

1

Christine fled from her home after another row with her mother; the tension between them had become too much to absorb without some sort of escape. She automatically ran towards the seafront, where solitude and the wind over the shore would help her regain her equilibrium.

The road seemed endless as her angry feet raced to the beach. She crossed the road, zigzagged through the dunes, then across the railway line which trailed along the edge of the beach, without caring if a car or train was coming to mow her down.

The stones under her feet ground menacingly as she ran along the water's edge, the drag of the shingle forcing her to slow down. The comforting sound vibrated through her body, till exhaustion took over.

Oh, the freedom of open spaces. No one trying to turn you into what they want you to be, Christine thought. She slowed to a walk, reliving the row with her mother. Why do parents conspire to crush every ounce of confidence out of their charges?

Christine was thinking hard, trying to categorise the thoughts buzzing around her head. Should she do everything her mother told her, or should she follow her inner thoughts of revenge and live out the powerful drives which were beginning to take over her life and disrupt every aspect of it, to a point beyond control?

The chilling sea air cooled her temper. As the salt water thrashed at the beach, it reminded Christine of how much she had in common with the sea; calm on the surface, with

an undercurrent that ran deep and strong, capable of formidable rage – like the rage she had felt when her mother questioned her about the packet of pills she found in her dressing table drawer.

‘Where did you get them?’ her mother had screamed.

‘Mind your own business,’ Christine had yelled in a screeching rasp that made her throat sore.

‘You will tell me where you got those pills, or I will tell your father his sixteen-year-old daughter has put herself on the pill without discussing it with me first!’

Her mother was getting more upset and frustrated with her self-willed demon offspring. This was just another episode to prove that she could no longer enforce any kind of order over her daughter.

‘Why do you do this to me? Other mothers don’t have the trouble I have with you,’ her mother had pleaded, trying to hold back her tears.

Christine knew she was being difficult but she could not help herself. What she craved most was her mother’s approval and understanding; if she knew all her daughter’s secrets, it would be an impossible wish that could never come true.

Christine looked at her watch; it was coming up to half past five. In twenty minutes her father would be home from work. Approval from him was not up for consideration; the way he had made her feel over the past four and a half years was total despair, guilt, shame and a sense of utter worthlessness.

But now life was starting to change. She could feel the effects of her burgeoning womanhood, and the attention she was attracting from the boys at school was beginning to rebuild her external confidence.

She had thought about going to the police, but would they believe her? She had threatened her father and it had worked to an extent, but her own insecurity would not allow her to put any questioning by police to the test.

ONE MAN'S POISON

Christine headed along the beach in a loop back towards home; she had regained some of the composure she needed to go and face her parents.

The walk along the stones towards the boathouse was becoming busier. Crowds were now a problem for her; she felt exposed, as though people could see into her soul and see what was buried there and how unclean she was.

It was a cool summer evening and all the other school kids were out, girls hanging around as boys played on their skateboards. They looked happy, a feeling that had deserted Christine a long time ago. The promenade was the ideal place for fun, where after school all the local kids congregated in the summer.

Christine walked past the flat piece of plain concrete where a group of boys tried to practise their turns and jumps, her feeling of exposure becoming acute. The bigger boys were looking at her, wanting to impress, not aware of the self-conscious feelings they were provoking.

Terry, a boy she knew from school, ran over and walked along beside her.

'Hi.'

'Hey,' she replied. 'You're going to break your necks on those stupid things.' Her eyes remained glued to the gravel in front of her feet as she spoke.

'Well, have you got any better games to play?' Terry suggested. He had learnt to give as good as he got with Christine, but he couldn't quite get used to her sharp tone.

'I may have,' retorted Christine without looking up, her answer sounding more confident than she felt.

When boys talked to her she felt empowered to play games, to test the new-found effect her looks had on them. Her hair was long and her tall, slim body, already mature for her age, was shaped to catch the attention she craved.

