

I

‘Put me out with the bins,’ he said, regularly. ‘When I die, put me out with the bins. I’ll be dead, so I won’t know any different. You’ll be crying your eyes out,’ and he would laugh and I’d laugh too because we both knew that I wouldn’t be crying my eyes out. I never cry.

When the time came, on Wednesday 29th November 2017, I followed his instructions. He was small and frail and eighty-two years old by then, so it was easy to get him into one large garden waste bag.

It was a month since he’d been up and about. ‘No doctors,’ he said. ‘I know what they’re like.’ And he did, because he was a doctor, of psychiatry. He was still able to write prescriptions, though, and would send me to Roscommon to get those filled out.

I didn’t kill him; it wasn’t like that. I brought him in tea that morning and he was cold in his bed. Eyes closed, thank God. I hate it on those TV dramas when corpses stare up at the detective inspector. Maybe you only have your eyes open if you’ve been murdered?

‘Dad?’ I said, though I knew he was gone.

I sat on the end of the bed, took the lid off his beaker and drank the tea, missing the sugar I put in mine. I checked his pulse first, but I could tell by the waxiness of his skin. Only, waxy isn’t the right word. It was more like . . . his skin didn’t belong to him any more, or he didn’t belong to it.

Dragging the waste bag across the yard to the barn was hard. The ground was frosted so I had to heave the bag up on to my

shoulder every few minutes so that it wouldn't rip. Once a month, when he was well, Dad would empty the bins into the incinerator. He refused to pay the bin charges and we lived in such a secluded spot that the council didn't chase us about it.

I knew that corpses decomposed and began to rot and smell, so I carefully placed the bag into the incinerator barrel. I splashed some petrol over the top and set it going. I didn't stay to hear it burn. He was no longer he, it was a body, an 'it', in a domestic incinerator beside a barn in a field beside a house at the end of a lane, off a minor road.

Sometimes, when describing where we lived over the phone, Dad would say, 'I'm off the middle of nowhere. If you go to the middle of nowhere and then take a left, a right, another left until you come to a roundabout, take the second exit.'

He didn't like visitors. Apart from our doctor, Angela, we had callers maybe once every two years since Mum died. The last few fixed the car or installed a computer, and then a few years later, another man came and gave Dad the internet and a newer computer, and the last one came to improve our broadband. I stayed in my room on those occasions.

He never offered to teach me how to use the computer, but explained all the things it could do. I watched enough television to know what computers could do. They could bomb countries. They could spy on people. They could do brain surgery. They could reunite old friends and enemies and solve crimes. But I didn't want to do any of those things. Television was what I liked, documentaries, nature and history programmes, and I loved dramas, fantasy ones set in the future or Victorian ones set in great houses and beautiful dresses, and even the modern ones. I liked watching people with their exciting lives, their passionate love affairs, their unhappy families and their dark secrets. It's ironic, I suppose, because I didn't like people in real life. Most people.

I preferred to stay at home. Dad understood that. School had been horrendous. I went to all the classes, tried to avoid other girls and went straight home afterwards. They said I was autistic, even though my psychiatrist dad had told me I definitely wasn't. I joined no clubs or societies, despite Mum's pleading. When I did my final exams, I got two As and two Bs and two Cs in Honours subjects and a pass in Maths and Irish. That was twenty-five years ago, after which we moved again, to a bungalow at the end of a tiny lane, a mile outside the village of Carricksheedy.

Weekly shopping trips were always an ordeal. I sometimes pretended to be deaf to avoid conversation, but I could hear the schoolchildren's comments. 'Here she comes, Strange Sally Diamond, the weirdo.' Dad said there was no malice in it. Children are mean. Most of them. I was glad I was no longer a child. I was a forty-two-year-old woman.

