

I Remember, Daddy

The harrowing true story of a daughter
haunted by memories too terrible to
forget



Katie Matthews

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Аннотация

Katie's memories of her childhood were patchy. She'd always remembered her father's physical abuse, his anger and violence. But there was a lot she had forgotten. And, at the age of 24, after the birth of her son, the memories that were gradually unlocked with the help of a psychiatrist were far more terrible. Katie had grown up living in fear. She'd never forgotten the icy coldness that used to spread through every vein in her body each time her father grabbed her roughly by the arm, or punched and kicked her mother. Or the occasion when she was 3 and he'd locked her in a bedroom for an entire weekend, without food or water. Or the night when he'd brought home a young woman he'd met at a bar, pushing her mother down the stairs when she dared to complain and then locking mother and daughter out in the snow, dressed only in their nightdresses. There were many, many incidents of violence and cruelty that Katie had never forgotten. But when she started a family of her own, and began to see a psychiatrist

to help her cope with the debilitating post-natal depression she was suffering, she was forced to recall memories that were even more horrifying. Memories of the sexual abuse her father had subjected her to from the age of 3, which her mind had locked away for over twenty years. And memories of all the other horrific incidents from her childhood that she'd dared not remember until then. During the months that Katie remained in the psychiatric hospital, the locked doors in her mind gradually opened, releasing the trauma from her past and finally enabling her to start to understand the reason for her self-disgust. This is Katie's story – the sometimes harrowing but ultimately inspiring true story of her journey as she comes to terms with memories too painful to remember but impossible to forget.

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Chapter One

The sound of Jackie's laugh was a distant, muffled echo, and as I tried to focus on her face, the room began to spin. Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain in my stomach, as though someone had stabbed me with the redhot blade of a knife, and I gasped.

'Katie? Are you all right?' Jackie's voice came in waves, as though someone was placing a hand over the speaker on a radio and then lifting it away again. I tried to answer her, but it felt as though my tongue had swollen and was blocking off the back of my throat so that I could barely breathe. My whole body seemed heavy, and as I reached out my hand to try to steady myself on the reception desk, everything around me faded to blackness and I dropped to the ground like a puppet whose strings had been abruptly cut.

I don't know how long I'd been lying on the floor before I opened my eyes and saw the blurred image of Jackie's anxious face. She was leaning over me and her lips were moving, although all I could hear was the loud pulsing of blood in my head. I tried to sit up, but a firm hand on my shoulder pushed me gently down again, and then a voice that wasn't Jackie's said, 'Don't try to get

up, Katie. You've had a nasty fall. Just lie still for a minute.'

And that was when the hammer started pounding violently in my head, making me feel sick and disorientated, so that it was a relief to lie back and feel the solid floor beneath the rough, ribbed-cord carpet. I closed my eyes, and when I opened them again, the room had finally stopped revolving and I could see more clearly both Jackie's face and that of another work colleague who was kneeling on the floor beside her.

As my senses gradually began to return, I became aware of a warm dampness that seemed to be seeping through the back of my skirt. The last thing I could remember was standing talking to Jackie, who'd been telling me something funny that had made us both laugh, and I supposed I must have been holding a cup of coffee, which I'd spilt when, presumably, I'd fainted.

Someone had placed a coat over me like a blanket, and I felt for the edge of it with my fingers and tried to say the word 'coffee'. But the only sound I made was a hoarse, unintelligible whisper. I swallowed and tried again, and this time Jackie leaned forward and gently covered my hand with the coat as she said, 'No, Katie. Don't have coffee now. Wait just a little while, until you're feeling better.'

I tried to shake my head, but the movement made the hammer inside it pound more vigorously, and so, for a moment, I lay completely still, waiting for the wave of nausea that was washing over me to recede. Then, twisting my shoulders so that I could reach down towards the hem of my skirt, I touched the dampness

on my leg. I must have banged my arm on the reception desk as I fell, because a sharp pain like an electric shock shot from my elbow to my wrist. Again, I lay completely still, waiting for the worst of the pain to pass before I pulled my hand out slowly from beneath the coat and raised it in front of my face.

