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Alice

Examination of the Mother-Daughter Relationship

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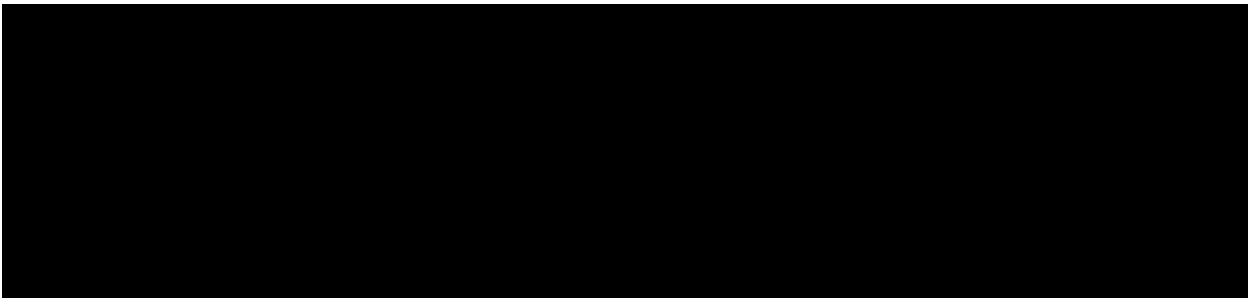
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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



(Signature)

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Abstract

Fiction: Alice

Exegesis: The Mother-Daughter Relationship in *Lives of Girls and Women*

This thesis consists of a creative fiction component, *Alice*, and an exegesis that is a literary analysis of the mother-daughter relationship in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. *Alice* is a collection of nine short stories that looks at both the mother and daughter's perspective of their relationship. The location is Crookwell, a small country town in New South Wales, set in the period following World War II until the 1970s. The exegesis examines the representation of conflictual patterns in the mother-daughter relationship – in *Lives of Girls and Women* – at a time and within a society that is on the cusp of change. It also examines the unconscious influence of the Second Wave feminist movement on Munro's thinking.

Like many regions of rural Australia, there appears to be no fiction set specifically in the Crookwell district. In a fashion similar to Munro, in *Alice* I seek to illuminate a bygone period and lifestyle. The short story cycle allows me to depict glimpses of ordinary everyday life and to capture attitudes within the community that influence the mother-daughter relationship of the central characters. Of special significance is the effect of organised religion and its influence on motherhood. Munro describes a community that enforces the 'institute of motherhood,' as described by Adrienne Rich (1995), the structured concepts demanded of men and women in the 1940s and 1950s, and the subsequent tensions that emerge between mother and daughter as an apparent consequence of these social expectations.

The exegesis examines why Munro's presentation of the mother-daughter relationship in *Lives of Girls and Women* is still relevant, and argues that, regardless of the social, cultural and contextual forces that moderate this relationship, there remains an ongoing primal tension between mother and daughter as the daughter seeks to differentiate herself and the mother struggles to be heard. By setting *Alice* in the Australian rural community of Crookwell, between the 1950s and 1970s, I seek to similarly explore the particular attitudes and tensions that arise for mothers and daughters away from the major cities. It is a theme that has been largely neglected in Australian literature to date.

Alice

The Chill

(Alice)

In the night sky smoke billowed from the church as flames sucked wood from its frame. The normally deserted street was in chaos. Men ran with buckets and hoses while tiles and mortar crashed around them and the local fire engine reverberated with importance. Alice, shocked by the fire's ferocity, gathered her children close: six tiny lives that resulted from an unlikely wartime romance. Her arm ached from the dead weight of George asleep on her shoulder. Johnny and Pat stood in stunned silence, mesmerised by the drama of the fire engine, spraying hoses and shouting men. Her girls, Mary and Ellen, held hands as soot peppered their faces while Jude strained to detach herself from her grasp and be part of the action. Peter her husband, in a heroic gesture, raced into the blazing building and emerged with the priest's vestments, carrying them triumphantly like a child's body. Despite the flurry of activity, there was not really anything to be done but watch as the fire burnt itself out. Alice smelt the singe of wool as she was hit by a flying ember. She rubbed her face – smearing soot on her forehead like an Ash Wednesday cross.

Alice gazed at the white backyard. Yesterday's washing hung like cardboard from the Hills Hoist and trees drooped under their frosty load. She dreaded chopping wood. On the farm it had always been a job for her brothers. She rubbed her feet on the stove, receiving the last of its warmth then ran outside to the shed. Balancing a piece of kindling on its end, she attacked wildly with the axe. After many attempts she made contact only to have the axe stick in the wood. Eventually she got the hang of chopping and before long had a neat stack. The task was engrossing and the wheelbarrow filled rapidly while she pondered the stupidity of leaving Murwillumbah for this harsh climate and Peter's dream of owning a country pharmacy. She was warm when she re-entered the house but relit the fire and sat with a pot of tea and a cigarette – a day of domestic chores stretched once more ahead of her.

Steam rose from washing slung over the fender as she dozed, the warmth transporting her to a childhood swimming hole and the jumbled sounds of the farm – cows baying to be

milked; siblings fighting, laughing and nagging; the baby, demanding to be fed while mother cried for her help. But she escaped, sliding into silence, plunging to the black rock on the river bed. Then, with head throbbing and lungs ready to burst, she would explode from the water. She was aware of a tapping – and prepared for the angry footsteps of her mother – but the persistent knock drew her from her sleep. She pulled her gown about her pregnant belly, ran her fingers through her hair and, opening the door, saw her very pregnant neighbour carrying a cake.

‘Welcome to your new home. I’m Bet Moss’.

Conversation flickered between them. Bet balanced a tea cup on her enormous belly – acknowledging her pregnancy, even flaunting it – so that Alice felt less awkward about her own ungainly shape. The frozen world dissolved in drips of condensation running down the window panes and soon the winter sun entered the room and touched their bodies, illuminating them in a maternal tableau. She’d had little contact with the local community since her arrival nine months earlier on the goods train from Goulburn. She’d made the excruciating trip with Peter’s mother and sister Bessie, and in her awkwardness she’d babbled on about her romance with Peter – disclosing far too much as the conversation lapsed into unbearable silences whenever she faltered. At Crookwell, Peter met them at the Station – it was the end of the line – and she remembered the sharp biting air making her cough uncontrollably.

They had a simple wedding at St Mary’s. The church, like the region, had a foreign feel with its smells of incense, candle wax and stale air trapped within its high gothic walls. It was strange to see Mary and the saints featured in the stained glass which muted natural sunlight creating a sinister ambience as mottled yellow and red light flooded the altar. Their wedding party was jammed into the sacristy because it was a mixed marriage. Peter’s mother, who was humiliated on his behalf, avoided her and left as soon as possible. Then there was a reception at Harvey’s pub where they drank too many toasts and danced well into the night. They had a two-day honeymoon, largely confined to their room, and Alice felt a flicker of arousal as she recalled the excitement of their first night. After the awkwardness of undressing and climbing into bed together, they revelled in the excitement of unleashed sexuality. She remembered the pain and disappointment the first time he entered her, how he came too quickly without giving her a chance to be involved. After that he was slow, and

considerate, and when she orgasmed she felt embarrassed by the wanton exposure of her own desire.

After Bet left, Alice set off to take Peter his lunch. In the weeks after her arrival she'd spent a lot of time at the pharmacy, unpacking, cleaning and dreaming of their future. They'd found papers indicating that the shop, originally a carriage waiting-room, had been a pharmacy for almost a hundred years. Alice had been unwell since her pregnancy and was isolated at home. For the first time in her life she felt useless.

She picked her way along back lanes. Her footsteps crunched loose gravel, broadcasting her passage to neighbours who came out to inspect her as she slunk past. Her growing stomach strained the serge skirt she had refashioned from her military uniform, making her feel fat and ungainly. Her pink jumper struggled to contain her enlarged breasts, transforming them into blazing emblems that announced her secret to the world. At the main street, she stalled in panic, as if making a solo stage appearance. She folded her arms around her embarrassing clothes and ducked quickly into a laneway that led to the pharmacy. Peter was busy as she creeped in, collapsing in a chair by the fire out the back then quietly watched him at work.

She could feel his tension as he jumped from one activity to another, his eyes wide in owlish concentration, his forehead shiny with melting Brylcreem. She watched his hands deftly wrap a parcel then secure it with string which he looped precisely and broke with a sudden jerk. He moved mechanically to the dispensary but paused to complete his ritual of recording prescriptions in his precise writing. Alice could hear the pen darting and scraping across the page then silence as he softly caressed his markings with blotting paper. A concoction bubbled on a Bunsen burner – the medicinal smells of menthol, camphor and disinfectant made her nostalgic for nursing. Peter became annoyed when he registered her presence. No hello darling or smile of welcome, just a command to 'Whip across the road and collect this prescription.' They often borrowed stock from the other pharmacy.

She felt sick at the thought of stepping through the front door but Peter was oblivious to her anxiety as he jotted down his request. She clenched her hands and considered escaping home but stumbled from the shop and edged her way down the shady side of the street. No one greeted her but a dog tagged along – sniffing at posts and waiting for her as she walked self-consciously past the few people on the street. She crossed the road to Clifford's

pharmacy where Jim Clifford, the pharmacist, emerged from the dispensary to warmly shake her hand.

‘You must be Peter’s wife. So pleased to meet you! Hope you’re enjoying the town. Hold on a minute while I get these for Peter.’

The pharmacy was filled with sunshine. Jim and his assistant introduced themselves and began telling her about community groups she could join like the Country Woman’s Association or the Amateur Dramatic Society. She was energised by the visit but, on her return to the shadowy side of the street, felt the chill of the Catholic establishments.

On her way home, Alice meandered along the Crookwell River as it carved its way through cow pastures and dry brown grassland recently cleared for development. The river was a thin ribbon in comparison to the powerful Tweed and, when she stooped to drink from her cupped hands, its cold water made her teeth ache. She found Bet outside her house balancing a toddler on one hip and giving an order at the green-grocer van.

‘Come in for a cuppa’, she invited.

The child whined and climbed onto Bet’s lap, putting his hands up to hold her face and control her attention. But Bet, desperate for adult contact, ignored him. She talked rapidly, feeding him rusks and pretending to look at books he piled on her. Alice learned about the town and Bet’s husband, Clarrie, who was very involved with the church. Bet felt neglected because of the time he spent teaching the nuns to drive and doing odd jobs at the convent. She was sick of providing meals for the priest who came to dinner every Sunday and made her feel very uncomfortable. Alice herself was disturbed by the gaze of the Sacred Heart which hung above the fire next to a smaller family portrait of Bet, Clarrie and baby Brendan.

The Crookwell District Hospital was a rambling building with no obvious entrance. Alice had a quick cigarette as she mustered courage to enter.

‘I have an appointment to see Matron Noyes.’

The receptionist directed her to a seat among a group of patients waiting to have wounds dressed and plasters changed. The place was vibrant and she felt at home. Matron

approached, in animated conversation with the Father O'Shannassy. She was personification of nursing authority; her body had thickened into middle age chunkiness with a prominent dowager's hump restricting her movement. She was intimidating as she dominated the conversation with the priest, who was dancing to keep up with her determined stride.

'Sister Anderson is it?' She enquired.

Alice hesitated. Was she Sister Anderson or Mrs Hemmingway? She nodded and rose to shake the outstretched hand.

'Have you meet Father O'Shannassy?'

She had, but he appeared not to remember the ordeal of her Catholic wedding.

'You are not one of us Mrs Hemmingway, are you?' He said as he bowed and left.

Alice felt Matron Noyes's scrutiny as they walked to her office: the wedding band on her left hand, the slight bulge of her stomach, her full breasts, and now the priest's confirmation of her marriage.

'We're struggling with a baby boom at the moment. As well as the usual run of things we seem to deliver a new child each day. The nurses are run off their feet. Two local doctors do daily rounds but our nurses have to manage everything when the doctors can't come ... which is most of the time! It's like a war zone around here.'

Alice laughed. 'Well I'd feel quite at home then. I spent twelve months at a medical evacuation station for Pacific troops where I'm sure I managed every type of trauma. I also have a midwifery certificate.'

'Unfortunately my hands are tied, Sister Anderson. You fit the bill but, as you probably know, I'm not allowed to employ married women. If you'd like to put your name on an emergency list we could call if things get really out of control. I'm afraid that's the best I can do'.

Alice longed to put on her uniform and fall into a familiar pattern of work. It would help her adjust to this place and to be known for who she really was. Her hope that she might be able to bluff her way into a job melted. Instead she would have to be introduced to Crookwell as Mrs Hemmingway.

Babies came in quick succession for Alice – three children in three years, then a year's reprieve before another three. Their demands were endless - Jude requiring the most attention with her tantrums and rebelliousness. Her mother's plea for help often echoed in her ears. The shadow of the church hung over their street – touching all the residents and its bell punctuated their day - the 6 am call to church, the noonday Angelus. Children streamed to St Mary's School and parishioners found standing room only at the church on Sundays. Rosary beads from the Moss family lassoed Alice's children, drawing them into the unfamiliar prayers and ways of the Catholics – leaving her on the outside while they prayed for her conversion. Her sons – Johnny and Pat – spent a lot of time with Clarrie Moss as he worked in the yard, building sheds, fixing cars and spinning stories about his childhood. The girls – Mary, Ellen and Jude – loved sleepovers there and wished that the rosary was part of their family ritual and that Alice would go to church with them. But Alice was resolute and, anyway, she enjoyed the free time on Sundays when Peter took the children to his church.

An abstract window behind the central altar of the new Anglican Church cast splashes of colour over the interior, binding the congregation in a haze of light. She loved the simplicity of this place: no Marys or other statues, no candles burning for intercession. The first hymn, *Onward Christian Soldiers*, was sung with gusto by the whole congregation and she could hear a voice just like her father's. They read scriptures and the sermon was about happiness not damnation. Afterwards she remained for morning tea and was coerced into helping organise the church flower show. She stayed longer than she anticipated and when she arrived home, Peter who was dressed in cricket whites was pacing furiously in the garden with a screaming George. Alice's bubble of happiness exploded into the screams, cries and routine of family life.

Alice was reluctant to leave Jude on her first day of school. She'd been persuaded to start her before she turned five, but regretted the decision as soon as Sister John took her to the front and sat her between two large boys. The room contained first and second classes – sixty pupils, jammed three-to-a-desk, for one nun to manage. Alice waited outside, listening to the chanting of prayers, tables and spelling. Sister John was young, with a red birthmark covering a large part of her face. Her body was swamped by a heavy black habit, white wimple and black veil, and burdened further by large rosary beads anchored to her belt. Most of the nuns were young farm girls, fresh from the noviciate and untrained as teachers. One day her oldest son, Johnny, reported that his teacher had locked him in a cupboard because he was a bad. After that, he was often out gardening at the convent so that he was falling behind with spelling and arithmetic. Alice joined the P&C but felt she didn't have the right to be critical of this unfamiliar culture.

She stood in the shade with other parents while the children stacked themselves on trestles and tables for their First Communion photo. Jude looked beautiful as she pulled at the brown scapular and rubbed her communion medal. Alice conceded that it had been worth the frustration and hours of labour to make the white voile dress and veil – to dress her seven year old as a bride - until she saw that look of ownership on the priest's face as he jammed himself among the little girls in the front row. Jude screwed her eyes against the glare, her face bleached to a flat radiance by the sun. Suddenly a plume of vomit cascaded over the group – Jude, on the top layer, no longer able to contain her excitement, bought up her breakfast – spraying her classmates and the priest. Alice struggled to contrail her convulsive laughter as she raced to Jude's aid

As they grew older, Alice's daughters sensed her difference and embraced religion with a zealot like ferocity. They attended mass daily, either to obtain special recognition from the nuns or to intercede on her behalf to a God who would ignore her in the afterlife. They presented their heads and hair brushes to her each morning as she was roused from sleep by the mass bell and, in her semiconscious state, she braided their hair. She hoped they would soon tire of this daily commitment, but their activities increased to include picnics with the priest, learning to play the organ, and preparing vestments for morning mass. Alice was uneasy and sought to counteract their religious focus with sport, trips away and even a beach holiday.

