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The Legacy

Written by Katherine Webb

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The
Legacy

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Prologue

1905

Gradually, Caroline returned to her senses. The numbness inside her head receded and she became aware of myriad thoughts, darting like caged birds, too fast for her to grasp. Unsteadily, she got to her feet. The child was still there, on the bed. A slick of fear washed down her spine. Part of her had been hoping that it would not be so; that somehow he would have gone, or better still never have been there at all. He had pulled himself to the far side of the bed, struggling to crawl properly on the slippery-soft counterpane. His strong fists grasped handfuls of it and he moved as if swimming very slowly across the expanse of teal-green silk. He had grown so big and strong. In another place, in another life, he would have been a warrior. His hair was midnight black. The baby peered over the bed and then turned his head to look at Caroline. He made a single sound, like *dah*; and although it was nonsense Caroline could tell it was a question. Her eyes swam with tears, and her legs threatened to fold again. He was real; he was here, in her bed chamber at Storton Manor, and he had grown strong enough to question her.

Her shame was a cloud she could not see through. It was like smoke in the air – it obscured everything, made it impossible to think. She had no idea what to do. Long minutes passed, until she thought she heard a footstep in the hallway outside the door. It sent her heart lurching, so all she knew, in the end, was that the baby couldn't stay there. Not on the bed, not in her room, not in the manor house. He just *could not*; and neither must any of the servants, or her husband, know that he ever had been. Perhaps

the staff had discovered him already, had seen or heard something whilst she had been slumped, insensible, on the floor. She could only pray that it wasn't so. She had no idea how long she had waited, her mind scrambled by terror and grief. Not long enough for the child to grow bored with its explorations of the bed, so perhaps not too long after all. There was still time to act, and she had no choice.

Wiping her face, Caroline went around the bed and picked the boy up, too ashamed to look into his eyes. They were black too, she knew. As black and inscrutable as ink spots. He was so much heavier than she remembered. She lay him down and took off all his clothes, including his napkin, even though they were coarsely made, in case they could somehow lead back to her. She cast them into the grate, where they oozed smoke and stank on the embers of the morning's fire. Then she looked around, temporarily at a loss, before her eyes lit on the embroidered pillowcase at the head of the bed. It had fine, precise needlework, depicting yellow, ribbon-like flowers. The linen was smooth and thick. Caroline stripped the pillow bare and put the struggling baby into the case. She did this tenderly, her hands aware of her love for the child even if her mind could not encompass it. But she did not use it to wrap him in. Instead she turned it into a sack and carried the baby out in it like a poacher might carry rabbits. Tears wet her face, wringing themselves from the core of her. But she could not pause, she could not let herself love him again.

Outside it was raining heavily. Caroline crossed the lawn with her back aching and the skin of her scalp crawling, feeling the eyes of the house upon her. Once safely out of sight beneath the trees she gasped for breath, her knuckles white where they gripped the pillowcase shut. Inside, the child was fidgeting and mumbling, but he did not cry out. Rain ran through her hair and dripped from her chin. *But it will never wash me clean*, she told herself with quiet despair. There was a pond, she knew. A dew pond, at the far side of

the grounds where the estate met the rolling downs from which sprang the stream that flowed through the village. It was deep and still and shaded; the water dark on a cloudy day like today, matt with the falling rain, ready to hide any secret cast into it. She held her breath as the thought of it rose in her mind. It turned her cold. *No, I cannot*, she pleaded, silently. *I cannot*. She had taken so much from him already.

She walked further, not in the direction of the pond but away from the house, praying for some other option to present itself. When it did, Caroline staggered with relief. There was a covered wagon, parked in a green clearing where the woods met the lane. A black and white pony was tethered next to it, its rump hunched into the weather, and thin skeins of smoke rose from a metal chimney pipe in the roof. *Tinkers*, she thought, with a flare of desperate hope in her chest. They would find him, take him, move away with him. She would never have to see him again, never be faced with him again. But he would be cared for. He would have a life.

Now the baby began to cry as rain soaked through the pillowcase and reached his skin. Hurriedly, Caroline hoisted the sack back onto her shoulder and made her way through the trees to the other side of the clearing, further away from the house so that the trail would not point in that direction. It would seem, she hoped, that somebody coming along the lane from the south had left the child. She put him amongst the knotted roots of a large beech tree, where it was fairly dry, and backed away as his cries grew louder and more insistent. *Take him and be gone*, she implored silently.