I would collect Dad's pension and my long-term illness benefit from the post office. Years ago, the post office wanted us to set up direct debits to our bank accounts for our benefits and pension, but Dad said we should at least try to maintain some relationships with the villagers, so we ignored the advice. The bank was all the way over in Roscommon, eleven miles away. There was no ATM in Carricksheedy, though with most businesses, you could pay with your bank card and get cash back.

I also collected Dad's post because Dad said he didn't want a postman poking his nose into our business. Mrs Sullivan, the postmistress, would shout, 'How is your dad, Sally?' Maybe she thought I could lip-read. I nodded and smiled, and she would put her head to one side in sympathy as if a tragedy had occurred, and then I would go to the large Texaco garage. I would buy what we needed for the week and get

home again, nerves abating as I turned into the lane. The round trip never took longer than an hour.

When he was well, Dad would help unpack the shopping. We ate three meals every day. We cooked for each other. So, I prepared two meals and he prepared one, but the division of labour was even between us. We swapped duties as age took its toll on him. I did the hoovering and he unloaded the dishwasher. I did the ironing and the bins and he cleaned the shower.

And then he stopped coming out of his room, and he wrote his prescriptions with a shakier hand, and he only picked at food. Towards the end, it was ice cream. I fed it to him sometimes when his hands shook too much and I changed his bed linen on the days when he could no longer control himself and didn't make it to the chamber pot under his bed, which I emptied every morning and rinsed out with bleach. He had a bell beside his bed, but I couldn't hear it from the back kitchen, and in the last days, he was too feeble to lift it.

'You're a good girl,' he said weakly.

'You're the best dad,' I'd say, though I knew that wasn't exactly true. But it made him smile when I said it. Mum had taught me to say that. The best dad was the dad in *Little House on the Prairie*. And he was handsome.

My mum used to ask me to play this game in my head. To imagine what other people were thinking. It was a curious thing. Isn't it easier to ask them what they think? And is it any of my business? I know what I think. And I can use my imagination to pretend things that I could do, like the people on television, solving crimes and having passionate love affairs. But sometimes I try to think what the villagers see when they look at me. According to a magazine I read one time in

Angela's waiting room, I am half a stone overweight for my height, five foot eight inches. Angela laughed when I showed her the magazine, but she did encourage me to eat more fruit and vegetables and fewer carbs. My hair is long and auburn, but I keep it in a loose bun, slightly below the crown of my head. I wash it once a week in the bath. The rest of the week, I wear a shower cap and have a quick shower.

I wear one of my four skirts. I have two for winter and two for summer. I have seven blouses, three sweaters and a cardigan, and I still have a lot of Mum's old clothes, dresses and jackets, all good quality, even though they are old. Mum liked to go shopping with her sister, Aunt Christine, in Dublin two or three times a year 'for the sales'. Dad didn't approve but she said she would spend her money how she liked.

I don't wear bras. They are uncomfortable and I don't understand why so many women insist on them. When the clothes wore out, Dad bought me second-hand ones on the internet, except for the underwear. That was always new. 'You hate shopping and there's no point in wasting money,' he would say.

My skin is clear and clean. I have some lines on my forehead and around my eyes. I don't wear make-up. Dad bought me some once and suggested that I should try it out. My old friend television and the advertisements meant that I knew what to do with it, but I didn't look like me, with blackened eyes and pink lipstick. Dad agreed. He offered to get different types but he sensed my lack of enthusiasm and we didn't mention it again.

I think the villagers see a forty-two-year-old 'deaf' woman walking in and out of the village and occasionally driving an ancient Fiat. They must assume I can't work because of the deafness and that's why I get benefits. I get benefits because Dad said I am socially deficient.

Thomas Diamond wasn't my real dad. I was nine years old when he first told me. I didn't even know what my real name was, but he and my mum, who was also not my mum, told me that they had found me in a forest when I was a baby.

