

And a  
Nightingale Sang

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mother's memory and sisters,  
Diana and Cynthia.



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## 1 IT'S WAR!

In the summer of 1939, it was hot and balmy as each day folded gently into another. We (I was the seventh of a family of ten plus my parents, two brothers, Gregory and Eric, and several sisters; June, Gay, Felicity, Diana, Patricia, Elaine and Kathy) lived in Hayling Island, near Portsmouth. Our house. "White Lodge," was a rambling one - white with a green-tiled roof, Mediterranean in style, with pinks growing in cracks from the grey, crazy paving drive that stretched to the house and garage. It was here that my father ran his dental practice. He had set it up on his own, purchasing the equipment (dental chair, instruments etc.) at his own expense and at great cost. I vividly remember the chair and bureaus of small drawers filled with dental floss samples. The temptation of such delights was often too much, my sisters and I used to sneak in and sample all the different products when we thought no one was looking, taking turns to move each other up and down in the dental chair.

My father found it a struggle, as there was no NHS then and often patients could not or would not pay him. Unfortunately due to this and the largeness of the family as well as him being too kind-hearted, we owed shopkeepers and lived in poverty most of the time. Despite this he was a very good dental surgeon and the dental plates he made for

patients were excellent and lasted for ages. He trained at Guys Hospital and The Royal Dental Hospital, just like his father.

Every day that summer, the sun lit up our house and Daddy, looking very dapper in his short, white coat, tended to his patients. Sometimes we heard children yelling and I remember seeing a trail of blood up the path from the surgery, after a tooth extraction. Hardly confidence inspiring for us children, whom Daddy treated too! I remember being chased around the dental chair, hotly pursued by him, my mouth clamped shut in fear!

The little drawers of medical samples were an endless fascination, but an angry roar from my father soon made us run into the garden. Here a cherry tree grew, and fat, red peonies drooped onto the paths, but woe betide any of us whom ventured to the end of the garden because there lived Daddy's bantams, his pride and joy. The males would come flying out to attack anyone daring to venture into their territory, and we were really afraid of their sharp beaks.

The house was also supposed to be haunted, apparently by a departed servant girl who would get up early in the morning and go downstairs. Her footsteps could be heard by several members of my family but not by me. I was sent upstairs by my father to his workroom, the passage leading up to it was in darkness apart from a stream of light across it. The door to the room was open but I was literally frozen to the floor in fear. After a while I was able to crawl downstairs but I had never felt so frightened as I did then.

At the back of the house there was a big field where once a day a tractor delivered swedes and various produce to the cows who grazed there. My older sister (by a year and a half) would drag me through a hole in the fence and run off when the cows were let out after milking. My short little legs couldn't run as fast so I was left surrounded by giant cows eating the vegetables with enormous tongues. I was

terrified and convinced that they were going to eat me!

Sometimes the family would hoist me up on the high wall at the end of the garden to beg the postman for black cherries and sweets. Of course I didn't get a chance to eat these goodies as I had to distribute them to the others waiting below!

All my sisters' friends were large and leggy, so it seemed they would either drop something on me or fall on me. Rubber tyres swinging from trees on ropes would wind me. When they raided my father's strawberry patch, I was unable to run away fast enough and would be met with a sharp smack on the bottom from my father's cane carpet beater as he angrily bellowed at me!

There was also a running feud with the Jehovah Witness family that lived next to us. Tales of deprivation and beatings were regularly told by two pale faced and bespectacled, pig tailed little girls. However, they always seemed clean and scrubbed in appearance. We never found out whether they were telling the truth or not, but I felt sorry for them.

Further along the coast, my grandfather, Sir Richard Gregory, Bart, FRS, lived. He was a great visionary and was a man before his times. (More details can be found about him on the internet, under the title "Sir Richard Gregory – His Life and Times.") His wife was Kate Florence, my mother's mother. She suffered badly from arthritis and was confined to a wheelchair – so much so that my mother needed to be near her, as her health was so poor.

Grandfather's house was large, well staffed with servants and overlooked the sand dunes and the sea. Grandfather led a busy life as editor of "Nature" and Pathé News. He warned the world of the danger of the nuclear bomb. He was also a good friend of H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw and Marie Stopes and he wrote many books. Grandfather was very worried about the fact that there so

many mouths to feed, and sometimes he would turn out with food baskets for us and Grandmother would bring blankets, as the Depression was biting and a lot of poverty lay underneath the veneer of wealth.

