

BABY TEETH

BITE-SIZED TALES OF TERROR

EDITED BY DAN RABARTS & LEE MURRAY

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INTRODUCTION

As I sit down to write this, I'm still quite stunned by just how far a little bit of goodwill and a whole lot of talent can go. Things happen so fast, and before you know it, you've conceived and given birth to something and it's heading out into the world all on its little lonesome.

That's the thing about kids – they grow up so fast. One minute you're wiping that cute baby vomit off their chins, next thing you know you're at their 21st and wiping that not-so-cute yard-glass vomit off their chins, and hands, and boots, and ... well, you get the picture.

So it was with *Baby Teeth*. One minute, I'm reading a post on *Reddit.com* about 'The Creepiest Thing Your Kid Has Ever Said' – or words to that effect – and dropping an idle comment on Facebook about how here was fodder galore for inspiring creepy short stories, and the next thing you know those stories are here in a book, being suitably creepy and

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hopefully not involving too much vomit, cute or otherwise, all to raise money for charity so that more kids will grow up reading books.

In all, twenty-seven writers from New Zealand and the USA thought it would be a good idea to donate a story or two – or three – for a good cause. We decided on the Duffy Books in Homes literary organisation as the good cause in question because, as writers, we need readers. So, we wrote a pile of stories which are completely unsuitable for children to raise money that we can donate to some good folk who will then spend that money buying books which are suitable for children, so that they can foster a love of reading in those kids as they grow up.

But it wasn't enough to trust to the collective narcissism of a bunch of writers. I wanted to know that this project had wider support, and so we decided to let the public decide if it was worth making *Baby Teeth* happen. We ran a crowd-funding campaign, asking people to show us their support for the book and for our goals by pre-ordering copies, and the response was better than I could've hoped for. We met our goal in just ten days, and nearly doubled it by the end of the campaign.

Easy, right?

I'd love to say it was, but nothing so bold and noble could be so simple. A lot of people put a tremendous amount of work into this book in a very short space of time to make it happen. Writers wrote. Designers designed. Artists arted. Typesetters typeset. And everyone involved worked their social media chops until they bled.

INTRODUCTION

But this is not a story collection for everyone. Let's face it: children see a different world from us. They see the shapes in the dark and give them names. They hear the noises under the bed or inside the walls and give them fingers, claws. This book is mostly horror, and the nature of the material – being focused around children – means that what these pages contain may prove disquieting, uncomfortable and even a little sickening for some readers. These are stories that are willing to look into those disturbing things that lurk in the dark, in the minds of small children, or of the unwell, perhaps. Things that children seem able to see and express with more chilling clarity than many adults are ever willing to.

You have been warned.

But horror fiction also has a deeper purpose than simply making your skin crawl and your stomach queasy: a purpose based loosely around the philosophy of shining a light into the darker places where people so often don't want to look, and trying to put into words the awful things that might be found there. Can fiction make us wonder about the real world, maybe help us see some sort of nightmarish reason in things that defy explanation, things we cannot personally stomach or fathom? Horror goes there. It forces us to look at the world, and sometimes we don't like what we see.

But fear not. You'll also find stories of humour and fantasy in this book, tales of hope and anticipation, of the bond of family and the unbreakable chains that link parents and children, no matter what. Love can be terrifying, because we know that at any time it might all be broken or stripped away by powers beyond our control. So we hold tight to what

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matters, and we let the tooth fairies carry away these baby teeth, these fragments of what might have been if the world leaned a little towards the light, a little towards the shadow.

Dan Rabarts – Wellington, August 2013

CATERPILLARS

DEBBIE COWENS

For her fourth birthday, my daughter was given *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and it soon became her favourite book. Lucy loved to poke her fingers into the holes in the pages where the caterpillar had chomped its way through every kind of food.

Real caterpillars, though, had proved a disappointment.

‘Mummy, it won’t eat the lollipop.’ I turned from the washing line to see Lucy standing beside one of the stripped swan plants, holding a red lollipop out to a fat black-and-yellow caterpillar as it inched up the leafless stalk.

‘Real caterpillars don’t like sweets, or any people food, really,’ I explained, carrying the laundry basket over to join her. ‘Monarch butterflies are very fussy eaters. They only like swan plants.’

