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Skin Flicks

Helen Maston

July 1, 1997

Mary,

The walking tour, even the first day, seems very strenuous. I'm quite exhausted and now wonder whether tracing my roots was such a great idea. The backpack is unbelievably heavy, really tiresome, and I would discard most of this gear if I had somewhere to leave it. As it is, I plod on, setting myself goals per day, seemingly easy steps, yet in reality very heavy going. Tonight I stay with an elderly couple in a bed and breakfast, lodging over their farmyard shed in a makeshift bedroom. I know everyone told me to book ahead, but I had no idea of my route, or ultimate destination, other than the area in which I believe my parents lived before their split. I have developed red welts about my wrists and ankles, which I think must come from the thick gloves and socks I wear to protect myself from the near arctic temperatures the English enjoy in mid summer. A strange bruising has also appeared on my arms and the lower part of my neck, which must be from the backpack bouncing around as I haul it off and on during the day. This said, I am quite enjoying being alone, thinking about a time of which I remember so little, and hope as I come closer to my destination familiar scenery will allow memories to surface which until now have been hidden. I have no recall of my mother, and hope to return with at least a part of my life with her intact in memory.

Annie

June 6, 1997

Dearest Annie

I must say now that I would much prefer you to stay here, and not take this trip in a gap year. It is ridiculous that a girl with your ability and HSC score should take herself off, losing all the momentum you have gained in your studies. You also place yourself behind your friends who go up to university straight from school. What would happen if the place you have gained is

unavailable next year. You may be greatly disadvantaged. I have spoken to Jane and Belinda and they too cannot see the reason for this desertion of all you have

Worked for. I am asking them to speak to you, as I know you will listen to them, if not to me. We have been so close for so long, our tiny family unit, and I hope my concern for you, my love, will enable you to see the stupidity of your course. England holds nothing for you, and never has. This is and always will be your true home.
Your loving father

NORTHUMBERLAND HERALD

SUNDAY JULY 31, 1981

Yesterday clothing was found matching that of the overalls and sneakers last worn by little Julie Mayhew before she went missing over two weeks ago. The items had been covered with earth and leaves and stuffed under a log in Bickam Forest, thirty miles from her home. At this stage, police are holding grave fears for her safety.

July 4, 1997

Dear Mary

I have had to consult a physician regarding the welts I mentioned earlier. They have now become weeping sores, and the doctor believes I must be allergic to the wool in both socks and gloves. I have thrown them to the four winds, and invested in thin cotton ones, in a green shade, loosely woven, and hope to feel improvement almost immediately. The bruising remains, and has turned a sickly purple colour, from the soft brown which it was, but gives me no trouble, unlike the welts which itch, as well as dampen any material around them. I have awoken some mornings with the sheeting about them gooey and greyish yellow. Yuck. On a lighter note, my journey moves apace, and I expect to be close to my destination in another fortnight. The country here is extraordinarily beautiful, yet the chill remains in the air, the skies so low and dark they often seem only metres above my head. It can be quite oppressive. My evening stops at inns and farmhouses allow me to regain the strength lost during the day, although I have met no-one with whom I can share the excitement of finally ""coming home"". I sometimes feel I have an aura about me which repels the friendliness extended to others staying in the same inn or hostel. Maybe it's my concentration on my goal which keeps people at arm's length. I quite like the solitude, but look forward to perhaps meeting distant relatives who may still live in the surrounding area.
Annie

July 8, 1997

My dear Geoffrey

I write to you in the hope that you will see a lass who consulted me last Friday. She will be coming up your way in less than a week, and I would value your opinion on the irritations about her wrists, ankles and neck. She is finding it hard to walk and to move her hands in a free manner. Her previous physician (she is on a walking tour) believed she had an allergy to wool, but the change to cotton clothing has done nothing to alleviate her symptoms. The markings are quite shocking, with deeply penetrating ulcers through which the bone is visible. The discharge is high although no sign of cellulitis or infection is present. I cannot believe the child has been able to travel so far on foot. She is adamant that she not halt her progress, however, so I have given her a referral to you, as head dermatologist at the Clinic. She knows to ring you before her arrival, and I would appreciate your fitting her in to your busy schedule as I don't believe she should wait any longer to be seen by a specialist. Thank you for your trouble. I await your assessment with interest.

John Palmer

NORTHUMBERLAND GAZETTE

MONDAY 5TH AUGUST, 1982

Discovery of a toy belonging to six years old Julie Mayhew close to a disused mining quarry, fifty miles from her home has prompted police to issue a statement regarding Julie's disappearance over one year ago. It is now believed the child was abducted and murdered, her clothing removed and hidden in bushland, whilst her remains are buried elsewhere. The stuffed bear, believed to be Julie's, which went missing with her, had been secreted under rocks. In a bizarre twist, the toy's paws were found tightly bound with rope, fragments of which were scattered about the area.

July 2, 1997

Mary

Today I feel I am close to journey's end. The fields, the paddocks, all seem vaguely familiar, the forest which borders this county has about it a feel of home. And thank God. I can hardly go on. My ankles and wrists are now so hideous, the bruises on my body so widespread, that I almost faint in pain and disgust as I wake and try to rise each morning. A kind doctor has referred me to a specialist in the next town, and I see him tomorrow. I have not yet met anyone who knows anything about my family, but I just know this will happen soon. I feel it, if you can believe it. It's like my mother is just around the corner, that I'll know her as soon as I see her, her face so familiar, even though outside present memory. I feel a

weird excitement, but I think that would be normal for anyone finding themselves truly for the first time. If only I was well, and able to move with ease, I would be running toward the next town. I have thrown off virtually all my luggage, and now travel with only a small cotton sack tossed over my shoulder, holding only the bare necessities, so I find it strange that the bruising has not improved, but grown much worse.

Annie

My darling,

Mary has told me of your ill health, and I beg you to forget this ridiculous journey and come home. I cannot bear to think of you alone and unwell. I insist you return immediately. If I do not hear from you within three days, I will fly to England myself and bring you home personally. Please don't make me do this. I have only your welfare at heart. Ring me the moment you receive this.

Father

July 14, 1997

Dear John

I have examined Annie Mayhew and cannot believe the girl has walked so far with such terrible injuries. I say injuries, as they do not appear to be an allergy or infection of any kind, but wounds made physically by beatings, and rope burns. I have questioned her for many hours about these marks and lesions, but she is adamant they appeared only as she began her trek. I would like to see her hospitalised, but she insists she must complete her journey, and as she has come so far, and has less than a few miles to travel, I have asked her to return to me in two days for treatment. I have reserved a bed for her at the Clinic, and you are welcome to make contact with her at any time. Meanwhile, I have asked her to call me if she notices the slightest worsening of her condition.

Geoffrey Robins

July 15, 1997

Mary

Tomorrow I enter the forest surrounding this town, as I feel a pull almost physical drawing me. The wind is fierce at the moment and I would normally be wearing my warmest clothing, but I have almost no garments left, having dumped them at various times as I walked. I have left myself with only the flimsiest shirt and a pair of overalls, with light gym shoes for walking. However, I don't intend to be long, it's just a scout around to see if the area reminds me of anything I did as a child. I certainly don't expect to see a relative hidden up a tree or my mother in the bushes. I'll then be heading

back to the dermatologist at the Clinic, as he has assured me he can fix this revolting 'disease' I seem to be stricken with. I've had communication from my father that appears quite hysterical, which I shall ignore. He'll calm down eventually.

Annie.

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