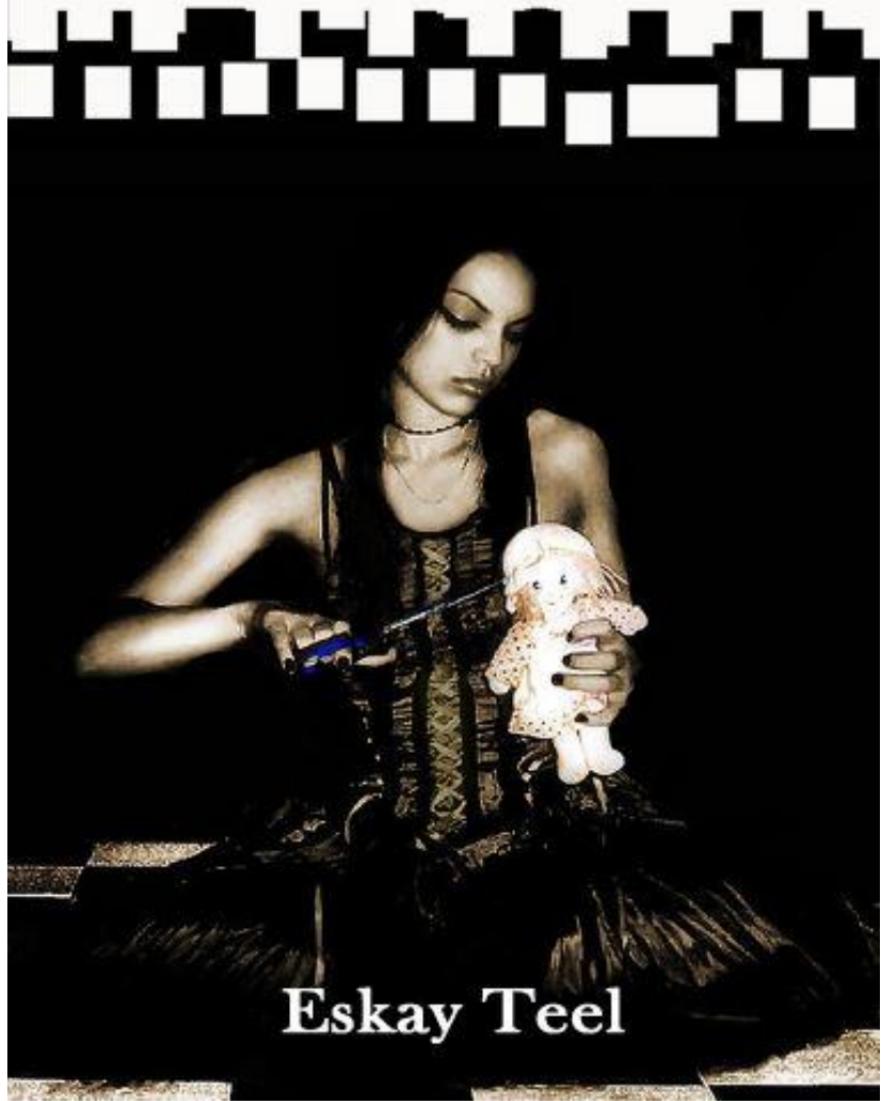


Alice in Worcestershire

Brummie girls do cry



Eskay Teel

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About the author

DESPITE being officially out-of-parental-control at the age of thirteen in the 1970's; experiencing the 'predictable' double-rape and all the other disturbing things you read about in her book, this 'Brummie' has turned out 'Alright, thanks mate!'

Eskay Teel lives as an expat with her Yorkshire-born husband in Mumbai, where they've lived since 2014. They were in Dubai for six years before that, and you'll read about expat life as she candidly talks-to-the-reader within the pages, and especially in the very last chapter called 'Writing the book'.

In 2017, Eskay and her husband plan to return to the UK to live 'The Good Life' - with low energy bills, a few chickens for fresh eggs, and a couple of acres for the grandchildren to get lost in.

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Alice in Worcestershire

Dedications

22 June 2013

On the day we scattered his ashes, the wind was blowing and
some grey ash went on to my hand.
Instead of freaking out, I caressed it into my skin
and it felt like *the* most natural thing to do
Because I was a part of him and he was a part of me.

30 December 2016

She heard the rustle of feathers - it was time to go.
And then there were six.

Alice - Chapters

Why Alice?

The white pump period

The long walk home

Ward of court

The police officer's tetanus

Olivia: the nun-witch of St John's

Mr A's question

Social services' historical records

The fart and the black plimsoll

Sixteen and bloomin' pregnant

Writing the book

photo: In Worcester - age 13

photo: Back in Birmingham - age 16

letter: Dear Mum

Acknowledgements

Why Alice?

