



Above: Grandma (right) and Uncle (left) with Baby Victoria (Centre)

Right: Lesley with Baby Victoria at the airport

be difficult for her, and prayed with her. I then convinced her to leave Victoria with me for a whole day, unaided, to see how she would cope. Twenty-four hours before we left for Australia, I parted company with the Grandma and Uncle. There were tears all round.

We failed to predict how devastated Victoria would be by the separation. She was okay at first, but soon started to fret over her missing relatives. She sobbed inconsolably for the whole day. Many tried to comfort her but nothing worked. Exhausted from crying, she eventually succumbed to sleep. After much prayer, as I lay in my Samaritan House bed with her on a mattress on the floor at my side, I heard Victoria stir around 2am. I quickly transferred to her bed and cuddled her, and this was the turning point. From that moment on, I was 'it' and she clung fiercely to me for the rest of our journey to Australia.

Coming home

Our journey home was uneventful, except for when we reached Dubai. With nappy bag, trolley, paperwork and a clinging baby, I struggled through the airport. I soon realized that Victoria had a dirty nappy and I was desperate to change her but she was not cooperating. She refused to let go of me. I couldn't

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even go to the toilet on my own. Fortunately, a kindly Indian cleaner came to my rescue and helped me dislodge the frantic infant and, with much difficulty between us, we managed to change her.



Above: Lesley Surman with Deborah (Left) and Peter (Right), holding baby Victoria (Centre)

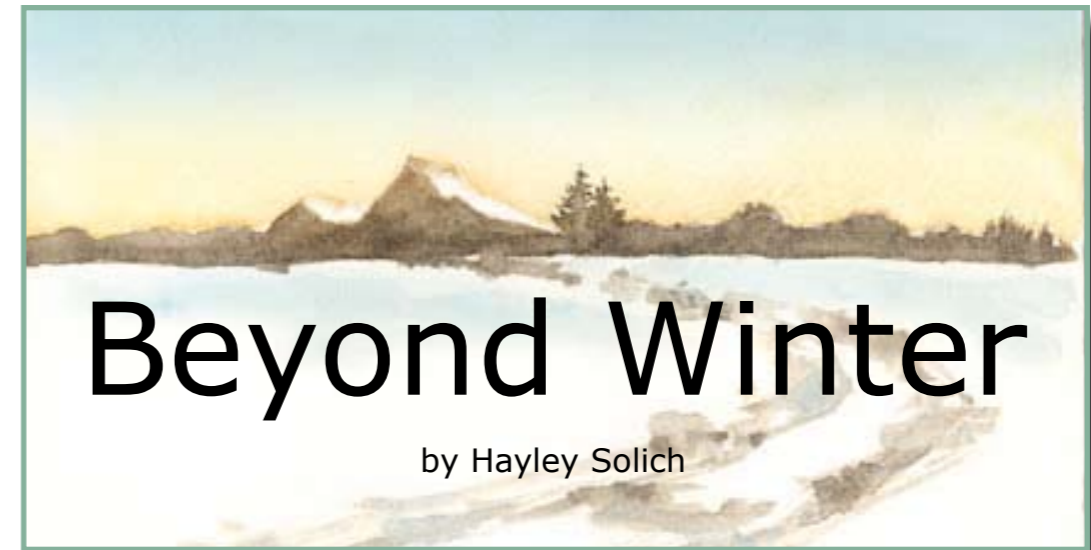


Imagine a ten-month-old baby who has already lost her mother, separated from the only 'mother' she remembers. This little child clung to me through three airports, two flights and twenty hours of travel, where she cried intermittently and refused for us to be separated. This was the hard part and I was so grateful when the plane touched down and I knew the mission was almost complete. Suffice to say, during this time Victoria and I developed a very strong attachment!

Finally, we landed at Perth airport on 16th of December, 2005, in time to reunite Victoria, her mother, father and siblings for Christmas.

For a family that had witnessed untold atrocities to close family members, this was an emotional reunion. It proved to me, once again, that God does extraordinary feats through ordinary, willing people!

Fiction



Beyond Winter

by Hayley Solich

Original Artwork: Adriana Herbut

"I hate you!" she screamed at the mirror. The angry scar, glared back at her as if to say, "You're no longer a woman."

Impulsively, Harriet picked up the shoe and threw it. Glass flew in all directions. Disgusted, she burst into tears and threw herself down on the bed of her childhood, heaving painful sobs.

Outside Harriet's bedroom door, Ashleigh and Robert crashed into one another as they rushed to see what had happened.