It was getting late and the walk home was taking longer than she thought it would, but she didn't care. Stopping

to gain courage, she sat on the shingle and looked out to sea, hugging her knees close to her body, searching the movement of the water for the way and the strength to face her parents, her calmness deserting her again.

Is there another girl across the seething expanse suffering like me, thinking my thoughts and wanting release from the inner turmoil? The water beckoned and repelled, with a sinister muteness.

All the things that had happened at home churned in Christine's head. What would happen next, how would she react? Her stomach tightened at the thought of more confrontation.

She stood up and walked on. After only a few yards, which seemed like miles, Terry walked up behind her, his skateboard still under his arm.

'Are you coming to the club tonight?' he asked, wondering what was going through Christine's head. He could tell her thoughts were somewhere other than the beach. Terry looked ahead self-consciously at the hazy evening sky. Christine carried on walking.

'I don't know – what's going on down there?' Christine replied, still preoccupied with the terror of going home. She wasn't sure if she had the strength to go out anywhere.

'I have to go home first,' she added quickly, thinking she may need company later. 'I have to sort something out – my mum keeps having a go at me.' A sigh escaped as her apprehension built.

'What have you got to sort?' Terry probed, a tone of forced interest in his voice.

Terry had been trying to gain some headway with Christine. He had been out with her a few times, but could not make up his mind if she liked him or not. Any degree of rapport had been unsuccessful, and she was making it hard work for him – wind-ups, mood changes, rebuffs and come-ons made him unsure, but his preoccupation with her was

ONE MAN'S POISON

mounting as her rejections and the games she played messed with his head.

'It's personal, really,' she replied, not wanting to sound too off-putting. She knew she had been rotten to him in the past, but now was the time to start using men instead of being used. She needed someone to be with, and to give her strength and power. Solitude was good, but not right now.

'Call me later, after supper, I'll tell you then.'

Christine jogged on to the corner of her road, then turned and shouted back, 'Make it about eight', brushing her long auburn hair from her face for maximum effect.

Christine approached her front door, slightly out of breath. 'Here we go,' she mouthed to herself, putting her key in the lock. She pushed the door open slowly and stepped inside. She shut the door quietly, looking over her shoulder to make sure the coast was clear, then slipped off her shoes and dashed upstairs to the sanctuary of her room.

Another confrontation with her mother was to be avoided if possible; the thought of going out was beginning to appeal, and a row could spoil her momentary confidence.

'Is that you, Chrissie?' her mother called, no evidence in her tone of the earlier dispute.

'Yes, Mum,' Christine whispered.

She could hear her mother coming up the stairs, with quick, purposeful strides.

'Can I come in, Christine?' her mother asked, opening the door before Christine had time to answer. She crossed to the bed and sat on the edge looking up at her daughter, who was undressing for a shower.

'Why don't you talk to me, Chrissie?' her mother probed. 'We can't go on rowing over everything. We could have discussed you going on the pill, before you took it on yourself.'

'I just wanted to do something for myself, Mum,' Christine cried, faking her tears.

‘But why go on the pill?’ her mother countered. ‘You’re too young for boys.’

If only she knew, Christine thought.

‘Well, you know I have trouble with my periods – sometimes the pain is too much,’ she sobbed, tears running down her face. She had learnt to make herself cry, realising in the past that it was the only way to make her father stop.

‘I went to Dr Vine,’ she continued, ‘and he suggested I go on the pill. He said it could help alleviate the pain and he gave me a prescription. He told me to go to the family clinic for a check-up every six months.’

‘Why didn’t he tell me?’ her mother asked, feeling excluded from her daughter’s life.

‘Because I asked him not to. I am grown up now, you know,’ Christine added.

‘Oh yes, of course,’ her mother sighed. Rising from the bed, she bent towards her daughter and kissed her on the cheek. She had not kissed her daughter for a long time. She went to the door and paused.

‘I’ll talk to your father and see what he says.’

