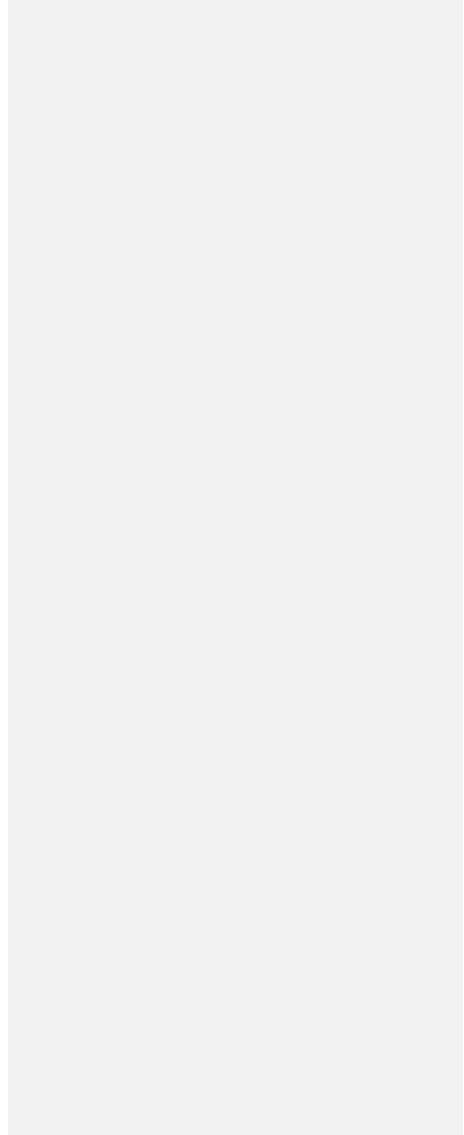


# Hugger-Mugger

*The Con Man Smile*

*Part 1*

M. L. Stark



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The foundation of this work is grounded in actual events, although specific names, places, and occurrences have been changed to enhance the thrill factor.

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## Dedication

As I reflect on that dark chapter of my life, I am grateful for the strength that emerged from within me. I carry the scars as a reminder of my resilience and the power of self-discovery.

Sexual abuse, for instance, can cause a myriad of physical consequences. Victims may experience chronic pain, difficulty sleeping, and a heightened vulnerability to various illnesses.

Psychological abuse, too, takes its toll on the body. The constant belittlement, manipulation, and gaslighting can lead to profound emotional distress, which in turn can manifest physically like depression, anxiety disorders, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Physical abuse, characterised by acts of violence and aggression, can cause immediate and visible physical injuries. Bruises, broken bones, and scars become painful reminders of the abuse endured. The psychological impact of physical abuse can also manifest through psychosomatic symptoms, where emotional distress triggers physical symptoms with no underlying medical cause.

It is essential to acknowledge the physical consequences that survivors of mistreatment face. By dedicating this book to those who have endured sexual, psychological, and physical abuse, we recognise their strength and resilience in overcoming these challenges. May this book serve as a source of comfort, validation, and empowerment for those who have faced mistreatments, reminding them they are not alone, and that healing is possible. May you all have a successful future ahead.

*M. Stark*

## Acknowledgement

“We must be the voice of those who have none.”  
(Proverbs 31:8).

—Mother Teresa

**M**y heartfelt thanks go out to all those who supported me during the challenging process of my personal growth, enabling me to bring this book to fruition. Writing is a task that is far from straightforward!

A unique and emotional credit to my family for bearing with my travel addiction over many years. Thanks that you’re my children and gave me grandkids, besides standing by me steadfastly throughout my trying moments. My existence would be incomplete without each one of you.

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A heartfelt gratitude to friends all over the globe who accompanied me in my travel activities. A special thank you to the many abused women I spoke to, as well as the cheerful people I met during my global travels. You all know exactly who I mean.

Enjoy the reading.

## About The Author

“Psychopathy is the only mental disorder where it is not the patient,  
but the environment that suffers.”

—Sanne Udsen, *Psychopaths in Suits*

Greetings, I go by Mary. I’ve always dreamed of writing a book about my life from the time I was born until now. I was married for 20 years, and we had four lovely kids, and now we have some adorable grandkids, too. Can you believe I ended up with a psycho after my divorce? It was one of the things that made me want to share a certain time in my life. Since I couldn’t fit it all into one book, I split it into several parts, so *Hugger-Mugger* is Part 1. So, I used my own experiences as examples but changed all the names and places.

Just so you know, it was like living in a dark hole when my life got stuck in a toxic and abusive relationship. At first, I was planning on not letting anyone know my secrets, but I wasn’t sure if it was the right move to keep my pain bottled up. Some memories were good, but there were also a bunch of sad ones that for real messed me up.

When I wrote this plot, I wanted to see it from a bird’s-eye view. I had to be my old self again, hoping I had gained some wisdom from my life experiences. You bet it did. I found out that being too good to the wrong people can, in fact, bum you out. Of course, I hoped readers would understand why I made certain choices, even if they weren’t the best ones.

If you got the serious feel from the story, it’s because it’s based on actual stuff, and maybe you thought Mary was naïve—you know, with her innocent blue eyes. That’s no biggie. Well, you didn’t know me, so your guesses could be spot-on. Maybe my thoughts and emotions were getting

to you, plus you might be onto something about all my self-imposed flaws. The entire story was mind-boggling and messed me up because of what the narcissist did. And if you thought Mary was a pissed-off bitter ex—think again—well, you were dead wrong!

And btw, I didn't know the fancy words for psychopaths, sociopaths, and covert narcissism, so I was confused about which term to use. But let's be real, I was not a psychologist, but it was all about how awful it felt to be caught in his web of lies. So, I was just trying to see who he, in fact, was by comparing his actions to how he presented himself. I had to find out if he was hiding any dark traits—he was just putting on a freaking show of being nice, but deep down, he was a heartless person with no morals.

I wanted to talk about this topic because it meant a lot to me and to let others know they didn't have to go through what I did. Therefore, I put my trust in those who refused to be oppressed, but many people need a hand with a lot of help. If I could make a difference in one woman's life by telling my story, then I'd say mission accomplished.