At first, I was upset. In the stories I had read, babies found in forests were changelings who wreaked havoc on the families they invaded. I do have an imagination, despite what Dad often said. But Mum took me on to her knee and assured me that those stories were made-up fairy tales. I hated sitting on Mum's knee, or on Dad's knee, so I wrestled myself away from her and asked for a biscuit. I got two. I believed in Santa Claus right up until I was twelve years old and Dad sat me down and told me the sorry truth.

'But why would you make up such a thing?' I asked.

'It's a fun thing for children to believe, but you're not a little girl any more.'

And that was true. I had begun to bleed. The pain of the periods replaced the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny, and Mum and Dad began to explain other things. 'If Santa Claus doesn't exist, does God, or the devil?' Mum looked to Dad and he said, 'Nobody knows.' I found that concept difficult. If they knew for a fact that Santa Claus didn't exist, why didn't they know for sure about God?

My childhood was replaced by duller, less colourful teenage years. Mum explained that boys might take an interest in me, that they might try to kiss me. They never did, except one time when I was fourteen and an old man tried to force

his mouth on to mine and crept his hand up my skirt at a bus shelter. I punched him in the face, kicked him to the ground and stamped on his head. Then the bus came and I got on, and was annoyed by the delay as the bus driver got off to help the old man. I watched him rise slowly to his feet, blood trickling from his head. The driver asked me what had happened, but I stayed silent and pretended that I couldn't hear him. I got home twenty minutes late and missed the start of *Blue Peter*.

When I was fifteen, I heard a girl in my class telling two others that I had been a feral child, found on the side of a mountain and then adopted by the Diamonds. She said this in the toilets. I was sitting on the cistern, my feet on the lid of the toilet in a cubicle, eating my lunch. 'You can't tell anyone,' she said. 'My ma heard it through a friend of hers who used to work for Dr Diamond when it happened. That's why she's so weird.'

The other girls did not keep it a secret. For a few weeks, they tried talking to me, asking me if I liked mountain climbing and if I ate grass. Stella Coughlan told them all to leave me alone, that it was none of their business. I ignored them all. I didn't ask Mum and Dad about it. I already knew I was adopted and I also knew that babies can't survive on mountains and that stupid girls make up things to be spiteful.

Mum died the year after I left school. We had been fighting a lot. She had wanted me to go to university. She had filled out my university application forms against my wishes. She thought I should study Music or the sciences. I love music and playing the piano is probably my favourite thing to do. Mum had a teacher come to the house to give me lessons when I was nine. I liked Mrs Mooney. She said I was a gifted pianist. She died when I was in my teens and I didn't want

another teacher, so I taught myself to get better at it. I didn't want to take any exams. I just liked playing.

Mum said there were many options open to me. But I did not want to meet strangers and I did not want to leave our new home. Dad said I could do an Open University degree, but Mum said I needed to be 'socialized' because I would never leave the house or get a job if I wasn't pushed. I said I didn't want to leave the house, and she was angry.

The week after that argument, she had a stroke, while working in her GP practice in the village, and died in hospital. The funeral was in Dublin because that's where all her family and old friends lived. She had always visited them regularly. On the few occasions her sister, Christine, had visited us, I had followed her around like a dog. She was like a glamorous version of Mum. Dad would stay in his study when she visited. Mum said that Dad made Aunt Christine feel unwelcome. After Mum died, she stopped visiting but always sent me birthday cards with money in them.

Dad asked me with wet eyes if I would come to Mum's funeral, but I declined. I needed to sort out Mum's clothes and see which could fit me and which would go to the charity shop. I asked Dad to bring back a recipe book from Dublin because Mum had done most of the cooking and, while I was excellent at helping her peel vegetables, I wasn't so adept at pulling together a full meal. But I knew I could learn from books.

When Dad returned after two days in Dublin, he asked me if I was sad and if I missed Mum, and I reassured him that I didn't and he wasn't to worry about me. Dad looked at me in that funny way he had sometimes and said that I was probably lucky to be the way I was, that I could probably avoid heartache for my whole life.