She stumbled back into the woods as quickly and quietly as she could, and the baby's cries followed her for a while before finally falling out of earshot. When they did, her steps faltered. She stood still, swaying, torn between continuing forwards and going back. *I will never hear him again*, she told herself, but there was no relief in this, in the end. It could not be any other way, but a chill spread through the heart of her, solid and sharp as ice, because there would

be no getting away from what she had done, she knew then; no forgetting it. It sat inside her like a canker, and just as there was no going back, she was no longer sure that she could go on either. Her hand went to her midriff, to where she knew a child lay nestled. She let it feel the warmth of her hand, as if to prove to this child that she was still living, and feeling, and would love it. Then she made her way slowly back to the house, where she would realise, hours too late, that having carefully stripped the baby she had then left him to be found in the fine, embroidered pillowcase. She pressed her face into her bare pillow and tried to wipe the boy child from her memory.

*'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness.*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Frost at Midnight*

I

At least it's winter. We only ever came here in the summertime, so the place doesn't seem quite the same. It's not as dreadfully familiar, not as overpowering. Storton Manor, grim and bulky, the colour of today's low sky. A Victorian, neo-Gothic pile with stone-mullioned windows and peeling woodwork green with algae. Drifts of dead leaves against the walls and moss spreading up from behind them, reaching the ground-floor sills. Climbing out of the car, I breathe calmly. It's been a very English winter so far. Damp and muddy. The hedgerows look like smudged purple bruises in the distance. I wore bright jewel colours today, in defiance of the place, in defiance of its austerity, and the weight of it in my memory. Now I feel ridiculous, clownish.

Through the windscreen of my tatty white Golf I can see Beth's hands in her lap and the wispy ends of the long rope of her hair. Odd strands of grey snake through it now, and it seems too soon, far too soon. She was feverish keen to get here, but now she sits like a statue. Those pale, thin hands, folded limply in her lap – passive, waiting. Our hair used to be so bright when we were little. It was the white blonde of angels, of young Vikings; a purity of colour that faded with age to this uninspiring, mousy brown. I colour mine now, to cheer it up. We look less and less like sisters these days. I remember Beth and Dinny with their heads together, conspiring, whispering: his hair so dark, and hers so fair. I was cramped with jealousy at the time, and now, in my mind's eye, their heads look like yin and yang. As thick as thieves.

The windows of the house are blank, showing dark reflections of the naked trees all around. These trees seem taller now, and they lean too close to the house. They need cutting back. Am I thinking

of things to do, things to improve? Am I picturing living here? The house is ours now, all twelve bedrooms; the soaring ceilings, the grand staircase, the underground rooms where the flagstones are worn smooth from the passage of servile feet. It's all ours, but only if we stay and live here. That's what Meredith always wanted. Meredith – our grandmother, with her spite and her hands in bony fists. She wanted our mother to move us all in years ago, and watch her die. Our mother refused, was duly cut off, and we continued our happy, suburban lives in Reading. If we don't move here it will be sold and the money sent to good causes. Meredith a philanthropist in death, perversely. So now the house is ours – but only for a little while, because I don't think we can bear to live here.

There's a reason why not. If I try to look right at it, it slips away like vapour. Only a name surfaces: Henry. The boy who disappeared, who just wasn't there any more. What I think now, staring up into the dizzying branches; what I think is that I *know*. I know why we can't live here, why it's even remarkable that we've come at all. *I know*. I know why Beth won't even get out of the car now. I wonder if I shall have to coax her out, the way one must coax her to eat. Not a single plant grows on the ground between here and the house – the shade is too deep. Or perhaps the ground is poisoned. It smells of earth and rot, velvety fungus. *Humus*, the word returns from science lessons years ago. A thousand tiny insect mouths biting, working, digesting the ground. There is a still moment then. Silence from the engine, silence in the trees and the house, and all the spaces in between. I scramble back into the car.

