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All My Fault

*The true story of a sadistic father
and a little girl left destroyed*

AUDREY DELANEY



EBURY
PRESS

Author's Note

This book is a true story, and everything that is recounted in it happened. Some of the information contained in this book is taken from evidence given in the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court. For the sake of privacy, some names have been changed. These appear in *italics*.

On a personal note, I would like to say that I was compelled to write this story; it was a driven force in me that would not rest until I did it.

This book was written over hundreds of hours and several months, so it was not done lightly, but with passion and motivation to help accomplish the following:

- To help people open their eyes and see how this crime affects children through to adulthood, if they make it that far.
- To show it can be dealt with; without shame.
- To urge families involved in this type of situation to get support to help them deal with it.

- To help teach people to educate their children about what's appropriate and what's not amongst the ones they love and trust.
- To help educate people to recognise someone who is being abused, so they might ask the right questions.
- To make child abuse an issue of public debate.
- To give information to those working with abused children/adults on how it can disturb one's mental health, so that healing can begin.
- To give comfort to all those who have ever been wronged. It was not you; it was the person who did it to you. It is their shame . . . and those who protect them.

Prologue

I was sitting in my little pink car one day with the radio blaring, allowing the music to drown out my thoughts, and pull me into a sweet state of nothingness. I didn't want to think about anything, or feel anything. The music gradually faded and the news came on, slowly reaching into my consciousness.

I only half listened as the newsreader went through the top stories of the day. It was only when I heard the words 'child abuse' that I jolted upwards and froze. Every bone in my body tensed up and I felt my fists clenching involuntarily. The words had struck a chord with me. I tried to push them out of my mind and pretend I hadn't heard them. But it was too late. A door had been opened somewhere in my mind—one that I had sealed shut a very long time ago.

I found myself short of breath, and I had a sense of falling into a black void. I sat in the car for what seemed like an eternity, waiting for the music to wash over me again, to

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wash away the bad memories. This time, though, it wasn't working; the memories pushed against me, uninvited and unwanted.

I gradually allowed myself to absorb what these words meant. Child sex abuse. When I heard those words I felt like a thousand wasps were crawling all over me body and stinging me all at the one time. The words drilled a hole in my subconscious that caused toxic thoughts to leak out into the rest of my mind. I wanted to put my head under one of the tyres of my car and get someone to drive over it. I just wanted to be put out of my misery. I felt lower than I'd ever felt before.

At first, I denied any connection between me and those hateful words. This was not what happened to me.

My da didn't do that. My da wouldn't do that.

No, it was different. What my da did was completely different.

Sure, it wasn't me da anyway. It was me. It was my fault. There was something dirty about me.

Chapter One

Da was, in many ways, a success story. He came from abject poverty, growing up in a tenement building in Gardiner Street, which runs through the heartland of Dublin's north inner city.

He shared a two-bedroom house with his four siblings and his parents. The place was cold and damp and they often found themselves with barely enough food to feed the family. They shared the one loo with three other floors of tenement residents and had little or nothing to their name, or so I was told.

Gardiner Street had a bad reputation at the time. It was considered a rough street and Da was always very conscious of this growing up. He became so ashamed of having been reared there that he hardly ever admitted it to anyone. In fact, when I was growing up I was never allowed to tell anyone where he was from, even though Nanny and Granddad Delaney were still living there.

Da left school when he was 12 years old, but after he got married he went back to college and studied to become

an accountant. He was a self-made man, someone who had struggled against social prejudices and poverty to become a success.

And he was successful—he ended up with a large house in Castleknock, an affluent suburb on the north side of Dublin, and he rapidly acquired the trappings of wealth; fancy cars and a boat on the Shannon. It was imprinted on our minds as kids how brilliant he was—he used to say that he had passed his exams in just two years when it had taken everyone else in his class three.

But it was only ever Da who told us how brilliant he was. I don't remember anyone else ever saying it. He was always telling me and my brothers that he was the most intelligent person we would ever meet, and I believed him.

Although I loved Da, I began to see a side to him at a very young age that wasn't nice. He never missed an opportunity to put people down. He was forever giving out about my Ma's parents; Nanny for smoking, Granddad for being half deaf and us kids for yelling at him all the time in case he couldn't hear us. His biggest gripe was the TV in Nanny and Granddad *O'Byrne's* house.

'It's always blaring 'cause your Granddad is deaf. Anyone with manners would turn it off when there are guests,' he'd moan.

Da considered himself a highly important guest when he visited anyone's home. He thought everyone should be delighted to see him and go out of their way to accommodate him.

As time passed, the more Da mixed with educated, successful people, the more obnoxious he became. It wasn't

just his obnoxious behaviour that made me dislike him, though. It was his bedtime routine that I hated, and it goes back as far as I can remember.

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Apparently, it's not true that all babies are beautiful because when I was born everyone said I looked like a plucked chicken with loose folds of skin. I was born in the bedroom of our house in Ballsbridge although I nearly arrived in the bathroom as the door got stuck while Ma was in there, and it was only that the midwife broke the door down that Ma made it into the bedroom in time, or so the story goes.

I was the first girl born to the family and I'm sure my Ma was delighted to have a little sister for my older brother, who was three years old by the time I arrived.

When I was three years old, Ma gave me and *Mark* a little baby brother called *Fergus*. The baby was a happy, placid baby and very easy to take care of.