'When I get home, I shall write a book about this place...

If I ever do get home.'

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

In the murky shadow of post-rape, poisonous black questions loiter in your mind, and probe every hidden corner like ominous talons hunting for a weak spot to molest. Then they pounce and prod accusingly until you blame yourself, even if you are only thirteen years old.

Today, I'm going to tell you the full story for the first time, after thirty-six years of patching up my emotional strong-box with dissolvable sticky tape.

As you read my true story, consider that this was the same era that the monsters Fred and Rose West were hunting down young females. One of those girls was from the same children's home that I was in. Her family and the authorities initially thought she'd absconded, but were puzzled as to why she hadn't taken anything with her.

This is from the *Independent* newspaper:

Carol Ann Cooper. Born April 1958 in Luton, she disappeared on 10 November 1973 aged 15. She had been living at The Pines children's home in Worcester, and was spending the weekend with her grandmother in the Warndon area of the city.

Her remains weren't found until over twenty-one years later – in the Wests' cellar.

Its early morning here in Dubai and the sun is already shining on the waters of the pristine marina outside. My husband is at work in baking-hot Abu Dhabi and I'm sitting at the desk in our modern waterfront apartment. Our three fascinating terrapins are enjoying the rays out on the terrace, and the English language radio show is on in the background. I've caught up with Facebook and armed myself with fresh full-caff coffee and a full pack of mint-flavoured cigarettes.

Here we go...

I'd been 'resident' in The Pines children's assessment centre in Bilford Road, Worcester, once before – on a three-month temporary and voluntary basis. My intake record at that time stated that I was *beyond parental control*. It said bluntly, *Parents unable to cope*.

My best friend was Pauline. She was there when I first went 'in' and was still there when I went back the second time. At sixteen, she was what you could rightly call a 'rough diamond'. Under her black-man's-meat headscarf, that she wore constantly, she had dyed blonde hair that was lank, long and very thin. It was nice when she washed it but

then she'd immediately wrap the scarf around her head and tie a tight knot at the back.

Her broken nose was a contribution from her ex-boyfriend/pimp, she told me, and it didn't help that she wore no make-up at all to pretty-up her faded aqua-coloured eyes. She always wore fitted jeans around her ample posterior, and open brown leather sandals which showed her toenails painted a deep red colour. Her pale legs were peppered with little round scars where a screwdriver had been jabbed into them, and there were several cigarette-burn scars as well. On her arms, she had crude tattoos of crosses and hearts, and various names.

She wasn't a bully, but her thin mouth made her look more serious than she was. She had a mature, cool inner strength that was like an invisible fortress. I admired her. And I needed her.

The home was divided into three units for different age groups and in our unit, we all had separate bedrooms. In Pauline's bedroom, we listened to Bob Marley and Big Youth constantly, and because of her I know all the words to all the songs on the reggae album *Rastaman Vibration!*

I didn't know she was a prostitute until she had an argument with another girl in our kitchen one day when the three of us had washing-up duties together.

In the long narrow kitchen, Pauline and another girl, Lena, were calling each other ‘slag’. Lena had a white mother and a black father - or a white father and black mother: I can’t remember which, because I never saw any of them visit her. She was very skinny, and had an Afro like a big black beach ball. She and Pauline normally tolerated each other, but today something unknown to me had stirred up their tempers before we went in to do the mountain of washing-up.

Lena, standing slightly taller than Pauline, but looking even taller with the extra inches on her Afro, suddenly said in a ‘my dad’s better than your dad’ tone, ‘At least I don’t charge for it.’ To which Pauline snarled, ‘At least I don’t give it away!’

The plate and tea towel in my hands nearly dropped on the floor. Lena had to shove past Pauline and me to open the door and storm out of the kitchen, without saying another word - leaving a dense, amplified, solid silence between me and Pauline that dominated the small room.

Nervous and nearly choking, I bravely asked, ‘Are you a pros-ti-tute?’ I actually said it like that. I knew I was asking a question that might get me beaten up, and I had to force the three syllables to stumble off my tongue and bounce around innocently on the stainless-steel draining board while I waited for her reply.

I expected her to go mental and deny it, but she just said plainly: 'Yes.' And we carried on with the washing-up.

My mum had called me a prostitute once. I'd laughed in her face and called her stupid, but didn't really know what it meant. It had to be a bad thing though, so as soon as possible, I looked it up in my favourite book, the dictionary, and then laughed even harder.

I was satisfied that she'd spent some time thinking about me, only me.

Pauline had been in the care system way before me and I suppose worse things had happened to her than early lights-out. She had a lot of time for me and was like a pretend big sister. Some of the time, though, this was not a good thing and sometimes the roles were reversed.

