Destroyed

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Extract

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Author's Note

Many of the events described in this book occurred as the result of the unspeakable actions of various individuals. Some of those involved in, or close to, these events are still alive, and I have been advised that several of these people cannot be identified for legal reasons. As a result I have been obliged to conceal the identity of certain characters in the book. At no point, however, have I altered or exaggerated the facts of what happened to me.

Prologue: Night-time

It is the darkness I remember most of all. The darkness and the strangeness of it all.

I am eight years old and lying in my bed. Mum and Dad are asleep. My brothers, Sean and Stuart, are asleep. My little sister, Mandy, is asleep. All around me is pitch-black, and I am huddled under my covers hoping that they will protect me from the hidden terrors of the dark. Night-times have always been scary for me. Bad things happen at night. Things that shouldn't happen.

But tonight I can't sleep, and morning seems a long way away. I am in a strange room in a strange house. The people I am with are strangers and I don't like it here. My mum tucked me in a long time ago, gave me a kiss on my forehead, and whispered, 'Good night, Jayne.' But I have been awake ever since, a jumble of confused thoughts going round in my head. I have been thinking of home, of the life I left behind. And I have been thinking about how

happy all the other children seem to be. There will be a party in two days' time, with dressing-up, and music, and cakes. The others are filled with excitement, and I wish I could share it, but somehow I can't.

Something isn't right. It's not just that I find myself in a new place, far away from the life I know so well. There is something else. Some*one* else. His name is Graham. He has red hair and piercing green eyes that seem to see right through me. The grown-ups like him: they like the way he talks to them, and the way he acts with us children. But I am not so sure. I am too little to speak up, to have an opinion about such things, but I don't understand why he always seems to *be* there. When I walk into a room, he is waiting for me. When I try to find somewhere to be alone, he turns up like a bad penny, disturbing me with some made-up question or errand. Occasionally he touches me, and my flesh creeps when he does. I hate it so much.

When the grown-ups are around he goes out of his way to help them, and talks to me in that cheerful, friendly, encouraging voice. Now and then, however, when no one else can see, I catch him looking at me. I don't like the expression in his eyes. There is a deadness there. A flatness. But when it is just me and him, he changes. He becomes scary. He shouts at me, tells me I am stupid, that I am annoying and clumsy and that I am doing things wrong. That I am naughty and will upset my parents. It makes me

want to cry, and sometimes I do – though not when the grown-ups are around. It would make them ask what was wrong, and I know I won't be believed even if I find the words for these feelings that I don't understand.

I close my eyes tightly, praying for sleep to come, to extinguish my worries and make me feel safe again. And eventually it does, but not before I am forced to look at his face in my mind's eye, to hear his voice echo in my head.

If I had known what he had in his mind, I would never have fallen asleep that night. I would never have been *able* to fall asleep. I would have run straight into my mum and dad's room, begged them to let me sleep with them. I would have screamed and shouted, no matter how much it disturbed my family and our hosts. But as I sleep, I have no idea that my life is about to change for ever. Of course I don't. Why would I?

What child, in her innocence, could possibly imagine the things that are about to happen?

What child, in her innocence, could know that grown-ups could be so evil?

What child, in her innocence, could begin to understand why?

As I sleep, he is preparing himself. He knows what is going to happen. He knows the urges that are controlling him. He knows the only thing that will satisfy them.

Worst of all, he knows where I am.

He leaves his room in the dead of night. The rest of the household asleep, he creeps along the corridor. He stops outside my door. His breath is unsteady with excitement, and so are his hands. Slowly, quietly, the door opens and he steps inside, closing the door silently behind him. For a few moments he looks down at the little girl in the bed, fast asleep. She will be awake soon, but when that happens he knows how he will keep her quiet, both for the moment and in the future.

He's got it all worked out.

I am allowed a few more seconds of blissful sleep. Of innocence and ignorance of the terrible things that can happen to a child.

But then he takes another step towards me. He bends down and pulls back the blankets. He forces himself on top of my curled-up, sleeping body.

And so it begins.

1
Through the Window

Remembering the past is like looking through a window.

When I think back on my life, I visualise myself gazing through that window and seeing the little girl that I used to be and all the things that happened to her. It's like looking at a different person, and at times I find myself wanting to bang furiously on the glass, attract her attention and tell her the things I know now. Maybe, if someone had done that back then, everything might have turned out differently and the events that followed might not have happened.