I know it's easy for me to say: ditch that abusive relationship. It's for sure not stress-free, and a lot of women end up going back to their abuser. And it's always a total disaster, without fail. I know lots of women are forced into exploitation by some crazy guy, but I also know the opposite is happening. I'm sure we're on the same page; The culprit should be in the trash, not the victims. But if we watch out for red flags, that would be a fantastic idea, and we'll have accomplished a ton. If you ever go through mental or physical abuse, I can only share my own experience with you through this story. Abuse always leaves you feeling down, and I've gone through it too. It freaked me out when he screwed everything up for me and everyone else. And he kept going on and on. By the time I was done

writing, I kinda felt like I was smarter than him and realised that being abused was, without a doubt, not cool. It was freaking nerve-wracking, and I bolted out of there.

Even though my script overall focuses on male abusers, I want to give male readers hope as well. Women can also be abusive towards men, believe it or not, so the guys have every reason to be worried. However, the articles I found on psychopathic abuse mostly said it was men. Sorry, guys, I can't mess with the stats. Seriously, like, three out of four crazies were dudes, maybe even more.

Then, I stumbled upon an article by the ManKind Initiative from March 2018, and their research showed that out of every three victims of domestic abuse, two are female, and one is male.

Gautama Buddha put it best when he said, "Three things can't stay hidden for long: The Moon, the Sun, and the Truth."

Brace yourself for this gripping story that had me hoping for a happy ending as well. Thanks for being interested in my story. Maybe I repeated myself, but it was important to me to get the message out.

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## Introduction

“The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.”

—Ernest Hemingway

Over the course of our lives, we all experience all sorts of relationships. Some are of the platonic or familial variety, while others are decidedly more romantic. And in these romantic relationships, there are bound to be many ups and downs. Some have more downs than anything that ultimately leads to the demise of the relationship, but what happens when these downs are more than just that? When they are actually

emotionally detrimental to someone in the relationship, and it is revealed that it is an abusive relationship they have found themselves in, that is when the person suffering begins to question everything while feeling trapped. This is what is explored in M.L. Stark's novel.

It was so sad to say that many people have experienced what it's like to be in an abusive relationship, whether it be mental or physical abuse. It is damaging, and often, those involved feel lost as to how to leave it. All of that and more are touched on in this book about Mary and Doctor Bates' turbulent romance that began under less than ethical circumstances. Mary started out as Drake's patient and ended up on a rollercoaster of a love affair with the man who was meant to help her. Mary was going through a difficult time in her life, and instead of this doctor giving her the proper tools and help to get through it, he decided he would start a romance with her. With Mary being in a fragile and vulnerable place, this was a recipe for disaster, and it wouldn't be until much later that Mary realized her mistake in dating this psychopath—as the author refers to him throughout the novel.

While this book talks about an incredibly sensitive subject of abusive relationships, which can be triggering for some, it is still an important book that perfectly lays out how someone even finds themselves in a situation such as that. And more so, how this person can fight their way out of it until they can find the true person they are once again. M.L. Stark has an effortless way of painting a vivid picture of this type of relationship, which will surely keep every reader of this book intrigued and outraged by the story unfolding before their eyes. The author has a talent for telling a story based on true events—while changing names, places, and other facts—that keeps their audience eagerly turning every page to learn more about Mary's story and how she overcame incredible odds.

While this story may not be the most upbeat read, that is not the point of it. It is to tell a raw and real tale of heartbreak and abuse at the hands of a man whose narcissistic and sociopathic tendencies seriously tested a woman who had already been through far too much in her life. The book is definitely worth the read, and I will be looking forward to reading more books by this author.

—Pacific Book Review

## The Source Of The Beginning

“It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what others say in a whole book.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche

My life required a positive redirection towards another path, and it gave me only one option before I probed my psyche, dissected the life cycle, and uncovered the flaw. I grappled with myself to select a topic as I yearned for candidness and self-reflection regarding my experiences. The text contained many factual details, yet I couldn't settle for a mere ten basic statements to ensure comprehension.

The six boxes, brimming with notes and pictures, captured a spectrum of emotions—from luxurious reminiscences to intricate experiences of malevolence and dubious horror—arranged on the floor, symbolising my connection with my beloved. The attainment of pivotal intel assisted in my apprehension of how I constructed the plot and my most serious error. Then, I pondered about how this individual had subjected many women to heartbreak and mistreatment.

As I retrieved the pen and paper from my drawer, I pondered the possibility of divulging an excessive number of macabre occurrences in my retelling of the tempestuous romance that resembled a modern-day version of *Wuthering Heights*. Within my thoughts, he embodied the enigmatic Heathcliff, a sorrowful, poor, and isolated wanderer, whilst she represented the qualities of Catherine—Rich and Bold.

Preceding the dawn of our love-hate relationship, it already captivated me how the blatant fatal accusations and severe harassment occurred before it all descended into complete chaos, similar to the experience of a life in Dante's *Inferno*.

The flames scorched my skin with a vehement hostility that left me pondering the beginning and the end.

Was it in the past, present, or future?

My initial purpose was to deconstruct the rationale behind my affiliation with a psychopath. Perhaps he displayed traits of a sociopath or a covert narcissist? Despite his lifelong deceit, I was uncertain about his dubious role in my life since I'd whatsoever no clue about it.

Thus, my future remained opaque in uncertainty.

I was uncertain if he displayed characteristics of egocentrism, duplicity, and Machiavellianism towards others and me. Even being advised by others, I failed to perceive the warning signs. Through the decisive act and affirmative questioning of myself, I could transcend and forgive myself for my susceptibility, mistakes, and mere existence. The process was crucial as I endeavoured to uncover the truth, but I was uncertain if my visions had become a source of disgrace. Perhaps the picturesque delusion I had dreamt about got snuffed out by others?

Yet, the denotation of my future was inconclusive, and here it began with the conclusion about who could determine its origin. Did I embark on the journey some time ago? Did the act of sexual intercourse between my mother and the man result in the penetration of a single sperm cell into the egg? Afterwards, it travelled through the fallopian tube and, in the end, affixed itself to the uterine wall, and I became the little girl who developed into the foetus in my mother's womb.

Did it begin beforehand or post-birth?

Was it the beginning of the end, or was it doomed from the start?

It could be possible that there appeared an overabundance of foolish queries, yet their determination brought about downfall and suffering for a petite girl. It remained the genesis of facts that I investigated despite my

lack of awareness, causing me to disregard too many perilous omens in my life. The pen moved like the dickens over the jumbled black ink on the crumpled paper until the moment of realisation arrived. If I carried on with my wretched path, all the joy in my life would descend into a sombre abyss. My aim was to discard the agony and welcome the bliss of a different and more happy life. It appeared as a poignant realisation that solitary existence was more appealing than the company of the nefarious being on Earth, and then I pondered: Perhaps I had attained knowledge from my blunders.

