Rocking Chair Blues

An Ann Stories Tale by Raymond Howell

Publisher: theannstories.co.uk

Rocking Chair Blues

By Raymond Howell

Published by: theannstories.co.uk

Rocking Chair Blues

By Raymond Howell

Authors Note

This short story is about a young girl Susanna and Ann who founded and runs The Organisation which helps abused children and women. It also includes a fly who accidentally became involved in the drama.

Susanna had just suffered a huge loss and maybe her life was in danger too except, just at the right time, a kindly and soon to be vegetarian fly happened along.

Section One

~~~~

Three emotions will command the following drama in very different and distinctive ways.

The first will surge from a child to sonically declare… Let me die.

The second will come from Ann, the first of the Firstborns who will respond quietly, but stubbornly… No, I won't let you.

The third emotion will rise from an ancient rocking chair which through its nature cannot help going against the general grain of the drama when it suggests loudly… *Here I am*.

But not using words. It is not that clever. Although, yes, it is said there is something almost human about the chair. Except it does not have a mouth or the other various bits and pieces that would make that orifice work. What it does have is a range of creaks and swishes and rolling rocks. They can vary from soft or gentle to loud and angry. But otherwise, to get attention, the rocking chair possesses a look-at-me aura which radiates a peacockish pride of purpose and place, though not with any foppish sense. Or with an exaggerated or affected pose. Or even with the suffer of conceit empowering the wide smile of its cute, bow-shaped toes. No, thankfully it does not suffer with those human ills for the heart of the wood knows only good.

The chair therefore has no lines to speak off or even staged mimes to be critiqued, but somehow the luminosity of the rocking chair's deep rich magical grain almost always manages to steal or steer the show, or if angered
~~~~

to squash unwary toes.

There is another who will enter the drama too but only if a particular window is left open, but more about him later because for the immediate moment, this stage belongs to the chair and the passengers it willingly carries with such loving tender care.

Section Two

~~~~

The chair with its deep centuries-smoothed lustre and beautiful grains, so blessedly free of scratches and oily residues, has never suffered injury through neglect, abuse or war. Although it is often involved in human conflict. Any marks left by a child's tears that run down Ann's back as she holds them tight while rocking them in the chair comfortingly, somehow just disappear.

Within the swirls and knots of its rich earthy grain planets, galaxies and universes flow. While wondrous creatures frolic in play. Or suddenly, as if borne upon mystic winds, mysterious portals into alternative dimensions like fairyland, toy-town and middle-earth, magically appear to children whose eyes care to seek them out. Some, as they stare at the mesmerising, seemingly never-still swirls pinkie swear they see glimpses of heaven and angels.

Whatever comforting world a child seeks to hide in as Ann rocks them in the chair, or when she sits by their bed to nurse them through the night, they will bloom somewhere in the grain. In its way the chair possesses life. It was carved from a tree grown from a seed gifted to Ann by her father. Or as he is known to some, The Father. So, through its impeccable past it now instinctively knows what she and her charges need - peace, happiness and love… A fate the tree was robbed of.

It can also be aggressive.

“I know you love that chair, but it’s vicious, Ann,” Rachel, The Organisation’s manager often moans. Especially after it has knocked her
~~~~

shins, or crushed her toes. Or suddenly rocks back hard as if to smack her hand away when she tries to shift it around or remove it from a room.

“And anyway, Ann, surely its legs are too short. You have to stretch yours right out to sit in it and you’re there for hours sometimes. It can’t be comfortable. Please let me buy one that is better suited to your long legs. Please, Ann!” Often uttered as a plead.

With a twinkling smile, Ann softly reprimands her efficient and well-meaning manager. “Then you shouldn’t try and move it, should you. How many times have I advised you that wherever you find it waiting, it is exactly where it needs to be? So leave it alone.”

Her smile comes from knowing how much the chair freaks Rachel out. It amuses her too when she hears Rachel declaring to new staff on a tour of The Organisation’s facilities.

“If you should suddenly find that chair…” said tersely. “...in a room, it means Ann is about to return with another poor child. And don’t ask how it knows. Don’t even think it! Just quickly tidy the bed and leave. And don’t try and shift it either. It will hit back at you! And I have the bruises to prove it.”

Another common moan from the staff which is never disputed is, “I swear that blimming thing moves about and rocks itself!”

Putting her smile to one side, Ann will explain patiently. “And as for my comfort Rachel, don’t worry for me. I am more than used to the chair, just as it is to me. We are a team, so let it be.”

A lecture usually follows, for Ann never misses a chance to share her thoughts. As Rachel well expects and is rarely ever disappointed.

“What does my discomfort matter when compared to the children who ride with me in this *wonderful* not *spiteful* as you think my nursing chair is, Rachel? And don’t deny it because I know.”

Stated with another twinkling smile.

“Remember what I told you. It was carved from a special tree by friends with thoughts of good speed and love for our mission, which the chair freely imparts to the children. Its only want here upon this poor broken earth is to help us restore her passenger’s spirits.”

“And that includes mine,” she might mutter quietly.

There are too many who need help. Far too many, her spirit grumbles as she cuts the lecture short to head off to save yet another suffering child.

Section Three

~~~~

Susanna, known for her mischievous smile and light-hearted, quick, but always well-meant wit, a child who should know only joy and love, is now lying in the arms of an Angel, broken in ways no child should ever be. But so many are, especially when caught in the chaos of other people's need for war. Wars which Susanna hated to hear about or see but had innocently become a victim of a certain type of war whose approach is rarely heard or seen. This leaky-eyed shattered china doll, with a cute swirly and once bouncy ponytail, has been tossed heartlessly into the wasteful realms of society's ever-increasing wayside flotsam. This discard of a war fought in someone else's mind did not care to live in a world as sick as this one anymore.

Susanna's mind might well be beyond mending, Ann was realising to her horror, as yet another plaintive message emanated from the child's spirit.

"Wait there for me, Bro. Wait for me cos I'm coming."

Since Susanna arrived in the room earlier that night she has not posed a single question about the chair. Or about the Angel whose armpit her delicately sloping nose was jammed hard into as if to hide away from a world, she wanted nothing more to do with. Or to note the pink-themed room. Had she, then in truth she would have been as horrified about the girly colour as Ann was for the child's spirit. Nor did Susanna wonder about her murderous mother or complicit father. In common with those poorly treated or tortured Espeans back in 1068 after the dreadful Normans had invaded and robbed them of all they owned and believed in, she had no conscious
~~~~

thoughts beyond a profound primaeval urge to embrace her death.

“I’m coming to join ya. Ya don’t get away from me that easy, you don’t. Cos I won’t let ya! Wait there for me, Bro ... Wait for me, Bro… Wait… wait for me, Bro. Cos I’m coming. I’m coming, Bro.”