Beth is staring at her hands. I don't think she's even looked up yet, looked out at the house. Suddenly I doubt whether I've done the right thing, bringing her here. Suddenly I fear that I've left it too late, and this fear gives my insides a twist. There are sinews in her neck like lengths of string and she's folded into an angular shape in her seat, all hinges and corners. So thin these days, so fragile looking. Still my sister, but different now. There's something inside

her that I can't know, can't fathom. She's done things that I can't grasp, and had thoughts I can't imagine. Her eyes, fixed on her knees, are glassy and wide. Maxwell wants her hospitalised again. He told me on the phone, two days ago, and I bit his head off for suggesting it. But I act differently around her now, however hard I try not to, and part of me hates her for it. She's my big sister. She should be stronger than me. I give her arm a little rub, smile brightly. 'Shall we go in?' I say. 'I could use a stiff drink.' My voice is loud in such close quarters. I picture Meredith's crystal decanters, lined up in the drawing room. I used to sneak in as a child, peer into the mysterious liquids, watch them catch the light, lift the stoppers for an illicit sniff. It seems somehow grotesque, to drink her whisky now she's dead. This solicitude is my way of showing Beth that I know she doesn't want to be back here. But then, with a deep breath, she gets out and strides over to the house as if driven, and I hurry after her.

Inside, the house does seem smaller, as things from childhood will, but it's still huge. The flat I share in London seemed big when I moved in because there were enough rooms not to have to peer through drying laundry to watch the TV. Now, faced with the echoing expanse of the hallway, I feel the ridiculous urge to cartwheel. We dither there, drop our bags at the foot of the stairs. This is the first time we've ever arrived here alone, without our parents, and it feels so odd that we mill like sheep. Our roles are defined by habit, by memory and custom. Here, in this house, we are children. But I must make light of it, because I can see Beth faltering, and a frantic look gathering behind her eyes.

'Stick the kettle on. I'll dig out some booze and we'll have tipsy coffee.'

'Erica, it's not even lunchtime.'

'So what? We're on holiday, aren't we?' Oh, but we're not. No we're not. I don't know what this is, but it's not a holiday. Beth shakes her head.

‘I’ll just have tea,’ she says, drifting towards the kitchen. Her back is narrow, shoulders pointing sharply through the fabric of her shirt. I notice them with a jolt of unease – just ten days, since I saw her last, but she is visibly thinner now. I want to squeeze her, to make her be well.

The house is cold and damp, so I press buttons on an ancient panel until I hear things stirring, deep pipes complaining, water seething. There are rank ashes in the fire grates; there are still tissues and a sweetly rotting apple core in the waste-paper basket in the drawing room. Encroaching on Meredith’s life like this makes me feel uneasy, slightly sick. As if I might turn and catch her reflection in the mirror – an acid grimace, hair tinted falsely gold. I pause at the window and look out onto the winter garden, a mess of leggy plants falling over, unpruned. These are the smells I remember from our summers here: coconut sun cream; oxtail soup for lunch, no matter how hot the weather; sweet, heavy clouds from the roses and lavenders around the patio; the pungent, meaty smell of Meredith’s fat Labradors, panting their hot exhaustion onto my shins. So different now. That could have been centuries ago; it could have happened to someone else entirely. A few raindrops skitter onto the glass and I am a hundred years away from everything and everyone. Here, we are truly alone, Beth and I. Alone, in this house again, in our conspiracy of silence, after all this time in which nothing has been resolved, in which Beth has pulled herself apart, a piece at a time, and I have dodged and evaded it all.

First we have to sort, to make some order of all the layers of possessions, of the items that have gathered into drifts in corners. This house has so many rooms, so much furniture, so many drawers and cupboards and hiding places. I should feel sad, I suppose, to think of it sold; the line of family history down the years to Beth and me, breaking. But I don’t. Perhaps because, by rights, everything should have gone to Henry. That was when it all

got broken. I watch Beth for a while, as she lifts lace handkerchiefs out of a drawer and piles them on her knee. She takes them out one by one, studying the patterns, tracing the threads with her fingertips. The pile on her knee is not as tidy as the pile in the drawer. There's no point to what she's doing. It's one of those things she does that I can't understand.

'I'm going for a walk,' I announce, rising on stiff knees, biting back irritation. Beth jumps as if she'd forgotten I was there.

'Where are you going?'

'For a walk, I just said. I need some fresh air.'

'Well, don't be long,' Beth says. She does this sometimes, as well – talks to me as if I'm a wilful child, as if I might run off. I sigh.

'No. Twenty minutes. Stretch my legs.' I think she knows where I'm going.