It was with this pretend big sister that a day trip was planned in the hot summer of 1976 - from The Pines in Worcester to Birmingham City - when I was still thirteen.

We got permission from our carers and were warned about getting back at the allocated time, which was an out of the ordinary 10pm for a long trip out. We had enough bus fare for the journey and a bit of spending money in our pockets. Our intention was to pop in to see Pauline's mum in Handsworth first, and then go shopping for some prized Trojan-label records.

Her mother, I assumed before we got there, must also be a prostitute because she lived with a black man!

Fascinated that this mother and daughter had relationships with black men, I thought that they must be dangerously, deliciously, anti ... *something*.

I was half scared and half excited thinking about going into this alien, dangerous area full of ‘real’ criminal life with dangerous black people; cheap prostitution; wacky-backy-smoking bandits – and, apparently, no sheriff in town. The lure was irresistible, but it was only for a peek, from an onlooker’s point of view. I was fascinated, and keen to be shocked.

The sun was shining when we reached Birmingham and we went straight to Pauline’s mum’s front door. We were greeted with a brusque Brummie accent.

‘What you doin’ ’ere?’

Pauline impatiently told her mum, ‘Don’t worry, we haven’t run away.’

We all walked together into the small lounge which was directly behind the front door.

Like most kids in children’s homes, Pauline didn’t have a bedroom of her own at her mum’s house anymore, so she didn’t have any wall posters to show me or teenage treasure

and stuff, so we had a rushed cup of tea on her mum's scraggy but clean sofa.

Looking around, I was disappointed that the house wasn't anything like I'd imagined. The picture in my head had been a cosy extravagant sweet-smelling boudoir with a care-free madam draping feathers around her neck in a cavalier fashion, wearing a short skirt and showing lacy stocking tops. In stark contrast, it was a single-story prefab with a run-down rough and tough housewife. She looked softer than Pauline though because she wore a dress and didn't have a headscarf on, so I could see her brushed blonde hair.

The ageing black boyfriend was a reality check let-down as well. He was mending a car outside, and being served mugs of tea by Pauline's mother. There were no dreadlocks like Bob Marley and Big Youth; no trilby; no massive cone-shaped spliff hanging from his mouth like on the front of the music albums; and no 'Black Power' slogan on his oily white vest.

To complete my disenchantment, his treasured black-man's-wheels was just an old Ford Escort with patchy paintwork, parked up on ramps, with the bonnet hooked open and vital-looking parts scattered around the floor.

I don't remember any goodbye hugs for Pauline as we left but they didn't argue, so that was a bonus.

Kids like me imagine that other mothers and daughters are overjoyed when they meet each other, that they sit holding hands after a long loving hug, and they laugh with each other, and then the mother asks her dear daughter if there's anything she needs, and whether she's OK.

Why does that last paragraph always made me cry?

Pauline tried to cover up her embarrassment by excitedly telling me that we could go to a 'blues' party later.

'Wow! Great – what's one of them?'

She told me a 'blues' was a completely illegal place to be, where all the music was reggae and all the people smoke drugs, drink from cans and dance all night. Of course, we just *had* to go!

I can't believe, thinking back to that evening before the 'party', that I was worried about not having any different clothes to change into. I was worried about what people would think of me, dressed in normal day clothes for a party. I'd instantly forgotten that we were in care and under strict instructions to be back on time. We'd be reported as 'absconded and missing' by ten o'clock, and when the police found us we'd be taken back to The Pines in deep trouble.

It was too late. We were free!

Before I continue with this story let me tell you that I'd never ever been involved in drugs. This was the first time I'd even been near it, and I Never (leave that capital N in there) had any this night either.

We arrived at one end of a normal street with 1970s cars parked on the kerb, square front gardens, and radiant street lamps shedding their glow on to the pavement every thirty paces. The house at the other end was the magnet, and we walked casually down to it. I optimistically imagined that 'Kay the Adventurer' was wandering into a Happy Jamaica setting, like the music videos on *Top of the Pops*.

Outside the 'blues' house, a few small groups of black partygoers were hanging around chatting and chilling. We didn't talk to anyone and no one stopped talking when we turned into the steps. These parties were like open houses in the neighbourhood and anyone could walk in - except the police.

Inside the house adults were reggae-smooching to some truly heavy reggae music that was nothing like *Rastaman Vibrations*. We got some blank stoned looks from people in the hallway, but none that made me feel unwelcome or scared. They may have even been tickled that a thirteen-year-old white schoolgirl and a white teenage prostitute were trying to mingle in inconspicuously and be part of their black crowd.

It was dim and smoky in the dancing room and a string of unseasonal Christmas lights hung on one wall, attempting to make the place look like a party den.

I didn't see Pauline talking to anyone while she was standing by me, so I don't know if she knew anyone there.