And on and on her spirit cries were sent to search the realms of the dead where she so longed to be standing once more beside her Bro, twins in death as they had been in life.

Section Four

~~~~

The only other visible presence inhabiting this unfolding drama, discounting spiders and a lost pea bug and is able rightly to claim to be an important part of Susanna's tale, is a very comfortably overfed, kindly disposed, biologically and aerodynamically advanced fly, who proudly bears the name, Horace.

Considering how fickle flies are and their wariness of humans, this one had acquired an affection for the Angel and yes for the child too. Although from the way Horace was paddling around in a sprinkling of little silver-white puddles pooling on the bright sunshine-yellow windowsill, such affection, unusual or otherwise, was not immediately obvious. But then again, neither are Horace’s many skills. Nor are his thousands of tiny lenses. Or that each one was focused at that very moment on the pleasantly hypnotic diffractions glimmering in the puddles, stirred and fed by the miniature-condensation-waterfalls that ran continuously and playfully down the glass. For the second time that day, the fly was delightfully entranced.

And strangely, for once, his legs momentarily stopped paddling about, where the energy shifted to his tiny nerve centre to be converted into a ponder. *Without legs or wings like me, how will the water droplets, ringing delightfully with their captured notes of the creation song, ever manage to return to the top of the glass and whizz down again*?

While Susanna bawled loudly and Ann vented quietly and with his momentous thought nicely out of the way, Horace once again paddled happily about in the little puddles, while inadvertently disrupting the cheerful
~~~~

flow of the tiny heavenly choirs. Although noticeably he did so without any of his usual annoying *catch me if you can* japes.

This special fly fattened as he was on an abundance of human waste, was still appalled by what he witnessed the child going through earlier. It had been enough to make him pause from his air-knitting to wonder. *Do I keep supping on meat juices or do I become a vegetarian*?

It was not the first time he had such worries about foodstuffs, which like all flies he would never refer to as grub. Forbid the thought! Humans might harm their offspring but we flies would never treat ours unkindly. As for food, rebelliously and fearfully many of his fellow flies were realising that human leavings can be laced with undetectable poisons.

“Our kind are being killed off in frightening numbers.” Some cry. “Danger and death surrounds us flies daily,” others rightly claimed. But now after the events of this life-changing day, Horace could add to their cries, yes they do, just as they do for human offspring. And they might call us pests, but at least we do not abuse or kill our young.

He was also to wonder a little later while snuggling up with his dearest fancy, his darling Nancy, how did I ever arrive in that room? There I was on the High Street heading off to meet you, me love and then the next thing, I wasn’t! How did it ever happen, Nancy? How?

He might well have noticed just how had he not been so hampered by his short-sightedness or allowed himself to be distracted. A dangerous state to be in when surrounded by so many humans as he was on The High Street earlier that day.

Section Five

~~~~

Before Horace's life-changing encounter the doting father of so many delightful offspring had followed an intoxicating stream of smells into a human's house.

But instead of finding a quick meal after he squeezed through the partly open window, he stumbled upon a scene which sent his strict sense of order spiralling into a mess he had no wish to walk about in. A human mother, a nurturer, a carer had her hands around the slim neck of a boy who was struggling weakly against her.

Unerringly attracted to the scent of the child’s fear the fly headed straight towards him. It was then during a split moment - short for a human but ever so long for a fly - that the boy’s sister burst into the room full of, ‘I’m home folks’ cheer, which instantly froze upon her young face. In the space of a second her crystallised smile tuned to an icy stare and then a silent snarl. The fly’s hairs were nearly combusted by the sense of the girl’s horror as it met the desperation within the boy’s last gasp, which silently pleaded.

“Get out of here quickly Sis before she kills you too.”

Committed to his manoeuvre the fly landed by the boy’s bloodshot eyes. Instinctively his quick tiny purposeful steps considered. ‘Will me darling fancy be better off laying her eggs in his nostrils, or in the corner of his eyes? Or better still, inside those handsome ears of his’.

The searing hot, caustic waves surging from the girl’s outraged and
~~~~

shocked but silent, feet-locked screams very nearly stripped every hair off his body, again. The sense of being a living part, the embodiment even, of her uncomprehending horror and fear, sent the fly's sense of reality reeling.

For a human's second, his thousands of lenses locked onto Susanna's frightened eyes. Instantly, he understood her intense pain and revulsion at the idea that his children may soon be feeding upon the boy's flesh. Startlingly, the idea caused him to swallow his proboscis. His sudden choking invoked a sickening vision of his many children wriggling through the soft tissue of a child who only moments ago had been living.

Rarely do his advanced multifaceted eyes miss a thing. But he freely admitted later when his darling fancy, his Nancy asked about his day.

"I rather wish I had missed seeing that."

Appalled by these wicked creatures, the shocked fly cried as he shot out of the open window. "You humans hate your children as much as you do my darling little grubs. And I wonder, how you'd cope if you had hundreds to look after!"

Severely flustered, he was too upset to even care what delights might lay at the end of a tantalising stream of odours that struck him as he flew as fast as he could back to the High Street.

After I've had a quick rest, but not near the butcher's shop. Oh no, not with all them dead animals there" he thought with a shudder. No, it'll be hey ho to the breeze and home to spill me heart's woes out to me darling Nancy. Except when he turned the corner onto the High Street the tricky breeze tipped, flipped and twisted him until he flew right into a human's face. Instead of swiping him away as humans do, the woman laughed and called him silly.

Astonished, he cried, “Hey, she’s talking with me. With me!”

To his wonder he then sensed her reply travelling through his whole being, “Come fly. Come and rest on my arm and tell me you’re troubles.”

Section Six

~~~~

Alighting on Ann's arm Horace was immediately captivated by her essence. It shimmered deliciously in his thousands of lenses as a pinkish-golden light while the sense of her unusual being zinged up and down his ever-alert antennae.

I've never encountered anything like her in me life, he decided. I haven't. There's summit about this here human that's different to those others who claim to be me superiors. Very different. While they swat at us flies like we're nowt, she, she, wants me to rest on her arm. Her arm! Bless her!

Then his thoughts rushed up in an excited babble as he realised he could say all those things to a human he had longed to, but which until now had been impossible. Bravely, Horace took his chance to defend his people to these humans who loathed his kind so much.

"But we're better than humans, aren't we?" He stated firmly. "Cos we do no harm, do we? An we don't make them wars things like you humans do that kill me kin, or fight with each other." He went on. "And are you humans able to fly so skilfully, like we do? Naw, you ain't. And nor can you react so quickly either. Or sift smells so expertly. And while you lot use and chew food inefficiently, I've seen how ya eat and wot you leave, I simply spit-spot-suck it all up with no waste and off I go, leaving no obvious trace behind me neither. Now who's superior." He offered smugly, before scolding. "And we don't kill our young either!"

"I agree with you," he felt her say which encouraged him to puff up and
~~~~

buzz his wings importantly, only to deflate a little when she asked. “But why are you so upset fly? What has happened to you?”