I know I don't think in the way that other people do, but if I could stay away from them, then what did it matter? Dad said I was unique. I don't mind. I have been called so many things, but my name is Sally. At least, that's the name Mum and Dad gave me.

In the days after Dad died, it was quiet. Maybe I did miss him? I had nobody to talk to, nobody to make tea for, nobody to spoon-feed ice cream to. Nobody to wash and change. What was I for? I wandered around the house and, on the third day, I went into his office and idly opened his drawers, found a lot of cash and Mum's old jewellery in a metal box. Lots of notebooks documenting my weight and height and development going back decades. A fat envelope addressed to me on his desk. Files and files with my name on them in different categories: communication, emotional development, empathy, comprehension, health, medication, deficiencies, diet, etc. Too many to ever read. I looked at their wedding photo on the mantelpiece, and remembered how Mum said they never felt like a complete family until they found me. I had long since been disabused of the notion that I was a foundling child. They had adopted me in the ordinary way, Mum said. She had asked if I was curious about my birth parents, and when I said no, she beamed at me. I felt good when I made my parents smile.

I looked at Dad's old photos of his working days, presenting papers at conferences in Zurich. Photos of him with other earnest-looking men in suits. Dad mostly studied and wrote academic papers but sometimes, if called upon in an emergency by Mum, he might attend to a local patient in Carricksheedy or beyond.

He studied the human mind. He told me that my mind worked perfectly but that I was emotionally disconnected. I

was his life's work, he said. I asked him if he could reconnect the emotions and he said that all he and Mum could do was love me and hope that, one day, I would learn to love them back. I cared about them. I didn't want any harm to come to them. I didn't like to see them upset. I thought that was love. I kept asking Dad, but he said I shouldn't worry, that whatever I felt was enough, but I don't think he understood me. I got anxious sometimes, if there were too many people around, or if I didn't know answers to questions, or if a noise was too loud. I thought I could recognize love from books and TV, but I remember watching *Titanic* one Christmas Day and thinking that Jack would have died anyway because he was a third-class passenger and a man, and Rose would most likely have survived because she was rich and it was 'women and children first', so what was the point of adding in the love story that wasn't even factually true. Dad was sobbing.

I didn't like hugging, or to be touched. But I never stopped wondering about love. Was that my emotional disconnection? I should have asked Dad when he was alive.

Five days after Dad died, a knock on the door came from Ger McCarthy, a neighbour who leased a field behind our barn. I was used to him coming and going up the lane. He was a man of few words and, as Dad used to say, he was 'a great man for asking no questions and making no small talk'.

'Sally,' he said, 'there's a wild smell out of that barn of yours. My cattle are all accounted for, but I'm after thinking that a sheep strayed in and got caught in there and died or something. Would you like me to take a look, or is your dad up to it?'

I assured him I could deal with it. He went on his way, whistling tunelessly, his overalls splattered with mud.

When I got out to the barn, the smell from the incinerator barrel made me gag. I wrapped my scarf around my mouth and opened the door. It hadn't burned properly. I could see the full shape of the body. There was an oily substance around the bottom of the barrel. Flies and maggots swarmed around it. I set the fire going again with rolled-up newspapers from the house and logs from the barn.

I felt disappointed with myself. Dad should have been more specific with his instructions. We burned organic matter regularly. Corpses were organic matter, weren't they? Maybe crematoriums were hotter. I would look it up in the encyclopaedia later. I poured in the rest of the petrol to get the fire started, hoping that a second burning would do the job. I pulled at my hair to calm myself.

I went to the post office to collect my benefits, and Mrs Sullivan tried to give me Dad's pension too. I pushed the cash back towards her and she looked at me quizzically and shouted, 'Your dad will be needing his pension.'

'He won't,' I said, 'because he died.' Her eyebrows went up and her mouth opened.

'Oh my God! You can speak. I never knew. Now, what did you say?' and I had to repeat that I wouldn't be needing Dad's pension any more because he was dead.