She left me in a corner where the DJ had set up. I watched him cue the next vinyl record on his double-decker sound system, which had a small light attached to it so he could see all the silver buttons. The plastic centrepiece was missing from his records and I wondered why a professional would keep damaged ones.

It was crowded in there but you couldn't start a chat with anyone because the music was too loud and everyone seemed to be staring at the ground anyway, or dancing with their heads up and eyes shut.

I tried to watch a couple who were grinding against each other, but I got embarrassed.

The next record started seamlessly at the end of the one just finishing but, again, I didn't recognise the track and started to edge my way out of the room through the movers. I was trying to not disturb them in case I alarmed them out of their serious dancing trances. I squeezed by in between the swaying tide, stopping when someone was swaying backwards, waiting for them to sway forwards, and then

taking another step behind the next swayer until I got to the doorway with no door.

The room on the other side of the thin corridor was a small kitchen. It had people in it but it looked like no one at all lived there. I didn't see a cooker and there wasn't any food or bottles of spirits like at a proper party, but there were loads of cans of Coke in a slab that had been ripped open on the counter. My thirteen-year-old mind guessed that if you smoke drugs and drink Coke you get pissed.

While I was looking at the slab of Coke on the side someone said 'You can have one'. That was the only person who spoke to me inside the house.

Gobbling up this experience, I felt invisible because everyone else just ignored me and I was simply observing and taking a glimpse.

Within half an hour, even fifteen minutes, maybe not even that, Pauline came up to me and said in my ear, 'This is no good. Let's leave.' It was OK by me: I'd seen all I needed to and felt like I knew everything anyone needed to know about 'blues' parties.

We went out through the open front door and on to the top of the garden steps. There were several men hanging around and, as if my invisibility veil had fallen from me, I

suddenly felt vulnerable, and young and stupid, as their attention was directed towards us.

We started to walk down the steps as two of the men began approaching us and talking about another party. We were both answering, trying to sound cool and light-hearted, saying that no, we were going home. We carried on moving, but by the time we got to the bottom of the steps - without running and acting like fools - they each had a hand on our elbows guiding us away across the road.

'You can come to our party. We've got another party to go to. Just down here.'

I was at the front and could hear Pauline behind me saying the same thing that I was saying.

'No, it's OK. No, thanks - we've got to go home.'

The collective chuckling of the men outside the blues was still teasing my ears as we moved further away from the house.

We carried on walking. No one stopped walking. I was trying to think. Then, all too suddenly, within what seemed like ten seconds, I was being turned left on to a dark garden path by the man's hand, still holding firmly on to my left elbow. His grip didn't hurt, but I would've had to jerk my arm to release it, and one thing I didn't want to do was create a scene and for this to turn nasty when they were just being super - or even just overly - friendly. We'd end

up making them angry and having to run away. They'd chase us, and I just knew that they must be fast runners because they were blacks and they had to run away from the police all the time.

So, with him now behind me and Pauline behind him and the second man behind her, we were all moving in file along the short brick-laid path with high dense bushes each side. I was trying to think faster without showing any ripple of panic, and I was consciously waiting to hear Pauline say something louder than my thoughts to get us out of here.

My head had stayed bowed down while I'd been watching my steps on the unfamiliar path, but then I looked up at the house and its shadowy windows and I somehow sounded disappointed when I said, 'Hey, there's no party here; it's all dark.'

'Just walk in there - it's in there.'

The shabby wooden front door was already ajar and he shifted from behind me to my side to push it further open with his left hand and move me forward with his right hand which was now putting pressure on my lower back, edging me over the little doorstep into an unlit dank hallway.

What would have happened, I often ask myself, if, at this point - or just before the turn on to the garden path - I'd made a run for it.

Would the other man have stopped me? What would've happened to Pauline? Would she have been able to run with me before they grabbed her? Would they have chased us? Would the men from the other house have captured us for them? Would they have murdered us? It was very late at night and it was dark, and the world – right there and then in Handsworth – was full only of black people who lived an illicit life anyway! It could've turned very ugly.

Within another few shuffled steps he mischievously said, in a high tone, ‘In here.’

It was another half-open door on the left. I wouldn’t have been surprised if it creaked loudly. I was starting to think that I wouldn’t be able to find my way out if I had to run to escape, but I still walked into the room memorising, ‘Out the door – turn right – a few steps – turn left – turn left again – out the front door – a few steps – turn right – down the path on to the road – *run*.’

Trying not to let my voice break I said, ‘I can’t see anything in here. We’re better off outside.’ But as I turned around he was shutting the door that didn’t creak.

...**(end of excerpt)...**

The author does not want
any of her five children
to read this book...

Or her husband, any friends,
and especially not her mother

Please only read
Alice in Worcestershire
if you don't know Eskay Teel



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