Spilling into the room, Robert surveyed the damage. "Are you alright?" he asked gently.

Ashleigh, being careful not to step on shattered glass, edged her way to the other side of the bed.

"Harriet, honey, please talk to us." Harriet groaned louder and pressed her face into the mattress.

Choked with tears, Ashleigh eased the nightie up over her daughter's shoulder. She began to rub her back rhythmically, as she had when she was a baby.

"It's going to be okay, honey," she soothed, swallowing back her own

grief. "It will get better with time."

Harriet shook violently when she heard the platitude, as if the words themselves haunted her.

"What time?" she protested. "I don't have time, remember!"

Robert turned and walked out quietly. It distressed him to see his daughter in this state. Unable to protect her from the pain of her condition left him feeling helpless and frustrated. He returned a short time later with a dustpan and broom. With head downcast, he began to clean up the mess.

"I'm sorry, Dad," he heard her anguished words. "I'm so sorry."

He paused briefly, unable to face her, and then continued to sweep.

He swallowed hard over the lump in his throat; his disjointed reflection in the shattered shards of glass mirrored the brokenness of his soul. How had they come to this place? Everything had been going so smoothly. Harriet was now a qualified doctor. There had been a few rough patches; like the death of a patient she felt close to but eventually things had returned to normal. This last year had been a good year. Then, wham, out-of-the-blue, the news had floored them all!

Ashleigh caught his eye over their daughter's shoulder and mouthed. "Will I tell her now?"

Robert shrugged his shoulders as if to say, 'It's your decision.' He picked up the dustpan and broom and quietly exited.

Ashleigh took a moment, grabbed a handful of tissues from the dresser and then gently turned Harriet to face her.

"Harriet, honey, I know it's hard right now, but we are here to support you." She paused for a moment, wiping the tears soaking her daughter's face. Pressing the tissues into Harriet's hands she continued, "Your father and I have organised a little surprise to lift your spirits. Why don't you get up, put on your dress, then when you're ready, come and join us downstairs?"

As Harriet looked into her mother's gentle, smiling eyes, alarm bells started going off inside her.

"What surprise?" said Harriet dully. She had been on the receiving end of her mother's surprises before and although well intentioned, they were often embarrassing.

"Just get dressed and hurry up," her mother said firmly. "Please don't keep us waiting."

"Oh, Mother," she groaned, dragging herself off the bed like a reticent child.

Satisfied, Ashleigh retreated and quietly closed the door.

Harriet trudged over to the

cupboard and pulled out the bra with one cup padded, and eyed it as if it were the enemy.

She avoided the broken mirror, choosing to dress with the cupboard door blocking her view. Pulling on her grey dress with a high neck and loose jacket, she slipped her feet into flat, practical shoes, then entered the bathroom.

Harriet tried to avoid the mirror at first, and then stared blankly at her image. Her thoughts were of numerous women, patients she'd treated, that had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Unemotionally she'd told them, "Surgery is the only option. Don't worry. It's going to be alright. No-one will even notice." She'd ignored their gasps, their faces filled with terror and fear, even the devastating silences. After all, she was the doctor.

When her eyes focussed again, her hand was cupping the padded bra. She noticed her once glorious hair, hung limply and her once healthy body, slouched, emaciated.

"No-one will notice. No-one will notice," her reflection taunted her.

Spinning away she clutched her stomach and doubled over as the sobs robbed her of breath. As her anguish intensified, she reached for the handtowel. Thrusting a portion into her mouth, she screamed as hard as she could, desperate to release the pain.

"Harriet!" called her mother. "Harriet, please come down. We're waiting!"

Hearing her mother's voice, Harriet let out a shuddering sigh.

Pull yourself together, Harriet! Stop thinking...stop feeling...just forget.

Turning on the water, she mechanically washed her face and hands, then dried them carefully.

It was more than she could bear; the fear, the terror; the knowledge of her lack of compassion. It seemed like a bitter twist of fate that she was now on the receiving end. She

dragged her reluctant frame out the door and down the stairs as if each step were leading her closer to her death.

"Dragging herself over to the cupboard, she pulled out the bra with one cup padded and eyed it as if it were the enemy."



Muffled voices drifted through the door of the lounge. Harriet froze. She had not seen anyone since the surgery. Would they be able to tell? She glanced down quickly, almost losing her nerve. This moment would come again and she resigned herself to the fact that she could not run forever. Taking a deep breath, she pushed open the door and stepped inside.

Sitting in a chair was an older woman with a kindly face. She beamed up at Harriet. The likeness between the two was not only

obvious, but also astounding. The same cerulean blue eyes twinkled at her as the tall frame unfolded from the chair to greet her.