Lately she'd sensed a change in Jude and wondered if she was ill or finally tiring of the religious nonsense. Alice stoked the fire to bring some warmth into the freezing house as part of the afternoon ritual before starting dinner, baths and homework.

'Don't you have to set the vestments this afternoon Jude?' Ellen, her older sister, asked. 'You'd better hurry or you'll be in big trouble with Sister Ann.'

But Jude didn't move immediately. Her face was white and Alice noted the violet circles under her eyes, her quivering lips and her sudden temper flares.

"It's none of your business Ellen. I'll go when I want to. I don't need you telling me what to do."

'I think you should give this up. If you don't like it - don't do it,' Alice snapped.

She'd talk to Bet about her daughter's close relationship with the priest, how it concerned her and how, as an outsider, she was reluctant to complain. The priests were regular dinner guests at the Mosses' house which Alice often thought was the catalyst for her daughters' increased religious fervour. They envied the Mosses' religious immersion: nightly rosary, daily mass, the special relationship the family had with both nuns and priests, and the favours this closeness bestowed. Did her children think they had to make themselves readily available to the whims of the religious to compensate for having a protestant mother?

'I have to do it,' Jude spat as her eyes filled with tears and she stormed from the house.

Alice was fed up. Despite the embarrassment she would cause Peter, she'd go and confront this situation with the priest. He needed to butt out of their lives. She waited a while then followed Jude up the hill. She sat in a pew at the back of the church, breathing deeply to calm herself. The church was dark but a carnival of coloured light flooded the altar highlighting Father O'Shannassy as he fussed with a chalice. Smoke from intercession candles spiralled past the shrine of Mary towards the statue of Christ on the Cross, filling the church with its claustrophobic smell. Jude emerged from a side door carrying a large vase of orchids – too heavy for her small, lithe frame. Her French braid was slightly unravelled, wisps of curls escaping around her face; her skirt was twisted and caught up at the back and her shoes were scuffed and worn. The priest rushed to take the vase, spilling water onto her

clothing in the process. He pawed at her blouse in an over-familiar way as she pulled back against the altar. Alice held her breath. She wanted to grab her child and hurl the chalice in the man's face but instead she waited. Jude squirmed free and retreated to the sacristy for more flowers. He followed. Alice crept along a side passage and in full fury entered the priest's space.

'Jude you're needed at home,' she said quietly as she interrupted the priest standing too close to her child. Father O'Shannassy showed neither surprise nor alarm, merely nodding in Alice's direction as he moved to read from his missal.

'And she won't be helping with the vestments again.' His non-response was almost as provoking as his inappropriateness.

It was night and Alice felt the biting chill of early winter as she walked the deserted street. The Southern Cross shone so bright it felt almost close enough to touch. She could see Bet and Clarrie reading in their lounge room and heard classical music coming from a house on the corner. The church was in darkness and, as she approached, the high bluestone walls and gothic bell tower gave the impression of an impenetrable fort. Peter had been dismissive of her concerns about the priest, and Jude, embarrassed by her mother's intervention, would not talk. Alice felt impotent against their solidarity and, in frustration, had gone for a walk. The church was unlocked and drew her in. A solitary candle shed its dying light onto the altar. Without intending to, Alice placed a candle in each of the thirty intercession holes. With mad determination she lit them and then swooped through the church lighting every candle she could find – on the altar, at shrines and in grottos. Shadows from the flickering flames danced on the walls as if applauding. She felt a strong draught surging through the doors as she left, extinguishing some of the candles but causing others to leap higher. In an improved mood she hurried home and crawled into the warm space beside Peter.

Choices

(Jude)

Jude waited in the car at the top of the hill with her brothers while their father scrambled down to the footbridge to collect Tom. His father Syd didn't have a car and Tom's legs didn't work properly because of polio, so Peter took him to school most days. Cockatoos screeched in gum trees along the river bank, sounding like the children had that morning as they squabbled over chores. Jude sulked in the back seat, still cranky that she wasn't allowed the glory of washing up.

'It's not fair,' she cried. 'Why do I always get the boring jobs? Mary's just the pet.' She'd given Mary a flick with the tea towel which nicked her in the eye and produced an exaggerated scream of pain.

'For God's sake Jude! Stop! Get your things and get in the car. You can go with dad and the boys to collect Tom. Just get out of my sight,' her mother cried.

Mum thought she could organise our house like an army hospital with a duty roster that we were supposed to tick each day. She always gave Mary and Ellen the best jobs and made me do boring things like drying up and making beds. Mary was bossy and caused lots of fights. Then she'd pretend it was my fault and I'd be in trouble as usual.

They heard their father sliding on loose gravel, the strike of a match and his crunching footsteps as he paced about, waiting for Tom and his father to arrive. They saw the smoke from his cigarette mingle with the mist that floated in the valley and heard him huff with exasperation as he kept checking his watch. Finally they heard him call out to Syd who had carried Tom through the muddy paddock to the footbridge. They heard the bridge timbers creak, then the squeak of Tom's irons and his heavy foot fall as he hobbled across it.

'Have a good day Tom,' Syd called to his son as Tom climbed onto Peter's back for a piggyback up the hill. 'Thanks again Pete.'

'No problem at all,' Peter replied, even though at home our father acted as if it were a big problem – something he had to do that made him late for work. Tom was one of his many projects and, when he was in hospital in Goulburn, Peter would drive Syd into Goulburn to visit him on the weekend. Occasionally, Alice insisted Peter take the kids with him too, and

Jude remembered being frightened as her father lifted her up to see Tom lying in the iron lung that sucked air in and out of him.

'Hi kids.' Tom smiled as he slid from Peter's back into the front seat. He was older than them, in sixth class, so not someone they would normally acknowledge. They nodded shyly and looked away, except for Patrick who always wanted to know everything about people.

'Can you kick a football Tom?'

'You just watch me,' said Tom with his usual laugh.

Jude had seen him in the playground with his classmates. They'd knock him to the ground and pounce on him, but he'd laugh and roll away from under the pack then scramble up in an awkward way – pulling his leg from under him, then straightening his knee with his hand as if it were a machine. He couldn't move very fast because he had to push his knee straight but he could shuffle the ball with his wonky leg as well as some of the other boys and could use it as a weapon if he was really angry.

The school bell rang soon after they arrived so they formed their usual lines outside the classrooms and filed in. Jude was too slow to avoid standing next to Billy Johnson who puffed and crackled more than usual in the cold school yard. The boys called him Puffing Billy and mimicked his rasping breath as they laughed and pushed each other. While the others stood at attention beside their desks, Billy was doubled over, panting desperately and making huge hissing sounds.

'Quick Sister!' Billy's on the floor,' Kevin Crocker called excitedly.

'That's enough of this nonsense! Everyone file outside again without a word. We'll start again and continue marching in and out until we can do it perfectly. Billy you stay where you are and stop that terrible noise.'

Once we were outside she took Billy away to the boys' toilet then came back and made us march in and out three times.

'Hey Joe! You've got Vera Smith's germs', whispered Paul Stone as he edged around Vera, patting her shoulder then blowing from his hand towards his mate. Vera had wiry white hair, dirty sand shoes, a uniform that didn't fit. She was poor and she looked filthy. She

never did her homework and wandered around alone at recess and lunch. Sister Dorothy shoved Paul in the back and made both boys stand in front of the class. She grabbed her cane and gave them two cuts on each hand for their naughtiness. Paul continued to smirk all the way back to his desk as he jammed his palms in his armpits and mouthed to his mates.

‘Didn’t hurt a bit!’

But Joe cried as he tried to soothe his smarting hands and slouched deep into his seat. The performance hushed the class. Quiet now, they all sat reading their new school magazines, dreading a full day with Sister Dorothy in a bad mood.

As a class they read *Ambrose the Kangaroo*. Jude had no trouble with any of the words and felt relieved to have progressed from the *Faye and Don* readers that she knew by heart. She could answer all the comprehension questions at the end of each section as long as she wasn’t required to write them down. Spelling was her problem. No matter how hard she tried she always slipped up and was never left standing at the end of the daily spelling bee. Before recess when everyone was restless, they did arithmetic – reciting times-tables, doing quick mental tasks and finishing off work sheets.

Milk crates were stacked under fruit trees outside their classroom where the smell of stale milk and squashed berries combined in a nauseating concoction. Jude pretended to drink the milk but like many others poured the contents of the squat bottle into the grass before joining a long line of girls skipping and chanting and taking turns to do as many peppers as possible. Recess was spent in the confines of the school yard, but at lunch time the children went to the large paddock across the road where they roamed freely. There were organised games such as rounders for the girls and football for the boys, but most dispersed into groups for free play in the pine trees and the long dry grass. Jude and her friends continued their daily game of dolls made from pine cones, dressed in leaves, ferns and grass. They constructed towns from branches and sticks and posted guards to protect them from the meandering hordes of boys who constantly tried to disrupt their play. Each day they would rebuild their village after it was trashed overnight. Lunch time passed in a blink compared to the agonising pace of the morning which was measured by the slow ticking of the second hand on the clock above the fireplace and Jude’s anxiety about possible exposure or failure.

Afternoons were a relief. The classroom was subdued and even rowdy boys like Paul and Joe sat quietly and did their work in anticipation of an extra chapter of the abridged version of *Great Expectations*. During the reading the children could rest their heads on their desks and sometimes Billy's disturbed breathing settled into a loud snore. The children tried not to giggle and Sister Dorothy pretended not to notice. Jude loved the smell of her desk with its layers of sweat, chalk dust and mould and found it mysterious and exciting like Mrs Havisham's house. Even the teacher's mood improved with the reading and she was gentle when she shook Billy awake for the worst part of the day – ten minutes of dictation. Jude tried not to panic as she got out her dictation book that was scratched with red scribble from other student's corrections. They were more harsh with their scrutiny of each other than the teacher – circling words, not giving the benefit of the doubt even if the *o*, *a* or *e* were indecipherable. Jude had developed an indecipherable scrawl in an attempt to hide her errors.

At the end of the day they were given back test results from the previous term and told to leave them in their envelopes till they got home, but of course they didn't. On the top of her dictation test Jude was almost relieved to see 54% – much better than the failure she had anticipated. She thumbed through the rest of the papers and couldn't believe the gold star on top of her maths paper, next to a mark of 100%. She shoved the papers back into the envelope and was seized by a flush of ecstasy as she floated from the school. She ran through the playground, called out to Tom as his dad helped him into another helper's car, dodged kids lining up outside Paddy's corner shop to buy lollies, all the while aware of the results that were shining in her bag like a treasure for her mother. By the time she reached the buttercup patch she was running so fast that she tripped and fell hard onto both knees, her hands scraped along the concrete and her bag was sent flying into the wild flowers.

Ann Moss came to her rescue. 'You okay, Jude? That was a buster and a half.'

Jude cried a little as red streaks, like spelling corrections, seeped through the jagged holes in her stockings, and her hands smarted as blood oozed from her palms. She limped with Ann to her front gate then rushed inside to claim her mother before the other kids arrived. But Alice was busy with a sick baby and said she would look at Jude's report later. By the time she remembered, Jude was in bed and the maths result no longer seemed important. In

some ways it was a great curse because, after that, anything less than a hundred per cent felt like a failure.

At assembly one day Tom was asked to talk about polio. He told us about the kids he meet in hospital and his time in the iron lung, as if it were a fantastic adventure. Afterwards Sister Loretta said that the government had organised for all children to be protected from polio with an injection. Jude dreaded injection day. She reluctantly handed over the pink permission slip to her mother, begging her not to sign it.

‘Please mum, I can’t have an injection. It’ll hurt too much. I don’t care if I get polio or tetanus. Can’t dad just give me some medicine?’

But Jude found herself in the long line of students – sleeves rolled up as they slowly approached the table where nurses, armed with abrasive mentholated spirits, had needles ready to jab in their arms. Some kids fainted before they got to the table and even Joe Ryan, the toughest boy in the class, began screaming hysterically as they grabbed his arm.

‘Stop that nonsense!’ Sister Dorothy was cross. ‘There’s no need for that behaviour – the job’s already done. Now roll down your sleeve and move on.’

‘Didn’t hurt a bit!’ Joe skited, now that he’d finished.

Jude didn’t know how to make herself move forward. She closed her eyes so that she’d stop counting down her turn. She thought of Tom and his squeaking leg; she imagined the iron lung squeezing down onto his chest to keep him alive; she remembered how he walked using his hand but nothing helped. She would still rather polio. She felt herself pushed along and next thing she knew her arm was grabbed and rubbed with Metho. She went rigid, clenching her eyes shut and jamming her teeth together.

‘Move on Jude.’ Sister Dorothy said gently.

‘Don’t I have to have the needle?’ She almost fainted with relief.

‘You’ve had it – you’re done. Now hurry up and move on!’ The elation was the same as the hundred per cent maths mark.

One lunch time a group of boys swarmed behind a row of pine trees close to where Jude’s game was in progress.

'Fight! Fight!' They screamed with such urgency that Jude was sucked into the boys' drama. As she drew nearer she saw Tom on the ground thrashing with his arms and good leg as Micky Jones bashed him. Jude, in a protective fury normally reserved for family, charged through the chanting throng and grabbed Mickey's arms, punching his face with all her might. The crowd laughed and cheered as she was pulled to the ground and wrestled by Mickey. It was like the injection – she felt no pain as she kicked and belted Mickey Jones and he retaliated. Tom rolled from the tangle to stand with the cheering kids, laughing and smiling in his usual fashion while egging her on. Mickey laughed as he got the upper hand, pinning her arms to her sides and straddling her like a conqueror. The crowd went quiet as the jangle of rosary beads announced the arrival of Sister Loretta. She grabbed Mickey by the scruff of his neck – pulled him off Jude and pinched his ear as she marched them both back to school.

'Hi kids' said Tom with his usual smile next time her father slid him into the front of the car at Brookland's Bridge. Jude was embarrassed to see him again and thought he might say something to her father, but he behaved as if the incident had never happened. She guessed he was used to putting up with things. He just wanted to be like he was before polio and didn't want people to make allowances for him. At school he laughed and stumbled along with the sixth class boys as they played football – rolling from the scrum when they piled on top of him – always happy, always one of the boys. Jude's brothers, however, Johnny and Pat, thought she was a hero to have fought Mickey Jones.

Equal

(Alice)

They went through the motions: the assembly in the dark; the formation into rows – arm’s length apart; the swig of rum to fortify against an imaginary cold; then the march to the beat of Clarrie’s drum. It was silly really – a pantomime of an earlier period when fear motivated precise compliance. Clothes ironed to sharpened creases. Shoes polished to gleam like patent leather. Orders screeched with authority and aggression. They remembered their youth as they marched down the deserted main street. For some it was the memory of perpetual fear, of death and dying, of the stench of artillery, mud and decay. For Alice it was the romance of Morotai. The way the soldiers reacted as if she was Bette Davis or Ava Gardiner; their neediness as she dressed their torn bodies and reassured them of their manliness. The importance she felt to be part of a national project that evacuated troops from the hell of the Pacific war, patched them up to be either sent back or evacuated home. It was the one day – when she marched with the men, when it was acknowledged that she too had played a role – the one day she felt equal.