But memories don't work like that, and no matter how much I bang on that window, the little girl remains deaf to it, and I am forced to witness every detail of my childhood as a helpless observer. I find myself wishing I could draw a curtain, turn and look in a different direction. But that is not possible.

I was born in Southend-on-Sea, the daughter of Brian and Sandra Horgan. My mum had been born in Southend in 1945, the eldest of nine children and the only girl. Despite the large number of children, hers was a loving,

stable upbringing, my nan and granddad always putting their kids first. Dad was born in the same year in Croydon. Sadly his father died when he was very young, and my grandmother went on to marry the man I came to think of as my grandfather.

When he was sixteen, my father worked on the big wheel at the fairground in Southend; Mum also worked there, on one of the other fairground rides, and that is how they met. It was 1961 – the sixties were just beginning; rock and roll was at its height. Dad must have been keen, because more often than not after he had finished work, he would ride back to Croydon on his prized motorbike and change into a dapper suit, while Mum went home and dressed up in an elegant dress and stilettos. He would then drive all the way back to Southend and take her out for the evening. Brian and Sandra would go out dancing to Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly and the other sounds of the early sixties.

The sixties may have been just starting, but the sexual revolution had not yet arrived in Southend-on-Sea. As was the norm, my parents decided to get married after they had been courting for less than a year. They were both seventeen years old by that time, and their first child – my brother Sean – arrived soon after, when they were eighteen. A second son, Stuart, was born in 1965. I came along on 30 January 1969.

We were not a wealthy family, though I don't suppose we were much worse off than most working-class families in those difficult days of the early 1970s. When it became clear that the wage of a Ferris-wheel attendant was not going to be enough to support a family, Dad took a job as a long-distance lorry driver, taking loads mostly to Northern Ireland. Mum, of course, had her hands full with us, but as we lived only round the corner from my nan and granddad's in Southend, she got a lot of help.

The nature of Dad's work meant that he was often away from home for long periods of time; perhaps it was this that put a strain on my parents' marriage; perhaps they just encountered the same problems that all married couples run into. Whatever the reasons, all I know is that one day my dad didn't come home. In Mum's books, however, families were meant to stay together, so she decided to travel to Northern Ireland to track him down.

And so I was packed off to stay with my relations while Mum went about the difficult business of saving her marriage.

My relatives' resources were limited and there wasn't much room, so Sean and Stuart, being older, were sent into foster care. How they must have felt, both of them still little boys, walking into the unfamiliar house of a strange family, I can only imagine. Years later, Sean would remember being bundled into a car while his little brother was driven away

in another: the image of little Stuart looking terrified as he pressed his hands against the glass of the car window before he was driven away has stayed with him. And Stuart himself told me of his overriding memory of his foster home. He had been allowed to take a toy with him, and so he chose his beloved yellow Tonka truck. A few days after he arrived at the foster home, he was quietly playing on his own with the toy when another of the children picked it up, dropped it on the floor and smashed it to pieces. Little Stuart was inconsolable, but then the child who had broken the toy told the grown-ups that Stuart himself had done it, and my brother was punished for not taking care of his things. On other occasions, one of the other children would deliberately urinate on his bed, so that Stuart would get the blame as well as the shame. I'm sure the grown-ups didn't know what was going on, and in later life Stuart recalled that they were nice people. But children can be so unkind, and he was on the receiving end of it.

Thankfully for them, the ordeal of the foster home didn't last for long. Mum and Dad sorted things out, and the family was reunited. We upped roots and moved to Larne in Northern Ireland, just north of Belfast, where my parents found a flat above a shoe shop. This was the first home that I remember.

Mum found the move to Larne extremely hard: no family to help with looking after the kids, and no friends.

Dad still had to earn a living for us, and so he was away, regularly, from Sunday night until Friday afternoon.

Our new home was dingy and run-down. The walls were high, the windows were small. We would have liked the luxury of carpet on the floor, but there was no money for that. The floorboards were ill-fitting, splintered and rough, and they had nails sticking dangerously out of them. To walk barefoot in the bedroom would be foolish; to do so in the dark would be even more so. Much better to stay under the covers, hidden from the night and whatever terrors it might contain. From the start, life there was very hard as there was little money to go around.