Without a doubt, I had not averted my gaze from the terror, and steered clear of the madman's erratic locomotive long before it wounded my soul beyond repair. Despite my valiant efforts to conquer the challenges, I'd refrained from seeking professional aid in my quest to restore a respectable lifestyle. It proved to be a major mistake, causing my health to remain dismal, although desiring to endure for a lengthier existence. It was about time for me to flee from the raging fire, but I was certain my lover wasn't willing to relinquish his opportunity for a luxurious life with the woman who harboured a fondness for him. Frankly speaking, I perceived him as lacking the concern gene, so I remained hesitant to live with a perfidious and conceited personality. Instead, I objected and applied some fiery red lipstick and thick black mascara, fixing my hair before donning some alluring attire, slipping into a pair of stilettos, and relishing in the ambience of a snug pub. Imagine the admiration that many men had for a person like me as they gazed at the blonde woman who showed them her smile.

When life took a turn for the worse, I found myself bedridden, gazing at a flawless photograph of a man I cherished so much. A deluge of salty tears rolled down my cheeks, with hundreds of them that crashed like God's hail—akin to frozen raindrops plunging from cumulonimbus clouds

before shattering with heart and soul to the ground. With my tears flowing all the time, albeit recognising, it appeared imprudent clinging to the photograph, which was a negligible reminder. The image exacerbated the excruciating pain in my already wounded heart, causing me to collapse besides inflicting unnecessary distress, leaving me trapped, unproven, and manipulated by the man I loved. The photograph had to be consigned to the dustbin of history. Despite this, besides remaining unsure of how proceeding with my life would be. My trembling finger grazed my self-conscious cheeks, brushing away the tears of sorrow and disposed of the foolish photo in one of the many boxes. The many fatal amorous emotions for him and the yearning and devotion were evocative, and to the core, it depleted me since I was indecisive and clueless about who the person was that ruled over this turmoil.

Him or me?

My nervous system was in a state of chaos as my blood congealed into small red ice particles, above all while venting my anger on him, causing my blood to boil like a dragon's fiery breath before seeking to immolate the image. Despite this, I didn't want to mourn for someone treating me disrespectfully and unapologetically. Was he expecting that I would disregard everything else to satisfy his desires? Even though I did everything I could and was a marked degree generous, his constant dissatisfaction persisted before resulting in a state of frustration and confusion for me. Still, tears were flowing down my cheeks because of him as I avoided confronting my emotions until identifying my preferred feelings, despite my constant fixation on death or the thought of taking my life. My fate and proclivity for suffering were determined by various factors, including the prevalence of hostility over my sincere nature, prompting me to desire an end to it all.



The ramifications of my imprudent behaviour caused anguish and, in the end, led me to a dire predicament when I acted similar to an idiot and presumed that the person, I revered also shared my sentiments. The grief endured as an agonizing, tumultuous and unrelenting sensation as if I were on the brink of surrendering to oblivion before plunging into the merciless abyss of the sea. Yet, my aspiration was to endure, akin to the fishermen's perseverance in overcoming the tumultuous ocean struggling to reach the shore. By being submerged in the ocean, causing the vessel that some men to perish from drowning, but the majority surfaced like a buoy before reaching the shore, enduring the arduous conflict.

I fused my sentiments, comprising pleasant and unpleasant recollections and thoughts of mortality surfacing, while I was daydreaming in thoughts about our dual suicide before our tepid hands interlocking in a synchronised and unwavering clasp. Amidst the passion of love, we were reclining next to each other on the verdant grass adorned with a multitude of white daisies, marvelling at the unspoiled blue expanse above. While the cherry blossom tree's many pink blooms, giving the impression of a colossal sun shining through the leafy canopy with no fluffy clouds in sight. The grandeur mesmerised us, and before ingesting the toxic blend, we were holding in our petite, brownish glass flasks before we, as a united couple, slept in perpetuum in perfect harmony. And thereafter for being accompanied by harmonious angels on a picturesque walk through a rainbow of pastel colours before passing through the ivory gates and beginning our new existence in the afterlife. Perhaps there would be resentment if I were to detect malevolent predators that had cloaked in human forms, like the devil himself, roaming the earth. Maybe it caught us in the infernal abyss before entangling in our troubles each day rather than basking in the divine happiness of our perpetual devotion.

## Chapter 1

### The Sly Chameleon

One of the most valiant acts was to recognise oneself, understand one's beliefs, and envision one's desired path. So, where did it all begin with this story while I was having such dark thoughts? The weight of despair hung heavily upon my shoulders, dragging me down into a pit of melancholy. Each breath I took felt laboured, as if the very act of living had become an exhausting task. It started in a dimly lit room, where shadows danced on the walls, mirroring the turmoil within my mind. The air was thick with an eerie silence, broken only by the sound of my own racing heartbeat. The flickering candle on the table cast a feeble glow, illuminating the pages of an unfinished manuscript. As my trembling fingers traced the words on the paper, I realised that the story itself extended to my own turmoil. It was born from the depths of my anguish, a reflection of the darkness that had consumed me. Each sentence seemed to echo the despair that had taken hold of my soul. The ink-stained pages bore witness to my inner struggles, as if the words themselves were imprinted with my anguish. They told a tale of a broken protagonist, lost in a world with a story that unravelled the depths of human suffering, exposing the raw emotions that often went unnoticed. In that room, during my darkest thoughts, the seed of this story was planted. It was a desperate attempt to give shape and form to the chaos raging inside me, to find solace in the written word. Little did I know this story would become a beacon of hope, a testament to the power of creativity in overcoming adversity.

As the days turned into nights, and the ink flowed from my pen, I found solace in the act of storytelling. It became a cathartic release, a way

to navigate through the labyrinth of my own emotions. The characters I created became my companions, their struggles a mirror to my own. And so, as the story unfolded, I discovered that even in the darkest corners of our minds, there was a glimmer of light. It was within these depths that true resilience was born, where the power of storytelling could transform pain into something beautiful.

So, how did it all begin with me wanting to write this story?