"Aunt Harriet!" She gasped and took a hesitant step forward.

Her aunt covered the distance between them and warmly embraced her.

"You've lost weight," her aunt said. "It's a good thing Ashleigh had the sense to send for me; otherwise you would have wasted away to nothing."

"Hardly", Harriet whispered, clutching at her aunt as if she were a lifeline.

A silent moment of understanding passed between the two. They had always had this special connection. It had been a hallmark of their relationship when Harriet was growing up.

Eventually Harriet pulled back, searching her aunt's face, "How long are you here for?"

Her aunt groaned, "Anxious to be rid of me?" she teased. "I'll be here long enough to get you well again. There are plans afoot. Suffice to say, I am not returning to India. I have done my time doctoring the poor abroad, now it is time for me to turn my hand to the homeland."

Harriet's parents exchanged knowing looks. At that moment, Ashleigh said, "Robert, perhaps we should make some tea. Do you mind helping me?"

As they left, her aunt nodded at her brother.

"Why don't we take a walk outside? It's so stuffy in here," said her aunt, turning toward the door. "Do you still have that old Elm tree that you loved to climb when you were little? You know, that big old tree, the one with the swing seat?"

Harriet paused, mid step, as a shadow passed over her face.

"Yes, we still have the Elm," she said quietly. "But Dad had to remove the limb with the swing-seat last summer. We'd had that swing-seat

forever. But the limb was diseased and he was afraid that the whole thing would die if he didn't. It was awful."

Harriet senior merely nodded and smiled knowingly, leading her out the back door.

Fresh air, mixed with the heady scent of roses, filled the garden like a soothing balm. Arm in arm, they walked in silence, and then paused in front of the mammoth Elm tree. It dominated the entire back corner of the yard, its strong branches twisting up and out as if beckoning to the sky above.

"You are no different from the Elm tree, you know," said her aunt quietly.

"Excuse me?"

"You and that Elm tree are the same. You both had a diseased limb that required removal so that you could survive. It had to happen. Look at the tree, HS. It's beginning to bud, even though that branch is gone. There are new shoots already appearing, and they will flourish in the new season ahead. Before long, you won't even notice the limb has gone. Life goes on and it will for you too." She squeezed Harriet's hand. "I know this is hard for you to hear, but you are beautiful and you're young - yes, 30 is still young, believe me! You have everything to live for and believe-it-or-not, there will be someone out there that will love you just as you are."

Harriet sighed. "But Aunt, how will anyone want me, I feel so...ugly...so scarred. I don't even feel like a woman anymore."

Her aunt gently held her cheeks and lifted her head to meet her steady gaze.

"Harriet, you're a wonderful human being, a beautiful woman and an amazing doctor, and you have so much left to give, so much to live for. This day will pass as you learn to accept the things that you cannot change. After all, the cancer is in remission. Let's be positive! How

many patients have you treated that have defied all odds and beaten this thing? Surely you are aware of what cosmetic surgeons can accomplish these days."

"This day will pass as you learn to accept the things that you cannot change."

Harriet senior released her face, and placed a protective arm around her shoulders as they stood silently looking up at the ancient tree. Winter indeed was passing and already tiny buds were appearing on the branches bearing witness to the new season's imminent arrival.

"Besides," her aunt continued. "You never know what opportunities are just around the corner. In fact, I'm looking for someone to assist me with a new project, beginning next month. I've managed to secure a clinic. It's in a good location. All I need now is great doctors to resource it. I've designed the clinic specifically for research into terminal illnesses and will have a treatment

arm for the care of sufferers. I need someone who understands the journey, whose been there and lived to tell the tale. I need doctors, not just physicians. Can you think of anyone who might be interested?"

As Harriet looked into her aunts eyes, she saw them sparkle with an inner knowledge and she knew that her family had orchestrated this situation for her benefit. Like the bough on the Elm, her heart began to bud with new life under the warmth of her family's love.

"You want me?" she gasped the question.

Grimacing, her aunt nodded. "Really?"

"Yes, really!" said her aunt squeezing her shoulder. "Tell me, who better could understand what they are going through?"

In that moment, Harriet's world began to change as she reconnected with her passion. She hugged her aunt fiercely, overcome by the emotions of the moment. With the wisdom of one who has walked many miles, her Aunt coaxed her out of her grief. Like the big old Elm tree, Harriet realised that it was time for her winter season to pass and that there is life beyond winter.



Original artwork: Adriana Herbut