It was just like she had blown a gentle breeze to bless his wings to carry him aloft and he gladly went with it. “A human child has just been killed in front of all me blimming eyes.” He blurted. “And there’s another one in the house down there in danger.”

There is!" He then added, in case she should doubt him like his fancy Nancy does sometimes and with a scold too for exaggerating.

Suddenly, as if he had just accidentally sucked in a grain of active lodestone he began tingling all over as her essence passed through his to extract the full story from his being. Suddenly as the tingling stopped to his “Cor blimey,” amazement the awesome human reacted quicker than he ever could.

Horrified by what she read lurking inside the fly, Ann instantly fizzled out to scour the houses in the street the fly had shot out of. In the rush, her powerful swirling vortex accidentally swept Horace up and carried him along and right back into the horrifying scene he had just thought to flee.

Several hours later, having followed her and the child’s scent to The Organisation’s buildings, set in their vast grounds, which had taken the fly’s breath away and tired him out too for there was no place to refuel, he slowly began to recover from his ordeal.

Like Ann, as he paddled in the puddles he sensed the poor child willing herself to die and could not help reflecting, what a thrilling yet sad journey this has been, for us all. Horace even shivered a little when his antennae started to twitch and zing alarmingly. There was something very different about the shadow in the far corner, he realised. Not only was it deeper, it was

menacing. Inexplicably and suddenly, it bothered and sickened Horace enough to send him up into the air.

I’m gonna bliddy turn vegetarian, I am. He determined as his desperate wings cut the thickening atmosphere. I’m bliddy sick of poking about in death’s muck. I won’t let it take that child. An I know me fancy won’t like wot I’m about to do, but I can’t have death take her.

“Nope.” He exclaimed as he teasingly buzzed the hopeful spider. “Our little-un’s will not feed on her juices this day, they’ll not you, you’ll not feed on me neither spider. Of that, I’m determined,” he railed as he headed towards Ann to warn her about what he felt and believed was approaching.

Section Seven

~~~~

As Horace raced towards Ann in a panic, she murmured concerned, "How do I bring you back Susanna? How?"

“There has to be something inside you that wants to live,” she sighed.

Just as she was thinking, I need to find it quick, Horace arrived and started flying erratically about her head.

“Lookout, lookout, death is coming! Lookout, lookout, death is coming”, he bravely yelled, as only a fly in desperation can. But it was all so hopeless. The sound of his frantically buzzing wings drowned out his tiny reedy voice. In a frenzy of distress, he buzzed Ann’s ears and danced upon her nose. He even traversed the shadowed valley of her chest before backing out and flitting to her mouth where in jerky circles his thin legs beat out a tattoo on her top lip.

“Hear me, death is coming, death is coming” the fly cried again before jumping to her bottom lip and repeating his frantic message.

Untangling her arm from the child Ann gently encouraged the fly away. But his need to warn her was too great.

“I ain’t having none of that nonsense” he buzzed as he skipped to her forehead and then to the tip of an ear, her hair, her left knee, her right knee and back to her lips, before returning briefly to her forehead. Then it was down again into that shadowed valley before starting the circuit and his
~~~~

chanting all over again. But suddenly, halfway through the third lap…

"Or was it the tenth? I was all a dither and counting ain't me strong point, as you well know," he happily confessed to his Nancy as they settled for the night on their favourite tree, snug behind a prominent piece of bark sheltered by the leaves of a low hanging branch that smelt so deliciously of warmed acorns. And blessedly free of spider webs.

Although there was that time they don't like to speak of when Orb the local thug, wickedly came in the night to spin his web right close to their resting place. It had given them both quite a turn in the morning when they saw it, especially when the web twitched and reached out to try and grab them. Luckily they had felt its energy, but even then they had barely made it past it. It was days before Orb ate his web and moved on to spin another elsewhere. It had made them wonder what the neighbourhood was coming to, and where were the birds when you needed them. They're dead, Horace had decided, bliddy dead. Thank you humans! And thank you cats, for nothing!

Section Eight

~~~~

"Anyways..." Horace continued as he snuggled up with Nancy. "...It might have been the fourth circuit, it was hard to know in all the excitement. Anyways Nancy, she suddenly reached out as quick as anything I've seen, or not seen..." he added with a chuckle.

“...it happened faster than light… Anyways, just as I was entering a spectacular spin, she snatched me right out of the air…”

He paused again to preen a little as Nancy buzzed her wings adoringly at her hero. Duly bolstered, he resumed the telling.

“...Well…, I said to meself Nancy I did…, this is it for you Horace, me old mate. Your times properly up here, it is! But instead of crushing the life out of me like that human did her poor child, she did summit to me blimming head. Cos I suddenly felt all calm and at peace… like I do after we…, you know what I mean, me dear,” he said with little suggestive flutters aimed at his fancy, who replied with a series of special little meaningful flutters of her own, which nearly made him forget all about his story. Pulling himself together but with a number of eyes still dwelling lovingly on his Nancy, he said.

“But it was more so… But whatever it was, it were wonderful. It really were. Then, she opened her fingers and I was right level with her eyes. Which by my counting she only had two. Not like us, ay,” he said smugly.

“But by the glory of a dung heap and cor blimey and all that lark, what a
~~~~

blimming pair she had. When they peered into mine a fizzle passed between us and it fair made me want to faint with wonder, it did. I tells ya, the waters in me ole tracheole truly sizzled. Strangely, she made no sounds that I could detect, but I felt a new tingling sensation passing right up me spiracle and down into me tracheae. Where it dived into the fluid of me tracheole, before dissolving to spread delicious feelings of well-being. And yes, a profound sense of 'thank you' too an it travelled around me whole body. Oh me darling Nancy…" he said as if in a swoon brought on by his fancy, as she so often made him do.

"Other than you me dear, nowt else until then has ever made me feel so satisfied and happy. But bless me eyes with wonderful things, she tilted her head back and pursed her lips. And Wow! I thought, she'd make a gorgeous fly that one would ... really! Anyways, she blew at me gently, but it weren't a kiss like yours Nancy, though it had that effect on me…, you know…"

Satisfied that he had said the right thing so his fancy will indeed fancy 'a fancy' a little later on, he fluttered his wings suggestively again before continuing.

"Her breath flowed out like a stream of warm air, similar to a flower-scented spring day - you know, those ones that always sets me a-going, me darling. An me blessed wings filled up like the sails of a laggard homeward bound butterfly suddenly catching ahold of a new strong breeze."

Imagining the thrill of riding a strong but friendly breeze Nancy fluttered her wings and danced excitedly. While Horace watching his heart's joy proudly, spit-spot-spitted for a moment before continuing.