It began as a journey of self-discovery, a testament to the stubborn spirit that lived within me. My philosophical musings endured for hours and days, contemplating the longevity of my newfound approach to life were. Following that, I pictured myself living near the coastline and leisurely strolling along the beaches, and then, during the summer of 2016, a wave of happiness washed over me when I moved from the rugged Balkan Mountains to a rich environment in the UK. My new apartment at the forefront of the row of houses offered a spectacular view of the vast English Channel, where I found the calmness of listening to the suave water hitting the shore, besides enjoying the fresh air while searching for solace, utilising it as therapy. The capacious balcony provided a panoramic view, just fifty meters away from the vast ocean, encompassing the seven-mile-long stretch of pristine golden sand, famous for its exceptional global standards of cleanliness. The coastal town had gained fame for its vibrant nightlife and superb beaches, recognised as world-class for years. Foremost, it adorned the promenade with an array of picturesque British beach huts, each boasting its own unique hue, which spanned from a radiant orange to a frosty blue and symbolised the transition from dawn to dusk, an area that comprised a populace of two hundred thousand.

Before Bournemouth was established in 1810, the area was home to smugglers and fishermen. It took thirty years to become a renowned health

resort, and then the stagecoach started trips from Southampton. The city's population remained small despite the establishment of shops in the 1920s. However, the urban area flourished after the founding of the Police Force and the famous Bournemouth pier. Before it was even a thing in 1870, they already had gas streetlights, beautiful Victorian architecture, a 202-foot spire at St. Peter's Church, and a water supply system. Because of this, the Victorian city experienced a huge growth spurt. They kicked off a volunteer fire brigade, jazzed up their Symphony Orchestra, popped open their first library, and even launched the Bournemouth Echo in 1900. They later started a college, a university, and the first chiropractic college in Europe. And on top of that, they gave the city full authority in 1997. The city, coastline, many British gardens, and the awe-inspiring wilderness with untamed horses in New Forest National Park had me hooked, and I found peace there when I needed it the most.

On my first night in bed, I could hear the calming sound of the waves and see the moonlight coming in through the windows. When I looked at the shiny stars in the clear night sky, I couldn't stop thinking about whether to keep going or suffer without a solution. During my initial night in bed, I heard the placid sound of the waves breaking on the beach through the somewhat opened windows and the blinds, which facilitated the entrance of the ethereal blue moonlight through the capacious windows. When I gazed upon the luminous stars with their speckling glints through the cloudless night sky, my mind stayed abuzz with unfettering musings before contemplating: *Keep living or suffer endlessly.*

The following morning, after a serene and euphoric night, besides the sun's brilliance entering through the window, I awoke from sleep at 10 am. Except remaining nestled in my luxurious sheets, which enveloped me with the snug warmth of the duvet draping my exposed physique. Despite

remaining immobile and unwilling to budge myself, I coaxed myself and took my time to stretch my limbs like a feline while rubbing my weary eyes. Then I noticed how the suave sea breeze conveyed the calming sound of waves caressing the shore, sending its sound into the room with a delighting feeling to my senses. With care, I placed my legs over the edge, then settled onto the edge of the bed, allowing for proper circulation while surveying the surroundings of chaos. In my half-awake state, whilst lumbering to the kitchen before brewing a pot of coffee and before seizing my cigarettes, I afterwards withdrew to the balcony. Upon noticing the absence of a chair and table, I, without concern, plopped down onto the wooden deck, relishing the crisp wind caressing my face whilst experiencing a delightful sensation of fresh sea air. Thereafter, I reflected on the ethereal quality of my being; it burned my soul with overwhelming distress, leaving my emotions in disarray, dangling by countless threads.

My cognitive and physical abilities were below par for an extended duration, impeding my effectiveness besides the unpredictability of my thoughts, causing havoc in my life, besides leading to both cherished moments and painful ones. The lack of focus declined because I knew not how to grasp all the deceptive untruths and indicators, thinking perhaps I was naïve and oblivious to any flaws in my presence, causing me to remain ignorant of the truth or the malevolent individuals I knew. The notion of an existence without love was unfathomable. Foremost when I perceived it as the paramount encounter of my life, despite my heart too-often remained preoccupied with boundless distress before crying a river of tears. As the tale within my book began whilst sitting on my balcony, the pen's ink upon meeting the crumpled paper marked the beginning of my tempestuous romance and the fiery blaze of animosity that persisted while scorching my skin, not knowing how to define its start and end.

Because of my many trips between Bournemouth and Heathrow Airport in London, which often ended up with many helpful discussions together with Lily Cat; she carried out the responsibility of being my faithful private chauffeur. Her awe-inspiring conduct projected a serious yet amiable persona, showing that she was a couple of years my junior.

'Have you heard of the Lounge Room Lizard saying?' Lily Cat asked. 'My friend dated an awful persona. Next, she was close to death.'

'Oh, dear. It's awful.' I couldn't contain my shock before I said. 'The expression is unknown to me.'

'Their charisma is second to none.' Lily clung to the steering wheel as she spoke. 'They're really persuasive.' Then we drove along at a blistering speed, 80 miles an hour, while talking. 'They come across as reliable and super charming.'

The Cat kept divulging more on the tale of how this person was often embroiled in the affairs of affluent women, seducing them with his beguiling words and deceptive charm.

I voiced my distress. 'I may have found this info a tad too late.'

The limo fell into a hushed silence, prompting me to gaze out the window and contemplate the splendour of British nature while realising the mention of lounge musicians often carries negative connotations. Also, on how the persona exuded a charming medieval quality, despite his appearance, was like a malnourished and suppressed lizard.

Suddenly, the cat bellowed. 'My friend was lavishly well-off.'

I uttered a low, 'Oh...'

'Do you know they appear as a smooth gentleman?' She grinned, but I was not privy to this information. 'They show their skills in elite venues.'

'Oh, now the dime fell.' As I spoke, I realised how the predators seek individuals with valuable assets and sufficient wealth to gain advantages.

‘Yeah. You see what I mean?’ Meaning the hunter chose vulnerable targets, benefiting the predator.

‘My relationship was a rollercoaster of love and hate.’ I felt like a parrot stuck in a black cage, suffocating with a tight seat belt around my throat, making it hard to talk.

Hastily, I seized the water bottle from the azure cooler box, gulping down almost half of its liquid and compressing the plastic flask in my left hand with such vigour that it produced a ripping and crackling noise.