My childhood memories start when I was about three. Some people might argue that you can't remember things that happened when you were that young, but I believe that you can. You may not remember whether it was winter or summer, whether you were in the hall or the sitting room, or even the exact details of the particular memory, but the emotions that go hand in hand with it are what you carry forward.

Memories of such times are very clear to me. I can remember certain events. And when the feelings are bad ones, they're even harder to forget.

I can't remember when exactly Da started calling to my room at night; all I do know for sure is that the bad feelings started when I was about three years old or a little older. I was very young when he started to abuse me. I can recall images of him, sneaking into my room.

He used to get into bed beside me and tell me stories about Granny as a little girl, and how she got lost in a fairy ring down the country and that she wasn't able to get out. He also told me stories about Granny going to school on a cow. I loved hearing the stories, but I didn't like when he would put his hands into my knickers and fondle my private area. As he talked, his fingers were constantly fiddling around my vagina, and it hurt me.

For a long time I thought it was normal for fathers to touch their daughters 'down there'; it was like a goodnight kiss or a hug. I'd been so damaged and my mind had become so warped that I remember thinking, how do other kids Da's do it to them, especially when there was more than one girl? It was such a normal part of my life.

The only difference between a goodnight kiss and what my Da did was that it didn't feel nice; it hurt and felt dirty. I figured that if you had to wash your hands every time you went to the bathroom, then there definitely was something dirty about 'down there'. That would also solve the question of why none of my friends spoke about their fathers touching them there. So I said nothing. That is how it started. While I was still a baby it started with him touching my private area and it progressed over the next few years, gradually getting worse and worse. When I look back now as an adult I can see that I had no choice in the matter;

we accept as normal the environment that parents create for us, and he created an environment of sexual abuse from the start. He groomed me as his victim from the beginning. I didn't have a hope.

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In the very early days, I remember it being just Ma, the two boys and me most of the time. Da was home very little and when he was in a bad mood, a similar atmosphere swept through the house. Da earned the money and paid the bills while Ma cooked, cleaned and looked after all of us. In those days, everything was done by hand so housework was ten times harder than it is now. I'll never forget the day Da brought home the twin-tub and put an end to having to hand-wash the terry nappies in a bucket of water.

Da thought he was the best husband in the world when he presented Ma with such an advanced kitchen appliance. He was smiling so much I'm surprised his face didn't crack. From then on, all Da's presents had domestic themes. Now my Ma, like most women, was in favour of any household appliance that would make life easier for her, but when they were being given to her as gifts every birthday and Christmas, I think she wasn't too happy.

We moved from Ballsbridge to Fairview on the north side of Dublin when I was about three. That was in 1970. At the time, this was a move up in the world.

The new house was a three-bedroom semi-detached with a garage. It was a corner house. There were ten houses on either side of the street in this small cul de sac. At our end

of the estate, there was a big wall surrounding an orchard. This was a place of wonderment to us kids. Over the years, most of us had a go at robbing apples from the canon and his housekeeper who lived there.

The Fairview house was very respectable. It had a good-sized front room, a sitting room and a small kitchen as far as I remember. Ma was delighted with it and glad to see the back of the old, damp redbrick in Ballsbridge.

I made my very first friends in that estate in Fairview. I was peering through the gates of my house, out on to the street and beyond, when a row of curious little faces came into my line of vision. They were all about the same age as me.

All were full of chatter and asked me all sorts of questions the way children do. They were fascinated by my blonde hair and blue eyes and kept poking their skinny arms through the grates in the gate to touch my hair and see if it not only looked different to their own brown hair but felt different too. These girls were to become the core of my primary school gang.

My clothes that first summer in Fairview consisted of teeny weenie shorts, skirts and dresses that only barely covered my knickers. It was an age of innocence that wouldn't last long. God when I think about it, my father must have loved it.

Fairview was a great place to grow up. I was at my happiest there, despite all that was going on behind closed doors. I loved my little friends. We were a close group. When you have a big bunch of kids growing up together there's bound to be some arguments from time to time,

but if we fought one day, we were friends again the next. And there were always ways of wheedling your way back into your friends' favour. Like, if you were lucky enough to have a birthday party coming up you could hold it over the others by saying, 'If you don't play with me then you're not coming to my party tomorrow.' It was more a case of using your persuasive powers than being mean. But no matter what, we all went to each other's parties.

Our birthday parties were pretty simple back then. I don't remember getting expensive presents from my friends, actually I don't think we gave presents at all. The whole thrill of a party was that you became one year older and got to feast on all the sweets and fizzy drinks you could stomach. You were just so happy to be allowed play together and eat sugary treats. And whether you wanted it or not, you always got a slice of the birthday cake, wrapped in a napkin, to bring home with you.

Ma never let us down when it came to cakes and parties. The table would be crammed with popcorn, sponge cakes, fairy cakes and, my favourite treat of all, Rice Krispie buns. Even as an adult, it doesn't feel like a party to me until the Rice Krispie buns appear.

The all-important blowing out of the candles was the peak of excitement. Usually one of my brothers would sneak up behind me and blow the candles out with me which meant my wish wouldn't come true. So after some squabbling and Ma trying to pull us apart, the candles were relit and my brothers well warned.

Afterwards, we played all sorts of games like musical chairs or musical statues. They often ended in tears, though, with