‘No, Mum!’ Christine shouted. ‘Please don’t, it’s private.’

She did not realise how sensitive her daughter was. *Perhaps I’m being unreasonable*, her mother thought, believing every word her daughter had said.

‘Okay, I’ll wait and see how we get on,’ the reply came, as she closed the bedroom door behind her.

Her mother went downstairs, calling up, ‘Don’t be too long, your supper will be ready soon.’

Sarah Tyler had felt a distance growing between herself and her daughter; she could not put her finger on the reason why, but it had been a long time since she had been able to show affection without Christine pulling away in cold resistance. She was pleased with herself that she had handled this inevitable second confrontation without losing her temper.

ONE MAN'S POISON

She now also felt closer to Christine and realised that perhaps she was not accepting the fact that her daughter was growing up and should have more of her own space.

Christine finished undressing and went to the bathroom, locking the door behind her. She turned on the shower, testing the temperature with her hand; she dropped her towel and stepped under the torrent of warm water and began lathering her body with her favourite soap. The advertising propaganda was true, it made you feel soft and sensual; men would not be able to resist.

She rubbed her soapy hands over her face and down her shape, as if being caressed by her man, whoever he was – at this precise moment he was just a fantasy, all her idols rolled into one.

She held her face towards the rush of water, the pounding drops running down her face and the length of her hair, splashing in a soapy mixture at her feet. As the water washed over her she began to feel cleansed, all her fears and bad memories fading in the ecstasy of the liquid heaven.

A loud knock at the bathroom door brought her back to reality. A shot of fear ran through her as if the water had turned to ice. She felt like a frozen spear had cut through her, piercing every nerve.

‘How long will you be, Christine?’ her father asked, trying to open the door as he spoke. ‘I want to have a wash and shave.’

Christine always locked the door, a force of habit now. It was the only way she could relax when indulging in the private things that a girl likes to do. It was not safe to be undressed in this house, unless you were on the right side of a locked door.

‘I won’t be long,’ she answered, hoping that would be enough to make him go away.

‘Well, let me come in and get some aspirins from the cabinet, then,’ her father asked hopefully.

‘No, go away!’ Her hostility was unmistakable. ‘I won’t be long, I’m just drying off.’ *I’ll get that bastard one day*, she thought. *If Mum wasn’t here, he would be impossible*. The thought of him outside the bathroom door made her shiver.

Christine turned off the shower and grabbed a towel, now seething with anger at the interruption of her fantasy.

She dried herself hurriedly and wrapped the towel around her body, tucking the loose end down her perfectly formed cleavage. She put her ear to the door, listening for movement: silence. She made a dash for her bedroom and locked herself in. She had reclaimed the key after many searches through the house for the hiding place where her father kept it. Now Christine took the key everywhere with her, it was safer that way.

She continued to get ready for her night out, her decision to go already made in her head. The anticipation was making her excited, her anger dissipating at the thought of Terry’s company and getting out of the hellhole that was home. She could have her fun by teasing him mercilessly at the club, flirting with the other boys.

She removed the towel from her body and dried her hair with it, then tossed it on the floor. As she went to her dressing table to get some clean underwear, she caught sight of herself in the mirror and could not resist an assessment of her developing womanhood. Standing upright in front of her full-length mirror, she combed her hair with her fingers, pushing it into shape. She appraised the slim waist, her tapered thighs and full, firm buttocks that looked so good in her tight jeans. Her breasts were firm and large for her age. She posed provocatively for herself, testing what effect it would have on Terry or any other boy she fancied if they were here.

She stopped and gazed at herself, still fingering her wet hair, holding eye-to-eye contact in the mirror with her own demon inside that would not go away. The comforting

appraisal she had made of herself now turned to sludge as she tore her eyes away.

'Christine! Your supper is ready,' her mother called impatiently.