‘Those idiots are hoping to trap women in marriage.’ The wild cat was speeding at 120 mph on the M27 motorway while she maintained our conversation before reaching Southampton.

She talked constantly about how the lizard’s strategic methods incited considerable conjecture, yet their disguises frequently proved impregnable and radiating self-assurance in their capacity of alluring any woman, as their standards for selecting a new prey were altogether very high. Often, they remained single because of their former partner’s detection of their dishonesty.

‘Oh, yeah, he also said he wants to marry me.’ Whilst aiming a piercing stare at the pristine black Mercedes-Benz, I vocalised my revelation. ‘New car, Lily?’ It looked like an S500 AMG line model.

‘Yes, I got it a month ago.’ She was taking fantastic care of it and had cleaned it before her arrival, resulting in a shine that almost blinded my eyes. ‘Mary, you were an ideal target.’ Her English was perfect, and she spoke with such calm and British politeness that I couldn’t help but appreciate her archaic dialect. ‘A sad, beautiful woman seeking true love.’

‘Nice car. The leather feels good.’ I noticed the neat seats and trendy beige interior. ‘It’s like soft baby skin.’ My fingers brushed over the seat.

'Oh, how sweet you are.' She smiled with a mild grace. 'Speaking of which.' A shift marked her sudden burst of dramatic intonation. 'He abused my friend. Such a parasite.' As she spoke, we made several directional modifications before reaching the M3 near Eastleigh and Winchester. 'It drained her of the last drop.'

'My heart aches for your friend. Has she recovered from it?'

'He showed no empathy or remorse.' As she spoke, a sudden horror consumed me. 'He harassed her constantly.' Her storytelling provoked a reminiscence in me of comparable events as the Cat's conversation carried on. 'Then deserted her. It shattered her.'

After being trapped in the cat's fancy black enclosure and having a two-hour chat, we got to Heathrow Airport before Lily, who pulled up at the entrance for departure. As I got out of the car, she grabbed my suitcase from the trunk, and then we hugged, and I recited a Russian proverb: 'Love is evil. You can fall in love with a goat' before I waved goodbye.



## Chapter 2

### The Intricate Tapestry Of Life

Instead of being embarrassed by my failures, I should use them as stepping stones to success, then learn from my mistakes and use that knowledge to start afresh. Among the various unfortunate incidents that took place during that year, one of them was a tragic plane crash in Colombia in 2010. And just like that, a sudden and impactful moment occurred as the city of Christchurch, in New Zealand, experienced a devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 7.1 that caused widespread destruction and upheaval. In addition, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had stated that the H1N1 virus, similar to the Spanish flu in 1918-1920 and the Russian influenza in 1977, was considered the third flu pandemic.

In order to truly grasp the starting point of the story, I found it necessary to transport you back to the winter of 2010, which was a bitter one, with icy winds that pierced through every layer of clothing. The snow-covered streets in Denmark mirrored the frosty emptiness I felt inside. As I sat by the crackling fireplace, a whirlwind of emotions churned within me, urging me to embark on a journey of self-discovery. At that point in my life, I felt lost and overwhelmed by the weight of my experiences and was as if I carried a heavy burden on my shoulders, one that was impossible to shake off. Each passing day seemed to blur into the next, leaving me with a sense of monotony and unfulfillment. With a deep longing to understand myself better, I delved into the memories that defined the past of my life; I wanted to decipher the moments that shaped me, to unravel the intricate tapestry of my life. It was a daunting task, like

trying to assemble a puzzle with missing pieces.

I was determined to make sense of it all.

As I flipped through old photographs and read through journals filled with faded ink, waves of nostalgia washed over me. I could almost feel the weight of my experiences echoing through my body, leaving a tangible impact on my present state. The pain, joy, and everything in between manifested as physical sensations, reminding me of the depth and complexity of my emotions. The bitter cold of that winter seemed to seep into my bones, mirroring the icy grip of fear and uncertainty that plagued me for years of how I in my formative years at the orphanage in the 70s, and as a teenager, was refused the opportunity to partake in the pivotal confirmation rite, causing me to feel like a disjointed Christian. Yet, amidst the chill, there was a flicker of warmth that radiated from the hearth, symbolising the hope I clung to, the belief that I could find solace and understanding in the pages of my past. With each memory I revisited, I could feel the weight on my shoulders gradually easing, as if the act of reflection was a cathartic release. It was a journey of self-discovery, an excavation of the layers that had formed my identity. And although I couldn't fit my entire life story into one book, I knew that by starting from that pivotal winter of 2010, I could lay the foundation for the narrative that would unfold.

So, with my pen in hand and a heart brimming with anticipation, I wove together the threads of my past, determined to make sense of the story that had brought me to this moment. Little did I know this journey would not only uncover the truths buried within me but also would ignite a newfound sense of purpose and direction, making me start where I, as an adult, had found myself in the process of reclaiming my selfhood and religious path, all while desperately fighting to salvage my marriage.

Despite being born into Catholicism, I had to take part in many religious events that I had been preparing for throughout the past year, where I took part in two retreat weekends at Our Lady's Benedictine Monastery during February and March 2010, leading up to my full Christian initiation during the upcoming Easter. Including the significant pilgrimage to Israel later that year. At that moment, I immersed myself in the absolute silence that surrounded the monastery, enabling me to establish a spiritual foundation as I readied myself for baptism and confirmation. With that, I would experience the last sensation of completing the last part of my faith, resulting in a profound sense of satisfaction.

When the snow descended from the heavens, a light dusting of it in small doses caressed my skin as I stepped outside in the early Sunday morning, basking in the enchanting panorama of the Monastery. I sensed a fresh rejuvenation of my faculties, harmonising both my emotional and physical well-being as I embarked on my walk to the nuns' graveyard. With my arms outstretched towards the sky, I took in the awe-inspiring sight before me, and with heart and soul, immersing myself in the mesmerising beauty of the mist and the celestial blue light, which evoked a scene that was reminiscent of a captivating Claude Monet masterpiece. With deep breathing, I inhaled through my nostrils, feeling the calmness spreading to my belly before exhaling through my mouth and letting go of my lingering tension in the frosty air.