The kookaburra laughed on cue as dawn broke. Walter choked out the *Last Post* and *Reveille* and they remembered their mates. Alice recalled the stench of the bodies of the boys returning from Burma – huge frightened eyes shining from corpses too weak to stand, yet days before whipped if they failed to work. Arthur had been one of those boys. His once emaciated frame now struggled with the burden of fat – his belly hung like a melon over his belt; his face florid with the effort of keeping up. But he beamed with pride as he limped along. Merle had given up on him while he was lost in Burma and continued to torture him by flaunting her kids who should have been his. A stream of cigarette smoke marked their passage as the troop demobbed and strolled back to the club.

Alice had parked the car near the memorial gates earlier so that she could rush back to get breakfast ready – urns on, pots of tea, sandwiches prepared. She knew that alcohol and two-up would take priority, but blotting paper had to be there for the day of heavy drinking. As president of the RSL Woman’s Auxiliary she had been preparing for weeks. With things underway for the men, she rushed home to check on the children, but as she pulled into the driveway she wished she’d afforded herself the full privileges of a returned soldier and

stayed at the club all day. A home battle was in full swing. George's full nappy was hanging to his knees as he waddled towards her, Jude was crying that Mary was too bossy and wouldn't let them make ANZAC biscuits, and Mary greeted her like a thunderstorm – her resentment at being in charge hurled at Alice like a punch. The breakfast things were still on the table, the floor was littered with cereal, and she could hear the boys skylarking in the bedroom. Mary slammed the door as she walked out.

Alice spent the next hour restoring order: washing up, sweeping the floor, changing George and putting him to bed with a bottle, setting activities for the day, and laying out clothes for the older ones to wear in the march at 11 o'clock. She braided Mary's hair, mesmerised by its gloss and weight, as the child sobbed in frustration.

'You're wonderful darling. It'll be easier now with George asleep and the boys playing outside. I have to slip back to the club to clean up breakfast and organise lunch but I'll be home to take you all to the march. Thanks for being such a big help. Get Ellen to look after George when he wakes.'

'No – I want George. Ellen can do all the other work.'

'Okay! Okay! Most of the work's done now. I just need you to be calm. I'll be home at ten-thirty.'

'No you won't! You're always late and then we'll be in big trouble for being late for the march.'

But Alice left knowing that she'd thrust onto her eleven-year-old daughter a responsibility way beyond her years just as her mother had done to her.

A similar mess greeted her at the club. Rowdy men slugged back beer as they clamoured to toss the two-up coins. Beneath their drunken yells was the cacophony of well-worn war stories. The sandwiches were gone and empty plates, full ashtrays, cups and saucers, and rubbish, were strewn about in expectation of a woman's intervention. Part of her Auxiliary team was in the kitchen preparing salads, cutting chickens, buttering bread and washing up. The kitchen was their world and they were reluctant to venture into the men's domain even to clean up. Only Poppy and Alice, two returned soldiers, were permitted to be part of the celebration they had been responsible for creating.

When Alice pulled into the driveway again, the children were waiting on the back steps. Jude, as usual, was sulking about something that hadn't gone her way. Mary was wearing the red nurse's cape over her school uniform and Ellen was jiggling to the rattle of military medals fastened to her chest. Johnny had on Peter's hat and Patrick kept jumping up to knock it off his head. Peter would march with the men and Alice would hold the little kids while the bigger ones were with a school group.

Walter again played the bugle while his son marched beside him, mimicking on a smaller instrument. Clarrie maintained a marching beat on his base drum while his son, Brendan, accompanied him. The crowd cheered as the children passed and Alice choked back tears as the odd assortment of men passed by, heads held high, some with legs and arms missing, all buoyed by alcohol and the support of their mates. Peter winked as he passed and for that instant she was infused with the excitement of their first encounter at Ingleburn Army Base when he waited for an hour for her to finish duty, and then pretended that it was a random encounter.

At lunch she sat between Rollie Ryan and Sid Fleming. Both had served on the Kokoda Trail and had chronic health problems because of malaria and dysentery. Most of the local men knew her story and her right to be at the lunch, but they still felt uncomfortable about being thrust into conversation with a woman. They needed to watch their language – to abbreviate the bloodies and fucks – to find something real to talk about other than escapades of courage or conquests of women and inane jokes. After each course Alice slipped out to the kitchen to check on her committee or to escape the male company as much as anything. The two hours of lunch was the longest period of the day.

'How's it going?' Poppie was having a smoke with her mates while waiting for the dessert to be delivered.

'Don't know if I can sit through another rendition of a Kokoda conquest. I'd rather be in the kitchen but guess we have to endure it – for the sisterhood,' Alice smirked.

Poppie laughed. 'Let's go and have a throw of two-up.'

They had another cigarette in the comfort of the kitchen where the women joked and laughed about their children, the march and their men as they washed dishes, served up apple pie and cream, and refilled the urns for tea.

Alice's boys were playing cricket in the backyard by the time she returned home exhausted at the end of the day. They flung their bats away and raced to the car.

'What did you bring us – are there any cakes?'

'Depends how good you've been.'

'Well Johnny hasn't been good. Mary said he'd get in so much trouble when you got home and dad would probably give him a belting.'

'I've been good,' he cried. 'It was an accident and I would have cleaned it up but Mary wouldn't let me. She pushed me outside and locked the door. She's the one who should be in trouble. She's been fighting with everyone all day.'

'Okay! Okay! You boys carry in these trays and I'll see what's been happening.'

Alice was relieved to find all six children present and that there were no obvious injuries. She pretended not to notice the small hole and brown stain that was spreading, like a suppurating wound across the ceiling. Mary was still trying to tidy up.

'Johnny wanted to make caramel and put a can of condensed milk in the pressure cooker while I was playing with George and Jude. It wasn't my fault. I said he couldn't but he sneaked in while I wasn't looking. It exploded with such a bang and I thought we had been bombed. ANZAC Day is the worst day of the year!'

Alice gave the children the leftover food. They would all be in bed before Peter came home so she could attend to the disaster then. Mary reverted to a whining child – demanding her share of the special cake, then dropping her slice cream down on the floor, without bothering to wipe it up. The boys disappeared to continue their game of cricket. The girls returned to their cubby in the bedroom with its labyrinth of rooms constructed out of the entire contents of the linen cupboard. She made chicken noodle soup from a packet, put George in the bath to calm him down, and wondered if it had been worth the effort to celebrate this one day of the year.

On the back step, she watched the smoke from her cigarette float into the night. The moon was full – staring down at her like the frightened eyes of those young soldiers. She remembered her frustration trying to nurse these boys on Morotai and how she longed for them all to be home. She heard the door squeak and felt Jude snuggle in beside her.

‘My day was terrible, mummy. I hate it when you’re not here.’

‘I’m only away for one day of the year. How about we plant the Judas tree tomorrow?’

Alice pulled her close, kissing her head. Yes this was a home worth fighting for.

Sunburnt

(Jude)

Jude felt the pressure of the harness between her legs, the throb of excitement as she was dragged through the water to the deep end of the pool. Screams and splashes faded to a background swirl while her straining breath, pounding heart and struggle to coordinate arms and legs obliterated the voice of the swimming coach. He pulled her to the ladder.

‘That’s all. Keep practising in the shallow end. We’ll do more tomorrow.’

As the coach unclipped the buckle and removed the harness, his hands lingered on her thighs. She lay on the concrete, a puddle of warmth forming like a shadow as she strained to control the shivering. The pounding subsided and the fug of noise distilled into words – names, shouts for a ball, isolated splashes as kids ran past and bombed into the water.

The shallow end of the pool was not her area. If she balanced on tippy toes and held her head right back she could stand in the four-foot section. She spent most of her time there, clinging to the gutter, pushing off from the side, bouncing off the bottom to turn around, then dog-paddling back. From her possie she could watch her older brother Johnny and his mates do running dives or bombs off the twelve-foot tower. They hadn’t landed on anyone yet but the manager was always yelling at them to be careful and stop bombing, but they just laughed and waited for him to go inside before starting again. Mary and Ellen swam together with their friends in the five-foot part but sometimes mum let them bring George so then they had to crawl around in the stinky toddlers’ pool minding him.

Today was a scorcher and the pool was full of kids. Jude’s mother had dropped them at ten and said to keep an eye out for her when the pool closed for lunch at one, so it was almost time to go. She went to the girls’ dressing shed, passing the kiosk on the way. Mr H called her over.

‘Good work today Jude. Here’s a pink musk stick for making it to the deep end. Keep up the good work and there’ll be more rewards.’

Jude smiled coyly and ducked out from under his arm. All the girls tried to please Mr H but he only acknowledged his favourites, ignoring the rest apart from yelling at them to stop running and splashing. He wore white shorts and a whistle around his neck that glistened in

the sun almost as bright as his sparkling teeth. His exposed body was dark from hours in the sun and the hairs on his arms and legs sparkled. Jude hoped she would eventually be able to help out in the kiosk like the big girls. She'd love to serve on the counter and maybe later she could be like Monica Leary and tidy up Mr H's loft and make him cups of tea.

The girls' dressing shed was the best place to get warm but all the good spots were full when Jude entered. Girls lay on their towels in the blazing sun, sheltered from the wind and the gaze of the boys. Some had tans so dark they looked foreign, while others just went red and their skin peeled off in long ribbons. Jacinta O'Brien was sitting with her friend, Carmel Cummins, and they were pressed into the wall's shadow as if herded there by the sun.

'That's disgusting!' She slung at them as she stumbled over their legs on the way to the shower.

After showering she crouched under her towel to remove her wet togs, marvelling at her own two-toned flesh but positioning herself so that the other girls could not see her changing body. She was the lucky one in the family who could stay in the sun all day without burning and whose skin tanned evenly without forming a mass of freckles. She pulled on the moo-moo her mother had made this summer. She still loved the pattern of Egyptian dancers and the contrast of a white towelling fringe made her legs look even browner. She pulled her black hair into a ponytail and went to sit on the grass near the wire fence to watch for her mother's car.

The grass was mined with bindies so she walked tentatively, jumping from one dirt patch to another, as she made her way to where they had all left their things that morning. It was best to sit under the only tree but you had to be there as the pool opened to get that position. Then, even if you were lucky enough to claim this soft green spot the bossy big kids would boot the younger ones off into the stark sunlight and prickly brown grass. If her mother ever came for a swim they'd have the best time. She'd bring a beach umbrella so they'd have their own patch of shade and she'd play with them in the water, throwing them in the air, letting them dangle off her and swim between her legs. Sometimes she'd dive off the big board: she bounced off the end, drew up into a tuck then glided into the water with barely a splash. If other parents were there they'd clap and Jude would think that her mum was an Olympic star. She was the best diver in Crookwell, but hardly ever came to the pool

since she'd had the skin cancer removed from her nose. Sometimes she took them on picnics to Mummel and would leave all the kids with Bet while she swam up to the bridge and back. Then she would be happy, and would laugh and sing silly songs and tell them about swimming in her beautiful river when she was a little girl.

Jude noticed the car parked in the shade behind the wire fence and saw her mother engaged in deep conversation with Mrs Dowling.

Damn! She thought. Now it will take another hour to get her away and mum won't be able to get a word in edgeways.

She could hear Mrs Dowling's posh voice ricocheting off the fence as if she were in a courtroom bamboozling everyone with her clever words and ideas. She was in charge of everything she could in the town and always sought to change things. At school she'd organised for free milk to be delivered each day. Now the children were forced to drink it at playlunch whether they wanted to or not – unless they tipped it out. Moira was head of the Catholic Women's League and Jude guessed that was what was being discussed. She had just returned from some great convention in Sydney where she was representing the Goulburn-Canberra area. As a lawyer she was used to being important, so after she married and couldn't work anymore she had to find other things to do. Mr Dowling ran a busy law practice in the town and everyone said that Moira did most of his work.

As she passed the kiosk on the way out Jude saw Monica coming down backwards from Mr H's loft. Her blond hair hung like a curtain to her waist and her shorts were so brief her legs looked like skinny curtain poles. Her face was red with a smatter of fresh pimples erupting on her chin but she wore a superior smirk and ignored Jude when she said good-bye. To Jude's surprise, down the ladder behind Monica came the equally beautiful Tessa Dowling – obviously another one of the chosen. Mary and Ellen would never be called on to be helpers. By this stage of the summer their faces were fermented with freckles that scoured deep into their confidence and marginalised them to the band of girls who played together without the constant gaze of Mr H or the teenage boys. Jude at eleven was already sprouting breasts but instead of concaving into a banana she thrust her shoulders back and dreamed of kiosk duties. Usually Mr H was the only adult at the pool but if one of the mothers came he managed the kiosk alone.

'Hey Tessa, your mum's waiting for you,' Jude called as she left.

The swimming lessons continued well after Jude could swim a length of the pool and towards the end of the summer Mr H let her serve in the kiosk. It wasn't as much fun as she anticipated and she felt awkward when he blew in her ear and rubbed his hands over her breasts and tummy.

Jude was serving paddle pops to Spike Cross and his brother the day Mrs Dowling stormed into the kiosk, making a great fuss and scaring everyone. Tessa fell down the ladder from the loft where she had been with Mr H and Mrs Dowling spoke in her superior voice with her fancy words and made everyone collect their things and go straight home. She closed the pool and it stayed closed for the rest of the week. Then Mrs Dowling in her organising way made a roster for all the mothers to have a turn as pool manager till the end of summer. On mum's day everyone had a turn at serving in the kiosk – even Mary, Ellen and the boys.

Jude didn't know where Mr H went, but thought he must have gone to manage an Olympic Memorial Pool in another town. She missed the excitement he provided that summer but, when mum became manager, she got to see his loft which was so small you couldn't stand properly and had to crawl around on his smelly old mattress.

The Extension

(Alice)

Alice loved the smell of sawn timber and the sound of the hammers; sometimes in unison, sometimes resounding like the volley of a drum. She loved the smell of the men – their sweat mixed with tobacco, putty and metal tools that skidded in their moist hands. Primal smells that evoked action, power and achievement. She loved their language – their robust banter between each other, full of ‘bloodys’ and ‘fucks’, refined in her presence to be peppered with ‘Darl’ and ‘Love’. They had time for her little boys, giving them off-cuts of timber, nails and little hammers which kept them occupied for hours. She had to balance on a plank to get through their construction site to the clothesline, so tried to get up early to get organised before they arrived. Otherwise they fussed, held her arm as she danced along the plank or, like pageboys, carried the tub for her. She was embarrassed by the attention, but secretly enjoyed the admiration and the company.

Washing was an ordeal but, when they first bought the house, Alice had to light the copper and wring clothes by hand, just like her mother. It still took ages but sometimes – as she stood threading nappies, towels and sheets through the ringer – the children would disappear into their own imaginative play and she would be lulled by the repetitive task to a private world where she could plan a future. It was here that she’d conceived the extension to coincide with the sewerage connection. An inside toilet would be the most exciting improvement but they would also get a large sunroom, an enormous eat-in kitchen, a bathroom and a separate laundry. There would be room to move and areas where the children could escape from each other, so maybe their fighting would stop. Certainly there would be no more dunny fires. Jude was the main culprit and, if no one agreed to accompany her at night, she would set alight the newspaper for warmth, illumination or just to create a little drama. Once a whole pile of paper went up and Alice had to use the hose to extinguish the fire. You’d have thought the mid-winter soaking would have cured Jude, but the little pyromaniac couldn’t help herself.

‘Hey Alice, come and check this out. Are you sure you want the windows this big?’

Steve would call at least three times a day for her opinion but she suspected he really wanted admiration. It was too late to change anything by this stage.

‘See how large the sunroom windows are compared to those in the older part of the house? There’s no continuity – it’s so obviously an add-on!’

‘We’re not bothered by that – we want light and winter warmth. The old part might look okay from the outside but it’s an ice box in the winter. I’d replace it too if we could afford it.’