"Afore I could twiddle me right front leg in glee, I was speedily hoisted up and gently headed towards a half-open window thingy. Then into the night and on through The Organisations vast grounds - but there's not much there

for us me love," he added as an aside.

"Then I was off across that big road and right back into town where I first bumped into her like. All the while riding upon wot I can only describe as a cushion of safe blessings and an immutable sense of overwhelming euphoria. An Strewth…," he added, with an extraordinarily expressive spit-spot-spit which set his legs nicely shaking.

"...It were bliddy great it were."

As if to prove the point, he then danced a charming little jig of his own around his fancy.

"An you know what, me fancy?" he declared as he circled her for the fourth time. Or was it the tenth?

"I think I just might go back! And if I do, I'll be able to tell ya if the human child lives or not, won't I? An I have to say, me darling spit-spot-spit, I hope she does… but I do have me doubts. I do, I do… I have me doubts."

Section Nine

~~~~

Ignoring the urge to flip back into her true Angel self to ease the cramps knotting her legs, Ann looked down at Susanna and smiled tenderly before softly sighing. "Your young face ought to be buried in a huge cone of soft ice cream, smothered with lashings of red gooey sauce and not squished in my armpit like a frightened little mole confused by sunlight!"

She was far too concerned to think of saying, or wiping your little nose on my best Kingfisher blue t-shirt and soaking it through too. Instead, focusing on the child's constant tears and gasps and gulps and her longing to be with her brother, Ann murmured.

"I need to break through your turmoil and find a way to help you, except I can't scan your mind while you're like this. But just know, that like the kindly fly, I will not let death claim you. I won't!"
~~~~

Section Ten

~~~~

Those few humans aware of Ann's origins are often confused by her determination to prevent untimely deaths. It strikes some as incongruous, or at the very least, at odds with what she represents. If heaven is so great why not let them go there?

“Don’t be silly,” she might say lightly, or more befitting her personality, launch into a lecture.

“As incomparable and as brilliant as my home is”, she explains, “Heaven is not a place to rush off to for the emotionally unequipped. It is far better to find a way there at the right time than to turn up too early and unprepared. In my opinion, despite the human mind’s clever complexities, it is neither capable nor responsible enough to judge when the time is right to leave a life as you humans know it. The body is the best arbiter of that and given the space to do so, it will properly prepare the mind for the change. Imagine spending eternity wishing that you hadn’t arrived before your time. From my experience with uneasy souls, it does not make for a pleasant stay. And let me add this too. In my opinion, the human mind cannot even tell properly when a body is yearning for food, for a drink or minerals and so their conscious takes a guess, which it often gets wrong. In matters of death, especially when a person is stressed, the conscious cannot be trusted to make the right decision. Either for it or for the body. Very much like the ways of your politicians really,” she might throw out caustically as a means to round off the discussion.

Or to start yet another rolling!
~~~~

But not this night, for other than the chair, who rarely disagrees with her, she had no audience to spar with. Except for young Susanna. But she was in no state for a discussion. Which was sad, because she would certainly have responded feistily. As Ann had sensed earlier when briefly she managed to meld her mind with the child's - just before the gallant fly attempted to warn her about death's approach. Unwittingly he had broken Ann's concentration, so now she had to wait for another break in Susanna's crying before trying again.

Section Eleven

~~~~

"She's so strong-willed," Ann murmured as the chair took over the rocking to give her legs a break. "I have to find the switch in her mind that will bring her back to us."

The usual worries about scanning a human's memories passed through her mind, What if she senses me rummaging around? Might I accidentally alter her future, or cause her mind to shut off? Or worse still, nudge the child nearer to death!

To influence or not, that is the question, she smiled at her clumsy paraphrasing, safe in the knowledge that Mr Shakespeare would not mind her borrowing it. Besides, she chuckled lightly, "Didn't you once or twice or even thrice claim my sayings for your own, you naughty man!"

And you would not be lost for material in these tempestuous times for sure, she mused while hoping the child was not sensing her thoughts. The poor mite could well develop that skill, she reflected. It's amazing what talents can emerge in moments of stress. And I feel she's clever and driven. So who knows what she might achieve if properly encouraged?

"And thank you for helping her along so far," Ann whispered to a woman she had to meet, where her words went off into the vast and mysterious ether as if to seek her out.

Another brief lull in the child's tears saw Ann grab the chance to scry Susanna's mind.
~~~~

Susanna’s surfacing thoughts rose and fell like spumous waves. The spray turning into lots of little shooting memories. Droplets that led off to different ages, moments and people, where many petered out like tiny ripples. Others were more disturbed, seemingly thrashing and striking against mental rocks. But all were brief and like sea eels, they were not easily caught. Some similar memories joined together to return to the surface. Where again like it had earlier one name kept rising from the swirling confusing array, Sally.

It was clear the child was thinking about the woman. But was it an attempt to rid herself of the memories, or were they, in their clumsy way, encouraging Susanna to return to this world?

Ann had no way of knowing, other than to sense a sadness. Or was it a deeply profound regret overlaying them? Regrets for leaving Sally behind, maybe? Ann wondered.

If it is, then that just might be the life raft that will float the child back to us. It just might be, she hoped, with very un-Angel-like crossed fingers.

Section Twelve

~~~~

I like the feeling I'm getting of you Sally, the librarian... And I think we should meet, Ann decided as she picked through yet another ghost-memory of a younger Susanna pushing open the library's tall glass door. Yes, we need someone like you working here who is able and willing to tease out a child's potential.

But then she guttered as she spotted the child’s reflection in the glass… Oh, my Father! Susanna’s so thin. Then looking down at the child’s legs she realised that she was still too thin to be healthy!

The same concern seemed to touch Sally’s face as the child paused at the desk to say hello before making her way to the rows of bookshelves.

Now and then Susanna paused from browsing the titles to turn and look at the desk. A nice feeling arose from the memory as if the child was happy because she caught Sally smiling at her. Or so Ann believed. Sally has certainly taken a shine to Susanna she decided.

As Susanna passed along the shelves now and then the memory would shake as if she was nodding her head where occasionally it was joined by a sense of surprised little chirps. Or of her breath catching in awe? Or in fascination, maybe? Whatever it was the memory held a strong sense of focus, as if her eyes had grown round in wonder.

But by the looks of things, Ann smirked when parts of the memory started moving along more quickly. I’m guessing there’s a bunch of books
~~~~

there you don’t care for. And what is wrong with maths or poetry, Susanna, Ann wondered as she read the titles.

There were tuts and groans too as a book was hurriedly replaced on the shelf, although Ann noted with a smile, she was always careful to return the volume to the correct spot. There were also lots of smiles from Ann and frustration too as she followed the child’s thoughts and movements around the Library.