Lucy picked up the caterpillar between her thumb and forefinger, and lifted it across to a neighbouring plant. ‘But

DEBBIE COWENS

there are no leaves left on this one and it already has two baby caterpillars on it.'

'They must have eaten them all.'

Lucy held the caterpillar to her face and gave it a stern look. 'Don't be too fussy. You have to eat other leaves as well or you'll never become a butterfly.' She placed it on a waxy leaf of the lemon tree.

'Come on inside now, Lucy. I need to get the washing in.'

But that wasn't the end of it.

Late that night she appeared, standing over me by the bed.

'Mummy,' she whispered in my face. 'We need another swan plant. It's hungry.'

'Lucy? What are you doing up?'

'It's starving. It needs food.'

'What?' I switched on the bedside lamp, the sudden yellow light shocking my eyes awake. The soft unbroken snores beside me meant that the light hadn't disrupted Bill's sleep. Little did.

'The caterpillar.'

'Oh, is that all? Don't worry about it. It'll be fine,' I muttered between yawns. 'Go back to bed.'

'No, it's hungry. It won't get to become a butterfly. It'll just die.'

Something about her voice chilled me. Maybe it was because I'd never heard her talk about death. Maybe it was the desperation in her voice and that she cared so much about helping the little caterpillar. Maybe agreeing was just the fastest way for me to get back to sleep.

'OK, sweetie. I'll get another swan plant tomorrow. We

CATERPILLARS

can plant it after kindy.’

Checking the caterpillars’ progress became our post-kindy ritual. Lucy would count the caterpillars on each swan plant – we had six plants along the fence now – and monitor their progress.

‘Look, Mummy. The caterpillar’s peeled off its skin and gone into its Chris-a-Lucy-is.’ She pointed excitedly at the brown and green cocoon.

‘Chrysalis.’ Last week’s library trip had involved a book on butterflies with photos and life-cycle explanations.

‘How long until it becomes a butterfly?’

‘A week or two. You’ll have to wait, Lucy.’

Lucy found the waiting hard. Impatient, she checked the swan plant three or four times a day, and spent most of every sunny afternoon playing in the garden where she could keep an eye on the chrysalises.

Unfortunately, our cat, Mog, had also been enjoying the spring weather. She had killed several sparrows and a fledgling starling, depositing their bodies in our hall, the bathroom, under our bed, and even in Lucy’s room.

‘If killing the poor birds wasn’t bad enough, she’s torn them to bits,’ I complained to Bill after finding a particularly disgusting mess of feathers and bloodied bird in Lucy’s wardrobe. ‘What if Lucy had found it? We’ll have to put a bell on that cat.’

Thirteen days after Lucy found the first chrysalis, she came running in from outside to find me in the kitchen.

‘Mummy! The butterfly has hatched. Come and see!’

Her excitement was contagious. I ran out behind her,

DEBBIE COWENS

thrilled to see one of our caterpillars had finally emerged as a beautiful red and black winged butterfly.

‘Where is it?’ I asked as we approached the row of swan plant stalks. ‘It hasn’t flown away yet, has it?’

Lucy shook her head and pointed to the ground. There, drying on the bare earth at the foot of the plant, were two scarlet wings, veined with black like a stained-glass window. There was no creature attached to the torn fragments.

‘What happened to the butterfly?’ I asked.

‘Only the wings changed. I took off its skin but it hasn’t grown another Chris-a-Lucy-sis yet.’ She pointed to the top of the swan plant where the flayed remains of a butterfly’s body had been squashed into a ball and speared on the tip of a stalk.

‘You mustn’t do that, Lucy.’ I grabbed her arm with more force than I’d intended. ‘You’ve hurt it. It won’t grow another chrysalis now. It’s dead.’

Lucy blinked at me. ‘I have its wings.’

‘No, we’ll bury the butterfly with its wings. And you must promise me you’ll never do that again, OK?’

‘OK, Mummy.’

We buried the butterfly behind the swan plants. Lucy made a cross for the grave out of ice-block sticks.

But words like never don’t have the same permanency with four-year-olds. I found four sets of torn butterfly wings in Lucy’s dresser drawer the next week.

I showed the wings to Bill after Lucy had gone to bed. ‘We have to do something about it.’

‘I thought you said you’d told her off already.’

CATERPILLARS

'I did, but it was like she barely noticed. The look she gave me. It was just ... blank. Not upset or angry or anything. She's really scaring me, Bill.'