They stood admiring Steve’s workmanship. He offered her a cigarette which he lit with cupped nicotine stained hands and they leaned against the naked framework watching the children pretending to be carpenters. Steve talked about other extensions he had done and the line-up of work waiting for him.

‘It’s boom time in Crookwell. Everyone’s dropping kids like rabbits, especially the Micks, so lots of houses need to be remodelled to increase capacity.’

‘What about yours Steve?’

‘Too busy making a quid to stop and do something at home. We are still up the Saleyards Road. All the boys jammed in one room, the girls in the other and the twins in with us – not like here. Your kids are so calm Ali – just like you.’

‘You’ve got to be joking! I must admit they’ve enjoyed the excitement of the extension and having you and Tommo around the place. I love it too because it stops the fights.’

Alice sensed a slow secretive smile forming on Steve’s face, but he ducked his head under the mass of sandy hair, stamped out his cigarette with the heel of his boot and resumed nailing the timber joists together. The tattooed ship on his biceps, a relic from his wartime service in the navy, pumped as he struck with the hammer. His body was hard and strong like the wood he worked on and his exposed skin almost black. His hands had prematurely aged and were knotted with veins like old wood. The final knuckle of his left index finger was missing – lost in action somewhere. Alice lingered, smoking her cigarette to the filter, her shoulders pressed against a post, her head cocked to one side, flirting, daring him to respond. Steve raised his eyes from the task and winked.

He knew how to play this game. It was part of his service – to ignite yearning, power and possibility in these lonely women. Things he also had lost in the crowded rooms of his house on Saleyards Road where every groan and heavy breath received a response from eight others, like the critique of a theatre audience. Where his desires had been muffled by the

house for so long, they only received expression in a minor way from the women in the houses he renovated – women like him, hungry with lust. Once the job was finished, he forgot the woman who shamelessly paraded herself before him – wistful and at times desperately seductive – requiring him to play his part with professional skill so that everyone was satisfied.

Each lunchtime Peter rushed home, hair slicked back, suitcoat slung over his shoulder, full of urgency and authority, to inspect progress and be consulted on things Alice had already discussed with Steve. She usually had sandwiches ready, but while the builders were there she'd taken to cooking individual pies for everyone in the promotional Pyrex dishes distributed in boxes of detergent. These were a special treat for the bigger children who charged in from school each day for a mid-day meal. Sometimes she filled the pies with left over lamb and sausage, but always set aside proper mince pies for the builders.

Well into the renovation the sewerage arrived. The excavator broke down in the lane at the entrance to their yard and there it was planted like a war tank for a month, at great inconvenience to Peter and the builders. But for the boys it was a different adventure every day – a space craft, a naval destroyer or another city. When no one was around Alice pretended not to notice that the boys had taken ownership. Meanwhile the toilet truck arrived each week and the children mimicked the dunny man's waddle as he struggled down the path with a full can.

The extension was completed as the first frost arrived. Small slow-combustion fires were put in both the sunroom and kitchen and although it was the boys' job to keep the wood box full, Alice spent even more time in the cold, cutting, stacking and fetching kindling. The fires, like babies, required constant attention but, with the insulated walls, the extension was warm and hard to leave for the quick dash to the bedrooms at night. The big open areas were always untidy with the children's mess and they rarely escaped to their own private haunts to create her illusionary tranquil house. Alice set them tasks of sweeping and tidying but it was a constant battle and she was happier to have them outside so she could keep the house in order – not that Peter noticed.

Clarrie their neighbour loved cars – driving them, pulling them to bits, fixing all the things that went wrong. He was the street hero and the boys gravitated to him as he worked and

told stories of his younger imagined self. He had the boys involved in making billy carts for the derby that was on at the end of the school holidays – a cart for each family with the oldest boy the designated driver. Old pram wheels and petrol tins were shaped into wonderful creations, painted and decorated with made-up family crests. The Saleyards Road was lined with spectators as the boys balanced in their vehicles at the top of the hill. Age heats were run with younger boys starting further down the hill to great screams of encouragement from fathers who were making secret wagers.

The final race had Moss and Hemmingway vehicles in it and started at the top of the hill. Alice was sick with trepidation and, expecting the worst, had even packed a small medical kit of bandages and disinfectant. She saw Steve the builder putting finishing touches to two carts containing small clones of himself. She noted his swagger and confidence as he adjusted wheels and gave final instructions to his boys who hung on his every suggestion. Peter had just arrived in his work clothes and stood next to her while Clarrie helped Johnno position his cart. Alice wanted to help but knew her son would be mortified if his mother entered their male bastion. Jude hated this sexist rubbish and couldn't understand why the girls didn't have billy carts. Whenever she found one vacant, she attempted to take it for a little spin, which was funny at first but then made Alice so angry she threatened to take her home.

Steve's sons, Chris and Dan, were the first away and maintained a clear distance throughout the race. Alice watched only Johnny – saw him manoeuvre through the other boys, saw him jump out to pull his cart back on track, saw the clear path as he sped past her, then overturn in a haystack. She broke rank and rushed to him. He was embarrassed, but not hurt. There were crashes all over the place but something terrible had happened at the bottom of the hill. She ran with her first aid kit and found Chris's cart smashed into a concrete post and the young boy lying unconscious with blood gushing from his head. She elbowed in to apply compression and make sure no one moved him till the ambulance arrived. She was aware of Steve's smell as he knelt next to her – the tobacco, wood and metal – but he was silent. She talked to Chris as she had to unconscious soldiers, reassuring and calm, but then he convulsed and his pulse vanished. She cleared his airway and began mouth to mouth resuscitation before showing Steve how to do cardiac massage. They worked together till the ambulance arrived. Peter held back the crowd, a figure of authority in his suit – no axel

grease under his nails, no flesh knocked off from putting the billycarts together. Alice could tell Steve wanted to scream at him to get the hell out of there, but a glance from her told him she knew what he was thinking. She cared for the child till the ambulance arrived and then, feeling like a failure, attempted to melt back into the crowd, but was seized by an hysterical Jude who was traumatised by being excluded from her mother.

Steve shunned her after the death of his son. His manliness dissolved in the alcohol that he consumed at the bottom pub. His family moved away when he no longer supported them and he staggered around the streets in his confusion, calling on Peter to help him out whenever he was desperate.

Metamorphosis

(Jude)

They felt self-conscious decked out in their school uniform, hats, gloves and blazers just to walk around Goulburn on a Sunday afternoon. The nuns considered this a treat and for the girls it was in many ways. Paired with their best friend, regimented into a long crocodile, they escaped the constraints of school and spent a leisurely two hours chatting and laughing. At boarding school, life was organised into silent fidgets of time from the first bell at six, through mass, cleaning, breakfast, school, sport, prayers, recreation, study and bed. The school was positioned behind a high wall at an intersection between the main street and the Hume Highway. They rarely had a chance to leave the grounds so this was one of the few opportunities to explore the town in which they lived for up to six years. Jude was still numb from her father's death three weeks previously and couldn't think about it without remembering the terrible trip with Father O'Leary and her mother's indifference to her grief and trauma. She'd returned to school after four days and was in trouble for not finishing an English assignment. Sister Ligori was the only one who seemed to understand and said that she would talk to her English teacher and that she needn't do it.

Jude saw a car idling at the end of the street but took little notice. She balanced on the curb, leant into a garden to pinch a crimson rose which she clenched in her teeth, and did a tango to the applause of her friends. The car cruised past, sniffing at them like a reticent dog, while the boys inside twisted and turned to get a better look. She was amazed and excited to recognise her brother's mate Greg at the wheel, and suddenly Johnny was there too, hanging from the window, calling out to her.

'Hey Jude! Hey! It's me!'

Jude rushed over as boys spilled from the car and Johnny swirled her off her feet in an exaggerated hug.

Sister Ligori was there in a flash.

'Back in line Jude! We'll have none of this. You're ruining the walk.'

'It's my brother Sister. Let me talk to him a moment then I'll catch you up.'

'No. Into line immediately! It's not Visiting Sunday.'

'Sorry Sister but I have to talk to him – I'm not going.'

Sister Ligori was red with fury, but her hesitation indicated a slight respect for Jude's spunk. She'd watched the girl return to school after her father's death, floundering in the strict routine of mass, chores and schoolwork, just as she had done six months previously when her own father had died. Sister Ligori (Kathleen McGorrie in a previous life) was trying to make sense of this world that her father had encouraged her to adopt. With him gone she had no one to please and the thought of leaving the order was ever present. The routines, the regimentation of time, the female company, annoyed her. She no longer liked this life and her love of God was no compensation for the emptiness she felt. If she was honest she wanted a family of her own – a daughter like Jude who was fun and alive and not intimidated by anyone. The convent had its peculiar way of dealing with death – it considered it a calling home, so no support was offered to the bereaved.

The girls had broken formation and were sitting in the gutter, sprawled along the low brick fence or lolling under the tree. They diverted their eyes, awkwardly pulling at their uniforms and standing behind each other, trying to hide from the boys' stares, their tension and embarrassment extreme, but they marvelled at Jude's guts in standing up to the old dragon.

'Carmel Devine,' Sister Ligori called out, coming to a snap decision while trying to reclaim authority.

'Stay with Jude – don't get into that heap of a car. We'll meet you in ten minutes on our way back from the orphanage.'

As the crocodile turned the corner the boys slumped on the ground in the shade – they shared Coke and chips with the girls and even offered them a cigarette, which they declined – one step too far even for Jude.

Jude hadn't seen Johnny since their father's funeral when she'd been herded back to school while he'd stayed at home to help their mum.

'You okay?' He mumbled, half looking at her, afraid she might cry in front of his mates.

'Yeah ... good! Don't think about it. How's mum?'

'She's working at the shop all the time – sort of managing the business. It's lucky that young chemist has stayed on. She's busy but goes to McLaren's each Monday night for a beer and financial advice,' he said with a laugh, implying something more.

Jude was sick of family talk and turned her attention to Tim Silver who was humming *Yesterday* while he puffed smoke in her direction.

'What are you blokes up to?'

'Taking Greg's car for a spin. Been working on the engine all day! Isn't it a beauty – Little Hottie!'

Jude laughed and flirted and wished she could climb into Hottie and spend the day doing exciting things with them, but the line of girls had re-entered the street and was bearing down.

'Hey – do you ever get down the town? See if you can get out on Thursday. We'll meet you at the 147 Café after school', said Tim.

That was a challenge Jude was up to. She didn't play by the rules; she was too reckless to be contained by the college walls and restrictions.

They re-joined the queue of girls – this time pulled in behind the nuns. Nothing further was said about the incident, just increased criticism for being rebellious, with Jude constantly anticipating a call to the Principal's office.

Jude knew about love through Ovid's poetry. Sister Ligori was playful in their small Latin class and delighted in getting them to translate parts of his *Amores*. She called herself *praeceptor amoris*, a teacher of love, whose first rule was to love yourself so that you would be worthy of love from others. Her second rule was to understand seduction. Not the seduction of Father O'Leary with his gizzard neck full of ingrown hairs, like forgotten feathers on a plucked chook. Jude sneaked out to meet Tim who was young and attentive and made her feel good about herself and forget that ride home with the priest for her father's funeral. These furtive escapes added excitement to her imagined romance. The girls in the dorm were energised by her drama and she delighted in shocking them by taking ever increasing risks. She didn't care if she was sent home – didn't really care about anything except having a good laugh.

Jude no longer observed the rule of silence while doing her charge of scrubbing bathrooms each morning. Instead she listened to her dad's old transistor radio, turned as loud as possible. She didn't push herself with schoolwork, except for art, and she spent most of Night Study fiddling with paint and experimenting with abstract compositions. She frequently relived that week of the Catholic School Strike when she went to school in Crookwell, when her dad was alive and life was fun, without pressure and rules that didn't make sense.

It was an adventure really. Jude didn't understand the politics of the strike – something about money and condemned toilets in their primary school. Her father had his picture in the local paper, had been interviewed on the radio, but honestly she didn't know if he was for or against it. She knew he'd like more money to help with school fees but she recalled phrases such as 'cannon fodder' and 'children as pawns'. For Jude it was a holiday from boarding school as she was sent home to attend the local state school.

Public school kids were a constant threat when she was at primary school in Crookwell. Their navy and white uniforms looked sinister when massed, threatening to ambush her as she walked alone in her green and beige. They would taunt, throw stones and occasionally the boys would fight, so Jude was fearful. But at school during this week she discovered that they were harmless – bubbling in an undisciplined way. They didn't form quiet lines outside the classroom but swarmed at the door when the bell rang with no transition between outside and inside behaviour. They shuffled, pushed, collided, yelled, laughed and ignored the teacher who stood quietly at her desk. When she started mouthing something that no one could hear Jude presumed the lesson had begun. Before long, nerdy kids in the front had their books out and were straining to attend, then they started shushing everyone to be quiet. It took ten minutes to adjust and then it was just the same as Jude's real school.

Stone-age man and their tools was the first lesson – a change from the lives of the saints. Half way through, all forty students dribbled outside to play with the assortment of rocks the teacher had prepared. They cracked them against each other to see which could be fashioned into useful tools and utensils. It was fun and noisy and even when some boys got out of control and tried to cut their clothes, skin and hair, the teacher didn't appear to react.

Jude puzzled over the patterns produced by the class as they tried to copy Mondrian's abstract designs. They filled their blank paper with cubes of colour in varying gradations and contrasts. Everyone had a go and the teacher found something good to say about all the work. Jude had always loved art but felt embarrassed at her old school when her work was singled out – it made her hold back, reserving her best efforts for the privacy of home where her mother had bought paints and pastels and organised a desk in her bedroom so she could be quiet and creative. The public teacher only nodded at her work and asked if she'd enjoyed the task.

At lunch Jude found Mary in the playground playing elastics. It was Mary's favourite thing – she jumped high and untangled herself like a slippery spring, waving and smiling with excitement while Jude joined a game of handball. The small playground writhed with activity – basketball, tips, handball, skipping and everyone appeared to be included. Jude hoped the strike would last forever. She'd learned to make scones and an omelette; to darn a stocking; to dribble a ball and shoot baskets. But the best part was living at home – eating whatever she wanted and watching television after school. Alice was busy with the other children and had started playing bowls with dad so she seemed less judgmental. Time was endless now that she was freed from the bell-punctuated control of boarding school.

Jude started meeting the boys behind the pine trees that defined the southern perimeter of the boarding school. She'd fill her bed with pillows and leave via the toilet block that adjoined the classrooms. She'd creep through the dark, silent school that was still full of the day's smells of sweat and chalk. She'd change into clothes she'd stashed under the stairs and feel freedom as she cut along the tennis courts to the pines. There were often three or four boys who had made a similar escape from their boarding school up the road. They'd sit in the dark singing Beatles' songs, talking about music and life while they drank soft drink and ate chips. Johnny was usually there and occasionally Jude would talk Carmel into coming too. The girls had little contact with teenage boys. Sister Ligori was forced to address aspects of sexual attraction as they glossed over sections of Ovid or came across certain images in the poetry of Donne and Hopkins. Yet the girls were sure these boys were neither predators nor whimsical creatures beguiled by female beauty and their own uncontrolled urges. They were mates who liked the same adventures, and so Jude was startled when

Tim's hand crept under her shirt, started fondling her breast, and then pushed her behind a tree and began kissing her with his tongue thrusting deep into her throat.

Sister Ligori was aware of Jude's activities. From her cell one night she'd spotted the girls creeping through the playground. Then she also did some night wandering, hiding in the shadows of the pines; observing the truants and watching her girls. She heard their innocent interaction and remembered nights when she escaped her father's control to muck about with friends. She observed the boys' nervousness and Jude's power, confidence and disregard for consequences. When the dormitory got out of control – with girls shrieking and laughing after lights out, sliding along the polished floors, not attending to their chores or completing their homework – and when more and more girls slipped out at night with Jude, she knew she had to act. She waited for a night when only Jude was at the pines; when her brother was there with his mates. She appeared, stunning them with her spotlight.