I was unsettled and scared of our new house – it all felt so strange and I found it difficult to sleep. One night stands out in my mind the most; I remember it like it was yesterday. My eyes shot open. I don't recall what time it was; I only remember being terrified: the usual childhood fears of monsters under the bed and shadows against the window. Something creaked, and I pulled the covers more firmly around my body.

I lay wide-eyed in the darkness, a chill running through me. I hoped the creaking sound would go away, but it didn't. If anything it got louder. At times I thought there was something in my room. I didn't want to be by myself any more, so I slipped out from under the covers and braved the cold, nail-strewn floor. As I crept towards the door, the

darkness enclosed me, stuck to me. I grew more frightened. I wanted to get back to my bed, but I had lost my bearings now and didn't know which way to turn. I started groping in the darkness, fumbling. Suddenly my fingertips brushed the doorknob. As quietly as my childlike clumsiness would allow, I opened it and stepped outside.

Now that I was in the corridor however, I was paralysed with fear. It was lighter here – perhaps a lamp was on – but no more comforting for that. I sat on the floor, hugging my knees.

Too scared to go and see my mum, too scared to go back to bed, I sat there with ever more terrifying thoughts whizzing round my mind. Thoughts of ghosts and monsters – all coming to get me.

And then, just as my fear threatened to overwhelm me, he was there.

I don't know where he came from – my memory of that flat is too hazy for me to know where his bedroom was – but his sudden presence made me jump. As I did so, my bare foot scraped along the floor and snagged on an unseen nail. Instantly my skin was covered in bright scarlet blood, the colour of poster paints. I breathed in sharply from the pain, then looked to my brother for comfort.

'I'm frightened, Stu,' I said.

Stuart was only eight years old, but he had the power to make it all OK like no adult could. He sat down next to me,

put his arm around my shoulder, and pulled me tightly towards him. 'Don't worry, Jayne,' he told me reassuringly. 'There's nothing to be scared of. It'll be all right in the morning. You'll see.'

'My foot hurts,' I told him. We both looked down to see the blood on my toe, and I remember that sight making me shiver. It didn't worry Stuart, though. He reached out, and pushed his thumb against the wound. 'If you press it,' he told me, his voice patient, 'it'll stop bleeding.'

I bit my lip and allowed him to make it better. Sure enough, the flow of blood soon eased, so he took off his sock, spat on it, and wrapped it round my toe as a makeshift bandage.

'Come on,' he said. 'You can sleep in my bed tonight.'

I looked at him gratefully as he led me along the corridor to his bedroom. 'I'm still scared, Stu,' I told him when I was safely in his bed.

'I told you, Jayne, there's nothing for you to worry about. You're safe. It'll be OK in the morning.' He put his arms round me as I lay there and gave me a cuddle. 'I'll look after you,' he whispered, and I knew that he would.

He stroked my hair. 'Just go to sleep, Jayne,' he said. 'Go to sleep, and I'll be here when you wake up.'

'Do you promise?' I asked him.

'Yes, Jayne,' he replied. 'I promise.'

The big, brightly coloured, crocheted blanket with

which he had covered me smelled of old things – old houses, old people. Musty. But I didn't mind, because Stuart was there with me. And so, with that smell in my nose, and the feeling of Stuart's hand stroking my hair, I finally fell asleep.

When I awoke again, it was light. True to his word, Stuart was still there, sitting on the floor. And even though he was asleep, his hand was still clasped firmly around mine. Now that it was light outside, and the sun had dispelled the shadows from that unwelcoming flat, I wasn't frightened any more.

We did not stay above the shoe shop for long. Soon we were all packed into Dad's lorry and moved into a bigger, brighter, more comfortable house in Antiville Road. Compared to our previous place it was like a palace – though in truth it was probably very ordinary – and the day we moved in I remember Sean, Stuart and myself being astonished by the size of the windows, and running around the empty rooms, shouting to make our voices echo. It was a perfect, idyllic place. There was even a large garden where Dad built us our own little farmyard, complete with real chickens.

'Are they ours, Dad?' I asked. 'To keep?'

'Course they are, Jayne,' he replied with a smile. 'And if you learn how to look after them properly, we'll get some ducks too.'