'Just coming,' she replied, shaking herself free from inside her head. Quickly dressing, she ran down the stairs and sat at the table without saying a word and began eating. She looked up at her mother and father, who sat at opposite ends of the table in silent boredom. A feeling of hatred came over her.

Nothing to say to each other, dead from the neck up, she thought. The chill of home was in the air; even the clock on the mantelpiece sounded lonely, ticking to itself.

'I'm going to the youth club tonight,' Christine announced, hoping there would be no third degree.

'Who are you going with?' her father asked.

'A friend is coming round for me and we'll be coming home together, so you don't need to worry.'

'All right, but don't be too late, you have school in the morning.'

'Okay.'

'Ten o'clock at the latest,' her father affirmed.

Christine finished her supper and returned to her room to complete the transformation from girl to woman. She could not wait till eight o'clock.

Putting on some music for company, she practised her make-up and changed her hairstyle numerous times. The phone rang downstairs, then she heard a shout of, 'Terry will be calling at eight-fifteen.'

Why is he going to be so late? Christine thought, her feeling of insecurity returning. She went back to her make-up, trying to rebuild herself, avoiding eye contact with her mirror image. *It will take more than lipstick to change how I feel.*

The knock on the door could not have come soon enough. Christine had done and redone her outer self, her hair and

clothes – dress or jeans? She settled for jeans; they squeezed her skin tight, which comforted her. Then she sat on the bed, killing time, still not convinced of the final result, folding her arms to stop herself shaking.

After one final minor adjustment to her hair, Christine rushed down the stairs and dashed out the door before her parents knew what had happened.

‘Bye!’ she shouted, slamming the door behind her. If her father had realised her friend was a boy, he would have asked more questions and possibly stopped her going out at all.

She grabbed Terry’s arm. ‘Come on, let’s go,’ she hissed as they ran till they were out of sight of the house.

They slowed to a walk to catch their breath. ‘What’s the rush?’

‘I’ve just got to get away from that place, they make me sick.’

‘What do you mean?’ Terry urged, surprised by the bitterness in her tone.

‘They just do. My dad’s a fucking creep,’ she said in a flat matter-of-fact voice. It was the first time she had been able to form words to describe her father. It was not a pleasant thought to realise that the one person who should protect you was responsible for your physical and mental torment. She wished he was dead.

Christine put her hand in Terry’s.

‘I can’t be too late home tonight,’ she said, pulling Terry closer. ‘I’ve had a bad day.’

‘Look, Christine, why don’t we go back to my place?’ Terry suggested. ‘We could talk if you like – or listen to some music,’ he added, hoping for some solo time with Christine.

‘Maybe later,’ she said, with a non-committal air.

They walked towards the club in silence, Christine wondering whether if Terry knew the truth about what went on at home, would he still be so keen to get her alone.

The guilt, that familiar nausea and self-loathing, consumed her once again. She couldn't conceive that anyone could like her, let alone desire her, knowing she was used goods, second-hand and damaged.

She squeezed Terry's hand, trying to reassure herself. It was becoming more difficult to maintain her confidence, which she gained when looking in the mirror. When faced with the outside world, it deserted her. She felt the ugliness she kept inside was there for all to see as her face exposed the truth.

Her natural desire to be outgoing was now being suppressed, the need to withdraw from everyone who could read her thoughts and be invisible was overwhelming.

'Come on, dreamer,' Terry said, pulling at her hand as he pushed open the door to the scout hall, the old wooden building that doubled as the youth club. It had been stained with wood preserver, which gave it the appearance of a large garden shed. The inside of the hall had been decorated in light blue and yellow, the colours of the scout troop, and it gave a lighter feel than the outside's first impression.

There were pool and tennis tables around the edges of the hall, and an opening in the wall at the far end served as a bar, leading on to a spartan kitchen in need of some modernisation.

The surface of the bar was littered with empty beer and coke bottles, the beer bottles smuggled in by the boys to add to the fun of the evening; if they were caught, they would be thrown out.