'Jude Hemmingway! Stand over here,' and she flicked her torch to a tree near the clearing.

'I want each of your names,' she said as she shone the torch in the boys' eyes.

'Now get back to school and if you're ever seen here again I promise I'll organise your school to get rid of you.'

They grabbed their things and quickly vanished from the grove, thrashing through the undergrowth, scaling the wall and jumping to freedom on the other side. Jude, almost with a sense of relief that she might be expelled, walked silently back to her dormitory with Sister Ligori.

The Funeral

(Jude)

The absence of smell was more shocking than the silence. There was no longer any hint of Coty powder used to smooth the jagged crater on her mother's nose. No whiff of L'Oréal that glued her sparse blue hair together. Craven A and Marlborough had long ago failed to deliver their promise of sophistication – a lifetime's addiction now hidden under fresh paint. Venetian blinds created a strobing effect as light picked out cobwebs and suspended dust particles around the sunroom. The house was empty. Things of value like her father's desk were quickly snapped up by astute siblings or taken to Vinnie's charity bins. Jude had been slow to realise the emptiness Alice's death would bring her. She sat breathing in nothing but her insignificance and rejection.

A photo of her mum's friend Bet had found its way into the folder of documents Ellen had set aside for her. Bet as a patient in Kenmore, with her geraniums – looking fat and loaded, eyes barely focused but pulling her drooping lips into a perfunctory smile. Jude glanced sideways at the photo, afraid to give it her full attention, then quickly slid it into the pile – the rush of emotion, the memory of Kenmore still too strong for her to confront. She slowly edged out a corner which showed a footpath – cracks filled with weeds and a sandstone wall mottled with glitter – shimmering with memories of fury and frustration.

She'd been the only sane one in the place and no one realised. There she was – trapped among the crazies until their contamination enveloped her – her only thoughts were of hate and escape. The whole thing was Mum's fucking fault. Before they drugged her to the eyeballs she'd reverted to her nursing role and tried to help the loonies. She'd talk to them or at least interrupt the barrage of words spilling from their gasping mouths. Jude remembered standing with an old guy stuck in the middle of a Parkinson's spasm – unable to go forward or backward. She'd sung to him – tried to give him a rhythm to propel his movement – which sort of worked till she was told not to interfere. But she'd been conditioned to help by two years of nursing and these nurses here had missed the caring part of their training. They poured drugs into people, hosed those who couldn't shower, then congregated around the nurses' station laughing and partying all day.

Jude had partied a bit in Sydney, but mostly she was dead tired from work and just wanted to sleep. But her mate, Mon, pulled her along to parties saying she had to meet some Sydney blokes and stop being such a country bumpkin. She remembered the party at Cremorne when she first tried pot. She was having a fag on the back steps – avoiding the clique of friends inside – when Jock plonked down beside her with his sweet smelling joint. He dangled his limp body from her shoulders and blew smoke into her face before thrusting the cigarette between her lips, and telling her that this was much better stuff than the shit she had – and it was. They'd spent most of the night smooching together and somehow she'd ended up at his place.

After that his place had been a destination of sorts – a putrid flat up the hill from the Coogee Bay Hotel that he shared with his junkie mates. She tried to help there too at first. She attacked the mountain of dirty dishes and got rid of the garbage plied high on every available surface for cockroaches to breed in. She'd even nicked sheets from the hospital for Jock's mattress. But after a while she cared as little as they and spent her time at the flat stoned, and inert like the lizards sunning themselves on the rocks outside. She remembered a nude plunge into the icy cold of Wylie's Pool one night when Mon came with her to Coogee. They'd screamed with laughter as a wild wave swept over the sea wall and almost washed them away. They'd run from there along the beach – teasing the waves, darting in and out, defying them to swallow them whole, collapsing together in a tangled mess of foam, completely dumped – hilarious.

Jude was finally enjoying Sydney. She loved her nursing, had a kind of boyfriend and a life away from the hospital. She thought she was doing a good job so was shocked to be reprimanded one day for her shoddy appearance and slovenly attitude at work. She was put on notice that things must improve or she'd be chucked out. And then it happened! She was caught having a drag outside the Nurses' residence after a night when a patient died and she'd been slow to alert the resuscitation team. She was sacked. After that she floated – shacking up with Jock for a while till the smell of filthy boys and their zombie existence got to her.

She pulled the photo from the pile again and studied Bet's face. There was a wave of recognition – the eyes were like her son Paddo's, though not as kind. Yes mum, she thought, she did see him in Melbourne. He probably saved her life but also almost killed her. He took

her in when she left Jock – from one drug scene to another – but Paddo’s was more sophisticated. He played bass guitar with a blues band and had access to good dope and wild parties. A different level of involvement was expected of her – party queen, nurse, navy. She thought she’d just try heroin for the hell of it – just one hit to be part of the group, to show solidarity. But it was wonderful. It filled her life, made up for a lost career, allowed her to float through a carefree existence. A year passed in a fug of music, wild parties, sex and drugs before Paddo went to Crookwell with his new girlfriend and she was thrown into Kenmore by Alice. Yes mum, she thought. Wonderful Patrick and his bloody father Clarrie – both knew where to put their women when they tired of them.

The frost of Kenmore – that’s what she remembered. Hexagons of ice filling the windows; the air so sharp you could feel its razor edge carving up your sinuses. But mostly it was scantily dressed patients in robes barely fastened, bottoms exposed, herding into the scant areas of sunshine behind small windows or left shivering and alone, restrained by their arms so that they wouldn’t hurt themselves or help themselves to a drink, a scratch, a nose wipe – moaning in frustration till they went mad or madder. These images were vivid at first – when Alice committed her, to cleanse her of drugs and tormenting voices. But she wasn’t mad then – just using drugs to escape failure, disappointment and a dark life. In Kenmore she embraced hatred with a passion – for the place, for herself and for a mother who had discarded her among the world’s junk – left her frozen and forgotten.

Alice’s funeral yesterday had not been like her father’s. People celebrated her release from the half-life in which she’d dwelt for two years. The sun forgot it was autumn and shone with the ferocity of summer, producing a blinding glare with no warmth. The mourners assembled – family, cousins, old friends and, of course, the local community – at the Anglican Church. The coffin was piled with mementos of her life: her winter hat, bowls bag, sheet music, and a tube of red lipstick that was placed by an old woman no one knew. Jude had never been to a service there and was surprised by its similarity to the Catholic mass – what had all the fuss been about? The children should have followed their mother – she was the only stayer. Jude and her siblings had long ago sloughed off the shackles of indoctrination of all kinds. Except for the hymns – Jude loved them – the nostalgia they evoked, the connection that caught in her throat and brought tears to her eyes.

She had chosen a tight red dress for the funeral – a vestment of celebration and release. It clung to her body, emphasising her full breasts and thin waist. She looked like an exotic princess alongside Mary whose porcelain skin, now bleached of freckles, spoke of her secluded and predictable life that had been framed by proximity to their mother. Jude’s gypsy bangles rattled as she took her place in the pew beside George – so emotionally burdened he was unable to lift his head. She felt the eyes of the community boring into her – in both judgment and wonder at her life that remained an intriguing mystery to them.

She didn’t recognise Alice in the woman they eulogised – a person of faith, a pillar of the community, a Good Samaritan in times of need. Jude’s knowledge of her mother was still coloured by resentment. She’d failed to be the mother she needed, failed to even see her among her mob of kids, and failed to hear her plea for recognition and help and when she was spinning out of control. Alice’s only solution had been Kenmore Psychiatric Hospital.

Among Alice’s papers there was a thin yellow slip – a duplicate copy of a discharge summary signed by Dr Angela Gow – a name indelibly recorded in Jude’s memory. Angela, who knew she wasn’t mad, freed her. She’d cut through Kenmore, discharging people who had been incarcerated for twenty years. Jude had little recollection of her time languishing in this institution. She remembered the sterile ECT room – being tied to a bed, the sedation, the blinding headache and the fatigue when her body swelled into obesity and confusion. But Angela saw the woman underneath the bloated body and questioned the criteria for administering ECT or, in fact, for holding Jude against her will. The discharge summary prescribed Panadol and Valium as needed, plus weekly visits to Dr Gow – nothing to indicate addiction or schizophrenia. She was set up in a flat with a carer, Geraldine, and given shifts at a local coffee shop. In Canberra, Jude walked the streets of Lyneham, rocking and weaving under her huge bulk till the fat rolled off – freeing her body and mind of mummifying stasis.

She gathered her papers into the purple folder and wandered through the house. It was small and dated without furniture – the hall light, a relic from the 1930s, was still a rope dangling from an ornate cupola. Stained glass windows in the front door darkened the passage to mournful shades of mauve. Alice and Peter’s bedroom still had a marble mantelpiece over a boarded up fireplace that had, at least by Jude’s recollection, never been used; but maybe it had been lit as a romantic gesture in the early years of their

marriage. The built-in veranda of the girls' room was not much wider than the hallway, but it had contained three beds when they were children. Jude remembered catching a glimpse of Mary's pubic hair and feeling relieved that her own sprouts were normal. She remembered Mary's eyes blazing, and her nails clawing at her face as she pounced on her and the bed collapsed. But at least she knew. She returned to the newer part of the house. The fires – beside which Alice had taught her to drink Scotch on the Rocks – had been replaced with smelly gas. The huge kitchen and sunroom had shrunk to a cubby and she wondered how they ever accommodated eight people and all the furniture. She pulled the back door closed, heard the fly screen give out its usual screech as it settled into place. In Alice's battered Holden Commodore, she turned on the engine, rubbed the St Christopher medal her father had bought for his first car, and took off.

Journey

(Jude)

Jude didn't know why she turned off the highway at Goulburn. She'd ducked and weaved with transport trucks for most of the trip from Sydney, enjoying the adrenalin surge of this battle, and was reluctant to lose the upper hand by stopping. As she accelerated away from a convoy she saw Goulburn stretched along the Mulwarrie River, saw Rocky Hill emerging from the mist and the railway yards strewn with debris from a time of former grandeur: abandoned carriages as useless and as hard to dislodge as her memories. The railway had been a vital transport link when she was a child.

The Sydney train – the sigh of steam as it arrived at the station. The screech of wheels, guards bellowing, a whistle; relief for the journey's end; anticipation; nostalgia for home followed by annoyance and disappointment; a journey of emotion from Jude's first recollection.

'Lippy. Lippy. Lippy.' A woman dressed in ordinary clothes, white hat and gloves and a shirtmaker dress with three quarter sleeves, chants as she lunges along the corridor, and stumbles into their dog box where little Jude hides in the folds of her mother. Alice fumbles in her purse and pulls out the red lipstick she had moments before been using to brighten her lips and cheeks.

'Here use mine!'

'Thanks Love. I'll just put in on with my finger.'

'Don't worry! Use it properly. Keep it. I've got another.'

'No mum! Don't,' Jude implores. But the woman grabs it and paints herself with Alice's happiness, infecting the lipstick with her own mystery and ugliness. She draws Alice into conversation. Violent words – bashing, murder and gaol stream from her carnival mouth. A red stain now rims the silver hip flask she offers to Alice, but Jude roughly pulls at her mother's hands to save her from further intimate contamination. The train jerks to a stop and the woman disappears into the night, leaving behind her the smell of trauma and fear.

The train was an escape route, transporting Jude from the fawn landscape of her childhood to the anonymity of the city – a new world, fresh, mysterious, unshackled and sparkling with possibility. The journey itself is laced with trepidation, excitement, and disappointment. The homeward journey is a passage from her imagined self to the ordinariness exposed by her family and this bland rural community.

It is ten years since her mother died and she had resolved to be completely free of Crookwell. At first it was a relief to escape the guilt of relinquishing her mother's care to the local community. Her family had all been too tightly coiled in their own lives and Alice, even in her dementia, was forever chanting: 'I don't want to be a burden. Just leave me to muddle along in my own way.' Muddle was what she did well. The car had a new bump or scrape each time someone visited and the fridge contained the same food – fermenting casseroles, dried carrots, putrefying lettuce, and potatoes with sprouts like antlers.

'Don't worry about me. I don't need Meals on Wheels. It gives a purpose to my day to shop for food and cook. I always have meat and three vegies and of course ice cream.'

But even when the evidence suggested that her diet was only ice cream, the children chose to believe her – it was easier than either the fight or the intrusion on their own lives. Jude, being single, felt a keener sense of obligation to look after Alice, but in her presence she found it difficult to function. Alice still took up all the oxygen and left Jude spluttering, dissolving into something she could no longer stand.

The journey along the Crookwell road is fast and direct. The road no longer meanders along the contours of the valley. The landscape has been adjusted: carved out, filled in, dammed to create a safer road and a greater water supply for Goulburn. On weekends, Alice would take them for drives to punctuate the monotony of life. They'd travel to Laggan to see new lambs staggering in the paddocks or do the loop via Grabben Gullen and Bannister as a driving lesson for one of the big kids – slowing then accelerating through culverts on the long dirt road, singing, and stopping to touch new foals or collect fire wood. Those dusty roads later ate up Jude's friends who spiked their boredom with races through the landscape of straw, the gums lining the road like old men, leaning forward to egg on the racers or swaying back in convulsed laughter at their inability to hold fast to the bends and

the slow grind of country life. Jude had seen local boys in the intensive care unit at her hospital in Sydney – boys with tubes attached to every orifice – forced now to be patient, kept alive to save another life when their young organs are harvested.

Connor Quade, the Rotary exchange student, showed them the ordinariness and futility of their lives. He came with his American eyes and wondered how they coped with the routine, ordinariness and lack of drive. He came with his guitar and his rock songs. He pumped up the music so that it blasted the school hall and filled the kids with its rhythm and excitement. He talked about different dreams: travelling the world; robotic inventions; the wild art of Andy Warhol, American literature and the banned books he brought with him – *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *Lolita*. He wanted success, not to be trapped by the cloying community of his childhood. Jude heard him. She too wanted escape from the claustrophobia of home. She wanted, among other things, to fall in love with someone she didn't know. For a while that was Connor but he quickly moved on to other girls, infusing them all with his unsettling dreams.

Jude looks for the beauty in the countryside that her mother found, but even after a hiatus of ten years it was hard to see it with fresh eyes – this is still just the road of her childhood. Once Alice stopped the car and picked wild flowers when Jude returned after a long absence. That compounded Jude's annoyance at returning to the stifling jar of this small town, but Alice used her returning eyes to see fresh beauty in wild daisies and the smell of the eucalypts.

Windmills hover on the crest of the Great Dividing Range. The original wind farm of a half dozen mills has expanded and now stretches along the ridge for a hundred kilometres. Jude and Paddo had protested against the original installation in an immature way. Paddo wanted to hear the voice of his ancestors, whirling through the hills with messages from a time when they roamed this country. They spent one summer camping, fishing and walking through paddocks, trying to imagine what the place would have been like before it was cleared and populated with sheep, cattle and people. But as much as he wanted to be in touch with his Wiradjuri ancestors, Paddo found no evidence of their presence – heard only the absent call of his boarding school mates – and so at the end of summer he was relieved to return to them in Sydney.

For Jude the windmills offer a spiritual connection as their giant arms perturb the air and channel her senses to the smells of dry grass, peeling bark and the earthy muskiness of wombats. She hears a symphony as the wind winds through the long grass, flutters leaves and sends loose bark cascading to the ground in a sort of crescendo. She sees a mob of kangaroos camped in the gums, hidden between the shadows and saplings, quietly waiting for the land to cool so they can graze.