I follow my feet. The lawn is ragged and lumpy; a choppy sea of broken brown grasses that soak my feet. It all used to be so manicured, so beautiful. I had been thinking, without thinking, that it must have got out of hand since Meredith died. But that's ridiculous. She died a month ago, and the garden shows several seasons of neglect. We have been neglectful of her ourselves, it would seem. I have no idea how she coped before she died – *if* she coped. She was just there, in the back of my mind. Mum and Dad came to see her, every year or so. Beth and I hadn't been for an age. But our absence was understood, I think; it was never tested too hard. We were never pestered to come. Perhaps she would have liked us to, perhaps not. It was hard to tell with Meredith. She was not a sweet grandmother, she was not even maternal. Our great-grandmother, Caroline, was also here while our mother grew up. Another source of discomfort. Our mother left as soon as she could. Meredith died suddenly, of a stroke. One day ageless, an old woman for as long as I can remember; the next day no longer. I saw her last at Mum and Dad's silver wedding anniversary, not here but in an overheated hotel with plush carpets. She sat like a queen

at her table and cast a cold glare around the room, eyes sharp above a puckered mouth.

Here's the dew pond. Where it always was, but it looks so different in winter colours. It sits in the corner of a large field of closely grazed turf. The field stretches away to the east, woods to the west. Those woods would shed a dappled green light onto the surface; a cool colour, cast from branches that fidgeted and sang with birds. They're naked now, studded with loud rooks clacking and clamouring at one another. It was irresistible on hot July days, this pond; but with the sky this drab it looks flat, like a shallow puddle. Clouds chase across it. I know it's not shallow. It was fenced off when we were children, but with a few strands of barbed wire that were no match for determined youngsters. It was worth the scratched calves, the caught hair. In the sunshine the water was a glassy blue. It looked deep but Dinny said it was deeper even than that. He said the water fooled the eye, and I didn't believe him until he dived one day, taking a huge lungful of air and kicking, kicking downwards. I watched his brown body ripple and truncate, watched him continue to kick even when it seemed he should have reached the chalky bottom. He surfaced with a gasp, to find me rapt, astonished.

This pond feeds the stream that runs through the village of Barrow Storton, down the side of this wide hill from the manor house. This pond is etched in my memory; it seems to dominate my childhood. I can see Beth paddling at the edge the first time I swam in it. She stalked to and fro, nervous because she was the eldest, and the banks were steep, and if I drowned it would be her fault. I dived again and again, trying to reach the bottom like Dinny had, never making it, and hearing Beth's high threats each time I popped back into the air. Like a cork, I was. Buoyant with the puppy fat on my chubby legs, my round stomach. She made me run around and around the garden before she would let me near the house, so I would be dry, so I would be warm and not white, teeth chattering, requiring explanation.

Behind me, there are distant glimpses of the house through the bare trees. That's something I've never noticed before. You can't see it through summer trees, but now it watches, it waits. It worries me to know that Beth is inside, alone, but I don't want to go back yet. I carry on walking, climbing over the gate into the field. This field, and then another, and then you are on the downs – rolling Wiltshire chalk downland, marked here and there by prehistory, marked here and there by tanks and target practice. On the horizon sits the barrow that gives the village its name, a Bronze Age burial mound for a king whose name and fame have passed out of all remembrance: a low, narrow hump, about the length of two cars, open at one end. In summer this king lies under wild barley, bright ragwort and forget-me-nots, and listens to the endless rich chortling of larks. But now it's more brittle grasses, dead thistles, an empty crisp packet.

I stop at the barrow and look down at the village, catching my breath after the climb. There's not much movement, a few ragged columns of chimney smoke, a few well-swaddled residents walking their dogs to the postbox. From this lonely hill it seems like the centre of the universe. *This populous village!* Coleridge pops into my head. I've been doing the conversation poems with my year tens. I've been trying to make them read slowly enough to feel the words, to absorb the images; but they skim on, chatter like monkeys.

The air is biting up here – it parts around me like a cold wave. My toes have gone numb because my shoes are soaked through. There are ten, twenty pairs of Wellington boots in the house, I know. Down in the basement, in neat rows with cobwebs draped around them. That one horrible time I didn't shake a boot out before putting a bare foot inside, and felt the tickle of another occupant. I am out of practice at living in the countryside; ill-equipped for changes in the terrain, for ground that hasn't been carefully prepared to best convenience me. And yet when asked I

would say I grew up here. Those early summers, so long and distinct in my mind, rising like islands from a sea of school days and wet weekends too blurred and uniform to recall.

