

There's been a pattern in her mind since she can remember. It fits into the folds of her brain, woven through, embedded. Like a soft lace veil it rises from behind her eyes when she first wakes and when she enters the dark room of sleep it drops gently down. Over time, she's come to think of it as a friend, a confidante. She tells the pattern her deepest nightmares, her wildest dreams. She recites the narrative of her day to it. She whispers to it about the things she loves, the things she fears, the things she can't name. In her mind, in those folds of her brain, the pattern is always rippling.

Her mum is in the kitchen trying to climb on the kitchen bench and her knee slips off the edge, over and over. Her mum is still in her pyjamas. The fleece ones with fat pink pigs on a pale blue background. They are bobbed all over, and too long, so her mum's feet look even tinier than they really are.

"What are you trying to get, Mum?" Maggie moves forward and touches her arm. Her mum lets out a small sigh and flinches.

"I wanted some marshmallows. I thought they were in this cupboard. They were there last week. They were there behind the noodle packs and the coffee. I remember seeing them." She tries to climb again and Maggie watches the skin on her knuckles whiten. Her fingers tremble. "I like the softness, the way they melt on your tongue, the floury sides."

"I know, Mum. They taste good. But we ate them a couple of days ago, remember? We sat in bed and read *The Great Gatsby* and dreamed about what parties we would throw and who we would fall in love with and we ate marshmallows with hot chocolate and you laughed because I spilled it on the doona and you said it looked like the cat had thrown up over it and I laughed because we don't have a cat." She pulls her mother to her chest and smooths her hair down the back of her head, taming the wild bounce. She wonders what patterns her mother has in her mind. Jagged and sharp. Pushing at the folds of her brain with sharp nails and cruel words.

"We should get a cat, Maggie, we should get a big fluffy ginger who does nothing but sit on the end of the bed and yowl for food. We could call it Ginger

Ninja the Whinger.” Her mum laughs but it’s the sad laugh. The empty one. The one that tries to plug the holes in her memory.

Maggie feels her pattern swell in her head, pushing at the sides, trying to escape. Its colours wick out through her tears but she dabs them away. She takes her mother to bed and tucks her in. There’s an empty bottle of Jack Daniels on the bedside table where the lamp used to be. There are three other empty bottles and each one has a candle stuffed into the neck. Ribbons of wax decorate the necks like bizarre tribal jewellery.

“I’m sorry, Maggie,” her mum says over and over.

“It’s okay, Mum. Try to go to sleep.” Her shoulders are bony under the pyjamas, solid knots. Maggie tucks the sheet under her Mum’s chin and she turns her head towards the table where the bottles stand.

“Take them away,” she says. “Take them away, smash them. I’ll get a lamp. I’ll get us some more marshmallows. I’ll get us a cat.” Tears leak from the sides of her eyes, dropping diamonds on her lashes that tipple over and run along the wrinkles at her temples. “I’ll get them tomorrow.”

There is a track through the grass to the garbage and recycling bins. It is dusty in the summer and a quagmire in the winter. Today it’s just hard under foot. There’s been no rain for weeks. The grass is as brown as the dirt under it. When she drops the bottle into the recycling bin it breaks into pieces, leaving just the rounded bottom whole. She lets the bottles fall from a height and they all smash. The coloured glass shards mingle, kaleidoscopic. She wonders if that’s what her mum’s mind pattern looks like. Chaotic, overlapping, glinting.

In the old lop-sided shed there are no seedlings, no tomato plants curling around stakes, no bags of blood and bone signalling that life comes from death. There are lots of bottles on the rickety shelves. Several bags of cement on the floor. Empty plastic pots, some with desiccated soil stuck to the inside. She steps inside where the air is cooler. Tucked on the bottom shelf is a bag of

potting mix. In her hand it's flexible, warm. Her pattern expands and she imagines fresh shoots and tiny white flowers.

She sees growth.

The moon hangs silver in the air and there's a silence in the small hours that she finds comforting. Her phone provides the light, her pattern the guidance. She mixes and plans and cultivates, pressing and designing and digging and pulling. An hour a night. An hour a day. It takes months. Baby steps. One foot in front of the other, but always moving forward. Each morning, she looks at her handiwork and her pattern blossoms, spilling over the edges of her brain's grooves.

Her mum is sipping tea, mug in both hands. Her skin is yellowy, dark smudges under her eyes. Curls of her hair spring from the sides of her head. Her hands tremble but she smiles between each sip.

"That smell is so good, Maggie. What are you cooking?"

"Soup, Mum. I told you."

"Chicken soup for the soul? Men are from Mars, women are from Venus? How to win friends and influence people? Eat, pray, love?"

Maggie stirs and laughs. There are piles of books in her mum's room but she doesn't know how often she reads any of them.

"Eat soup, pray for my salvation and love my daughter? Eat, pray, love. Yes. Yes."

"I used the first carrots and baby zucchinis."

Her mum's face shines and when her mouth makes an 'o' her wrinkles smooth out. She looks so much younger, happier. "You grew vegetables?"

"I told you before, Mum. And flowers."

The chair's legs scrapes across the floor and her mum stands up. She takes Maggie's hand and together they walk to the back door. There's a sharp blue sky outside. Too bright for her mum, who shields her eyes.

"You did all this?" Her voice is like the broken shards of glass.

"I did all this," Maggie says. *I really did all this.* She looks at the pots of pansies spilling colours over the edges. She looks at the trellis where she's tied beans and planted tomatoes that reach up to the sun. The fluffy tops of the carrots poke up from the vegie patch between the shed and the bins. White zucchini flowers stud the vines. Against the back fence, she smiles at the golden faces of the sunflowers, nodding on the breeze.

Her mum steps onto the path and looks down. "It's pretty," she says. "It's so pretty and colourful. It's like a river of stones, snaking through the garden. I love it."

"You've seen it before, Mum," Maggie says, tapping her toe on the smoothed upturned bottom piece of a green wine bottle, buried into the concrete path. "You walked on it ages ago, remember?"

Her mum shakes her head. There are fresh tears streaking her cheeks. "I can't remember? Why can't I remember?"

"It doesn't matter, Mum. I'm glad you like it." She takes her hand. "Walk with me."

They step over the concrete, dotted with the beads of glass, a mosaic of her mum's habit. A soft reminder. The pathway takes them from the house to outside world through a garden flourishing with plants. Green with life. There's promise underfoot. There's hope bursting along the edges.

They walk to the gate and turn to look back. Her mum leans into her side.

"Sometimes," she says to Maggie, "sometimes, in my mind, there's like a sharp feeling that hurts when it pokes through the reality. It shreds my mind. It stings. I can't explain it but it's like something lives in my head." She laughs

wildly, throws her arms up to her ears and scrabbles at her hair. “I sound mad. I am mad. I’m the maddest thing. Poor Maggie. Poor you,” she says.

“It’s okay,” Maggie says. And her pattern swells to fill the spaces so that the pathway and the flowers and the plants are cast in a golden sheen. “It’s going to be okay.”