Christine entered the hall with dual feelings; walking into a room full of people made her feel nervous and want to turn around and run away back to solitude. No one can drain your mind when you're alone. But her new rebel demon rose up and drove her forward.

As soon as they stepped inside, they were descended upon by Terry's older brother. Although he was not as good-

looking as Terry, Alan's well-built frame was very apparent, his shirt sleeves rolled up, exposing large defined biceps. Christine could not resist the power in this boy and immediately flirted, her confidence buoyed by the new attention. Her inner thoughts were neutralised for the moment.

The conversation was solely directed at Christine, and Terry could see how she was making up to his brother, obviously trying to annoy him.

'Fancy a game of pool, Chrissie?' Terry asked, trying to break back into the action.

'No thanks,' Christine replied dismissively, 'but you go ahead.'

'Okay, come on Alan, I'll give you a game,' Terry offered with a defiant tone in his voice.

The two brothers went to the farthest table in the hall, and set up the game.

Round one to Terry, Christine thought, looking at Paul, another boy from school who had been standing on the edge of the threesome.

This is not what I had in mind, she said to herself, her confidence beginning to wane.

'Do you fancy a coke?', Paul asked, for want of anything else to say.

'Yes, that would be nice, thanks,' Christine said stiffly, walking straight over to the bar.

'Here you are, that's better than a coke,' he said, handing her an unopened bottle of beer.

'Can you open it for me?' she asked, feigning frailty to squeeze all the attention she could out of this failed situation.

She took a drink from the bottle, the fizz clinging to the back of her throat. She scanned the room, forcing down a second swig of beer. She tried to focus on Terry and Alan, who were totally oblivious to her presence, and stood detached from Paul, who waited self-consciously.

ONE MAN'S POISON

They seemed to be having much more fun than her. It was like someone stabbing her with a jealousy knife, and twisting it in her stomach to add more pain.

Christine's insecurity came flooding back. All she had wanted to do was feel good about herself; now all she wanted was to get out of this place, out of herself, away from people watching her.

I should have gone with Terry to his place, she thought. Now look at me, making a mess of things again. If only she could start thinking straight, she might get what she wanted for a change.

She took more sips from the bottle, searching for the confidence to go over to Terry. She decided to take positive action. Grabbing Paul's arm, she pulled him towards the pool table, not wanting to go alone. The beer was starting to give her a little more power.

She strolled with as much naturalness as she could muster, her hand still on Paul's arm for added strength.

The brothers continued their game, not noticing that Christine was watching them, content in each other's company.

'Can we go, Terry?' Christine asked, interrupting their game.

'But we've only just got here, and I'm in the middle of a game...' Terry replied, trying not to sound too dismissive.

'Please, Terry, I don't feel too good, I want to go,' she pleaded, dropping Paul's arm as an afterthought.

'Let's go to your place,' Christine whispered in panic. Solitude was something she needed, but being really alone, with only her thoughts – that would be too painful right now.

Terry looked up at Christine's face and saw a look of terror he had not seen before.

'All right then, give us a minute, we'll just finish this frame.'

Christine stood uneasily waiting for them to finish. Paul

tried to hold her hand, but she did not respond, draining the last drop of liquid from the bottle.

‘Do you want another?’ Paul asked.

‘Yes, okay,’ she replied eagerly.

The second bottle went down easier than the first, and it gave her something to do with her hands, helping her to handle the wait.

‘Come on then, let’s go,’ Terry said. As Alan potted the black for the last time, he gave Christine a searching stare, trying to work out what was wrong with her.

They left the club and walked silently towards Terry’s home, holding each other close, but for different reasons. Christine offered the last of the beer to Terry. She’d had enough – too much beer made her need the toilet.

Terry’s house was quiet; his parents had gone to the cinema and his brother was still at the youth club. He had the freedom to do what he wanted, with a girl he had fancied for what seemed forever. His brother was always there to steal his space; he knew Alan could have Christine if he wanted. Now he could take the lead without interference.

