Lovereading.co.uk

The Middle Place

Kelly Corrigan

Published by Ebury Press

Extract

Copyright © Kelly Corrigan 2008

Published in 2010 by Ebury Press,
an imprint of the Random House Group Ltd

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

'A heartbreaking, life-affirming and captivating celebration of love' JILL MANSELL

The *New York Times* bestseller

the middle place

kelly corrigan



1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Some names and identifying details of people described in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

Published in 2010 by Ebury Press, an imprint of Ebury Publishing
A Random House Group company
First published in the USA by Hyperion in 2008

Copyright © Kelly Corrigan 2008

Non-exclusive permission granted to reprint four lines from Lowell T. George, 'Roll Um Easy'. Naked Snake Music, July 31, 2007

Photo credits: page 118, Jen Corrigan; page 263, Andy Sheehan

Kelly Corrigan has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

Addresses for companies within the Random House Group can be found at www.randomhouse.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organisation. All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace approved FSC certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement policy can be found at www.rbooks.co.uk/environment

Printed in the UK by CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, RG1 8EX

ISBN 9780091936020

To buy books by your favourite authors and register for offers visit www.rbooks.co.uk

Chapter One

monday,
august 2, 2004

August is a terrible time to be born.

I aspire to be the self-actualized person who no longer needs or even wants her birthday to be noticed. I fight the urge to plan something. *It's so self-serving*, I tell myself. But this one—thirty-seven—this one is shaping up to be the most mundane, uninspired birthday to date and I'm not sure I can leave it alone.

To: The Ladies
Re: Lunch
Date: Monday, August 2, 2004

As I'm sure you've committed to memory, my birthday is August 16. Mine and Georgia's and Madonna's and Menachem Begin's. But this year, I just want to celebrate mine. Could I talk you into meeting me for lunch in San Francisco? Maybe somewhere with a deck that serves an

icy noontime cocktail? Lemme know if you can sneak out on Sat August 21 and I'll get back to you with a locale.
Love,
Kel
PS People bearing gifts will be stoned to death.

Oh well, I think, noting that my childish need for birthdayness won again, *I tried*. I hit send and start my routine: pull on yesterday's yoga pants (I don't actually do yoga), pair them with a new green T-shirt from Costco, toast frozen waffle for Claire, smear bagel with cream cheese for Georgia, water down juices for both, strap girls into car seats, drop girls off at preschool, come home to move things (dishes to shelves, cans to recycling, socks to laundry basket, bills to pile, shoes to closet). By 11:30 A.M., after I've lost the whole morning to a couple dozen five-minute tasks, it's time to head out for pickup and begin the afternoon routine, which is as dull and typical as the morning routine, so I'll spare you.

Edward, my husband of four years and the father of these girls, is in Philadelphia for work. He usually bathes the girls; it's his time with them at the end of each day, and based on what I overhear, it generally starts out pleasant, quickly becomes trying, and then, by lights out, circles back around to delightful. The fact that he puts the girls down "after a long hard day at the office" makes my mother adore him. As she should. He's full-service.

On this particular night, after washing the crumbs of chicken nuggets off their plates and successfully negotiating a trade of ten lima beans for a handful of chocolate chips, I take the girls up to the bathroom. Georgia likes to wash my hair. She likes to be the mommy. She'd like to wash her little sister's hair too, but Claire won't have it. When Edward is

away, I often find that I've been talked into the tub so the girls can pour too much shampoo on my bushy brown hair. This night is such a night, except on this night, as I brush past my breast to get some soap out of my eyes, I think I feel something hard, just there, under the skin. I touch it once, pressing it lightly with the open palm of my hand, and then, after a flash of shock passes through me, I force my full attention to bathing the girls.

My girls are good—one chubby, one scrawny, both funny. Claire is a year and a half old, and Georgia will turn three next week. They seem older, but for different reasons. Georgia regularly confounds me with questions like "Does *wrecked* mean *ruined*?" and "What means *language*?" Claire is topping out at the hundredth percentile for height, weight, and head size. They love Van Halen and Play-Doh and fighting over old rubber bands and barrettes they won't keep in their hair. I love them madly and hope they will be older sisters to more kids just like them.

As I dry myself off, I know I have to touch it again, just to be sure I'm wrong. But I'm not and so I start moving at a manic pace, directing the girls in that weird, strained way mothers do in movies when they find out a bomb is about to go off in their basement, right below where their children are blithely playing with their Legos.

"Georgia, honey, I need you to get in your pajamas right now and meet me at the top of the stairs. Claire, pick up that nightgown and bring it straight to me. Let's go, sweetheart. Right this minute."