'Now you're over-reacting. A lot of kids pull legs and wings off bugs. It doesn't make them some psycho off one of your CSI shows.'

'That wasn't what I meant ...'

Guilt silenced me. What kind of mother would fear her own child? How could I suspect my sweet little Lucy with her freckles and curls and giggles?

After that we stayed indoors after kindy. I kept Lucy close. I read her stories and she helped me prepare dinner.

'I like peeling, peeling Mister Potato, peeling Mister Carrot,' she sang as she stood beside me.

I smiled. Lucy could make up a song to accompany any activity.

'Be careful with the peeler, sweetie. Remember, you always have to peel it away or you might cut yourself.'

Her eyes widened. 'It could cut me? Could it cut off your skin, too?'

'I didn't mean to scare you, honey. But they're sharp and you have to be careful so you don't get hurt.'

Lucy nodded and held out her vegetable peeler to me. 'Show me the curly peel again, Mummy. Show me on Mister Potato.'

I took the plastic handle and, grabbing a large spud from the sink, spiralled the blade around the top of the potato. 'My granny showed me how to do this. She could peel a whole kumara in one long, curling piece. Do you think I can do this

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without breaking the peel?’

‘Uh-huh.’ Lucy grinned.

‘Ta-dah!’ I dangled the long coil of potato skin in front of her, and she clapped and giggled, but then shrieked when I deposited it into the compost container.

‘Mummy, no! Don’t throw it away.’

‘It’s just potato peel, Lucy. Don’t be silly.’

‘I want it,’ she growled.

The determination in her eyes worried me more than the strange request. ‘It’s going in the compost. It’s good for the garden,’ I explained.

I didn’t mention the potato peel to Bill. It would sound even crazier than the business with the butterfly wings.

After dinner, Lucy seemed more like her usual sweet self. She sang her ‘I Like Bubbles’ song at bath time. She was angelic for hair-washing, scrunching her eyes shut and holding her breath like she was diving under the waves as I rinsed out her hair.

‘I like your skin.’ She grabbed my forearm as I wiped the water from her brow, her little fingers poking and feeling along my damp wrist. ‘It feels nice.’

‘Oh. Thanks.’ I pulled my arm back.

‘Mummy, why don’t people have wings?’

‘We’re not born with them, sweetie.’

‘Neither are caterpillars.’

‘No, but they grow them when they become butterflies. People don’t become butterflies.’

‘No, silly,’ Lucy giggled. ‘They die, die, die, and then they become angels. With wings.’

CATERPILLARS

She reached her dripping hands behind me in an awkward hug and squeezed the skin of my back. Where my wings would be.

‘Lucy, stop it. That’s not funny.’ I stood up, my voice stern to mask my fear, but she kept laughing. ‘Bill,’ I called down the hall. ‘Can you come down here?’

Lucy was still giggling when Bill reached the bathroom. I gave him the look but he just grinned at Lucy.

‘What’s all this noise about? Is it you, little Miss Giggles, huh?’ He knelt down by the bath and splashed the water at Lucy who squealed in delight.

‘Don’t, Bill.’

‘Don’t what? Splash the giggle monster into submission?’ he joked. ‘Go have a sit down. Relax. I’ll take care of this.’

I watched him playing with our cute little girl, flapping and laughing in delight. Was my imagination running wild? How could I let the words of a four-year-old girl, my daughter, get under my skin?

‘OK, don’t get her over-excited,’ I muttered. ‘It’s nearly bedtime.’

A glass of red and half an hour of TV blotted out most of my worries. By the time I kissed Lucy goodnight, she was just my lovely daughter again. I resolved to get a good night’s sleep and headed to bed. My exhaustion was obvious as soon as I slid between the sheets. I could barely keep my eyes open and I fell asleep within minutes of turning the lights off.

I woke in the night with a terrible sense of danger. Unsure whether I’d had a nightmare or woken up to one, I blinked in the dark, my own breathing drowned out by Bill’s heavy

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snores. A glint of something silver flashed a few inches from my eyes and a familiar shape stood by the bed.

'I want to peel off your skin,' she whispered, her small hand pressed against my left cheek, the cold steel of the peeler on the other. 'You'll be a beautiful angel.'