The main street of the town has been modified – it is easier to cross, with traffic bays extending to the middle– but most things remain the same. The pharmacy, still called Hemmingway’s, has had a facelift while preserving the old facade. The butcher’s hasn’t altered – large carcasses swing from hooks out the back and, in the window, the display of cuts and sausages is the same as Alice would have seen in the 1960s. The drycleaner still stands behind her counter and stares vacantly at the activity on the pedestrian crossing, or sells raffle tickets that reek of cleaning fluid. At the Greek café Jude buys a coffee – as good as a Sydney one, she thinks, as she walks slowly down the sunny side of the street.

Woolworths and Coles have not yet invested in the town so local money still sloshes around. There are coffee shops, a trendy bakery and a tourist information centre. Businesses that appeal to an increasingly leisured population indicate a shift in culture and a break from the pragmatism of her own childhood.

She parks the car outside the church – its blue paint leers like a neon sign demanding attention from a community for whom religion has been somewhat irrelevant. Painted mortar desecrates the sturdy granite and belittles the power and authority of a building that once dominated the life of the township. Jude watches a row of girls skip in the adjoining school yard – balk at the turning rope – respond to its rhythm then slip in, chant an unfamiliar ditty, and exit without tripping. Jude aches to give it a try. She’d been good and even won a skipping competition at the Floral Festival – the same year Johnny was the champion pie eater. She walks down Wade Street to their house and crouches to search for buttercups amongst the wild plants along the path.

The Judas tree is in bloom – large pink pom poms camouflage the rough trunk that once cut her legs as she tottered along the fence, lost her balance and fell through its branches. It was her tree, her mother said, as she poured water and pattered the soil around its roots. The house is unaltered – same curtains, same paint peeling from the eaves, same roots lifting

up the path – but there is no feeling of home. She recalls how the house would send her a sense of her mother’s presence even before she reached the front gate. She remembers waiting on the front step till she heard Alice’s car pull into the yard, unwilling to confront the emptiness. She travels the once familiar road to the cemetery in search of this feeling of home, detouring past the High School, and past her memories of being there after her expulsion from Goulburn.

She drives through the new estate adjacent to the school – modern houses, almost like a Canberra suburb, new roads and even a new adventure park with a flying fox and adult exercise equipment. She is startled to find herself in *Bet Moss* Street – named after their neighbour who died just before her mother. From there she turns into *Alma Jones*, *Margaret Ramsay* and then *Moira Dowling* Streets. All named for local women, mothers of children she had known, ordinary women who were just a part of the community. The streets are ordinary like the women, with stylish, inexpensive houses crowding their sides. Jude is alive with anticipation as she drives into every cul-de-sac. At every turn and intersection she is expecting to see *Alice Hemmingway* Street for she surely was a stalwart of the community too: president of the RSL Women’s Auxiliary, the Bowling Club, St Mary’s P&C, local business woman for twenty-five years, mother of six children. But her name is missing.

Her parents’ graves are afloat in a sea of granite. An overgrown rosemary bush, when touched, infuses the place with the smell of Anzac Day and partly obscures the inscription on the headstone with its icon of a setting sun. Jude finds some scissors in her luggage to trim it back. She pulls out weeds and picks up the plastic flowers and glass jars that litter the site, and throws them into her car. She strolls along the rows of graves, reading the headstones and remembering this generation whose time has passed. She pauses by the graves of Bet and Clarrie Moss and wonders if the afterlife has lived up to their expectations. She is struck by life’s brevity: even the oldest person was less than a hundred. She is almost half-way there and has little to show and she wonders if Alice ever paused at mid-life to ponder her purpose or had she been too busy with the trivia of her family’s expectations. She wishes her mother had a street, but even that would not ensure

permanence. Alice and Peter have come and gone with hardly a trace – but this is Jude’s birthplace and she is bonded to it.

So May It Be

(Alice)

The water's too hot. My hands smart as I stab through bubbles in a sink full of assorted remnants of my life. I pull out a cup that once belonged to my mother, white with a green and purple orchid sketched delicately along its face. The tea set sat for years in the top cupboard – too good to use. It is the only piece of her that was salvaged from her few possessions after the funeral. Jude and I made tea the day it came – filling the beautiful pot, then sitting, just the two of us, but with a third place set for Mum as I related stories about life on the farm. The hardship: raising twelve children, milking morning and evening, running the place while the men worked elsewhere; then losing her children to war, suicide, and distance, and the death of my father in a terrible accident. We drank the pot dry as I tried to make sense of her suicide, but then I shoved the tea set out of sight and brought it out occasionally when life was inexplicable. I feel Mum beside me, mumbling her troubles as we work together, washing dishes – immersed in activity, without eye contact, she confides.

The water is cooling and I leave my hands submerged long enough to feel around. I hold Jude's egg cup, a chip on its rim, encrusted with grime, catches my finger. I scratch at it with the hard nail of my thumb, deformed by a staph infection which used to cause unbearable pain when I changed her nappies. Jude always needed more of me than I could give. When babies cried and children demanded help with homework, she'd sulk, throw things about, then lock herself in her bedroom to draw. She and the older boys never helped me wash up. I wouldn't ask, but played a game of bluff, for Mary, Ellen and George couldn't sit and watch me work alone. Furious at their weakness, they'd rise and grab a tea towel and after a while their anger would dissolve.

Jude's primary school years are still a blur: she's average – no prizes or punishments. She's lost in a sea of children but men noticed her – the priest, her uncle, the bath's manager. Her Lolita looks and coyness, her control over these besotted individuals, gives her power and identity. But she was the most beautiful baby. 'Pretty enough to be a princess', I yell to her older sisters as I press her into the wire mesh of the maternity ward veranda for them to see. They'd arrive each morning in pyjamas, crying out for me as they stood on the fence

that separated us. I couldn't stand their sorrow so left after two days and Jude slotted in. Her sisters took her for walks and rocked her when she cried but they fought with her when she was no longer a pliable doll.

I grab a baking tray from the pile of dirty dishes. I see remnants of the chicken casserole I make each weekend in case someone comes. Did anyone come? I need time to organise my thoughts, time to concentrate, so that I can remember. My life is a mass of froth and I get everyone and everything mixed up. But, if I stay here calmly washing dishes, my terror dissolves like fat from the plates. Charred food has been baked hard into this tray. I scrub with steel wool and Sunlight soap but nothing moves. I get a knife and chip away at the black glaze, talking to Jude as if she's finally arrived – maybe she has. I've waited so long for her to return but when she's here she finds only guilt – hers and mine.

She arrives home with Father O'Leary after her father's death. He offered to collect her, to save me the long trip, to leave me free to care for the other children. I hug her as she enters but she sweeps away, locks herself in the bathroom and uses all the hot water while the others bang on the door to hurry her up. For hours, little George runs around the block, throwing himself at me after each circuit as if I'm his winning post. Food from neighbours piles on every surface and when the funeral is over we stand like this at the sink, stripping their tarnished trays back to their original metal. Jude is a vague presence in the periphery of my consciousness as I hold the hands of crying visitors and console them for the loss. I want them to leave us alone so I can hug my children and halt George's race.

Was my brother-in-law Fred lusting after Jude like all the others, or was he a kind soul wanting to help? I should have stepped in when he brought her photos of beautiful women and said this is how she would look when she was older: when he gave her jewellery, that even she was reluctant to accept, but she'd jump all over him, sit on his knee, cuddle and kiss him and he'd beam with those lazy brown eyes and my sister and I just smiled.

'Don't send me back to school', she begged. But I had to get rid of one – there were too many people wringing my hands, pulling me away. I thought she'd be safe.

'Why did you?' She shouts as I chip at the black tray. 'Why did you send me back to him?' I squirt in more soap, fill it with water and put it on the stove to simmer. Fat congeals in the cold water of the sink so I drain it and start again with hot foam.

At boarding school Jude floats, her needs invisible to those in charge, while I learn to run a pharmacy and a family alone. Once a month I collect her for Visiting Sunday and each time I'm shocked by her appearance – skinny, swollen eyes, wild hair – the guilt between us is so heavy we travel the long road home in silence as she grunts and stares out the window. She lies on the sunroom bed watching TV – sharing nothing.

Then Father O'Leary brings her home for good. The nuns can't cope with her naughtiness. Something has happened on the trip from Goulburn. He has scratches on his face and neck and Jude has a bruise on her arm.

'I'll pray for her soul,' was all he said as he left. But I prayed for his. Prayed that he'd rot in hell – but that was all I did.

Jude takes my wine and helps me home from McLaren's where I leave my worries and dignity most Monday nights. She cooks spaghetti, serves mine cold and leaves me to do the dishes as I sober up. I fail as a mother and Jude fails to see a woman, overwhelmed by grief and responsibility. Then begins our new routine: she disappears and I wait. I drive to Sydney, to Canberra, to Melbourne and hang out at hospitals, rehab centres, jails while she's admitted, committed, discharged. And I see her look of hate, uselessness, frustration; her impatience with me as she looks beyond me for another fix. She works as a kitchen hand.

I dip my hands in the hot water and find a wine glass – froth it up then rinse with hot water but it shatters in my hand, creating a deep cut. Blood pours into the sink and the bubbles transformed like a sunrise - white clouds edged with pink, become densely florid. I feel the sting in my hand, the throb in my head as my body floats, then thumps to the floor. Hot water cascades from the sink – painful at first as it soaks me but I float to and from a peaceful place. The tray on the stove explodes and I cry out as boiling water pools around my body.

I hear Bet laugh as she throws me her cupful of problems. Then children run squealing, crying and climbing over me to play with the bubbles and I send them to get fresh fruit from the crisper. Who are they? To whom do they belong: brothers, daughters, grandchildren, great grandchildren? Their names are old and new and mix together generations, cultures and religions with Arthur, Walter, Molly, Xavier, Gideon and Priyanka. And they pile on top

of me like dishes on the draining board pouring their worries into my confused mind. I hear abuse and betrayal; depression and anxiety but, above all excess – of spending, eating and parenting. I try to attend, to concentrate on detail, to match problems with advice but everything is swirling together in an exploding mess, holding me down, burning my face and arms. The babies nestle their faces in mine with kisses and cuddles and I drown in their chant: *merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.*

Then Jude pulls me through this mire, blows away confusion with clean air so that I lie on my bed with a green shield on my face. People gather around talking and imploring. I no longer know what they've been to me. The faces jumble. I hear my mother and daughter speaking through the same mouth – saying words I don't understand, but still with their silence and their look they judge and find me lacking. We acknowledge a mutual failure.

Exegesis – The Mother-Daughter
Relationship in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls
and Women*

The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*

Introduction

Alice Munro, in *Lives of Girls and Women*, draws on her own experience of growing up in rural Ontario to narrate the stories of people living in the fictional town of Jubilee, including Ada and her daughter Del. In this narrative, Munro was not looking to produce a social, psychological or cultural critique of Canada in the 1940s and 1950s, but to represent moments in the lives of women. Her stories capture the tensions between generations of women during this period, out of which the Second Wave feminism movement emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Illuminating the roles of and restrictions on women through detailed descriptions of this rural community and its social organisation, Munro reveals the lack of opportunity and agency which contributed to these tensions. While her aim was to record women's lives, she was also influenced by contemporary feminist discussions of identity, gender and the conceptualisation of the mother-daughter relationship as posited by Nancy Chodorow (first published 1978), in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, and Adrienne Rich (first published 1976) in *Of Woman Born*. Munro's narrative, in which she uses the short story cycle – consists of fictional stories woven together to simulate a novel by their treatment of character, themes, setting, chronology and narration. This reflects *écriture féminine* (as proposed by French feminists Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva) with its mimicry of the gossipy, interrupted, and seemingly disconnected female voice (Giorgio, 2002, p. 15).

My interest in Munro's work is linked to her representation of the mother-daughter relationship and the influences that underpin it. I explore *Lives of Girls and Women* through Adrienne Rich's (1986) premise of a split between 'motherhood (the institution)' and 'mothering (the personal)' (p. 13), and use the consideration Munro gives to this dichotomy.¹ I also use the influence of Chodorow's (1999) theory of gendered identities, the blurring of boundaries between a mother and daughter, a daughter's desire to reproduce primal intimacy by becoming a mother herself, and men's need for emotional separation from their mother (p. xii). Through a close reading of *Lives of Girls and Women*, I consider

¹ See Rich (1976): 'I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control' (p. 13).

how Munro represents an ambivalent relationship and why, despite intergenerational change, her descriptions of the mother-daughter relationship still resonate.

The concept of essentialism in the mother-daughter relationship has been largely negated by feminist discussion which moved beyond the biological definition of motherhood to a paradigm inclusive of technological, economic, legal and cultural considerations (Hirsch, 1989, p. 13). Giorgio (2002), in *Writing Mothers and Daughters*, sought to identify commonalities – in both the daughter’s quest for identity and the representation of the mother-daughter relationship – within six European cultures, but rejects essentialism in this relationship. I argue that a consistent conflictual pattern often emerges as a daughter seeks to differentiate herself from a mother she never fully recognises. The stories in *Lives of Girls and Women* resonate with my own collection of short stories in *Alice*, which similarly examines a mother-daughter relationship in rural Australia, during the 1950s and 1970s, by giving independent voices to both mother and daughter.

Del’s journey to independence

Lives of Girls and Women covers the stories of Ada and her daughter Del in Canada in the 1940s and 1950s. The lives of mother and daughter are in symbiotic exchange within a closed system where Del’s growth is matched to Ada’s deterioration and decline. Their points of contention include ambition, education and self-fulfilment. Munro’s use of Del as the mature narrator, allows her to recount her own life, from infancy to adulthood, while also giving a daughter’s perspective of her mother’s life. The use of this point of view simultaneously exposes the silence of the mother and reveals Del’s fear of becoming like her mother – both of which were significant issues in mother-daughter plots at that time (Hirsch 1989).

While Munro’s text can be examined in terms of a mother-daughter conflict, the tension between Ada and Del arises out of Ada’s desire to vicariously live out her own relinquished dreams via her daughter’s education and escape, while at the same time expecting her to also embrace motherhood. In this she differs from her peers who are seeking only to groom their daughters in a motherhood apprenticeship. Del, however, is torn between the two: the fear of becoming like her independent mother and the desire to be loved and to conform to

the social expectations of the community. Del's matrophobia² and insensitivity to her mother account for much of the tension within their relationship. In her journey to adulthood, however, Del is unable to disengage from her mother's influence as their 'personalities', as Rich would argue, 'seem dangerously to blur and overlap' (1986, p. 236). Del both resents her mother's intrusion into her life and expects it. 'Her concern about my life', she says, 'which I needed and took for granted, I could not bear to have expressed' (223).

Del's struggle for differentiation is never fully resolved and she never truly becomes independent from her mother. Her life is presented in sequential stories that explore patterns within their mother-daughter relationship, beginning with a hazy memory in 'The Flats Road' and ending with her writing a gothic novel. The intervening stories deal with community values that explore notions of motherhood, Ada's attempts to modify motherhood to her own specifications, and Del's exploration of identity and struggle for differentiation from her mother. 'Princess Ida' shows their move to Jubilee and the exclusiveness of their relationship as they leave the men behind. There is ambivalence for both mother and daughter concerning freedom, education, sexuality and love and Del struggles to define herself without suffering the same ostracism as her mother.

While 'Princess Ida' represents the climax of Ada's development, the climax of Del's life is in 'Baptizing' when she flaunts her sexual abandon as a rejection of her mother's dream for her of education and freedom. Her relationship with Garnet French satirises a male sex story of domination and is the culmination of her quest as a female to be the subject of her own desire. With Del's emergence from her affair, however, her embedded connectedness to her mother's ideals of words and independence is asserted in her choice to become a writer. Ada on the other hand wanes – shifting from a strong, independent woman utilising her limited education to effect community change – and she grows weak and old, and is sidelined by society and by her daughter. While identifying the bonds that unite them, Del remains ambivalent to her mother and is instrumental in her silencing.