With the exception of our grandparents, our family members looked down at us, the terrible unwieldy Fowlers! In fact, if it had been the seventies we might have been a social worker's dream!

Despite all the problems, we were basically a happy family and my parents were very much in love. My mother trained at the Royal Academy of Music and was a professional pianist and violinist. She had trained with Myra Hess and played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. There was always a piano in the house, which she played frequently, playing many works, such as "Fingal's Cave", all through with no music sheets. I also remember her playing the violin, sitting on the edge of her bed, at her father's house, also at Walberton, Sussex, while I played on the floor as a small girl of about three years.

One of my mother's dearest friends was a school teacher's daughter, we used to climb up their wall and call 'Can we come over?' If the answer was yes, the school master used to put a ladder up for us to climb down and then invite us in for Beatrix Potter stories and delicious spongefingers. Usually accompanied by clear, cool lemonade in long glasses.

When the war was declared, I was six years and eight months, and not due to go to school until I was seven, which was the expected age at that time.

We never expected a war, and so life went on more or less as normal, with summer days spent on the beach, where my brothers and sisters were cared for either by a batty old Nanny called "Mary" or a friend of my mother, Nurse Coates. Sometimes we were also taken out by the elder sisters, usually June, Elaine or Patricia (although I must add that on the odd occasion it did end in disaster!)

We dug for shells and crabs in rock pools and paddled in the sea.

One of Nurse Coates' sons had a birthday party, and sandwiches and an iced cake were handed around, the latter attracting many wasps – we all screamed! The smell of the sea and hot sand were sleep inducing and in the sun's haze the curve of the beach seemed to go on forever, to the end of the world.

A man pushing a small cart sold penny ices and the crunch of the feet on the pebbles meant the crab seller was on his way - a young lad with a basket slung over his shoulders, in which lay orange-cooked crabs.

As the sun began to dip behind the sea, it was time to return home and bedtime. Time to say "Goodnight" to my mother and father and to go to bed in the large bedroom at the top of the house, with picture windows that looked out to the ocean.

Some days my mother would take me to look from her bedroom window at the Queen Mary gliding up the Solent on her way out of Southampton, and with all her lights ablaze at night. I would always dream of the glamorous life onboard her.

All felt right with the world, but dark forces were gathering and Pandora was to open the box and unleash terrible evils, which even to this day, continue to haunt the world, and these evil deeds would alter all our lives, forever.

In late summer, war was declared and my father joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, RAMC, his regiment was the Royal Ulster Rifles. His rank was Captain, later to be Major. He wore a hat with a green cockade and he was stationed in Bally Kinlar Camp, Northern Ireland, and at Blackpool.

When my father was gone we had to move away to what we thought was a safer area, away from the coast, as Portsmouth was being bombed. The brave people at Hayling were lighting beacons on the beaches to draw the

fire away from the docks in an attempt to save our ships.

My parents hired a taxi and drove into Sussex to look for a safer place and house, and they found an old farmhouse called “Snapelands” in a village called Lodsworth. It was there that we were to stay for the duration of the war, which we thought would last for a year or two, but of course lasted for six years and was to disrupt our lives forever.

Now that we had arranged to move, we had to find a removal van, an almost impossible task, as Pickfords and all other forms of transport had gone for moving troops and the war effort.

At last a cattle truck was found and we, as well as our furniture, were hastily put on board. There were stray bits of straw on the floor and a strong, unpleasant smell of manure. Mother travelled in a taxi at the front with our youngest sister, Felicity, then only a year old and very fretful. We remained under the watchful eye of our eldest sister, Cynthia, as we bumped along the winding roads of Sussex.

In a sense, we were refugees, displaced and fleeing for our lives, like so many in Europe, never to see their homes again even to this day. As the lorry swayed along, a stone jar fell on my sister Gay’s head and she started to cry. My head was full of questions: Where in the world were we going? Why was our old life gone? In fact it was to be changed forever and after the war, nothing would be left but hardship and debris. We eventually managed to traverse the village road and a rough farm track to Snapelands (a different name for ‘snipe’, which was a local bird in great abundance at the time).

The Sussex farmhouse that nestled in the valley seemed to be a safe haven. It was to hold our hopes and fears for the oncoming war and we prayed our new dwelling would ensure our survival.

A day after we left Hayling Island, a bomb fell on the

house next door and burned it to the ground, we were lucky to have moved just in time.