‘Do you want a cup of coffee?’ Terry asked, not sure what else to say; chat-up lines didn’t come easily to him yet.

‘Not really,’ she replied, moving closer to him, yearning for attention, longing for reassurance that the ugliness she felt inside was not there for him to see.

He held her in his arms and kissed her gently, leaning back against the kitchen cupboard to maintain his balance. His nervousness made him unsure on his feet; he felt slightly light-headed with excitement.

A surge of blood coursed through him; there was just one thing he wanted.

‘Why don’t we go to your room and play some music?’ Christine asked shyly.

‘Yeah, why not,’ Terry muttered, embarrassed by the

ONE MAN'S POISON

obvious bulge in his jeans. They made their way upstairs, Terry trembling with anticipation.

'Which is your room?' she asked, trying to see through the gloom at the top of the stairs.

'Straight ahead,' he said, pushing her shoulders lightly through the door.

They entered the room and Terry closed the door behind them.

No locks needed to keep this man out, Christine thought fleetingly, dismissing the thought of home.

Terry stood motionless against the door as Christine went over to his bed.

'Do you like me, Terry?' she asked as she took off her loose jumper, kicking off her shoes. Terry could not believe the question – she knew he liked her. She started undoing the buttons of her top slowly and purposefully, revealing her best assets. She shed every garment as she had practised at home, during those private experiments to test her attractiveness. She knew he liked her, but she needed to hear it, because she did not like herself.

To Terry she seemed like an expert at arousing him. He could not believe his eyes. This vision was slowly appearing in front of him, naked and beautiful.

Moving towards her, he fumbled with his shirt buttons, hastily trying to strip off without letting his trembling show. He wanted to impress her with his experience, hoping that with his few past girlfriends he had learnt enough.

Christine came closer, helping him with his shirt and the belt holding up his jeans. Hurriedly he pressed her back on the bed, his jeans still hugging his ankles. He fumbled for direction; Christine responded. Her sighs of acceptance gave him confidence to resist his natural urge and to concentrate on pleasing this girl the best way he could.

Christine's passion rose quickly, lost in the need to be

loved, to be consumed, to give till there was nothing left; nothing left to be used, nothing left to be stolen.

Terry could feel the tension drain from her body, her dark eyes searching his face for signs of her control. She relaxed her fingers, releasing the sharp nails from the flesh on his back.

Christine lay still in Terry's arms, consumed in the peace she felt. *I could lie here forever*, she thought, tears forming in her eyes. Her first boy, holding her safe from torment.

Her power achieved at last, she could manipulate and have her way. As they sunk into a sleeping void, revenge could wait. Time overcame them as it soaked up the hours that sped by in an unknown mental peace.

The front door slammed.

Christine awoke with a fright. The room was black, the only light from a luminous clock face on the bedside cabinet, which showed 11.17.

'Christ!' Christine cried, sitting up and giving Terry a thump in the back.

'Wake up, Terry, quick, it's bloody late. I'm going to be in big trouble.'

'What's the matter?' Terry asked, trying to see Christine in the darkness.

'Look at the time! It's the middle of the night and somebody has just come in, I heard the front door slam.'

Terry rubbed his eyes, trying to wake up. 'Oh, that was probably Alan. He always makes so much bloody noise when he comes in.'

'I don't care who it is, all I know is you had better get me home quick.'

They dressed in silence and waited till the house was quiet, then crept down the stairs and out of the front door, closing it without a sound.

The walk home was fraught with increased dread, each

step bringing her closer to the inevitable battle, her new-found power now a distant illusion.

They arrived at Christine's house and she looked at Terry with an unspoken plea, her fear rising.

'Can you get in without them knowing?'

'I've got a key, but everything makes a noise in that place, you can't open the door without a loud click, and the floorboards on the landing creak. I know because my-'

She stopped in mid sentence. She always knew when her father was creeping around; the floorboards would creak and then, the door of her bedroom would open... A shudder went through her at the thought.