As I give them their instructions, I dial my ob-gyn at home. Dr. Birenbaum is also my friend Emily, and she lives about ten minutes away. She answers, and I can hear her ten-month-old babbling in the background. Emily is happy to have us come over and give me a quick feel.

It's late, dark outside. On the short ride over, we listen to the *American Idol* CD that Georgia's friend left in our car. The girls are thrilled to be riding around in their pajamas instead of going to bed. I tell them we are having a dance party at Emily's.

"Mommy? Mommy? At Emily's? When we are having the dance party, Claire can't dance on the table because she could fall and be in a cast. Right, Mommy?" Georgia asks. I had recently impressed Georgia with a story about a boy who broke his leg by jumping on a bed. He had a cast on for six weeks. "Because she will cry and have to go to the hospital and get so many shots. Right, Mommy?"

I had emphasized how unpleasant hospitals are.

Then I hear myself say, "That's right, Peach. Doctors, hospitals, lots of shots."

Emily gives me an exam on her sofa. We joke about her husband coming home to find me topless on his couch, arms over my head. I say I was hoping he would be there so I could get a two-for-one. Georgia and Claire are terribly charming, asking if Emily will tickle them too and then trying breast exams on each other. It's probably a cyst, Emily assures me. I leave Berkeley twenty minutes later, relieved to have a doctor involved. Emily will line up a mammogram for me in the next couple of days, just to be sure.

I come home, carry the girls to their beds one by one, and wait for Edward to call from his business trip. He works for TiVo, and he's gone to Philly to negotiate a deal with Comcast. When he calls, he runs through the highlights of his day—the contract's coming along, stuck on one issue, one of the guys is a real prick. We tell each other how tired we are. He mentions a sore throat.

Then, in a carefully controlled tone, I say, "So, when I was

in the bath with the girls, I was, you know, washing myself, and I found a lump." As I talk, I touch it again and again, like you would a loose tooth or a canker sore, each time, surprised to find it still there. "It's hard as a rock. It's so *right there*. You won't believe it."

I tell him everything Emily told me; that it is hard, which is bad, but it is movable, which is good, and that in younger women, lumps tend to be cysts.

"Okay, that's good. And you have no breast cancer in your family, so that's good. And hopefully you can get a mammogram tomorrow or the next day and we can be sure," he says, in character. He is a man of reason, my husband. He does not buy into worry. "It's gotta be a cyst," he adds. We hang up a few minutes later, both projecting optimism.

Alone in my room, though, I feel the onset of alarm. I lay my whole body across it, to muffle the earsplitting sound. To fall asleep, I read a long article from a ten-year-old *National Geographic* about Hurricane Andrew in Florida. On the cover, there's a dirty, sticky, sunburned Marine holding a newly homeless toddler. The guy who wrote the article says that over the course of ten days the hurricane revealed itself, starting as just a patch of thunderstorms, then becoming a tropical storm, and eventually showing its true colors as the unstoppable hurricane it was. A local TV reporter named Bryan Norcross stayed on the air for twenty-two hours straight, "talking his listeners through the most horrifying hours of their lives, telling them how to find safe places in houses that were blowing apart." I don't usually last for more than a couple of pages at night, but tonight, I keep going until I finish. I have to follow the arc from panic to toil to renewal. I have to get to the end, to the part where the devastation gives way to rebirth. I

read this one sentence over and over again, until I am ready to turn out the light:

"Seven weeks after the storm, there are signs of recovery. Many trees are flush with new growth. Power has been restored. It will be a splendid place once again."

'If you ever forget what really matters in life, read this book'
STEPHANIE CALMAN

At thirty-six, Kelly Corrigan had a marriage that worked, two funny, active kids and a weekly newspaper column. Even so, Kelly still saw herself as the daughter of garrulous charmer George Corrigan. She was living deep within the Middle Place – 'that sliver of time when parenthood and childhood overlap' – comfortably wedged between her adult duties and her parents' care.

But Kelly is abruptly shoved into coming-of-age when she finds a lump in her breast – and gets the diagnosis no one wants to hear. When George, too, learns that he has late-stage cancer, it is Kelly's turn to take care of the man who had always taken care of her – and to show us a woman who finally takes the leap and grows up.

'I loved *The Middle Place*. It isn't about cancer, it's about love. It's also very funny – I really couldn't put it down'
KATIE FFORDE



EBURY PRESS
ISBN 978-0-091-93602-0
9 780091 936020
£7.99 Memoir www.rbooks.co.uk
Cover design by Becky Glibbery.
Cover photograph © Lee Frost: Trevillion Images.