I smiled with pleasure as he explained how to look after the chickens and, true to his word, not long after that he came home one weekend, smiling excitedly, with some ducks. Soon we had hedgehogs and frogs as well. It was paradise for a little girl.

My memories are of a warm, comfortable place where I felt happy and secure. For a time when we were at Antiville Road, I started wetting the bed. Mum was brilliant, creating a little star chart just for me and rewarding me with gold stars if I woke up dry. I was so desperate for one of those little gold stars and praise from my mum that I did the very best I could not to wet the bed, and soon I didn't need that star chart any more.

While we were at Antiville Road, there was another big change: Mum fell pregnant again. I was so excited at the prospect of a new baby in the house, and used to pester my mum with questions.

'Will it be a boy or a girl, Mum?'

'We don't know yet, Jayne. We won't know until the baby's born.'

I privately hoped it would be a girl, as I already had two brothers.

'Will I be able to play with it, Mum? Will we be friends?'

'Of course you'll be friends, Jayne. It'll be your little brother or sister.'

I started playing out little fantasies about what a good big

sister I would be when the baby arrived. I would help Mum in any way I could, and look after the baby whenever she was busy doing something else. And when Mandy was first born, I was so excited. It meant Dad was around, for a start, looking after us for two weeks and spoiling us rotten while Mum was in hospital.

Dad seemed so happy about the new arrival. 'You looking forward to being a big sister?' he asked me one evening while I was helping him cook dinner for the four of us who were still at home.

I nodded enthusiastically, a big grin on my face.

Dad bent down then, and gave me a cuddle. 'It's an important job, being a big sister, you know.'

'I know, Dad. I'll try my hardest.'

'Course you will, Jayne. But you've got to always remember that you're still my little girl. I don't want you feeling left out, just because everyone's excited about the new baby.'

'Ok, Dad,' I replied happily as he hugged me tighter, before we went back to cooking dinner.

Sean, Stuart and I had a happy couple of weeks with my dad, waiting for the baby to come home. We would go for long walks, holding hands; he would tell me silly jokes and pull funny faces – I felt as close to him then as I ever have done. And when Mum and Mandy finally arrived home, I got a little present – a Barbie doll of my own. She had a

yellow hat and raincoat, and little wellies just like mine. The day I was given her, it was pouring with rain, and I was allowed to walk to school with my doll dressed up in her waterproofs. It was fun, I decided, having a sister.

Reality never quite lives up to a child's expectations however, and of course things were not quite the way I imagined they would be when Mandy arrived. Up until then, I had always been the baby of the family. With Mandy's arrival, things changed. I started feeling really left out. I don't know when I first managed to convince myself that Mum preferred Mandy, but as time passed that was certainly how I felt.

It's a terrible thing for a child to convince herself that her mum loves someone else more than her, but while I never resented Mandy, I felt, probably wrongly, that I was never able to do anything right in my mum's eyes once she arrived.

On one occasion, Mum was busy cleaning the house. I thought it would be a help to her if I picked Mandy up and sat with her for a while so that she could get on with her chores uninterrupted. I took her in my arms and turned round, not realising that the vacuum cleaner was in the middle of the floor behind me. I tripped up, and Mandy fell from my arms on to the floor, hitting her head. Mum was there immediately. She took one look at the situation and quite rightly I was in really bad trouble.

I opened my mouth to try to explain what had happened, but all that came out were big sobs – distress that I had hurt my sister, of course, but also distress that I had made Mum angry with me.

Things were different between me and Mum after that. I know it was me who changed, not her, and it seemed that whenever I tried to do the right thing, I messed up in her eyes. I became worried all the time – I couldn't tell anyone how I felt, not even my dad or Stuart. I didn't want to cause any trouble or seem jealous. Deep down I knew I was being silly. From my perspective, I was always to blame, and Mandy seemed to get all the attention and love.

I became known as the clumsy one in the family.

I desperately wanted my mum's approval. But the harder I tried to please her, the clumsier I became, and as time passed, I simply learned to accept that this was the way things were. I loved my mum just like I loved my dad, but I had managed to convince myself that I was second best, and I was just going to have to get used to it.

We would have been happy to stay at Antiville Road for the rest of our childhood had we been given the opportunity. But we weren't. I don't know why we had to move out of that house, but move out of it we did, to a run-down, bombed-out area. Our new home was in a road called Hope Street.