She was finding it hard to understand the sequence of things. Without time markers the memories confusingly passed back and forth between events. One moment Sally was wearing a pink dress, then green, blue or the polka dot one she was presently wearing. The moments could well be days or weeks apart Ann knew full well, but they were chained together by the cause of the child’s troubled thoughts. Maybe her respect for Sally and her regrets. Where again Ann hoped. Regrets for leaving Sally behind when she joins her brother in death? Could it be?

Most times Susanna seemed to leave the library empty-handed. Then on one visit, Sally asked the child what interested her. She had simply replied, “I dunno. I guess I’ll know when I see it, right.”

When the memory suggested the child had shrugged, Ann laughed, only for her heart then to go out to the child when the memory revealed she smiled as she said shyly, but boldly. “But when I do find one I like, you can help me read it, can’t ya.”

Sally’s expression said it all. How can I not like and want to help this bright and yes nicely forward young girl? Where she seemed to reach a decision. Looking over at a shelf of ‘Did you know’ books her eyes rested momentarily on a large volume that was sat in the middle section.

“Try this,” she said, presenting it to Susanna. “It’s mainly pictures about the rainforests, there is some easy-to-read text there too. But I think you’ll like it and I’m rarely wrong about such things.”

True to Sally’s well-meaning boast, Ann sensed it was very much to Susanna’s liking. It was obvious Susanna was hooked immediately by the exotic far off and colourful world displayed inside. That part of the memory lingered long on the pictures of children with smiles as bright as a sunlit spring, while they hugged pet sloths or stood proudly with little monkeys perched on their shoulders.

Caught up in the memory, Ann sensed an affectionate and longing sigh from the child as if she had fallen in love with the children’s happiness and their simple but organised way of living. It was obvious it had surprised her too.

“Look how clean they are and they live in a jungle”. She said to Sally, before laughing. “And look. they’re cleaner than me blimming scratty bruvver is…”

And there the memory stuck before finally wavering and then shrivelling as if in pain, before dissolving into a sorrow-filled misty greyness where once again the child’s chanting started.

Wait for me, Bro. Wait for me cos I’m coming to ya. Wait for me, Bro. Wait…

Section Thirteen

~~~~

As if memories of Sally had risen once more to push against the child's sorrow, her tears suddenly caught and her confusion calmed. Instantly Ann entered her mind to continue scrying.

Once again Sally dominated the memories. She was helping Susanna read the comments that linked each rainforest picture or colourful illustration together to explain how loggers were destroying the rainforests on behalf of large corporations for profit. Sally then helped her understand what that meant and together they read other stories in some of the library's magazines detailing how the indigenous tribes were being chased away from their rightful ancestral lands. Or killed outright so a business could steal their trees and farm the stolen land.

Susanna was furious. Ann could feel strong anger coming out of the memory and that does not happen often. Human memories are usually one-dimensional and mostly unemotional until they settle. But not this one of Susanna's. The rising outrage Ann felt had ignited the child's imagination and drove her on to want to do something to help the rainforests and the people who lived there and tended them. And so, Susanna's innate need to fight a cause which Ann guessed had been waiting to rise like it so often does in children was gladly given its freedom.

From then on Sally became her co-conspirator and researcher into whatever cause might have grabbed Susanna's attention on a given day. There were many to choose from, Ann noted with a smile, along with pride for this quick-witted child. The more Susanna learnt, the more she confided
~~~~

in Sally and their friendship grew and blossomed.

Ann was quite taken with the child's progress and intelligence, enough to mutter. "Good for you Sally, you were exactly what the child needed."

Then she swelled with even more pride for Sally and Susanna as the child's growing knowledge encouraged a sense of focus to rise from that innocent apathy that children are often encouraged to have for their surroundings. One invariably imposed by adults whose own awareness has been bludgeoned by a need to continue serving the Norman's imposed way of life - you will slave for us until you die. So, Ann was not surprised when during one visit to the library Susanna suddenly declared hotly.

"Sally, this planet's mine, and those money gits ain't going to take it from me. They ain't, I tell ya Sally…, I tell ya they ain't. I'll put a bleeding stop to em I will."

To Sally's amusement, Susanna ended it with a determined fist pump, only to add another one as she declared. "And that's a flipping promise you can buy a flipping burger wiv!"

"For me, it will have to be a flipping vegetarian one," Sally offered with a laugh as she hugged the child, against the rules, of course, but what the heck this once - to which Susanna replied seriously.

"I've been meaning to ask you about that, wiv you being a vegetarian and all, ow Sally can I be one?"

I cannot in all consciousness let this child leave this earth before her true time Ann vowed. She has so much to offer the world, as the world can offer her if she opens up to it.

Then Ann made a decision that would cause her to break her father's, The Father's…, *well*..., not rule so much… but guidance on matters of free will, especially when it involves revealing her origin to humans.

Humans, he reminds her often, need to arrive at their beliefs about such things in their own way and time. If they know who you are they will lose the free will to do that. And you know my view on free will - it should not be hindered. Or so he has scolded gently countless times when she abuses his advice. Yet… she still pushes against it.

As I'm about to do now in the cause of the greater good, she internalised as she decided. I'll not ask for your blessing as you'll question my motives. 'Are you trying to save this child's earthly life so that she might grow to help you save the planet?'

And you would be right, as always, she smiled. But on this occasion only to an extent, Father of mine, she smiled again. I already wanted to save Susanna. But knowing what I do, I would say saving her is imperative and must be seen through. And so Father I'm about to do something that you will not approve of, she smirked. But you'll come around to the idea eventually, I know you will. Although only after I've done it, she smirked again. So I suggest if you're looking my way, you'd better go and look elsewhere for a while.

Love you…

Section Fourteen

~~~~

"Amy", Ann mind-called or mind-talked as Angel's both firstborn and second tier refer to their ability to speak mind to mind, spirit to spirit, heart to heart. "I need your help. I need you to find a librarian for me, her name is Sally..."

“You don’t…!” Ann then chuckled when Amy replied. “Oh, I know her very well. Sally takes my self-defence classes and what’s more… She’s here with me, now!”

“Perfect! Bingo! Brilliant!” Ann cheered, though quietly for Susanna’s sake. How fortunate for Susanna and me, she considered, and just let The Father try and tell me off now! Fate, she chuckled to herself again, Yes that word fate which he does not care to hear, but nevertheless, it has nicely intervened.

“Bring her to me will you Amy, if you can. I need her here urgently to help me with young Susanna.”

“Err…” Was Amy’s immediate hesitating response. “Isn’t that against The…”

“...Yes and No”, Ann cut in hurriedly. “And if you keep quiet about this I will not tell the Father that you enjoy drop-kicking misbehaving humans now and then. So, do we have a deal?”

“Deal,” Amy laughed back. “And once I’ve explained the why and what
~~~~

and if Sally is OK with it, or if she doesn’t just simply pass out or lose her mind - we’ll be right there with you my misses manipulator!”