At first, I couldn't identify the dark stain on my fingers. It wasn't coffee, or even, as I'd been so afraid it might be, my own urine. And then I realised it was blood. A jolt of fear made my heart start to race and I felt a sense of total weariness. I rested my hand, palm upwards, on top of the coat that covered me and whispered Jackie's name.

'Yes, love,' she said immediately, leaning over me again and smiling a small, reassuring smile. 'I'm still here, Katie.'

At that moment, someone must have noticed the blood on my fingers, because a hand slowly lifted the edge of the coat and I heard a sharp intake of breath, followed by a man's voice saying, 'Oh my God! There's blood everywhere. It's all over her legs. Where's that sodding ambulance?'

Someone shushed him, and then Jackie put her hand on my arm. 'It's all right, Katie,' she said. 'You probably cut yourself when you fell. I expect you caught your leg on the side of the desk. We've called an ambulance just to be on the safe side, so that they can check you over and make sure you haven't broken anything. You're okay, though. You're going to be okay. Don't worry.'

But I could see clearly the worry in her eyes.

She stroked the top of my arm distractedly as she added, ‘Someone’s gone to find Tom. He’ll be here any minute. You’ll be all right, Katie.’

I wanted to tell her that they wouldn’t find my boyfriend Tom, because he was out doing a delivery. But it suddenly felt as though a weight was pressing down on top of me, forcing the last few ounces of energy out of my body. So, instead, I just closed my eyes and let the hot tears run out between my eyelashes.

They didn’t make contact with Tom before the ambulance arrived, so I went to the hospital alone. And as I lay in the emergency department, staring up at a patch of flaking paint on the ceiling above my head, I tried not to be afraid.

It sounded as though a dozen people were all talking at once, and then someone laid a long-fingered hand on my arm and said, in a slow, precise voice, ‘I’m sorry, Katherine. I’m afraid you may be losing the baby.’

Finally, I had something to focus on. But although I could understand each of the individual words the doctor had spoken, I couldn’t make sense of what he’d actually said. I wiped my hand across my eyes, brushing away some of the tears that were wetting my hair and dampening the pillow under my head, and then I turned to look at the doctor.

‘What baby? There is no baby. I can’t ...’ I sobbed a single, choking sob and whispered, ‘I was raped when I was 18. And I was ... damaged. So I can’t have a baby.’

‘I’m sorry.’ The doctor touched my arm again and I wondered

for a moment whether he meant that he was sorry because I'd been raped or because he'd made a mistake about the baby I couldn't have. 'You're definitely pregnant, though,' he said. 'We need to take you up to the operating theatre to have a proper look.'

I felt the small knot of panic that had been lying like a lump of lead in my stomach start to unravel, sending expanding threads of fear up through my chest until I could taste its sourness in my mouth. I pressed my face into the pillow and, for a moment, thought about giving in to the miserable weariness that was threatening to overwhelm me, and sleep. Instead, though, I turned to look at the doctor again, reached out to touch his white-coated sleeve and said, 'Please try to save my baby.'

When I woke up from the anaesthetic, Tom was sitting beside the bed, his hand covering mine, and as I looked up into his eyes, I knew immediately that there had been a baby and that they hadn't managed to save it. I felt an almost physical sense of sadness and loss, which seemed out of all proportion for something I'd never really known I'd had. And as Tom leaned forward to touch my cheek with his fingers, I burst into tears and cried as though my heart had broken.

Chapter Two

Tom worked in the despatch department of the company where I'd been working for the last few months. We'd fallen for each other almost as soon as we met, and within a few weeks I'd moved in to live with him at his mum and dad's house. That

was the way I did everything in those days; I was impetuous and made quick decisions, determined to live my life to the full and to throw all my energy into doing the things I wanted to do. It was always all or nothing with me then, and I knew I'd been really lucky to find Tom. He was a shy, lovely guy, with a large, loving family that soon became the family I'd never really had.