WHITE GRANT STONE

When she saw him walking up the path, chainsaw in one hand, jerry can full of two-stroke mix in the other, Maria ran to Susan and buried her face in her shirt. 'Don't let him do it Mummy! Make him stop!'

Susan smoothed Maria's hair and spoke softly. 'It's okay, Peanut. We talked about this, remember?'

Maria was sobbing. 'He can't do it! He can't!'

Maria ran into the house as soon as Paul stepped onto the front porch. He could still hear her crying as she ran up the hall.

Susan looked at the chainsaw. 'Put that in the garage.'



As far as Maria was concerned, there was no greater meal in the world than dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets, pasta and a carrot on the side. But tonight she wasn't eating. She nudged a stegosaurus around with her fork. 'Why?'

GRANT STONE

'Peanut, you know we love you,' Susan said. 'You know that, right?'

Maria nodded.

'Well, because we love you, Daddy and I want to buy a big house for you to live in. Don't you want a great big bedroom? Don't you want a pool?'

'Yes.' Maria's voice was no more than a whisper. 'But you can't chop down the tree.'

'Peanut, I know you love it, but it's only a tree. When we move into our new house there'll be lots of trees.'

'It's Bobby's tree. If you cut it down he won't have anywhere to live.'

'Bobby can come and live with us in the new house.'

'No. He *can't*.' Maria moved so quickly the back of her chair didn't hit the floor until she was halfway up the hall.

Susan stood, but Paul grabbed her hand. 'Wait. The book says not to give in to tantrums.'

Susan sat back down again. Maria's door slammed shut.

'Who's Bobby?'

'Her imaginary friend. Soon as she comes home from kindy she runs straight out to the tree. Even yesterday, in the rain. I took a coat out to her, but she was already soaked. Ran her a warm bath when she finally came in.'

'She does this a lot?'

'Every day for the past three weeks.'

Paul shook his head. 'I should have known that.'

Well, if you'd come home on time once in a while. Paul looked at his plate. He wasn't hungry either.

Maria screamed again. Susan put down her knife and fork

WHITE

and stood up.

‘Honey,’ Paul said. ‘The book—’

Susan was already halfway across the room. ‘Fuck the book!’



‘What’s his name again?’

‘Bobby.’ Susan leaned in the doorway, a cup of coffee in her hands.

Paul considered the tree. It was a big pine, maybe twenty years old. Pine wasn’t protected. He didn’t have to worry about a neighbour dobbing him in to the council like he’d get with a pōhutukawa. Sticky sap, needles all over the grass. Nobody gave a shit about pine trees in the suburbs.

He tried to imagine what the section would look like, when they were all done. The original house would stay where it was. He’d bowl the fence on the other side, run a thin driveway all the way to the back. Neither of the houses would have much garden but people didn’t care about that any more. The tree was right where the living room would be. Or was it the tiny bathroom they’d sneaked in on the ground floor? Whatever. Build another house, sell both, buy a third. The Auckland guide to climbing the property ladder. They’d been lucky enough to buy one of the last houses in the street with a decent-sized section. The back lawn was so valuable it might as well have gold buried under it.

Maria peered around the back door.

‘Hey baby,’ Paul said. ‘Come and sit on the grass with me.’

Maria shook her head and hugged her Care Bear.

‘I was just talking to Bobby.’

GRANT STONE

Maria looked up. 'You were?'

'Yes. We've been talking about the tree. I told Bobby that if he let us cut it down he can come and live with us in the house. And when we move to the new house, he can come too. Would you like that?'

Maria stared for a long time. Paul kept up the smile until his cheeks hurt. *You're a bad man, lying to your own daughter. Even by your standards, this is shit.* But it wasn't any worse than telling her about Father Christmas or the Easter Bunny, was it?

'So, I'll go get everything ready.'

Maria didn't move. A tear rolled down her cheek.

'Come on, Peanut,' Susan said. 'Let's go back into the house. It's going to get pretty noisy.'

Paul put on the safety goggles and the earmuffs and the ridiculous arm and leg protection the man at the hire shop had insisted on. The chainsaw started on the first pull. Even with the earmuffs, it was incredibly loud. He revved the chainsaw a couple of times and walked towards the tree.

Something hit him low in the back. Paul stumbled forward. The chainsaw hit the side of the tree and glanced away, barely missing his foot. He slipped on the wet grass and fell to his knees before the tree.