Section Fifteen

~~~~

True to her word six minutes later Amy fizzled into the room holding a hysterically giggling and alternatively burbling and very confused Sally in her arms.

Declaring gaily, “We’re here”, she gently lowered Sally down upon the pink princess bed that lay, or rather stood, opposite Ann’s rocking chair, while the poor woman mumbled, “But, you can’t be… you can’t be…”

“We are Angels and you’ll be alright in a minute,” Amy said with a reassuring pat on the back of Sally’s shaking hand. A comfort that was straight out of Ann’s how to deal with human’s textbook. Which made Ann smile while Amy explained.

“Travelling the Angel’s highway gets humans like that, especially for the first time. Right, Ann? But you just be careful now and try not to move too quickly. Give yourself a chance to reassemble properly.” She suggested teasingly, “Else you might find your arm drops off or something.”

“Amy! Don’t you dare tell her that…! The poor women will believe you!” Ann shrieked into Amy’s mind before smiling at Sally who had suddenly frozen on the bed and was sitting as white and as still as a fly encased in ice.

“Sally,” Ann said lightly to the frazzled young woman, who appeared much younger in real life and she realised with a twinge of guilt, vulnerable too.
~~~~

“It’s OK to move - if you were going to fall apart you would have done so by now,” she added with laughter.

“And you can trust me. For that’s the last thing I want to happen to you,” she said in a lowering voice that quickly changed to a conspiratorial whisper. Which then continued to drop as she uttered, “Because I need your h…”

Then her voice cut out altogether, although Sally was sure Ann’s lips were still moving like a bad ventriloquist. Then suddenly the word, “Susanna…” crackled loudly inside her mind.

She’s speaking INSIDE MY HEAD! MY HEAD! INSIDE IT!

“...is willing herself to die…” Ann continued explaining as she pushed Sally’s startled gushing aside.

“...And she’s not doing a bad job of it either,” Ann confirmed regretfully, “and I can’t get through to her properly. I thought with your connection you might succeed where I’ve failed… I’m hoping you’ll like to try. Will you?”

Section Sixteen

~~~~

Many questions surged through Sally's mind. Each one vying for position with the intenseness of unruly gangs of drunken acrobats and gymnasts seeing who can fill every inch of a building's lift first. With difficulty she latched onto one as it somersaulted through her mind at exactly the same time as Ann did - how does she know I know Susanna?

To Sally's increasing unease, Ann replied, "I know because I'm an Angel, it is my gift to know such things…"

Amy looked at her askew while mind-talking… "ANN… YOU CAN'T TELL HER THAT! You can't!"

"I can hardly say I rummaged through Susanna's mind and found her there, now can I." Ann retorted.

"This way is better. She will expect that sort of thing of us anyway. And it's not a lie, is it? After all, being able to read a human's external thoughts is one of my gifts, isn't it? And don't forget I can read an Angel's mind too when I have a need. And I just might do that next time John is around you!" She teased. "So play along my dear Amy please - and on this occasion, vagueness is best I think."

"You get more like your Father every day!" Came Amy's quick retort, which landed with a sense of laughter in Ann's mind.

"And you wash your mouth out, girl", Ann laughed back. "And you just
~~~~

wait until I tell him you said that!”

“He’ll laugh and agree with me and you know it. Then he’ll ask why I said it, and I just might have to tell him!”

“Truce?”

“Truce!”

“Sally”, Ann explained, “Susanna has had a bad shock.”

Immediately Sally tried hard not to think *and so have I Ann* in case it was picked up, but regardless Ann caught her drift and her eyes briefly twinkled with humour, although it was short-lived.

“She witnessed her mother killing her twin brother earlier tonight,” She explained still using mind-talk.

“And she is desperate to die to be with him. She’s shut everyone and everything out. She’s strong-willed and she’s willing death to come to her. I need you to talk to Susanna. Tell her you have new information about the rainforests - or something. Tell her you need her help… Say whatever you feel you need to say to bring Susanna back to us. Can you do that?”

“I’ll try,” Sally offered weakly. She was not only reeling from the news but also the urgent appeal emanating strongly from Ann’s startling sapphire blue eyes which bore into her soul while stoking the coals of her tattered slightly scared spirit into new life.

God knows how I will, she thought as she sensed she was on the point of going into shock herself. But this is for Susanna, she needs me. Then forming out of her rising but raked spirit came the realisation that she needed Susanna too. The child had lightened her otherwise boring days in a decaying library

that was slowly sinking beneath the weight of electronic books and social media, where the child's enquiring mind had filled her with renewed purpose.

Suddenly her determination to save Susanna and bring the child back from her shook, her heartbreak and the suffering of unimaginable horrors, was as strong, if not stronger, than Ann's own.

"OK, Ann…," she agreed firmly while slipping off the bed.

Pausing for a beat to regain control of her wobbly legs and fighting a whirling, swirling head, filled with the wonders of the moment, all of which begged for exploration, *but not now*, she knelt beside Ann and Susanna.

"...I'll do whatever I can to help."

Where the rocking of the empathic chair immediately eased, lest it crushed Sally's fingers or toes.

Neither of the trio voiced the thought, let's hope it's enough. But like the sharp tang of freshly passed gaseous wind, the sense of its malodorous presence spread like drifting marsh gas to foul the ventricles of their hearts.

Section Seventeen

~~~~

If the weight of misery were a winter coat Susanna's would be porcupine quill lined. With the material woven from torture implements stolen from the Bastille along with other such things used daily by humanity to torment, maim or kill. She was literally dripping with pain and distress as she stood shivering on the bank of the River Styx. Or some such similar location, where she sought the boatman who might take her to the other side.

Well-being's antimatter pooled around her poor cold feet in ever-widening puddles before joining the fast-flowing, yet stagnant, mercury-like waters of the starless and moonless midnight-coloured river, where she imagined her twin Bro was waiting on the other side.

She could not see him but she was certain he was there. They were joined, they were one, they were the same. He would not voluntarily desert her, just as she would not him. She simply needed to call the boatman, that is all, and then we'll be together again.

The story she read with Sally said this is what you do when you reach the river, but without a name for the boatman how can she call it except with her heart? The story had not revealed exactly how to summon the boatman. So all she could was wait impatiently on the bank hoping to be spotted by CCTV cameras, or whatever they use here. Let the boatman come soon her distress wished. Please let it be soon.

I'm coming Bro her heart called, wait for me, I'm coming, wait for me.
~~~~

Suddenly she had a memory of yelling those very same words to him. They were much younger then and he was swifter and longer of leg at the time, although not anymore he isn't, her spirit groaned. He had mouthed 'RUN SIS' as he legged it out of a shop clutching a bar of stolen chocolate, where he left her frightened and tearfully trailing far behind. But she had called 'Wait for me Bro' and he came back to take her hand where together in whoops of delicious adrenalin-filled laughter they fled their imaginary pursuer.

