advisory Bureau who not only held my creditors at bay and negotiated my debts, but also held my hand and kept my head above water through it all.

In October 2000 I finally got awarded a small disability allowance, the green light for my right to survive as the mess I am, a little safe ground to stand on, and finally start to heal from.

After decades of not being able to do anything but go on finding ways to beat the odds and stay alive without abandoning my ethics (as so many others finally do), and apart from that, finding ways to suppress, deny or deal with the fear of being abandoned to a personal "Death Row".

I was awarded a disability allowance primarily because I was born into an alien and abusive environment and never given the chance to recover from it.

This is the first concrete validation, in 43 years, of my basic right to life.

It changes everything.

Just through having that tiny (meager in Ireland) guarantee of safety, my head can start to move on, function, attempt things I would never have been able to face before.

An undreamable, never mind impossible, dream came true.

Suddenly one day I stopped crying to the music, and started making it, all by myself.

I meant to try even when I was in Switzerland. I thought if I sat down and tinkered for months some kind of tune would come out.

It took three days.

I cannot believe I did it.

I honestly cannot believe it.

To be able to write music (complex fully orchestrated stuff too) is enough for me for the rest of my life.

I doubt any of it will ever become famous, or that many people will hear it. I do not know enough about "interfacing" with the world to bring that about.

Quite objectively, it seems a shame.

Apparently, I can conceive new melodies and orchestrate them faster than Mozart. Without ever having had any training.

That seems the kind of thing somebody somewhere would have a use for. But, I would not know how to make that connection.

I am not boasting here, it is all too late for me. Nothing is ever going to give me a real life now, and as long as I do not lose any more I am happy with what I have.

I am pleading for the next generation of wasted, set-aside lives.

You never know what you are wasting.

When you see an Hooker on the side of the road how do you know that the equivalent of everything in this book, and everything it took to write it, is not floating around inside her head, the way it was in mine?

There was all of this and a lot more besides, including a few symphonies.

Maybe I am not worth keeping alive, but the music in me certainly is.