'Here goes,' Christine said, kissing Terry full on the lips. Then she pushed the wrought-iron gate closed behind her with a metallic thud.

'For Christ's sake,' she hissed, flapping her arms in panic.

'Good night and good luck,' he whispered, wishing he could go inside with her. The thought of her facing her father on her own did not seem fair after such a lucky night.

The door opened with a dull click and Christine stepped into the hallway darkness, climbing the stairs with leopard-like stealth. Pausing at the top, she tried to remember which boards creaked. One step forward ... silence. Phew, not that one! Each step towards her bedroom brought her closer to safety. She could feel her heart pounding. As she took one more step, the door to her bedroom opened and the light went on.

'Oh God!' Christine shouted in fear.

'Where the hell have you been?' her father shouted. 'Do you know it's past midnight?'

'I know,' Christine said, pushing past her father. He grabbed her arm as she entered her room, her dash for safety stopped at the first try. She tried to hit him with her free hand, something she had never done before. It

felt good, but he was too strong for her; he swung her around and pushed her back onto her bed. He let go of her arm as she fell, hitting her head on the wooden headboard.

Christine squealed with pain. Her father dashed forward. 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' he cried, stroking her hair and trying to comfort her.

'Don't touch me! Get away from me!' she cried, feeling braver than she had ever felt. She tried to force a tear, but she was too angry at bumping her head.

'Where is Mum?' Christine pleaded, knowing she would have been waiting up for her; she always wanted to know where her wayward daughter had been.

'She's gone to stay with Granny, she's not well again.'

Christine's heart sank to its lowest ebb. The thought of him violating her this night was too much to contemplate. Terry had been the first boy she had let touch her, and she had felt safe. Other boys were a phantom that needed to be exorcised. She needed to see if it was different, and to see if she could be the motivator, the initiator and controller of the act.

'Where have you been?' he asked again, regaining his composure.

Christine jumped from her bed, brushing aside her father's hand, and ran to the furthest corner of her room.

'Get out of here!' she shouted, the tears now pouring down her cheeks.

'Where have you been?' her father asked again as he rose from the bed, his knuckles whitening with anger.

'I've been out. I've been out with a boy,' she cried, feeling sure this was not the right thing to say, or the right time to say it.

'Someone else has been doing what you have been doing to me for years.' She blurted out the statement without any thought, but now she had, she wanted it to hurt, hurt like

no one had ever hurt before, to pulverise and torment in ecstatic revenge.

The degree of pain on his face took Christine by surprise. *At last*, she thought, *a piece of retribution*. The joy she felt shocked her; she laughed at another kind of power.

He stopped and looked at his daughter in disbelief; he had never really thought about the day she would go out with boys. He thought she would always be his, mind and body, and that's the way it would stay.

'Any boy who cares to try gets his way,' she screamed at her father, 'and they all make me feel better than you do. You make me feel sick!' Her rant was gaining pace with her rising confidence in her new-found supremacy.

Her father ran at her, his face contorted with jealousy and rage. He slapped her face and head in uncontrollable savagery at the realisation that he no longer dominated; she was lost forever.

Christine sank to the floor, trying to cover her head with her arms to protect it from the slaps that kept coming, her head and arms now stinging with pain. The slaps stopped.

There was silence. She stayed crouched on the floor, the sound of her father's laboured breathing dominating the space between them. She waited for the slaps to start again. The breathing faded as she heard her father leave the room.

A demonic smile spread across her face. She felt different, an unnatural lightness around her lips. The strain had gone, replaced by a smile. The pain of the slaps dissipated into pleasure as the reality overcame her – life would never be the same again. She now had the power, and she would be in charge of what happened to her body and soul from now on. The inflicted pain of each slap increased, the cost of each one worth it, somehow invigorating and cleansing. But the hollow grip in her chest was still there, painful and empty.