

Extract from : **Out of the Frying Pan** by Sarah-Anne Barfoot (2022, Brighton Fringe)

I never realised there would be a shopping list for chemotherapy. That Aveeno hand cream is the only one that works (*offer hand cream to audience*), that patients' mouths can become so dry that they want to suck saliva pastilles. That their hands and feet can get so cold that they want to wear thick socks and gloves in bed. Mum's first chemo session is on my birthday. It is hard watching someone who loved food lose their appetite.

This is when we decide to introduce cannabis oil, with the oncologist's approval, we do our research, from the Medical Cannabis book source the highest-grade oil we can find and have it made. Mum, who has never been stoned before, dreams of being chased down the street by chipolata sausages and of devouring sardine sandwiches. One day, she levitates above her chair, so she says. And she sleeps.

I stay with Mum, we watch *Escape to the Country* and some gardening programme, with Charlie Dimmock, it's the first time Dad doesn't joke about her nipples. I start accompanying Mum on her weekly shops to the supermarket, just like I had done as a child, these trips were the highlight of my early youth, we would have breakfast in the café, fried egg and chips, I loved the way they turned the eggs and tipped them, so perfectly, *Out of the Frying Pan*, I tried countless times at home, but it never worked. On our last trip, Mum has a coughing fit at the till, the woman looks at her and says, 'Thank goodness, for a minute I thought you were dying', Mum never goes back.

The day Mum goes into the hospice. The dog is allowed upstairs.

It takes about an hour to get her downstairs. It's hard to move her, she's in pain and she wants to fall asleep.

We talk about roast potatoes in the ambulance. How mine have never been as good as hers, how I will spend a lifetime trying to match them, I notice the paramedic is looking at me in the rear-view mirror.

She's crying.

They tell us mum has stabilised in the hospice, and that she might be allowed home for Christmas. That's the thing I find the hardest, I always thought there would be one more conversation, the one in which I'd say everything that was left. Instead, I say very little because something profound, beyond words, connects the two of us, makes us transparent to each other, and when it happens, the distinction between us vanishes, this treasure box of love and death.

I kiss my mother's head and hold her hand, and even though I know it's too late, every part of me is screaming, 'Don't die, for god's sake, don't die.' Silently wailing, willing my life force into her, sending my energy through my fingertips, holding her hands, till they became warm, and I can kid myself that she is still alive. I imagine I can see her eyes open. See her smile. Feel her breath upon my face.

Hear her voice one last time.

I decide to take a scatter pod of Mum's ashes to India; we are blessed by the Ganges in Varanasi. Then I travel north with them to cross the border into Nepal. At four in the morning, I release Mum's ashes at the Himalayan viewpoint in Pokhara. I have never seen such a place where land meets sky. Then I understand, the world is on fire, and every creature does what it can to survive. It dawns on me that without ritual, humans live in nostalgia. I think of Mum, and I make a promise to myself to live the best life I can.

(To audience)

Maybe tomorrow, I will go for a sea swim, feel the sun on my skin, share a picnic with friends. What a thing it is, this life, to love. And here we are, all just doing the best we can.

2nd extract from 'Out of the Frying Pan'

There was a garden thick with foliage
Where nasturtiums and deadly nightshade grew.
There was a chestnut tree called Stickle Bud
And a shed full of bones.

Two children play in the dirt
They're making mud pies and drums
Out of thimbles covered with mouse skin.

They bury things just to dig them up
And see how the flesh has rotted from the carcass,
They have a three-legged frog in the pond
And talk to a sheep called Clementine.

One day one of them falls from a bike
On Hazlehurst drive,
A face is covered in scabs
Left unrecognisable for weeks.

They walk their rabbits on a lead
And leave letters in the fairy tree.

Their father tells them if they dig in the dirt
They may end up in China or Australia.
So, they dig for hours.

One of them puts excrement on the roses
As they have seen mother do with manure.

And tips white paint on the black dog
After father's sarcastic remark,
'Go on then, tip it all over her. '

Mother reads a bedtime story,
It is about a rabbit in a snare.