At the entrance to the barrow the wind makes a low moan. I jump two-footed down the stone steps and startle a girl inside. She straightens with a gasp and hits her head on the low ceiling, crouches again, puts both hands around her skull to cradle it.

‘Shit! Sorry! I didn’t mean to pounce on you like that . . . I didn’t know anybody was in here.’ I smile. The wan light from the doorway shines onto her, onto golden bubble curls tied back with a turquoise scarf, onto a young face and an oddly shapeless body, swathed in long chiffon skirts and crochet. She squints up at me, and I must be a silhouette to her, a black bulk against the sky outside. ‘Are you OK?’ She doesn’t answer me. Tiny bright posies have been pushed into gaps in the wall in front of her, snipped stems neatly bound with ribbon. Is this what she was doing in here, so quietly? Praying at some half-imagined, half-borrowed shrine? She sees me looking at her offerings and she rises, scowls, pushes past me without a word. I realise that her shapelessness is in fact an abundance of shape – the heaviness of pregnancy. Very pretty, very young, belly distended. When I emerge from the tomb I look down the slope towards the village but she’s not there. She is walking the other way – the direction I came from, towards the woodlands near the manor house. She strides fiercely, arms swinging.

Beth and I eat dinner in the study this first night. It might seem an odd choice of room, but it is the only one with a TV in it, and we eat pasta from trays on our knees with the evening news to keep us company, because small talk seems to have abandoned us, and big talk is just too big yet. We’re not ready. I’m not sure that we ever will be, but there are things I want to ask my sister. I will wait, I will make sure I get the questions right. I hope that, if I ask the right ones, I can make her better. That the truth will set her free.

Beth chases each quill around her bowl before catching it on her fork. She raises the fork to her lips several times before putting it into her mouth. Some of these quills never make it – she knocks them back off the fork, selects an alternative. I see all this in the corner of my eye, just like I see her body starving. The TV pictures shine darkly in her eyes.

‘Do you think it’s a good idea? Having Eddie here for Christmas?’ she asks me suddenly.

‘Of course. Why wouldn’t it be? We’ll be staying for a while to get things sorted, so we may as well stay for Christmas. Together.’ I shrug. ‘There’s plenty of space, after all.’

‘No, I mean . . . bringing a child here. Into this . . . place.’

‘Beth, it’s just a house. He’ll love it. He doesn’t know . . . Well. He’ll have a blast, I’m sure he will – there are so many nooks and crannies to explore.’

‘A bit big and empty, though, isn’t it? A bit lonely, perhaps? It might depress him.’

‘Well, you could tell him to bring a friend. Why don’t you? Call him tomorrow – not for the whole of Christmas, of course. But some of the working parents might be glad of a few extra days’ grace before their little home-wreckers reappear, don’t you think?’

‘Hmm.’ Beth rolls her eyes. ‘I don’t think any of the mothers at that school do anything as common as work for a living.’

‘Only riff-raff like you?’

‘Only riff-raff like me,’ she agrees, deadpan.

‘Ironic, really, since you’re the real thing. Blue blood, practically.’

‘Hardly. Just as you are.’

‘No. I think the nobility skipped a generation in me.’ I smile. Meredith told me this once, when I was ten. *Your sister has the Calcott mien, Erica. You, I fear, are all your father.* I didn’t mind then and I don’t mind now. I wasn’t sure what *mien* meant, at the time. I thought she meant my hair, which had been chopped off short

thanks to an incident with bubblegum. When she turned away I stuck out my tongue, and Mum wagged a finger at me.

Beth rejects it too. She fought with Maxwell – Eddie’s father – to allow their son to attend the village primary school, which was tiny and friendly and had a nature garden in one corner of the yard: frogspawn, the dried-out remains of dragonfly nymphs; primroses in the spring, then pansies. But Maxwell won the toss when it came to secondary education. Perhaps it was for the best. Eddie boards now, all term long. Beth has weeks and weeks to build herself up, shake a sparkle into her smile.

‘We’ll fill up the space,’ I assure her. ‘We’ll deck the halls. I’ll dig out a radio. It won’t be like . . .’ but I trail off. I’m not sure what I was about to say. In the corner, the tiny TV gives an angry belch of static that makes us both jump.