While on my stroll, I crossed paths with the snow-covered fields, and my gaze then shifted towards the tranquil forest, its majestic scenery adorned with a fresh fallen snowflakes that sparkled in the light. This picturesque sight served as a muse, prompting me to pause, and I admired its splendour before envisioning how the trees and low-growing plants in

their lush, greenish state during the beautiful spring season would look like. While positioned on the trail, my intention was to restore and rejuvenate my emotional well-being while also observing the squirrels and immersing myself in the pleasant melodies of the birdsongs echoing in the surroundings. During my stroll to the serene and pristine snowy garden where the nuns in peace rested, a melodious blackbird serenaded me, soothing my troubled mind while instilling me with fortitude. I paused for an additional moment before continuing my walk along the winding path. The mist dissipated, revealing the beauty of life as the weather grew colder and brighter, following the rise of the Sun with a radiant light on this wondrous morning prior to my arrival at the extraordinary graves. The gentle breeze delighted my spirit as it, like a soft feather, brushed against my cheeks, my hair fluttered and my neck felt the delicate touch of angels' wings, sending a pleasant shiver down my spine as I admired the exquisite beauty of the multitude of tombstones bearing different names. My heart hastened as I felt the warm blood speed through my veins while having a strong longing for ruby-red roses and wished to place one on every grave. Within a heartbeat, I felt compelled to dash towards the city, acquire a multitude of flowers and, with compassion, arrange them in tribute to each nun who found peacefulness in this mesmerising place. However, there was neither the time nor the opportunity to run to the city.

As the sun cast its rays upon the vast stones covered in a thick layer of snow, silver light descended from the cosmos, transforming the scene into a shimmering display of millions of diamonds while the flurry of tiny snowflakes ceased to fall. The garden-fresh air filled my nostrils while sensing as it carried the sweet scent of citrus and lavender, as all of a sudden, a wave of déjà vu swept over me as if I had known the nuns in a previous existence. I plunged into the scene for a few extra minutes,

feeling a surge of compassion, until I spun around and noticed that my footsteps had marred the pristine snow, and with caution, I retraced my steps, avoiding further disturbance of the fresh powdery snow. Before entering the monastery, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of positivity regarding my rejuvenated soul, having the feeling of being enveloped in the beauty gifted by the sun, the refreshing air, and the gentle caress of angelic wings. Following that, I was primed to engage in the retreat and pondered on the prospect of revisiting the place to pay my respects to the nuns in their serene graveyard, where I would place a multitude of deep red roses like I wanted to do it on this wintry morning that appeared snowy, bright, and magnificent.

As the spring blossomed into full glory, I couldn't help but feel that the summer was drawing closer, marking the countdown to my long-awaited trip to Spain. With each passing day, my heart seemed to beat a little faster, and a persistent smile adorned my face as the flowers were bursting into a kaleidoscope of colours whilst the azure skies stretched above me, adorned with fluffy white clouds that seemed to paint a picture of the endless possibilities that lay ahead. The longer days allowed for leisurely walks, where the sun kissed my skin, leaving behind a faint glow that served as a constant reminder of the adventure that awaited me.

And finally, the very atmosphere was whispering tales of the vibrant streets and picturesque landscapes that awaited me on the day when I sat on the flight to Spain. As I arrived at our summer residence; a fancy and upscale community of Puebla Aida, situated just a few kilometres away from the city, with a location that provided a perfect blend of convenience and luxury, and with a sigh of relief, I sank into the couch, feeling a sense of relaxation washed over me.

### Chapter 3

## Figment Of Imagination

Along my journey, I had the chance to experience some truly profound moments, and one of the most significant ones happened after a meeting with my friend Cliff, who was not only a real estate expert in Spain but also was married to my best friend Lucy. In a surprising turn of events, he couldn't stop talking about a doctor who had aided him in overcoming a sports injury. Cliff, who described Dr Bates as a medical wizard, was recommending him to me as someone who could assist with my medical problems.

Perhaps others thought déjà vu was real when they heard a stranger's voice and felt like they knew it, even though they hadn't seen the person. Scientists didn't believe it, but some saw it as supernatural. They found that frequent travellers and movie watchers were more likely to experience déjà vu. They also said that people who were in a delicate state or super stressed were more likely to experience that. Studies also found that déjà vu was connected to having a good memory; they recognised things and remembered past events or people. I'd dealt with that a lot. They claimed that migraines with aura were associated with déjà vu, and I also had a major issue with migraines.

I'd never hid how much I believed in all those happy love stories and cartoons I watched with my kids, whether at the movies or on TV. During those disastrous years, I had to make some important life choices. But reality wasn't always as perfect as Disney or Hollywood made it seem. I daydreamed about having a super happy life, even more ecstatic than it already was—not because of others or Paul, but foremost of myself.

Not letting my curiosity get the better of me, I dialled the number for the Harry Potter clinic, being determined to find out more about the topic.

A lady with a nasal voice said. 'Kate speaking. How can I help you?'

'Does Dr Bates work wonder's here?' I asked with a laugh, trying to lighten things up before explaining my problem and asking for his help.

She let out a chuckle before she started talking. 'Give me a second, please.' Then she threw a few questions at the guy in the back, who I assumed was the doctor. 'Hey, I've got a new client asking if you can work miracles.' She told the guy and then paused. 'Can we help her in any way?'

He let out a jovial laugh. 'No problem,' replied the guy with a raspy yet with a gentle voice. 'We'll handle the whole ball of vax.'

Out of nowhere, this weird feeling came over me, shaking up my soul and making my mind wander while I waited. And then, after that first phone call on a perfect August morning, my new life began after talking to the SW Clinic. But then weird thoughts started popping into my head, like a crazy mess. His accent caught my attention since it seemed familiar.

Modest, I spoke 'Hello'. I was irked since it took Kate a while.

'Hang on, please,' Kate said before withdrawing the phone; I only just caught her voice before she returned. 'Before I can schedule, I need more info.' She added before flipping through some pages. 'Oh my, it swamped us with work.'

She asked for my full name, address, and when my problems started before scheduling my first appointment at 11 am in two days. It shocked me at how fast they scheduled me and acted all fancy; I pretended to read my calendar before agreeing to the meeting, then hung up the phone, threw it on the couch and let out a cheer, sliding back onto the couch.

The last bone doctor did an ultrasound and found a bump that was causing pain in the nerve. Lots of doctors tried different treatments, like

painful cortisone shots and useless remedies, but it was all a waste of money. Walking was a pain because my entire foot hurt, and my knuckles were making this awful crunching noise. I was open-minded about any treatment options and ready to pay whatever it would cost, hoping that the doctor from my déjà vu would come to my rescue.