He will come for me. He will hunt down the boatman. He will, he will come for me. Come for me Bro, find me, Bro, take my hand again, find me, Bro. He will come for me, he will, he will.

But the far bank thickly wreathed as it was in mysterious uncertainty offered no sign of him or the boatman.

Section Eighteen

~~~~

I'm alone in this cold dark dismal place which even the dead are ignoring, she thought dismally, as she recalled the story Sally had helped her read that described how long lines of souls here queued for the boatman.

Her spirit sank a little further as she recalled her friend. Sally. Sally… I'm sorry Sally but I have to go to my Bro.

I have to.

Then worryingly she wondered, or is it the ferryman? But does it matter? Does it? Maybe? Maybe it does, she decided. Maybe it's like using the correct spell before a magic door to open it? If I get the calling right will this dark then magically turn to light? Will I see my Bro on the other side waving as the ferryman floats across in his raft or boat - oh hell what is it?

His raft? Boat? Ferry?

Whatever it is - will I see it coming for me? Will I? Will I…?

No, she decided a few moments later. Nothing is working her spirit spat dejectedly as it sent her spiralling down into an even deeper darker despair.

That's it, that's it! That's the answer, she suddenly realised. I need to die on this bank properly. I need to leave my body behind. I remember now! Isn't that what the story said? Only those who are truly dead can freely enter. Am I right? I am? Yes, I am, I must die. I must.
~~~~

Wait for me Bro, wait while I die, wait for me to catch you up. Wait for me Bro, cos I'm coming. Wait for me, Bro. Wait.

The thick unwelcoming waters of the river teased her tantalisingly as it snaked soundlessly by. 'In me' it taunted, 'is the death you seek, come into me girl, come into me…'

Oh! It's true, her despair yelled, encouraging her to lift her foot to wade in. Her bones could feel the truth, her tongue tingled with death's sour metallic bloody taste. Hair which had come adrift from her ponytail which Crane Fly, her brother - she was his Stick Insect, loved to pull teasingly, clung like decaying ivy to her tear-dampened face. Where it too bore the fusty, musty metallic smell and bitter tang of death. As for her thin unprotected legs? This place of death which had longing caressed them some while ago had chilled them to the bone. Her feet ached as well, while her fists twisted by cold cramps had balled tightly as if the heat from her desire to die had seared and shrivelled her tendons into a pugilistic death grip pose.

She was more than ready to step into the water. All she had to do was move.

One step, two steps, three steps in.

But just as her foot was about to touch the surface she paused. Or, as she then realised while swaying uncertainly above the river. It's not me, I'm not hesitating…

I've been stopped!

Once again she tried placing her foot down on the surface and into the death-granting water. But there was no connection. The river appeared to be shrivelling as if backing away from her. The harder she tried to touch the

water the further the surface wrinkled and crinkled away.

Why…? What…! How…!

Confused and shocked she stepped back to gather her ragged spirit before trying again.

Why did that happen? She wondered. Why?

Her spirit knew the answer for suddenly it lifted. Then her eyes saw what her spirit had sensed.

The far bank still appeared as a veil of mournful grey swirling mists but gone was the frightening intimidating peeps she had of an impenetrable flat dead blackness that lay behind it all. Faintly, but growing more in strength as she stared, the far bank began slowly to burst into a rebellious celebration of life.

Of life.

Life!

Not death…

Life!

Section Nineteen

~~~~

Two things then occurred simultaneously which knocked her spirit. But not down, up, sending it soaring to meet the sensational thrill of a hummingbird in splendid metallic colours suddenly appearing to hover just inches from her face. Where the light in the bird's tiny eyes sparkled like gems as it looked into hers.

Wow! Do they sing too? She wondered while yearning to hold it.

But if it was singing she was not able to hear it for the sounds of a rapidly growing forest suddenly erupted into loud but chaotic joy, drowning out her remorseful inner music, replacing it with many of the wonderful songs that creation has to offer.

As they grew and the sounds played around her, the river started to flow fast and clear while bank-side vegetation grew rapidly to blossom and bloom in lush splendour. Fish jumped out of the river to snatch at flies, while flocks of shrieking many coloured parrots skimmed the water to skilfully and gleefully grab a drink on the wing. One or two sadly disappeared, pulled under by unseen jaws, but others soon came to take their place.

Refusing to be left out, monkeys with long curling tails jumped from canopy to canopy, chattering and calling loudly while chasing through the trees. In the distance, she could just make a village like the one in the book Sally had shown her. And yes, her heart sang, there’s the children with their pet sloths and monkeys, look at them all smiling. Oh, it’s great her heart sighed. What a magical place this is, she thought as riots of colour exploded
~~~~

before her eyes and wonderful noises created music she had never heard before and it was far better than a pop song because this was alive, real and happening here and now. This living world and all its music and colours and gorgeous smells and dramas will not be stopped ever, she thought, cos it wants to be and so it will. Or so it seemed to her enthralled eyes and rapidly beating heart.

I'm in a rainforest and it brilliant, it brilliant her spirit cried in joy. It's everything I had ever hoped it would be. This ain't death as I imagined it. But if it is, it's a paradise and I want to be a part of it. I do!

Then with the crash of a rapidly sinking heart, she watched the loggers arrive.

They were acting as heartlessly as Sally had described. Quickly, swathes of forest fell beneath their brutal ways. Animals un-homed wandered lost. The children and adults ran as their village was destroyed. Some seemed to fall as if dead. Her heart screamed in outrage as loudly as the sad shrieks of the parrots who were fleeing never to return. The forest's fantastic choruses were consumed by the whine of saws, the thud of axes and clanks of chains, where what was not worth cutting down men set afire. Dark acrid smoke filled the air as the monkey's calls were replaced by the tuneless cheers and ribald laughter of men working full out to the loud, bossy score, of their un-orchestrated greed.

The hummingbird returned to hover briefly before her but this time its eyes were filled with such sadness that her heart crumpled. But then the spirit of her brother appeared to wave and call to her, his voice dripping with anger, bleeding with concern and tight with panic as he jumped from weeping stump to shocked stump on the other side of the now dead-looking river.

"Hear me Stick girl. You're needed to stop this. I couldn't stop er, our

mam, from silencing me, but she ain’t silenced you. You still ave a voice. You can stop this from appening, an you must! Do it. You must help the forest, Sis. I’ll be here waiting for ya when you’re finally ready to come and face you’re passing proper like, but that ain’t now…, got it… It ain’t now.”

He just managed to get in a quickly shouted "It’s good ere Sis, you’ll like it and mind to look out for a little of me inside you, cos I’ll be there. I’ve been promised see…' before he faded away, along with the forest and the river.