(echo)

But I cannot tell from where
He is calling out for aid.
Crying on the midnight air
Making everything afraid (echo)

One is dressed for a party
Wearing her favourite black velvet dress
With a white collar.
Just before the doorbell rings,
She runs through the lounge,
And trips skinning both her knees

Her sister experiments
With kissing a lightbulb,
She is left with huge

Callouses where her lips
Should be.

She remembers when mother
Nearly amputates her finger
In the car door,
Outside the fruit shop
In the village.
A lady runs out with an apple.

That same day she loses her bear, Jesus Christ
In the back of the car and screams
For his return
At the top of her voice.
'I've lost Jesus Christ.'
Till all the street goes quiet.

There were childhood haircuts in Cheryl's
Now a Centre for Ayahuasca.

She has a recollection of them building big traps
To catch people
With the neighbourhood boys.
Trenches covered with twigs and leaves
In the heart of the big woods.

Here there was also a quarry
Where they would slide down,
Bums on sacks screaming & hollering
Into the trees.

Their father hides money in the stream as they walk
With the dog
For years,
They are convinced
That you can find money anywhere.

And we can see the mother,
And we know that something's not quite right.
Or is it?

There is a birthday party
After the big hurricane

There is no electricity
So mother cooks on the open fire

Sausages and potatoes
Warm bread rolls
And Aubergine dip

There are indoor fireworks
Snakes alive

That spread like rampant worms
Across the table

Coiling and writhing
From grey pellets
In some twisted fornication

Her sister scares an anxious child
Holding a black wig in her hand
Clutching it like a giant spider
She chases her through the garden

Mother tells them about the pig farm catching fire
They are standing in the honeysuckle
Smelling its sweet, heady scent

The echoes of cries,
Haunt her dreams.

And then mother stumbles
Or is she dancing?

Her tooth is wobbly
Her sister ties
String to it
Attaches it to a wooden door

Slams it over and over
Till there is fresh blood.

She breaks her clavicle
Falling down the stairs
And learns to ride her bike
With one hand.

They make a cat poo bomb
With a gang of boys
Burn down
Half the orchard.

She cuts the breasts off her Cindy dolls
Refuses to sleep
Recites things to no avail

A group of owls is called a parliament
A group of emus is called a mob,
A group of larks is called an exaltation
A group of doves is called a piteousness,

Picks her ears till they are red raw.

A group of ravens is called an unkindness,
A group of flamingos is called a flamboyance
A group of peafowl is called an ostentation,
A group of parrots is called a pandemonium,

A group of woodpeckers is called a descent.

One day she is dressed as a Queen's Guard,
She pulls the wings off a fly
The only time mother hits her.

The mother dreams she is in the old house and the
daughters can't see it, but they know it exists because
once upon a time they lived there.

She is shaking,
But is she really fitting?
Or is she dancing?
The light is low and it flickers
Sometimes it is hard to tell.
She is surrounded by her daughters

And sometimes the lines blur,
So, they became one creature,
One big giant creature
That is either fitting or dancing
Or laughing & crying
And no one is certain
Until the end
When the scream rings out...

She is going into room by room and calling out things as
she sees them and so in a sense, they are there too,
except they are not. They are in the living room of the
new house with a bucket and a commode and a mother
who has transformed overnight into a tiny frail bird. A
blackbird.

Her hands have taken on the shape of feet, and they
can no longer pick things up. Her feet dip into the gentle
pillow of her imaginary feathers which stop her from
standing. When she sings, it is a delicate cry, and all the
while she is trembling. The delirium tremens-leave her
body with a violence not one of them is accustomed to.

Then they are in the car,
The daughters,
And no one can speak
As they follow the ambulance.
The mother's skin has gone black,
The air in the car can be cut with a knife.
Suddenly an army
Of Hells Angels appear

Out of nowhere
(SFX motorbikes, revving engines)
Riding their bikes
Either side of the car
Like chivalrous convoy.
It's a sign. She will live.