Almost midnight, and Beth and I have retired to our rooms. The same rooms we always took, where we found the same bedspreads, smooth and faded. This seemed unreal to me, at first. But then, why would you change the bedspreads in rooms that are never used? I don’t think Beth will be asleep yet either. The quiet in the house rings like a bell. The mattress sinks low where I sit, the springs have lost their spring. The bed has a dark oak headboard and there’s a watercolour on the wall, so faded now. Boats in a harbour, though I never heard of Meredith visiting the coast. I reach behind the headboard, my fingers feeling down the vertical supports until I find it. Brittle now, gritty with dust. The piece of ribbon I tied – red plastic ribbon from a curl on a birthday present. I tied it here when I was eight so that I would know a secret, and only I would know it. I could think about it, after we’d gone back to school. Picture it, out of sight, untouched as the room was cleaned, as people came and went. Here was something that I would know about; a relic of me I could always find.

There’s a tiny knock and Beth’s face appears around the door.

Her hair is out of its plait, falling around her face, making her younger. She is so beautiful sometimes that it gives me a pain in my chest, makes my ribs squeeze. Weak light from the bedside lamp puts shadows in her cheekbones, under her eyes; shows up the curve of her top lip.

‘Are you OK? I can’t sleep,’ she whispers, as if there is somebody else in the house to wake.

‘I’m fine, Beth; just not sleepy.’

‘Oh.’ She lingers in the doorway, hesitates. ‘It’s so strange to be here.’ This is not a question. I wait. ‘I feel like . . . I feel a bit like Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*. Do you know what I mean? It’s all so familiar, and yet wrong too. As if it’s backwards. Why do you think she left us the house?’

‘I really don’t know. To get at Mum and Uncle Clifford, I imagine. That’s the kind of thing Meredith would do,’ I sigh. Still Beth hovers, so pretty, so girlish. Right now it’s as if no time has passed, as if nothing has changed. She could be twelve again, I could be eight, and she could be leaning in to wake me, to make sure I’m not late for breakfast.

‘I think she did it to punish us,’ she says softly, and looks stricken.

‘No, Beth. We didn’t do anything wrong,’ I say firmly.

‘Didn’t we? That summer. No. No, I suppose not.’ She flicks her eyes over me now, quickly, puzzled; and I get the feeling she is trying to see something, some truth about me. ‘Good night, Rick,’ she whispers, using a familiar tomboy truncation of my name, and vanishes from the doorway.

I remember so many things from that summer. The last summer that everything was right, the summer of 1986. I remember Beth being distraught that Wham! were breaking up. I remember the heat bringing up water blisters across my chest that itched, and burst under my fingernails, making me feel sick. I remember the dead

rabbit in the woods that I checked up on almost daily, appalled and riveted by its slow sinking, softening, the way it seemed to breathe, until I poked it with a stick to check it was dead and realised that the movement was the greedy squabble of maggots inside. I remember watching, on Meredith's tiny television, Sarah Ferguson marry Prince Andrew on the twenty-third of July – that huge dress, making me ache with envy.

I remember making up a dance routine to Diana Ross's hit 'Chain Reaction'. I remember stealing one of Meredith's boas for my costume, stumbling and stepping on it: a shower of feathers; hiding it in a distant drawer with dread in the pit of my stomach, too scared to own up. I remember reporters and policemen, facing each other either side of Storton Manor's iron gates. The policemen folded their arms, seemed bored and hot in their uniforms. The reporters milled and fiddled with their equipment, spoke into cameras, into tape recorders, waited and waited for news. I remember Beth's eyes pinning me as the policeman talked to me about Henry, asked me where we'd been playing, what we'd been doing. His breath smelt of Polo mints, sugar gone sour. I told him, I think, and I felt unwell; and Beth's eyes on me were ragged and wide.

In spite of these thoughts I sleep easily in the end, once I have got over the cold touch of the sheets, the unfamiliar darkness of the room. And there's the smell, not unpleasant but all-pervading. The way other people's houses will smell of their occupants – the combination of their washing soap, their deodorant and their hair when it needs washing; their perfume, skin; the food they cook. Regardless of the winter, this smell lingers in every room, evocative and unsettling. I wake up once; think I hear Beth moving around the house. And then I dream of the dew pond, of swimming in it and trying to dive down, of needing to fetch something from the bottom but being unable to reach. The cold shock of the water, the pressure in my lungs, the awful fear of what my fingers will find at the bottom.