Shocked, her eyes flickered open where they fell upon a patch of Ann’s tear-dampened kingfisher blue t-shirt. It felt so comforting that her eyes closed again. But this time she fell into a peaceful and deeper well deserved sleep.

Section Twenty

~~~~

"That is what I call a good joint effort Sally", Ann said with a wide grin. "Thank you. You described the forest so well that I was there as well. You were brilliant."

“Now, would you like to take her from me and put her to bed? I really think she would like to know you did that. Then we can talk about your future here with us because you do have one, if you agree. Which I hope you will. In fact…” Ann said, as she grinned and assumed full manipulative mode. “...I know you will. You’ll want to keep an eye on Susanna, and you have lots of questions about Amy and myself too, I know. So,” she laughed, “I guess it’s a done deal then. Right?”

There was not a single No, or an if, or even a but from Sally. With a straight face and a heart that was pounding yes yes yes, she took the child carefully from Ann’s arms and laid her upon the pink princess-styled bed. Then, after tucking the dusty pink sheet gently beneath Susanna’s chin and pulling up the little pink and yellow kitty’s bedspread, she turned with a crafty smile blessing her lips.

“OK, Ann, I’ll join you,” she said, “but only on one very… very… big condition.”

“Which is?” Ann asked intrigued.

“You change the colour scheme of this room and quickly. She absolutely abhors pink! Her tastes are decidedly tomboyish. I know for a fact
~~~~

that when she wakes and sees this she'll be so repulsed by the colours and frilly style and so furious that you think she is that sort of girl, that to escape further outrage to her eyes and sensitivities she'll promptly return to that river! And we don't want that now, do we, Ann…?"

Then a few moments later she said with a smile as she looked over at Amy. "And now tell me this. Here I am in my training leotard, purseless, sweaty and shoeless, so how the heck am I meant to get home? And I'm not going by that Angel's Highway thing again either. It turned me inside out and I'm still not sure if I'm truly me."

"I'll drive you," Ann said, "and we can talk more about your future on the way."

"If Ann's driving you, you'll wish you'd chosen the Angel's highway instead," Amy teased before fizzling out quickly.

"She's only joking," Ann explained.

Immediately Amy's amused voice rolled gently into Sally's uneasy mind. "I wasn't joking. So you make sure to buckle up. And it's best to keep your eyes closed too."

Section Twenty One

~~~~

Susanna awoke in the morning to the hues of a blue room and the tang of fresh paint. *Where the labour came from and how they were able to work so quietly is best left to the imagination*.

Then she saw Ann's sapphire blue sparkling eyes and the pinks and whites of her bright endearing smile, while her ears were filled with the faint but insistent celebratory buzz of a happy fly's wings.

Then she spied the stack of 'Did You Know' books left on the bedside table. Trust you Sally, her fragile smile suggested as she glanced at the titles. But most wonderfully of all, was the sense of a small part of her brother resting inside her, along with his favourite football perched on the toy box at the end of her bed and still thoughtfully muddy from his last play.

She wasn't healed and probably never will be fully, Ann thought as she watched her. How can she properly heal after seeing her brother killed by a mother who should have loved them? Then she recalled the conversation in the car ride with Sally. Probably egged on by a father who simply did not care for anything unless it had a beer can attached. Or was capable of being injected, or touched where he should not?

While Ann silently ranted, Susanna was slowly finding the will to go on, along with a growing awareness that those around her will help in whatever way they can. But best of all, I'm not alone, she thought as looked shyly up at Ann.
~~~~

Although right now I dearly wish that damned fly would cease its excited buzzing - just for a bit…, please Mr. Fly. Could you…? And would you look away too while I rid meself of these 'ideous little kitty PJs?

Ann could not help but smile and think Sally you were spot on as she watched the child's face break into a disgusted grimace as she began pulling off the PJ top.

"There's a camo-t-shirt in the wardrobe waiting for you and black jeans and camo-trainers too. Sally suggested they will be more to your taste. I hope you like them."

"Oh, I'm sure I will."

And thank you, Sally… Susanna whispered inside her head, relieved that her last worry was over. She was not going to be forced to wear pink frilly happy-clappy born-again crap as the impeccable smiles on the faces of the glistening goody-goody people she met when she arrived yesterday had suggested they might favour putting her in.

Then shrewdly she added,"...And thank you for the books - I owe you big time, I really do. Don't I, Sally? Cos I know it was you with me down at that river."

She nearly peed herself then, in fact, she did a bit when Ann's voice spoke directly inside her mind… "And to you Susanna, Sally has just replied, you're so very, very welcome young lady and we'll get together later, I promise."

But even that joy was pushed aside when she felt her Bro's laughter erupting inside her as he royally teased his stick insect for wetting herself.

He’s with me! He’s really with me…! OMG! He said he would be… and he kept his promise (for once!).

Maybe I can go on, she thought.

And maybe now I will.

Section Twenty Two

~~~~

With a beautiful unguarded smile which lifted Ann's smile higher, and with a heart that suddenly felt the joyous enchanting music wrapped within the buzz of the fly's wings, Susanna reached out gladly and purposely for the t-shirt.

“I’ll leave the rest on the bed for you. When you want it, you’ll find a little washroom behind that door there in the corner,” Ann explained. “I’ll be waiting outside for you. Call me when you’re done.”

Yes, Susanna decided with a sheepish smirk as the door closed behind Ann, I must try to survive. And I will try. But first I need to clean meself up a little I think. But I swear this, I do, I’ll scream the blimming place down if the towels are pink! I promise you Bro I will. An if I do you’ll ear me for sure! An that my now younger than me crane fly Bro…, but then she paused when suddenly she realised what she had just thought.

But she did not cry, or crumple with despair, though the sense was there like a pin jabbing the back of her eyes. But instead of returning to the river which she realised she dreaded the idea of, she found the strength to smile broadly as she recalled his favourite tease. Or was he stirring it up one last time? It was so hard to tell, she reasoned as the echo of his past ribbing flowed through her mind, ‘I’m six minutes older than you stick…’

And she thought then, just as she did every time he teased her with it, you were only older than me cos your blimming big ead blocked mam’s passage and stopped me climbing over ya an getting out first. That’s why…
~~~~

But now I’m older than you, Bro, and taller too, and those my dear Bro are facts you can go an buy a veggie burger with, and that’s a promise. An I do love you, Bro, I do 'onest. An I’m really glad a little of you is 'ere with me, it’s brill. An it’s 'elping me cope. But now if you don’t mind, I need to get dressed and get on wiv me living, just like you told me to do down at the river. So, I’ll catch ya later my little younger now than me Bro, she teased with softly dampening eyes and gently aching heart, which she knew would never truly be whole again, but I’ll get by Bro… I will… And that’s a promise too.