She looked behind me at the butcher's wife. 'She can speak,' she said, and the butcher's wife said, 'I'm amazed!'

'I am so sorry,' Mrs Sullivan continued to shout, and the butcher's wife reached out and put her hand on my elbow. I flinched and shrugged off her touch.

'When is the funeral?' she said. 'I never saw it on the death notices.'

'There's no funeral,' I said. 'I cremated him myself.'

'What do you mean?' said Mrs Butcher and I told her that

I had put him in the incinerator because he had told me to put him out with the bins when he died.

There was a silence, and I was turning to leave when Mrs Butcher said, with a tremor in her voice, ‘How did you know he was dead?’ And then Mrs Sullivan said to Mrs Butcher, ‘I don’t know who to call. The guards or a doctor?’

I turned back to her and said, ‘It’s too late for a doctor, he’s dead. Why would you call the guards?’

‘Sally, when somebody dies, the authorities have to be notified.’

‘But it’s none of their business,’ I protested. They were making me confused.

When I got home, I played the piano for a while. Then I went into the kitchen and made a cup of tea. I took the tea into Dad’s office. The phone began to ring and I turned it off. I looked at the envelope on his laptop with ‘Sally’ written on the front, and ‘to be opened after my death’ in Dad’s shaky handwriting. It didn’t say how long after his death I should open it, and I wondered if it might contain a birthday card. My birthday wasn’t for another nine days, so I was going to wait until then. I would be forty-three years old. I felt like it was going to be a good year.

It was a large envelope and, when I picked it up, I could feel that it was thick and that it contained many pages. Maybe it wasn’t a birthday card. I put it into the pocket of my skirt. I would read it after *Murder She Wrote* and *Judge Judy*. I settled myself into the living room on the sofa I used to share with Mum. I looked at Dad’s empty armchair and thought about him for a few minutes.

I was soon distracted by the goings-on in Cabot Cove. This time Jessica Fletcher’s gardener had been up to no good with the rich lawyer’s widow and she killed him when he

refused to leave his wife. As usual, Jessica outsmarted the Sheriff in solving the crime. During one of the ad breaks in *Judge Judy*, I heard a knock on the front door.

I was shocked. Who could it be? Perhaps Dad had ordered something on his computer, though that was unlikely because he hadn't used it for about a month before he died. I turned up the television loud as the knocking continued. It stopped and I had to rewind the TV because *Judge Judy* had started again and I'd missed a bit. Then a head appeared at the window to my left. I screamed. But it was only Angela.

4

Dr Angela Caffrey had been Mum's business partner and took over the practice after Mum died. I had visited the practice many times over the years. I didn't mind Angela touching me or examining me, because she always explained clearly what was going to happen. And she always made me better. Dad liked her and so did I.

'Sally! Are you all right? Mrs Sullivan told me Tom has died, is that right?'

I stood awkwardly at the door to Dad's study in the hall. In the past, Dad always invited Angela into the sitting room and offered her tea, but I didn't want her to stay long. Angela had other ideas.

'Shall we go through to the kitchen, and you can tell me all about it?'

I led her down the steps to the kitchen.

'Oh, you have the place spotless, your mum would be so proud. You know, I haven't been here for ages.' She pulled out Dad's chair from the table and sat down on it. I stood with my back to the range.

'So, Sally, did your father die?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, poor Tom! Was he ill for a long time?'

'He slowed down a lot and then he went to bed about a month ago and didn't get up.'

'I wonder why he didn't call me? I'd have come straight out. I could have made sure he was comfortable.'

‘He wrote pain med prescriptions for me to get filled in Roscommon.’

‘He wrote prescriptions for himself? That’s not exactly legal.’

‘He put them in my name. He said he wouldn’t go to jail and neither would I.’

‘I see.’ She paused. ‘And when exactly did he pass away?’

‘I found him dead on Wednesday when I brought him in his tea in the morning.’