² 'Matrophobia' was coined by poet Lynn Sukenick and used by Rich to express the conflictual fear of becoming like one's mother while experiencing a 'deep under-lying pull towards her' (Rich 235).

Mothering – the personal

While Rich interprets motherhood as a socially constructed institution that is necessarily reflective of community values and accepted patterns, she also posits that mothering is the intimate relationship between mother and child (1986, p. 13). Kristeva, on the other hand, sees this relationship as 'a war between mother and daughter', of love and hate (quoted in Moi 1986, p. 183). In *Lives of Girls and Women*, however, Munro's depiction of mothering can be analysed by addressing both the intimacy and the ambivalence of love and hate existing in the mother-daughter relationship.

Del's early life on the Flats Road highlights unconscious aspects of the mother-daughter relationship while showing Ada's struggle to determine her individuality against the demands and expectations of women. Chronology is established through Del's developing voice as the story catches up to the voice of the mature narrator by 'Age of Faith'. Initially, Del is unable to articulate her relationship with Ada and in this period their relationship is expressed through the sensory, as she absorbs information from environment and community while feeling secure within her family. Her mother, an expected presence, involves her children in trips to town, domestic chores, entertaining, and includes them in community gossip. Later, when Del has become embarrassed by her mother, she recalls an earlier shame but also a pride in her mother's power:

When I was younger, out at the end of the Flats Road I would watch her walk across the yard to empty the dishwater, carrying the dishpan high, like a priestess, walking in an unhurried, stately way, and flinging the dishwater with a grand gesture over the fence. Then, I had supposed her powerful, a ruler, also content. She had power still, but not so much as perhaps she thought, and she was in no way content, nor a priestess. She had a loudly growling stomach, whose messages she laughed at or ignored, but which embarrassed me unbearably. (100)

Ada is confident, composed and strong, and proud in assuming an identity of motherhood and domesticity. She also has the maturity to be content in herself, and without embarrassment. In writing about her bodily functions, Munro reflects societal disgust and secrecy about such intimacies while daring to write about the female body and the physical ravages of childbearing. Tension is registered between mother and daughter with Ada

accepting her physical decline while Del is revolted by her mother's public display of intimate bodily failure. At the same time, Del acknowledges both a love and admiration for her mother's past power and majesty.

Together, Del and Ada endure the scrutiny of the maiden aunts, Elspeth and Grace, and the 'nimble malice that danced under their courtesies to the rest of the world' (49). While Ada is confronted by their criticism and the inequality they perpetuate, Del enjoys their company, and the contrast they embody with her mother's values, and she soon learns to manipulate their approval:

My mother went along straight lines. Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace wove in and out around her ... She pushed them out of her way as if they were cobwebs; I knew better than that. (46)

Munro depicts the similarities between mother and daughter as they seek education and independence, but the contrast between Del's secrecy and Ada's exhibitionism becomes a source of conflict. The aunts are presented as caricatures of women who have failed to fulfil the social norms of marriage and motherhood and who, as a consequence, are dependent on the patronage of their brother. Through comment if not example, they promote institutionalised ideals of motherhood posited by Rich which 'demand ... maternal "instinct" rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realisation, relation to others rather than the creation of self' (1986, p. 42). Del says of them:

It would have made no difference if Uncle Craig had actually had 'abstract, intellectual pursuits' or if he spent the day sorting hen feathers; they were prepared to believe in what he did ... they dropped their voices, they made absurd scolding faces at each other for the clatter of a pan. Craig's working ... They respected men's work beyond anything; they also laughed at it ... Between men's work and women's work was the clearest line drawn, and any stepping over this line, any suggestion of stepping over it, they would meet with such light, amazed, regretfully superior laughter. (40)

It is from the lifestyle represented by the aunts that Ada seeks escape both for herself and her daughter.

Munro gradually unfolds a pattern of ambivalence in the mother-daughter relationship. Del oscillates between love and hate for her mother as she struggles to escape Ada's control and the possibility of taking on her characteristics. She is embarrassed by her mother's exclusion and position in the community with its resultant ridicule, and by her inability to show tenderness. Ada's passion for her husband is concealed from Del, and while Del constantly provokes her mother to attest to its existence, she also dreads it:

I used to wish ... to see my parents by look or embrace affirm that romance – I did not think of passion – had once caught them up and bound them together. But at this moment, seeing my mother go meek and bewildered ... and my father touching her in such a gently, compassionate, grieving way ... I was alarmed, I wanted to shout at them to stop and turn back into their separate, final unsupported selves. I was afraid that they would go on and show me something I no more wanted to see than I wanted to see Uncle Craig dead. (62)

Del wants her mother to reveal her sensuality yet is reluctant to recognise that something so intimate might not just be embarrassing, it could confront her with the reality of her mother's separate existence, one beyond her connection to her daughter.

The power struggle between mother and daughter gradually unfolds, with the first incident occurring when Del is made to go to Uncle Craig's funeral. Ada tells Del, 'You have to learn to face things sometime' (59). Del's response to this is framed by suspicion and resentment.

I did not like the way she said this. Her briskness and zeal seemed false and vulgar. I did not trust her. Always when people tell you you will have to face this sometime, when they hurry you matter-of-factly towards whatever pain or obscenity or unwelcome revelation is laid out for you, there is this edge of betrayal, this cold, masked, imperfectly hidden jubilation in their voices, something greedy for your hurt. Yes, in parents too; in parents particularly. (59)

Munro highlights a different perspective of Ada's personality when she ungraciously assumes responsibility for Del's biting of her cousin:

'My mistake, my mistake entirely,' said the clear and dangerous voice of my mother. 'I never should have brought that child here today. She's too highly

strung. It's barbaric to subject a child like that to a funeral.' Unpredictable, unreliable, still at the oddest time someone to be grateful for, she offered understanding, salvation, when it was no longer, strictly speaking, of much use. (71)

Ada's defence is unexpected and it is the only time that any deep tenderness between mother and daughter is evident. Their power struggle is again seen in Del's decision not to help Ada sell encyclopaedia to poor farmers, when Munro has Del allude to her hopes of not just overcoming her mother's authority, but reversing it:

Over all our expeditions, and homecomings, and the world at large, she exerted this mysterious, appalling authority, and nothing could be done about it, not yet. (87)

This pattern of differentiation intensifies in Jubilee when Del becomes a teenager and her rejection of issues dear to her mother becomes a form of resistance. While Del shares her mother's ambition, her aunts pose the community view and the dichotomy they represent is stark. As Munro writes, 'to be ambitious was to court failure and to risk making a fool of oneself ... Choosing not to do things showed, in the end, more wisdom and self-respect than choosing to do them' (48). But Del and Ada are risk takers and both appear foolish, to each other and the community, in the decisions they take.

Religion reinforces the gendered norm imposed on such rural communities and is portrayed in the fanaticism of Uncle Benny and Ada's mother. In 'Age of Faith', Del seeks to make a measured assessment of its importance either as an affront to her mother, or in order to understand Ada's agnostic views:

'God was made by man! Not the other way around! Man at a lower and bloodthirstier stage of his development than he is now, we hope. Man-made God in his own image. I've argued that with ministers. I'll argue it with anybody. I've never met anyone who could argue against it and make sense ... Go and get your fill of it. You'll see I'm right. Maybe you take after my mother ... if you do, I suppose it's out of my hands.' (135)

This critique of religion sets the scene for Del's seduction by Garnet French and his religious association, 'No person of any importance or social standing went to the Baptist Church' (119). Her opinion is a source of further antagonism between mother and daughter.

It is perhaps through sexual pleasure that Munro most emphasises the tension in the mother-daughter relationship. Del 'didn't want to be like [her mother], with her virginal brusqueness, her innocence' (228). She flaunts her affair with Garnet French and demands that her mother witness the place where she spilled her virginal blood, even though it is of no interest to Ada:

In the morning I went around to look at the broken peonies, and a little patch of blood, yes, dried blood on the ground. I had to mention it to somebody. I said to my mother, 'There's blood on the ground ... I saw a cat there yesterday tearing a bird apart ... You should come and look at it'. (287)

The spilling of blood signifies yet again, a separation of mother and daughter and references traditional celebrations of loss of virginity. There are ambivalent messages in this interaction. While the bird and blood may indicate independence, sexual intercourse and future maternity also have the potential of crushing independence, as when a cat preys on and kills a bird (Rasporich, 1990, pp. 181-2).

Del's affair serves to highlight Ada's anxiety that Del could become trapped like a 'domestic animal' despite Del's determination to enjoy the moment as a man might do, without concern for the future:

Her concern about my life, which I needed and took for granted, I could not bear to have expressed. Also I felt that it was not so different from all the other advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and came back proud. Without even thinking about it I had decided to do the same. (223)

Del's physical encounter is without any intellectual connection, and she believes it makes her the subject of her own sexuality. As Ada fades physically, her hopes of an imagined future for her daughter are thwarted once more when Del fails to get a scholarship. It is in defeat that she exclaims, 'You will have to do what you want' (303). However, when Del refuses to participate in Garnet's baptism it is a victory for the influence of the mother and Del's abjection of her mother and resentment of this victory is symbolised with a depiction of her voracious appetite:³

I went out to the kitchen, turned on the light, and make myself a mixture of fried potatoes and onions and tomatoes and eggs, which I ate greedily and sombrely out of the pan, standing up. I was free and I was not free. (304)

While free of the intoxication of the affair and the potential traps of pregnancy and marriage to Garnet French, Del is not free of Ada's influence which she perceives as entrapment.

It is Del's inability to perceive tenderness in her mother that accounts for the pathos that pervades the story. It is not surprising that in mirroring this, Del shows a detachment towards her mother as Ada starts to fade:

Sometimes she would go and lie on her bed and call me to put a quilt over her. I would always do it too carelessly; she would call me back and make me tuck it in at the knees, around the feet. Then she would say in a petulant, put-on, childish voice, 'Kiss Mother,' I would drop one dry, stingy kiss on her temple. Her hair was getting quite thin. The exposed white skin of the temple had an unhealthy suffering look that I disliked. (231)

Ada tries to reclaim a tenderness and concern from her daughter but it is too late for these intimacies as Del, influenced by her mother's calculated dreams, prepares to move away into her separate life as a writer. Hirsch considers that the daughter is privileged in the mother-daughter relationship while the mother's voice is silenced. However she posits that 'what is unspeakable by the mother may still be heard, read and absorbed by the daughter' (Hirsch, 1989, p. 27). Ada remains a symbol of a motherhood in which passions are

³ Kristeva explains abjection of the mother by the daughter as a primary attempt at separation. Abjection is signified by nausea, distaste, horror, over-eating (Moi, 1986, p. 238).

unrecognised or disclosed. We hear her public voice and her mother voice to Del, encouraging her to avoid the trap of the restricted life in Jubilee, but her private voice – her loves, longings and, disappointments – is absent. Like her own mother, Ada remains enclosed and confined by concealed prayers and dreams.

Motherhood – the community influences

While mothering is depicted in the personal relationship between Ada and Del, motherhood – its expectations and tensions – is explored through descriptions of the minutia of life that resonate as an understanding of the complexity of place and culture into which Del is born. Minor characters are significant in providing the backdrop of values that influence the cultural practices that define motherhood during this period. In some instances, Ada is seen as a bequeather of entrenched attitudes and social values, while at the same time she embodies resistance and rebellion. Ada and Del's mother-daughter relationship is a product of post-World War II Canadian society with its entrenched binary attitudes towards the gendered personality as theorised by Chodorow (1999, p. viii). Motherhood is the upholder of existing values of patriarchal authority and female objectification. The later ambivalent love/hate relationship of Del and Ada is contextualised with these patriarchal contextualising influences and masculinist norms.

The mother and daughter interaction is incidental in the first chapter so it is through setting, both social and natural, and through Del and Ada's interaction with other characters, that Munro begins to develop their characters. They live on the fringe, both geographically and socially. 'The Flats Road', Munro writes, 'was not part of town but it was not part of the country either' (8). While Ada embraces independence later in the novel, she is depicted as also siding with the belittlement of women, for example, when she joins in the men's banter about what constitutes an ideal wife, even though, as she acknowledges, they 'talk as if [they]'re buying a cow' (13). Del reports that her mother, at that time, 'had these unpredictable moments of indulgence, lost later on ... She was a fuller fairer woman than she later became' (13), yet in her childhood Del exhibited an innocent trust and sense of security living in 'a house as small and shut up as any boat is on the sea, in the middle of a tide of howling weather' (33).

The environment provides an early implicit distinction between mother and daughter and of an innate pattern of future separation. In the liminal space between town and country,

between infancy and awareness, Del is raised by a mother who finds this setting awkward, who feels superior to those around her, and who has no affinity with its wildness. While Ada struggles, Del learns how to respond to the challenges of their environment and acquires an instinctive sense of self-preservation. She can sense impending danger and entrapment, and is later able to react instinctively to remove herself from perilous situations such as her drunken escape from Clive in the Brunswick Hotel (243). This self-protective mechanism is repeated in her escapes from Mr Chamberlain and later from Garnet French's attempt to baptise her. Del feels comfortable in nature's tangle of unpredictability and uses this to calm herself when escaping or recovering from male aggression such as on her walks with Jerry Storey, and her sexual encounters with both Mr Chamberlain and Garnet French. Her resilience is different to her mother who feels safest in the town – '[her] fort in the wilderness' (86). After the attempted baptism Del reports:

As I walked into Jubilee I repossessed the world ... Unconnected to the life of love, uncoloured by love, the world resumes its own, its natural and callous importance (303).

Del reclaims control, and sees logical possibilities for her life untainted by the overwhelming emotion that has previously dominated her decisions.

Ada tolerates the community's cruelty to disability and difference in the characters of the 'two idiots on the road', Frankie Hall, Irene Pollox and the disabled man, Mitch Plim. Defiance is an alluring force for Del and, in defiance of her mother, she is attracted to Mitch Plim's house with its hint of prostitution and deformity. Once there she finds it both enticing and repulsive: 'It seemed to embody so much that was evil and mysterious' (8). Later, again in defiance of her mother, she flirts with danger in her seduction of Mr Chamberlain and the affair with Garnet French.

Ada's relationship with her son, Owen, is not fully developed. As if influenced by Chodorow's theory of gendered personality development, Munro removes him from his mother's influence at an early age by depicting his preference for his father's rough lifestyle. 'There was Owen, living on the "Flats Road saying 'turrible and drownded' and using Uncle Benny's grammar, saying he wanted to quit school' (303). Ada's relationship with Owen

contrasts with her interdependence with Del where their boundaries remain blurred (Chodorow, 1999).

Maternal genealogy

Munro acknowledges the influence of maternal genealogy in perpetuating both the motherhood apprenticeship and a daughter's fear of being doomed to repeat her mother's life. Here however she uses education as the motif of maternal genealogy that influences three generations of women. For Ada's mother it is religious education that is prioritised over the welfare of her family:

My mother took [her inheritance] and she ordered a great box of bibles. They were the most expensive kind, maps of the Holy Land and gilt edged pages and the words of Christ were all marked in red ... I was tramping all over the country at the age of eight, in boys' shoes and not owning a pair of mittens, giving away bibles. (95)

Ada mimics her unnamed mother's fanaticism, selling encyclopaedia to uneducated country folk, and also co-opts her children to help. Del shares both women's fascination with the power of words and books: 'I shared my mother's appetite myself, I could not help it. I loved the volumes of encyclopaedia ... sedate dark-green binding, the spidery, reticent-looking gold letters on their spines' (82). In each of these mother-daughter relationships, the daughter displays ambivalence towards her mother – identifying a common culture of words while seeking to sidestep their representation of motherhood.

