

Dear, dear Danoeh, in the morning of the world you wait, like I waited. It is custom keeps our minds apart. And Customs. Three months in quarantine. And the feet drilled out to make sure nothing is hidden.

## JODY VALENTINE

### HAPPY ENDINGS

They were talking, in sad, hushed voices, but with the wry humour that is sometimes called black, about Lost Innocence. Each one had a story to tell. A Death of a loved one. A Rape. A Betrayal.

Scott said “What about you Jo?”, thinking I was still an innocent, “Do you still have the moonlight in your eyes?”. He smiled. He stabbed a slice of camembert. “Still believe in unicorns?”

He was wrong about me. I had lost my innocence, piece by piece. Though, I did believe in unicorns once. As a child, I was a romantic. A dreamer. I believed there were fairies who lived in our mango tree, who danced under the stars. I believed in gnomes, pixies, elves and hobbits. But above all, I believed in Happy Endings.

I wasn't the sort of child who could go to sleep after something as horrifying as the Three Little Pigs. My mother discovered me, tears on my pillow, a red nose, an hour after bedtime, crying for a lonely old wolf. I didn't like that self-satisfied little pig who built his house of bricks and I thought the little red hen should have shared her bread with the others even though they hadn't helped her. My mother soon learnt to modify these horrid stories.

In the Goldilocks story of my youth, the insipid little girl apologises to the Little Bear and helps him build another chair. Goldilocks turns out to be a crash-hot cake maker so they all have chocolate and walnut cake for morning tea. With icing. The Big Bad Wolf climbs down the chimney to be greeted, not by a pot of scalding water, but balloons and streamers. The Pigs sing Happy Birthday and say “And you thought we'd forgotten what day it is today!!”, before the repentant wolf cuts his cake and makes his wish. I felt pity for the Wicked Witches. I knew they were really just sad old souls. I insisted that in the altered endings they were forgiven and invited to dinner.

My mother said I was a little “fixer”. I always wanted the baddies to turn out to be goodies and everyone to be happy.

Which is why, when I was seven I gave up believing in the Christian God, on the very sensible grounds that I didn't like Him. He would condemn heathens to everlasting pain and refuse to take the soul of my cat. Hell can be very frightening, if you love other people. So I dismissed him, along with the other dreadful tales my Aunts would tell me. The Scissorman, who snipped off thumbs and the Sandman, who threw sand at restless children.

I preferred to believe in fairies. Once I found a piece of onion skin that had been warped and twisted by the wind to form a sort of wing shape. I carried it around with me, waving it at skeptics saying "Look see. This is my fairy wing. Prooooooof!!". I had no elder siblings to snatch it away and say "It's only a bit of old onion". I was an only child, indulged by my parents, living in a wonderful house with a shady garden. I could grow up believing that the world was basically a beautiful place, that people are always nice at heart and that things always work out in the end.

"So?" said Scott, "When did you lose this sweet faith in the world?"

I started to see sadness. Mostly on television. The African famine relief pictures would make me run to my room. I'd shut the door but I couldn't escape those shrivelled limbs and swollen bellies. I would cry of course. Then my parents would hold me and say "It's all right, darling", when they knew, what I would learn, that it's not all right, that the world is a sad and cruel place. An old lady I loved to visit died of consumption. I read far too many books. A friend told my secrets to another. I watched the evening news.

"And that was when you lost your innocence?"

I don't think so. You see I still didn't believe that Wicked Witches really wanted to be wicked. I didn't understand evil. I stopped believing in fairy-tales but I didn't stop looking for Happy Endings.

Once, when I was fifteen I found one. I remember, standing outside the Hall, with my friends who loved me, being soaked in anticipation, thinking "It might be true. This might be it". The evangelist looked into my eyes, and said that he knew tonight I would find God. Tonight I would be saved. I was surrounded by my friends, who held my hands and told me they knew how I was feeling. They had all prayed for me.

If you want to believe something strongly enough you will. I sang and danced and prayed and wept and laughed and believed. For nine blissful weeks I was absolved from all my responsibility. The Christians taught me about Good and Evil. They gave them names, God and the Devil. It was then I think that I lost my innocence, when I believed that

there were such absolutes. I lost the compassion for Wicked Witches, by believing that they may burn in Hell for eternity.

People still mistake me for an innocent. They see my blue eyes that quickly fill with tears, mostly for my self, but sometimes for others. Yet since I left the Church, abandoning my very last bedtime story, I have committed monstrous crimes. Out of greed, I have betrayed my loved ones, and I have hurt others to satisfy my desires. I have lied and caused pain. I became the Wicked Witch. I would not have hesitated to fry children to feed myself.

Sometimes when I remember the joy, I wonder if perhaps the devil has stolen my soul, as my old friends said. I should like to dress up the black parts of my soul in fur, give them a tail and a pitchfork and call them the Devil. However, I cannot let myself off so easily. It sounds far too much like an excuse. Like saying, "But it wasn't Me". It would be denying the evil that exists in me.

I am still a confused Wicked Witch. In a way I have returned to my rejection of evil that can be personified by a monster or a "baddie". I know I am capable of both absolutes. I have only learnt one thing from my loss of innocence. There are no Happy Endings.

## ROSS CLARK

### FROM GRENFELL TO GUNDAGAI

(from *Map Reading*)

*Saturday, 2nd September (1972)*

Today Henry, you are fifty years dead, and I am here in the Exchange Hotel, Grenfell. I arrived a little after closing time, booked my room, had a couple of beers, then headed off for my afternoon ramble, gulping down a pub sandwich.

The museum has a bushranger section, lots of odds and ends like pioneering implements, harnesses, family Bibles and the like . . . and a Henry Lawson corner. Your manuscripts and photos are sitting quietly there behind wire. The folk there were friendly and knowledgeable, and sent me off to the place, just a few streets away, where you were born — in a tent, as the mythology goes.