‘Oh my dear, that must have been so distressing. Now, I don’t want to pry but Maureen Kenny –’

‘Who?’

‘Maureen, the butcher’s wife? She said that you said there was no funeral and that you had him cremated on your own.’

‘Yes.’

‘And where was this cremation held?’

‘In the green barn.’

‘Sorry?’

‘The green barn.’

‘Here? Behind the house?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you not think to call someone? Me, the hospital, an undertaker?’

I felt like I was in trouble, like I’d done something wrong.

‘He told me to put him out with the bins.’

‘He . . . what? He was joking, he didn’t mean that!’

‘He didn’t tell me it was a joke.’

‘But how can you be sure he was dead?’

‘He wasn’t breathing. Do you want to see the incinerator?’ I asked.

Her eyes opened wide. ‘That’s not the way to dispose of . . . Sally, this is serious. Only a medical professional can certify a death. Didn’t he leave any instructions about his funeral?’

‘No, I don’t . . .’ and then I remembered about the envelope. ‘He left this for me.’ I pulled it out of my pocket.

‘And what does it say?’

‘I haven’t opened it yet.’

I was getting bothered with all of this talking. Either I don’t talk at all, or I talk too much and I say things that don’t make sense to anyone but me.

I put my hands over my ears and Angela moderated her voice.

‘Would you like me to open it? May I read it?’

I threw the envelope at her and went to the piano, but it didn’t calm me. I went to my room and crawled under the duvet and the soft blue blanket. I began to pull hair from my head. I didn’t know what to do. I wondered when Angela would leave. I listened to hear the front door shut.

A soft knocking sound woke me up. It was dusk outside. I must have blacked out. It happens when I am distressed, though it hadn't happened in many years.

'Sally?' Angela whispered. I looked at my watch. She had been there for three hours and twenty-five minutes.

'Yes?'

'I've made some tea and beans on toast. You should get up because we have to talk.'

'Is there sugar in the tea?'

'Not yet,' she said, 'but I'll add some.'

'Which mug did you use?'

'I . . . I'm not sure.'

I opened the door and followed Angela down the hall.

She gave me my tea in Dad's Scrabble mug. I added a spoon and a half of sugar and an extra teaspoon of milk. She had made herself tea in a china mug that neither Dad nor I had ever used.

'So, I've read your dad's letters –'

'There's more than one?'

'Yes. It's okay, love. The thing is, I have to call the guards, and they will want to talk to you. But I don't want you to worry because I'm going to be with you, and I'll explain your condition to them and I'll make sure they are gentle with you. But, and this is the hard bit, they will probably want to search the house and you should come and stay with Nadine and me for a little bit, while they carry out their enquiries.'

‘What enquiries?’

‘It’s just that . . . it’s . . . unusual to burn a body of a family member, it’s not legal, and I’m so sorry to tell you this, love, but there were funeral instructions in his letter . . . among other things.’

‘Oh. Why would the guards want to search the house? On TV, they always leave a terrible mess.’

‘They’d want to reassure themselves that your dad died of natural causes, but it’s clear in his letter that he knew he had little time left. It’s obvious that he trusted you, and that he loved you. I’m confident the post-mortem will show that he was already dead.’

‘I don’t want visitors and I don’t want to come to your house.’

‘Sally, if I can’t control this, you might end up in a prison cell for a few nights or more. Please believe me. Your mum and dad would have wanted me to help you. In the letter, your dad said you should ring me when he died.’

I pulled at my hair again. She reached out but I flinched away from her. ‘Sorry, I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking,’ she said.

‘But he didn’t say when to open the letter. He just wrote to open it after he died. I didn’t know I was supposed to open it that same day.’

‘I know, but I’m afraid there is going to be a lot of fuss now. I’m going to call the guards, and they will want to interview you. You might need a solicitor. But I will be with you and I’ll explain anything that your dad hasn’t explained in the letters, although he was thorough.’ She paused. ‘There are things in the letters that you may find . . . upsetting. But we will take it slowly. Your dad only wanted you to read one section per week. There are three different parts.’