I hadn't done Google or anything, but he might be great, fake, full of himself, or smart.

On that awesome day, I woke up early, which was so not me because I loved to sleep and snooze until at least 10 am. I dragged myself to the kitchen, made a cup of coffee, grabbed my smokes, then headed to the rooftop, sipped the warm coffee, lit up my first cigarette, and enjoyed the beautiful sunrise, watching the sun come up over the peak, with the ocean stretching out behind. I was so confused, just lost in my thoughts about fixing my hair, putting on makeup and picking an outfit after I finished my coffee and cigarette. Then I went to the bathroom, got undressed, checked myself out in the mirror and then enjoyed a nice, warm shower that made me feel calm. Then I checked out my whole body—armpits, arms besides toes for any dark hairs. It freaked me out when I found a wild forest growing on me. So, I went back to those awful memories of all those laser hair removal treatments I got ages ago in my private areas. The wild bush on my pubic bone had to be removed. It made me bonkers until the tangled bushes disappeared and revealed a small, straight mohawk. The seductive lady's accessible pearl delighted Paul. I had a tough time picturing a search in a dense forest, like finding a needle in a haystack. Despite this, he navigated with his dick through a non-existent wilderness of lengthy tresses. That's why I chopped off the big mane, but it kept bugging me when those unwanted growths came back. I never went back to the Laser Clinic because of her mishap, leading to severe burns.



Luck was on my side, and I got away without a scratch.

When I was in the shower, I used the lady shaver to remove any stray hairs before cleaning myself. Then, I hopped out of the shower, threw a towel on my head and another around my body, brushed my teeth and used mouthwash before spitting it in the sink. Next, I stared into my closet, musing: *Hm? This one? Red or green top. No, too provocative. The blue blouse with lace? Nope. Too fancy.* Next, I went for a casual look, choosing a fabulous white top with intricate lace detailing. There appeared a jumble of various tops and blouses up strewn on the bed whilst pondering: *Off-white or khaki pants? Nope,* and pulled on a pair of blue, fitting jeans. The rest were on my bed. *White pumps or the red ones?* Afterwards, I found these amazing sandals covered in beautiful white, red, and blue Swarovski gems and put them on. The rest I flung back into the closet before I dried my hair and put it in a cute knot at the back of my neck. It looked nice, with vibrant colours and some strands hanging around my ears and neck. Finally, I put on some nice makeup that matched my face and got ready to enter a new world of hope and new experiences.

Before I left, I turned off the AC and TV and grabbed a ciggie. My scent was gross, but I fixed it with mouth spray. Afterwards, I left the white building they built five years ago; it appeared more modern than the rest of the complex. When I stepped out of the penthouse, the scorching heat hit me hard, so I rushed down the outdoor stairs and headed to the garage. I then got in the convertible, turned on the engine, put on the Enrique album, and rocked out while removing the hardtop. Some drops fell on my face because I washed the car yesterday evening, making it shiny. Before I hit the road, I opened the green gate and zoomed off, looking like a happy-go-lucky rich lady in my fancy Mercedes-Benz.

When I got to the clinic, after driving for 15 minutes and 10 kilometres, I found a parking spot right in front of the clinic. It was a stroke of luck that I got a spot downtown, even though it seemed impossible. So, I parked the car, put the top up, closed the windows, fixed my messy hair, locked it with a click and walked about twenty meters to the left to the parking meter. Then I bought a ticket, put it on my windshield, locked the car again, and headed to the clinic. As I stood by the door, I realised it was too early, so I grabbed a cup of coffee and freezing water from the nearby café and plopped down in a white plastic chair. I dug into my black Prada bag and pulled out the cigarettes and pink lighter. But then I got super anxious, and all these crazy questions flooded my mind. Any specific things I should be prepared for? Stupid! I was a mess and knew not what to believe or depend on. Unnecessary! How should I address the wizard? Nonsensical focus. What was up next, and was he a good doc? How crazy! Don't lose yourself, Mary. But then it felt kinda weird, like déjà vu all over again. We had met before but didn't know who he was.

I was dying for a smoke but trying to resist. Shake it off, Mary. I was being a total birdbrain. Stay cool. Use mouthwash. It was insane. No, avoid grabbing the cigarette out of your bag. And then, I freaked out again. Seize the cigarette and savour your coffee. The tiny crimson fiend tempted me while it sat on my shoulder. Gnaw on a piece of gum. My mind was dumb and illogical, but I felt ashamed of smoking and wanted to hide it from everyone. It was impossible for me to quit. Being a smoker in the 21st century was tough, but I kept my coffin nails in my bag and enjoyed my mocha before grabbing some gum, then chewed two pieces ten times before disposing of it in the flowerbed in front of Dr Bates' door. The heat had killed some plants, and then I looked at the fancy front door and the grey concrete building. I squinted towards the sun and noticed that all the

windows were open and white.

The promenade boasted of a bakery, clothing stores, and El Caucho, a premier Argentinian steakhouse where their steak culture had always been a source of pride, serving national dishes shrouded in myths and secrets. The beef soup was crazy delicious, the avocado salad was so fancy, and the surf and turf came with these amazing tiger shrimps. I always enjoyed it with the spicy pepper sauce and a nice Merlot from Mendoza. My friend Miguel, who originated from Buenos Aires, once invited me to this place. Most shops had apartments upstairs, but not the huge red building with the green market where I got all my organic greens. They had a vast selection of rare herbs and spices, including Pil-Pil, an awesome mix of spices I always use in my shrimp recipe. Plus, there were a ton of booths with lots of nuts and dried fruit.

Standing in front of the fancy door, I reached out to press the dirty doorbell. The sticky texture was so disgusting that I used my finger to push the button, which made a jingle. Then, I went to the clinic feeling all over the place, like a lost hummingbird.

‘Hello.’ The woman said in a nasal Spanish dialect. ‘Who is it?’

‘I have an appointment now. It’s Mary.’

The door opened with a soft hum, and with my buttocks, I opened it with an inward push. I had a weird feeling in my belly, like a bunch of butterflies, and my heart was racing. I couldn’t decide if I should take the elevator or the stairs but decided on the stairs to the second floor.