Something hit him again, high on his back this time, strong enough to knock him over.

'Maria!' Susan ran from the back step, but she too slipped on the grass.

'Liar!' Paul rolled onto his back. Maria aimed another kick. 'Liar!'

WHITE

Susan climbed to her feet and wrapped her arms around her daughter. Maria kicked out backwards, catching Susan on the shin. 'Liar!'

Maria's heels dug twin gouges from the lawn as Susan dragged her away.

'Sorry,' Susan called. 'She got away. I'll lock the door.'

Paul didn't get up from the grass until he heard the click of the lock. Even when he put his earmuffs back on he could still hear his daughter's screams.



The original plan was to cut the wood up as he went and create a tidy pile. Paul still knew a few people with burners who would pay for a winter's worth of firewood. But either the chain was blunt or the tree was tougher than it looked. He found himself pushing the blade down, which the man in the hire shop had specifically told him not to do. The branches didn't cut clean; they broke away in ragged chunks with dangerous edges that would have sliced him if he hadn't been wearing the gloves.

And all the time Maria looking at him through the window like a ghost.

Four hours later he stood, trembling. The shattered remnants of the tree covered the whole backyard.

He went to the shed for the shovel, slipping on pine needles as he went. He'd cut the trunk as low as he could. Now he had to dig out the roots.

The spade cut through the soil with a satisfying thunk. There'd been rain nearly every day the past couple of weeks. Hopefully, the soil had softened a little. Perhaps this wasn't

GRANT STONE

going to be as hard as he'd thought.

He heard the click of the lock on the back door.

'Come in and have something to eat,' Susan said. 'It's been hours.'

'Not yet,' Paul panted. 'Nearly done here.' His arms and back complained with every spade of dirt. He'd be sore for days but if he stopped now he'd never get started again. Nothing to do but tough it out.

He glanced back at the house. Maria was out now too, sitting on the steps. Her cheeks were wet. Had she been crying all this time?

Something broke under the shovel with a crunch. Maria screamed at the same moment, a long, high howl.

Paul peered into the hole. There was something white shining there in the dirt. He reached for it. An old teapot, perhaps, or ...

He scrambled back, heels slipping, until his boots lost purchase altogether. As he fell he felt a branch leave a long scratch on his side, but it was a faraway feeling, as if it were happening to someone else.

Paul lay on the ground, looking at what he'd pulled up, what had been beneath the tree for so long. It grinned at him. It was a small thing, white against the sodden earth. The child couldn't have been more than five or six. The skull sat at an angle, its top shorn off by the spade. There were no other sounds in the world but his ragged breathing and the rushing of his own blood in his ears.

That, and the sound of Maria, curled up on the back step, howling like a dog.

BURYING BABY

PAUL MANNERING

Momma slept a lot in the nights before the baby came, leaving Essie to pace the dark and empty house alone, Daddy out doing his job.

Essie would be asleep when he came home before dawn. She always woke up enough to feel his hairy face press against her cheek to give her a kiss, his hot breath wafting into her blanket nest, making her feel warm and safe.

'I love you, Daddy,' Essie would mumble as Daddy tucked her deeper into her warm bed. Then Essie would sleep until it was time to get up and have breakfast.

When Momma emerged, she looked tired and grumpy. Daddy got her settled in the comfy chair and made a fuss, fetching a warm drink and something to eat. Essie had to sit at the table alone, Daddy's breakfast forgotten on his plate. Those precious few minutes of *just them* time, and of feeling truly loved, were over. Essie's breakfast curdled in her stomach.

PAUL MANNERING

Daddy rested his big hands on Momma's swollen stomach while Essie regarded the bulge with suspicion from the shadow of the kitchen door. Daddy spoke softly to Momma and they smiled at each other. Essie didn't feel jealous of the way her parents loved each other. She knew, deep inside, that their love was different and somehow sacred in a mysterious way.

The baby made Essie frown. The thing hadn't even been born yet and already it was taking them both away from her.

Soon enough Daddy had to go. He kissed Momma and stroked Essie's head. 'Be a good girl,' he growled with mock seriousness. Essie beamed up at him and hugged his leg.

Then Essie and Momma were alone for another long night: Momma watching TV and Essie bringing a blanket and books from her room to the sofa and hiding from the bright light of the screen while reading the stories in her books.