‘Why?’

‘Well, there’s . . . a lot to take in. I thought your mum and

dad were open with me about your circumstances, but it seems there was a lot they kept hidden from everyone.'

'About me?'

'Yes, Sally. But we can discuss that another time. I have to call the guards now. Would you like a mild sedative before they come? To help you stay calm?'

'Yes please.'

6

Two guards came, not one. One man, one woman. I didn't look at their faces. They were nice and calm until I told them I'd put my dad in a refuse sack and then into the incinerator. The smaller one raised her voice. 'What in the name of God did you do -'

Angela asked her to lower her voice. The pill that Angela gave me made me feel like I was in a kind of dream world. They said they would have to get a forensics team straight away and that I needed to pack a bag and leave the house, but that I must leave out the clothes I had worn the day my father died. They groaned when I presented them with a neat pile, freshly laundered. Angela said she needed to give a copy of Dad's letter to the guards and she photocopied it in his office while I went to my room to pack a bag. The woman guard followed me, tutting. I used Dad's suitcase. I didn't have one of my own. He wouldn't mind. It was dark, and it was after my bedtime.

'Will you please not make a mess?' I said. The man said they'd do their best and the woman made a harrumphing noise and said, 'You'll be lucky.' Angela gave the man the photocopied pages and asked him to make sure that they were given to the highest-ranking officers in the investigation. He nodded. He said little. He asked for the keys of the Fiat. I gave them to him but asked him to make sure they repositioned the seat when they were finished going wherever they needed to go in it. They said they would need me to come to the station in Roscommon in the morning. Angela said that she would bring me there herself.

As I left the house, I heard the woman guard say ‘Fucking psycho’ to the man, but he noted that I heard and shushed her. She turned to look at me and I was able to read disgust on her face.

I don’t know why she was disgusted. The house was spotless. As I walked towards Angela’s car, four patrol cars arrived through our gateway and people started putting on white plastic suits over their clothes. They set up these huge light beacons pointing towards the house and barn. Angela said they were treating it as a crime scene.

I was feeling a little drowsy but I wanted to stay. In lots of dramas, police planted evidence or contaminated the scene. I needed to make sure that wouldn’t happen. Angela assured me that it wouldn’t.

We didn’t say much on the drive to her house, but I looked at her then while she watched the road. She was a nice rounded shape. Like grannies in old TV shows. She had curly grey hair. She wore a check shirt and a denim skirt and black ankle boots. I liked the way she looked. She glanced over at me and smiled and frowned at the same time. Dad always warned me about mistaking people for how they look with how they act, but we both liked Angela.

I woke up in a strange bed in a strange house, although my own blue blanket was on the bed. I had packed it last night. I opened my mouth to scream, but Dad had always said that I mustn't do that unless I was in danger. Was I in danger? I would shortly have to explain again why I had disposed of my dad. I shut my mouth and didn't scream. I remember Mum saying that if you tell the truth, nothing bad can happen to you.

I heard some commotion outside the bedroom door. 'Hello?' I called.

'Sally, I'm leaving some green towels inside the bathroom for you. The shower is easy to use. We'll see you downstairs for breakfast in about twenty minutes, okay?'

It was Nadine's voice. Nadine was Angela's wife. I had met her around Carricksheedy several times. She was younger than Angela and wore her long blonde hair in a ponytail. She walked their dogs and tended to their chickens and designed furniture for her job. I didn't like the dogs and always crossed the road. 'We've put the dogs outside so you don't have to worry, okay?'

Dad went to their wedding. I was invited too but I didn't go. Too much fuss.

Their bathroom was like you'd see in a hotel in a film, or in an ad for bathrooms. I sat on the toilet and then washed my hands and brushed my teeth before stepping into the large shower stall with one glass wall. We had one family bathroom at home and a separate toilet, and the shower was