

Alice #6

Years and years of Dog Collars: Not the petite, cutesy, coloured, crinkle edged type, jingling with a small bell; instead plain, thick and tanned leather, straight edges, with the occasionally used metal buckle and a well used pointed tip at the other end. Bought from the shadowy, dusty hardware shop, deliberately as a weapon, as we never owned a dog that big.

She kept them near, in her apron pocket or hanging off the designated nail on the kitchen door. The unknown trigger started "The Chase" - her lunge for her weapon was the starter's gun. "Don't just stand there, time to run" screamed my brain". Weave out of the room, away from the raging clenched teeth and swinging arms, down the hall, make it faster to reach the door to outside (she never followed past this door) - yet deciding upon when to return inside, after your racing breath was gone, meant being ready to restart the unfinished race.

"Too slow" the weapon would say, as it clipped your bare skin, making its first sting. "Get to your bed now, it offers a soft landing" quietly called my brain. Curl up or fight back, arms and legs pushing and dodging. trying to breathe in amongst the grunts and tears. Regardless, the leather still slapped down often and hard. "Hold her wrists, it can sometimes slow the lashings", whispers my mind. It's the only physical contact you have with her. There were never any remorseful hugs or soft touches of apologies. Who hears your hysteria, her venomous "useless, useless bastard" screech? You can't see any neighbours for the paddocks and trees, but you know he must hear the sounds waft up to his shed as he works. Yet he does nothing. No-one ever comes to investigate the noise. You rub your welts in silence.

Eventually the chase stops. It doesn't matter if you run, the rage and welts still come. So you stand still, let it happen, it is over quicker this way. You can't be a bystander for your little sister's turn, so you step between the two. Still the rage and welts come. At least my sister's turn is over the quickest. You learn not to give satisfaction with tears.

After years and years of hearing the poisonous shriek: "If you don't behave you will be sent to boarding school" unknowingly it becomes the start of the escape plan. The only time she cries is at the first drop off point, and she looks more ugly than ever. I am a numb statue, my sister and brothers are in the back seat as she drives away.

With no social skills useable amongst the rich kids, a new loneliness arrives as I watch how families treat each other lovingly. I go between my rock and hard place every weekend for a year to be with my siblings. The next year I choose my loneliness over my hate for her. Staying in an empty boarding house has safety, yet another new loneliness arrives as I miss my siblings. Now I have no place to call home. The escape becomes a long search for a new feeling of home; unguided, drifting and bumping my way through society. Needless to say it got messy, lots of memories upon memories, I was fully aware of the foundation they are laid upon.

Eventually my contact stops. It is my only way to end this. However, being out of arms reach has not stopped her toxic tongue. To protect myself and my child I don't answer her random and cold attempts of communicating. Yet my input (or lack of it) has never altered her need to continue. Time has not healed the confusion, self-doubt or hate, and insight tells me that not even her death will give me closure.

There are years and years of memories. It could be the family resemblance in the glint of a mirror reflection, it could be the neighbourhood dog, it could be a calendar date, it could be an overheard conversation - any and all sorts of moments project the crisp scenes into my mind daily. No-one wants to know this story, not even I.

So, thank you for this Alice moment, it is my chance to give some small details, outside of therapy, of another life. Let the escape continue, as these words leave me and enter into an audience who are ready to hear.