'Essie—' Momma moaned. Essie slithered out from under her blanket. The air had a scent of fear and sweat, tinged with blood. Essie licked her lips.

'Momma?'

'It's time, sweetheart ... It's - *oooh* - it's time ...' Momma squirmed in her seat, illuminated by the glow of the TV. Essie cinched her eyes shut and jabbed at the power button, shutting off the noise and the searing glow.

'Essie. I need you to ... ohhh ... I need you to be a big girl. You gotta help Momma, honey.'

Essie nodded and stepped closer. The fabric of Momma's comfy chair was stained dark, and fluid dripped through the wicker frame, splattering on the floor in thick, viscous drops.

BURYING BABY

'I'm here, Momma. Should I call Daddy?' Daddy had a cell-phone. The number for it was on the fridge.

'Daddy's working, baby. Leave him be – ohh ...' Momma shivered, her legs spreading, her knees drawing up. 'Help me get my pants off, sweetie.' She spoke in rasping breaths. Essie leaned forward, plunging her face into the deep musk emanating from her mother's core. She pulled the soft fabric of the pants down, startled to realise that Momma had wet herself like a little kid.

'What do I do, Momma?' Essie's senses tingled. The small amount of blood that had come from inside Momma made her teeth itch and her fingers flex.

'Hold my hand! Ohh ...' Momma's back arched, her loose T-shirt sliding backwards off the pulsing lump of her belly. Essie gripped her mother's hand, feeling her mother squeeze tighter as a contraction rippled through her.

'Ohhh – *shaka ... nyah ... rikaash ...*' Momma moaned. Essie felt the hairs on the back of her neck rising at the old prayer. Essie watched with a mixture of fascination and disgust as more fluid wept from Momma down there.

Her mother panted between the regular contractions. 'Hold the baby's head,' she gasped. Essie pressed her hands against the trembling flesh of her mother's thighs. The head emerged and she felt the weight of it resting in her palms.

'I got the head, Momma,' she whispered.

'One – more – puuuushhhhh ...' Momma bore down and Essie felt the small shape slide out into her hands. The cord that ran from the baby's stomach to inside Momma glistened purple and pulsed with a steady beat. Essie frowned at the

PAUL MANNERING

grey-skinned thing that had come from inside Momma.

'Clear his mouth. Make sure he can breathe,' Momma murmured in an exhausted whisper. The baby mewled a bubbling cry. Essie lifted it up and handed it to her mother, who pressed the naked thing against her bare breast and kissed its tiny head.

When Daddy came home his feet pounded as he rushed into the room. Essie was still up and Momma had delivered the afterbirth, a blood-filled, membranous sac that made Essie's nose twitch and her stomach rumble.

Dropping to his knees, Daddy hugged Momma and peered at the tiny face wrapped in a soft towel, cradled against its mother's breast.

'He's perfect,' Momma whispered.

'Yes, he is,' Daddy beamed.

'He's not. He's a monster. We should bury him,' Essie said, emerging from the kitchen with a shovel in her hand. The fresh dirt clinging to it matched a dark streak on her cheek.

'Of course,' Daddy said and Momma smiled.

'You two go on ahead. I need to rest.' Momma let Daddy lift the tiny wrapped bundle. She sank back into her comfy chair.

Essie followed Daddy outside. She had dug a hole about the size of a shoe box and as deep as her arm was long. Daddy crouched and sniffed the soil. 'It's good,' he growled.

Essie watched as he unwrapped the baby and laid him, naked and squirming under the pulsing sac of placenta, down into the cold, dark earth. Essie filled in the hole, the baby's squalls fading as he vanished under the dirt.

BURYING BABY

When the soil was packed down smooth with the flat of the shovel, Essie and her father stood looking at the small mound.

‘How long will it take, Daddy?’

Daddy squatted next to her, his long arm curled around her shoulders, his razor-sharp claws caressing the rough skin of her throat. ‘Oh, a night or two. You were buried for three nights before you came up right.’

Essie blinked her yellow eyes, the moonlight sparkling off the dark scales that ran down her face and rose into twin lines of curved studs on her neck.

‘Grammar says babies are like meat: you gotta bury it to get it to age right.’ Essie nodded solemnly.

‘Grammar knows the old ways are the best,’ Daddy said and grinned, the moonlight sparkling like diamonds on his jagged teeth.