Early in the book, Ada uses enunciation and tone to differentiate herself from the community: 'She spoke to the people on Flats Road in a voice not so friendly as she used in town, with severe courtesy [and] noticeable use of good grammar' (12). She values people who have 'experience of the world, [and] contact with any life of learning or culture' (183). These values are her focus and they compel her to move to Jubilee where she hopes to become part of a more educated community. However, despite her efforts to be included, her lack of formal education is an obstacle and she reverts to judging the women who shun her:

Mrs Comber brought up the fact that my mother had not gone to university and only to a ... *backwoods* high school ... What good is it if you read Plato and never clean your toilet? asked my mother, reverting to the values of Jubilee. (93)

While Del is embarrassed by her mother's exhibitionism, she is understanding of her desire to be educated, and fleetingly acknowledges her mother's private yearning. As a mature narrator, Del applauds her mother's tenacity for education, despite community condemnation that saw 'knowledge as an oddity' (81):

She signed up for a correspondence course called 'Great Thinkers of History', from the University of Western Ontario, and she wrote letters to the newspaper. My mother had not let anything go. Inside that self we knew, which might at times appear blurred a bit, or sidetracked, she kept her younger selves strenuous and hopeful. (93)

Del needs words and facts to make sense of her volatile world. She, like her mother, will not conform to local custom without good reason to do so and she asserts her need for a detailed explanation when Uncle Craig dies of a heart attack:

My mother's usual positiveness seemed clouded over; my cold appetite for details irritated her. I followed her around the house ... repeating my questions. I wanted to know ... I wanted death pinned down and isolated behind a wall of particular facts and circumstances. (58)

This scene is an early indication of their conflicting relationship. In relentlessly pursuing her own interests, Del remains insensitive to her mother's grief. The quest to master words dominates Del's life as she weighs this desire against her need for love, community acceptance, and escape from her mother's influence. In the end, the legacy bequeathed by her mother and grandmother leads her to gather 'As' around her as symbols of academic success, and directs her passage into becoming a writer.

Performance of motherhood

Through the character of Ada's mother, Munro presents motherhood as a performative identity in the sense of Judith Butler's (2006) work on performative gender, whereby repetition normalises behaviour:

The repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulated frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being. (p. 45)

By extending Butler's concept, it is clear that the expectations and norms of motherhood, like femininity, have no inherent set pattern but are shaped by their repeated performance. The institution of motherhood, as depicted in Ada's mother, has been established as a social norm in the community by repetition, compliance and acceptance. On her mother's death, Ada must leave school and take her mother's place in the home. Her only escape from this bondage is marriage which is a similar fate. While Ada is initially a substitute for her mother, she finally defies her father, walks to town, organises accommodation and returns to school. Del, in her maturity, salutes her audacity:

Oh, if there could be a moment out of time, a moment when we could choose to be judged, naked as can be, beleaguered, triumphant, then that would have been the moment for her. Later on comes compromise and error, perhaps; there she is absurd and unassailable. (98)

There is a community of women to facilitate Ada's independence. Grandma Seeley provides accommodation, a job and basic clothing; Miss Rush provides love, piano tuition and a positive sense of self; Fern provides friendship and fun. Ada becomes visible in the community through letters to the paper on issues important to women.

Munro's text is a valuable contribution to literary representations of mother-daughter relationships and forms part of what Hirsch, in her analysis of mother-daughter plots in nineteenth and twentieth century novels, notes as a progression from silencing the mother's point of view to exploring points of connection between generations (1989, p. 67). In presenting three strong women who exhibit glimpses of determination within the restrictions of their circumstances, Munro finds a whisper in Irigaray's silence of maternal history (Whitford, 1991, p. 44).

While Ada's mother sees religious words and meditation as a means of escaping servitude and abuse, Ada sees education for herself and her daughter as a preparation for impending change:

There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had up till now has been their connection with men. All we have had. No more lives of our own, really, than domestic animals. *He shall hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force, a little closer than his dog, a little dearer than his horse.* Tennyson wrote that. It's true. Was true. You will want to have children though. (222)

Ada has reinterpreted the performance of motherhood by deciding for herself how she will exist in this community. However there is ambivalence in her desires for her daughter, Del. On the one hand, she desires her to be independent of male control but at the same time she expects Del will prioritise having children. The impact of structural inequality and the influential patterns of gender norms and expectations are very clear here. Ada is presented as a mother whose primary connection with her daughter is still concerned with the reproduction of mothering.

Del seeks books – her own and her mother's – as illuminations for a life. And, while almost falling into the same trap as her grandmother, she is able to escape Jubilee's with its traditional marginalisation of women through education. In the three generations of women, Munro shows the daughter's lack of sympathy for her mother, which confirms a trend found by Hirsch (1989) in her research into mother-daughter relationships whereby 'the sympathy we could muster for ourselves and each other as mothers, we could not quite transfer to our own mothers' (p. 26).

Minor characters

Minor characters in *Lives of Girls and Women* highlight community values that influence the cultural, social and political expectations of motherhood. Madeleine, Naomi, Aunt Moira and Fern Doherty represent feminist thinking of the period while Uncle Benny and Uncle Craig (not discussed specifically) represent masculinist community expectations of women.

Madeleine

Madeleine is both an angry mother and an abandoned child. She has been isolated and abused but is so feisty that she rails against her situation to win the applause of Del's family when she liberates herself. She arrives at the Flats Road unformed, already thrown into motherhood, full of self-hatred and hatred for the child who has caused her entrapment.

For Hirsch (1989), such anger is a dominant theme in maternal subjectivity where ‘to be angry is to claim a place, to assert a right to expression, discourse [and] intelligibility’ (p. 169). Munro’s depiction of entrapment, abuse and neglect is tolerated without protest by this community and it is what could have awaited Del had she accepted Garnet French’s offer to live with his family on Jericho Road.

Madeleine is enraged by her entrapment. In ‘An Ethics of Sexual Difference’, Luce Irigaray (1993) postulates that patriarchal structures suppress maternal genealogy by separating women from each other and weakening their voice, autonomy, and identity (p. 108). There is no suggestion of a mother in Madeleine’s life, only a family of men who have pushed her aside. The women of the Flats Road isolate her and restrict her from voicing an identity. In her rage and silence she has no other capacity to respond to her social situation and Del is confronted by her violence:

Her rage was not immediate. She needed time to remember it, to reassemble her forces ... [Rage] or silence seemed the only choices she had ... ‘Dirty little spy-bugger’ – Her short hair was not combed, she was wearing a ragged print dress on her flat young body. Her violence seemed calculated and theatrical.
(22)

While both Ada and Del recognise Madeleine’s vulnerability, they do nothing. In the end Madeleine sinks into oblivion and they ‘remember her like a story, and having nothing else to give ... gave her ... strange, belated, heartless applause’ (34).

The androgynous image of Madeleine is repeated throughout the novel: in Ada as a child, who was ‘spindly ..., with cropped hair because her mother guarded her against vanity’ (94), and later as an older woman when ‘her hair grew out in little wild grey-brown tufts and thickets; [and] every permanent she got turned to fizz’ (101). Munro uses this motif of hair to symbolise rage and resistance. Del rejects her mother’s appearance as she ceases to comply with the stereotype of female grooming. However, it is mid-way through her affair with Garnet French that Del cuts her own hair and adopts the look (291). It is a look that signifies independence, a separation from conforming to male expectations, and a differentiation of the self from the girls who prioritise appearance and are complicit with male objectivity. But her actions also represent a subconscious identification with her own

mother's values for, as Nancy Chodorow (1987) argues, a daughter's identification with her mother is intuitive and continues throughout life, as she internalises many of her behaviours, values, and thoughts (p. ix).

Naomi

Naomi epitomises how young women respond to the expectations imposed on them in this community. While she shares Del's adolescent wilfulness and sexual discoveries in Jubilee before becoming entrapped by pregnancy and marriage, her fate is what awaits those who fail to make an escape through education. Despite this stark choice, schooling beyond a certain stage is not important for women or men in Jubilee because it is seen as an extension of childhood that offers no better prospects of finding work.

Naomi's options are cut off in the third year of high school when she relinquishes a classical education in favour of one that grooms her for the restricted opportunities in Jubilee that precede a marriage. She leaves school for the first job on offer and distances herself from Del as she joins the group of other women who are preparing for marriage. Through Naomi, Munro explores the impact of advertising in objectifying women. The life of these girls is depicted as a *masquerade* as they respond to advertising's demanding physical modifications in the hope of becoming more desirable to men. Rich (1995) considers this female objectification common and admits that she too 'suffered the obscure bodily self-hatred peculiar to women who views themselves through the eyes of men' (p. 22).

Naomi conforms to community pressure and takes on playing the role of a powerless woman in search of a husband. This is in contrast with Del who, in spite of a desire for conformity, remains strong and self-confident. Unlike Naomi, Del is confused by propagated sexist messages and takes exception to a newspaper article that expresses a notion of women's limited intelligence:

The author was a famous New York psychiatrist, a disciple of Freud. He said that the difference between the male and female modes of thought were easily illustrated by the thoughts of a boy and girl, sitting on a park bench, looking at a full moon. The boy thinks of the universe, its immensity and mystery; the girl thinks, 'I must wash my hair.' When I read this I was frantically upset; I had to

put the magazine down. It was clear to me at once that I was not thinking as the girl thought. (227)

But Del remains ambivalent. She still 'wants men to love [her]' (228), even though her most innate desire is to be as educated as possible: '[She] got A's at school ... never had enough of them ... stacked them around [her] like barricades' (246). Like Naomi, Del experiments with love: first her flirtation with Mr Chamberlain, and then she accompanies Naomi on a drunken night at the Gay-la Dance Hall in the company of Bert and Clive. The girls are depicted as objects of sexual desire and Del is more awkward than Naomi, not knowing how to 'dance me loose' (237), or how to respond to their inane jokes:

You had to be always on your guard, not to be left stupidly gaping when the time came to laugh. I was afraid that if I did not laugh at once I would give the impression of being too naive to understand the joke or of being offended by it. (240)

At the end of the night Del escapes, ignoring Naomi's recommendation of Clive: 'He's not an idiot [and] has a good job' (244), choosing instead the novels of Charlotte Bronte over the local boys, and causing her friendship with Naomi to fade. Through this intertextual reference, Munro parallels female entrapment to that of Victorian women.

Naomi, in perpetuating social trends, falls pregnant to someone she doesn't love and barely knows. Pressured by her mother, she proceeds to marriage which she accepts as her lot in life:

Oh, who says I don't want to? I've collected all this stuff. I might as well get married ... I could see her married, a bossy, harassed, satisfied young mother out looking for her children, to call them in to bed or braid their hair or otherwise interfere with them. (297)

Despite her mother's advice about birth control, Naomi's life becomes a replica of her mother's life. The attitudes of both mother and daughter resonate in their acceptance of Naomi's fate. Ada, on the one hand, despite expecting motherhood for Del, has stepped beyond the petty constraints of society to prioritise herself and equip her daughter for

options other than motherhood. Del's ambivalence toward her mother is not because of her powerlessness or lack of self-determination, it is because Ada confronts Del with choices.

Aunt Moira

The silence of the mother in not disclosing the truth about the social and physical wounds of motherhood is demonstrated in both Ada's failing body and in Munro's description of Aunt Moira, sister to the spinster aunts. While the maiden aunts serve as critical voices, their sister Moira embodies a disincentive for motherhood with its inherent wounds. In sympathy with feminist thinking of the period (Hirsch, 1989, p.166), Munro is explicit in writing about the female body:

Aunt Moira had a gynaecological odor ... She was a woman I would recognise now as a likely sufferer from varicose veins, haemorrhoids, a dropped womb, cysted ovaries, inflammations, discharges, lumps and stones in various places, one of those heavy, cautiously moving wrecked survivors of female life ... Not much could be said for marriage ... if you were to compare her with her sisters, (50)

Hirsch discusses a reluctance to write about the female body as a pervasive trend amongst feminists, fearful of exposing female physical weakness. She suggests that 'for Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, the body is not matter but metaphor' (1989, 166). Munro is graphic in her description of gynaecological consequence and voices a subject hidden from both daughters and society. Aunt Moira's silence resonates with the 'corporeal and psychological [silence]' described by Kristeva (1977) in *Sabat Mater*. She advocates for a 'post-virginal' discourse on maternity to halt the self-sacrifice and anonymity associated with passing on generational social norms between mother and daughter (Moi, 1987, p. 183). While Aunt Moira pays the price of maternity in secret, Fern Doherty must also pay a price for failing to meet social norms.

Fern Doherty

Fern Doherty is childless and, in this community, women in her position are both admired and rejected. She shares the house with Ada and Del in Jubilee, has a boyfriend, attends church and appears to enjoy her life. Munro alludes to a mother she visits in hospital and suggests a relationship of ongoing connection combined with independence. She is an

ambivalent character who could be construed as either Ada's secret lover, or as a woman unfettered by family to whom Ada aspires. She introduces a musical dimension to the lives of Del and Ada through her love of opera; and she has a secret store of sex pamphlets that anticipates Del's promiscuity. Like Fern with Mr Chamberlain, Del also becomes the subject of desire in her relationship with Garnet French, setting her own agenda about enjoying or ending the relationship.

Conclusion

In portraying mother-daughter relationships in the various characters of *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro references issues that were later identified by prominent feminists. In her presentation of a rural Canadian community, she illustrates 'the institution of motherhood' termed by Rich (1995), to imply a society so structured that women sought to replicate their own situation in their daughters, leaving the men with economic, social and political power. She explores the silence of the mother, identified by both Kristeva (1986) and Hirsch (1989), which meant that daughters failed to know both the real other woman within their relationship and the full story of their mothering, with its negative physical and psychological effects. The structured concept of what it meant to be either male or female, in Chodorow's (1979) theory of gendered personality, saw the reinforcement of different expectations for men and women. As a girl, Del stays close to her mother while Owen identifies with his father and moves away. Butler's (2006) theory of gender performativity too, in this case of motherhood, is illustrated by generations of women who, deprived of choices, repeat the lifestyle of their mothers as a natural consequence of being a woman. Munro pre-empted Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva's *écriture féminine* (Giorgio, 2002) by writing about the female body and exposing negative physical and psychological aspects of aging and mothering. Her choice of the short story cycle is a break away from the traditional novel and can be considered a form of *écriture féminine*. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro presents female characters in a variety of situations: in traditional families, living and working independently, living with other women, living alone, being powerful and powerless. She offers a record of a period that pre-empted the Second Wave feminist movement and provided a standard against which to measure changes in understanding of the mother-daughter relationship.

Munro's use of Del as the narrator gives a daughter's perspective of a mother she never really knows, presenting her as a 'spectre alternately overwhelming and inconsequential' (Fox Keller, 1985, p. 111). The ongoing tensions within their specific relationship are shown to be a consequence of their conflicting personalities and mirror the generational patterns of motherhood as well as the entrenched community attitudes that they seek to modify. The various mother-daughter relationships, depicted by Munro, are characterised as responding differently to social expectations of motherhood – from Ada and her mother, to Madeleine and her daughter, to Ada and Del. Each relationship varies according to personality and social and economic constructs, but each retains a pattern of ambivalence as the next generation seeks to claim a differentiated self and the mother's emotional attachment to the daughter remains unvoiced.

While writing *Alice*, which I wrote prior to my engagement with Munro's book, similar issues emerged in presenting a mother-daughter relationship between Alice and Jude. Patterns of performance, social influence, gendered expectations, and silence are still considerations when writing about this relationship. Issues raised by Munro continue to be relevant despite economic, social and political change for many women. The mother-daughter relationship, although modified by the personalities involved, is still subjected to similar external pressures and tensions as the daughter seeks to differentiate her identity from the mother she sees only as an extension of herself.

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