The universe always had a plan, whether it was destiny, my own choices, or future challenges, despite what others wanted or the sacrifices I made without thinking twice. But I didn’t know there was a purpose behind the whole shebang—maybe that session was an enormous sacrifice in my life, or maybe how it affected my future. As I was walking down the

corridor, I saw three fancy doors made of beautiful brown wood with shiny silver handles. It was dead quiet. I used my shoulder to push the door labelled seven, which made a squeaky sound before I got in. Wow, there were so many extra doors in this vast place before a woman finally greeted me, giving me a suspicious look through a slightly open door.

She offered her hand and welcomed me. 'It's wonderful to have you here.' And freed her hand at that moment. 'I am Kate, the secretary for Dr Bates,' and was pointing towards the sofa. 'Take a seat. I shall return in a jiffy.' She returned within five minutes, smiling and talking Spanish with another patient. 'Take care,' Kate said to the middle-aged woman, clad in a dull, flower-printed knee-length dress in shades of red—yellow and black, besides donned flat black shoes. Kate bid her farewell whilst casting a quick glance at me before saying, 'Dr Bates is ready now,' Showing me the direction of the room while she engaged in cordial chitchat with me; I walked a few steps behind her. 'Step inside, please, Mary.'

Right from the start, I felt this strange force in my bones, even before I got there and met them, and it turned into some weird flash. As soon as Kate opened the door, he started talking to her, and my heart started racing. The promnesia was real, and his voice was so rugged, like Clint Eastwood, and it made me feel all gooey inside whilst my legs went wobbly. The events didn't just happen by chance, and I felt both eager and anxious as I went through this mysterious and unfamiliar phase of my life.

His voice was like a total game-changer for my old memories.

## Chapter 4

### Déjà Vu

**E**ver had that feeling of déjà vu when seeing something new? Some believed that déjà vu was simply a glitch within the Matrix's system. Right off the bat, I felt a sense of familiarity with Dr Bates, like we'd met before. As soon as I walked in, I felt all these emotions that reminded me of him. I couldn't help but notice this handsome dude with salt-and-pepper curly hair chilling in his chair and giving me a cute look. Then, I had a déjà vu all over again when I saw him with his head askew and thought about it; my mind went crazy with all the places it could be. He looked so surprised when he saw me, like we had this connection or something; I could see it in his eyes. When he walked up to me, his smile was so bright, and it made me feel all happy inside. Then, he looked right into my eyes, like he could see into my soul and was thinking if he knew who I was. His eyes were like magnets, pulling me in with their mesmerising beauty and comforting presence before the excitement grew, buzzing with anticipation. I didn't get why my mind was filled with so many illusions. I took a deep breath and cleared my mind by exhaling. But then something weird happened as I reached out to shake his hand, and my hand just glided into his with this spooky grace, giving me the chills. The handshake felt odd, like it was straight out of a fairy tale, and left me totally confused.

As this weird force passed between our hands, with strange currents flowing from his hand to mine, maybe it appeared reversed, 'Hi, I am Mary.' I said, beaming all over my face.

He had this look, like Sean Connery, at his suavest time. 'Hey there, I'm Dr Drake Lucifer Bates,' he said, showing off his impressive manners.

This encounter brought up the question I had two days ago. But I couldn't connect with him based on anything from my past, and his name didn't ring a bell, and the feeling of déjà vu disappeared in a flash before I felt a shiver down my spine, not sure if it was creepy or cool. Besides that, I couldn't help but feel like I'd met him before, maybe through Paul's work, since we went to business events with important people like lawyers, CEOs, and artists. It could be Dr Bates held significance in Paul's life.

Despite my confusion and no response, the doc kept being polite and asked again. 'What can I do for you, Mary?' While lost in my thoughts, all I could focus on was how he held my hand, like we were one, as his dark, captivating eyes locked with mine and took me to another world. 'Hi Mary, what can I do for you?' He asked while I was zoning out.

I hoped he hadn't noticed the impact he had on me. His attitude hinted that he remembered me from some place before, and I glanced away, simulating the examination of a picture in the room. While all this cosmic activity occurred, I sensed his affectionate and playful grip strengthening while joining his other hand on top of mine. He made a subtle rotation by pushing it downwards before I withdrew my hand, inserting it into the pocket of my jeans before disappearing out of my reverie.

My clumsy speech was like a carnival clown's nonsense chatter. 'Oh...hmm... You see...They operated on my back in the past. Followed by a swim, it occurred. Yes, indeed... and after the past year, I felt these discomforts in my foot.' He gave me his full attention, staring into my eyes. 'Hmm... Well...' My speech was filled with confusion. 'It's like a pebble...' I took off my sandals, showing the cause of my discomfort. 'Exactly there.' And felt like a fool. 'I find it odd when I hear a crunch.'

He roared with laughter, treating me like a clown, finding my presence amusing. 'Ha...ha...what a witty clarification.' His gaze was hypnotic and

left me spellbound with awe.

I didn't find it funny at all, so my lips turned down. Then, I saw his amazing vibe, a cute smile, making me almost faint, while telling me to sit at his treatment table for an evaluation. He gave my leg a gentle squeeze and examined my foot. We had bumped into each other before 'cause I recognised his voice—like a strange connection, as when he'd held onto my hand. Besides, the way he held onto my heel with care, touching my toes. It felt like a gazillion years ago when a doctor did the same thing with the same touch and his intense glare and smile. The time began in the early 1800s, but I couldn't express how strange our connection was. I've had a *déjà vu* many times but still can't quite understand it.

As I wrote this book, I thought about a cool encounter with this awesome couple in their forties that I had met from Downunder. Ralph and Jenny were both Aussies, and they lived in Sydney before their tragic incident in 2017. He was, like, a total gentleman with a virtuous soul, a super cool guy with an amazing sense of humour and married to a gorgeous woman with an impeccable and lovely soul. They had a huge beauty clinic downtown because he was a cosmetic surgeon, and she was a nurse. Before the accident, we had agreed that I should visit them again soon to prepare for our plans before I moved to Aussie. I tried writing and calling them multiple times but got no response for months, and it freaked me out. Then, out of nowhere, my senses told me about their death and gave me nightmares for three nights straight. It was like a movie in my mind. Ralph was bound firmly to his wooden chair while being forced to watch what happened with Jenny. A dishevelled, dark-haired woman and a scruffy, rotund, dark-ginger-haired man tortured Ralph's wife, all while his agonised screams filled the room. For over an hour, he'd observed the heart-wrenching mishandling of his wife whilst feeling helpless because...