Tom and I had been together just less than three months when I collapsed that day at work. We hadn't been using contraception, because I'd told him that I'd been raped when I was 18 and that, because of the damage that had been done to me, the doctor had said it was very unlikely I'd ever be able to have children. It was a sadness I thought I'd come to terms with, and Tom had seemed to accept it too. But, when I had the miscarriage and we lost the baby that day, I could tell he hadn't been as resigned to the prospect of not having children as he'd pretended.

On the day when I was taken to hospital after fainting at work, the doctor told me, 'You were about eight weeks' pregnant. Unfortunately, though, it was ectopic – the baby was growing outside your uterus. I'm afraid it never really stood a chance.'

It was a shock to discover that I could conceive after all, although there was still the possibility that I'd never be able to carry a baby to full term. And I was surprised, too, by the profound sense of grief I felt when I was told that I'd lost the baby I'd only known about for a matter of minutes. My reaction seemed to border on the self-pitying, and feeling sorry for yourself wasn't something that had been allowed by my father.

No one likes a whinger, he'd told me more times than I could count. So, when things went wrong, I'd learned to pick myself up, dust myself off, and start all over again. Now, though, I felt as though I'd suffered a heart-breakingly important loss. And what also seemed particularly daunting and unnerving was the thought that I was going to have to reconsider all the assumptions I'd made about who I was and who I might be in the future.

Of more immediate and pressing concern, though, was the fact that I'd have to start using some sort of contraceptive. So, six weeks after I'd lost the baby that had been growing silently inside me, Tom drove me to the family-planning clinic.

I hated talking about sex at the best of times, and the knowledge that I was going to be asked personal questions by a total stranger made me feel quite sick. I didn't want Tom to come into the clinic with me, and I think he was vastly relieved when I asked him to wait outside in the van.

The nurse asked me all the questions I'd expected – about my health and my sex life – and then one I hadn't anticipated: 'Is there any possibility you might be pregnant?'

'Well, no,' I told her, shrugging slightly and wondering if she'd been listening to any of my answers to her previous questions. 'I told you, I've just lost a baby.'

She looked up at me, her pen paused above the folder on her desk and her head inclined at a slight angle, one eyebrow raised. Then she said slowly, 'The time when you're most likely to fall pregnant is when you've just lost a baby.'

‘No one told me that!’ I answered huffily.

‘How old are you?’ She looked down at the desk and shuffled her papers.

‘Twenty-three,’ I said, feeling suddenly unworldly and embarrassingly naïve.

‘Well, let’s do a quick pregnancy test, shall we?’ She cleared her throat and then looked up at me again with an encouraging smile.

‘But I’m only here to get the pill,’ I protested.

‘I know. That’s fine. But we just need to make sure, to be on the safe side.’ She stood up, collected together her papers and opened the door, and I followed her meekly into the corridor.

Half an hour later, I walked out of the clinic and into the car park, opened the door of Tom’s van and climbed into the passenger seat beside him.

‘Are you sitting down?’ I asked Tom, stupidly.

‘Well, of course I’m sitting down!’ He turned to look at me with a quizzical expression. ‘What is it, Katie? What’s going on?’

‘I’m pregnant,’ I told him, staring out through the windscreen, but seeing nothing.

‘What? You mean the baby’s still there?’ The distress in his voice made me turn to look at him at last, and I could see tears in his eyes as he reached for my hand and said, ‘But you lost the baby. I don’t understand.’

‘This is another baby,’ I told him. ‘I’m pregnant again.’

We sat together in silence for a moment, both of us trying to

absorb information that our minds didn't seem able to process.

'That's great,' Tom said at last, wiping the back of his hand quickly across his cheeks. 'It's great news. My mum and dad will be thrilled.'

'It isn't great news!' I almost shouted at him. 'I can't do this. I can't be pregnant. I'm all messed up inside. What if I lose this one too? I won't do this, Tom. I'm not prepared to take the risk.'

Tom was right about one thing, though: his parents were over the moon when they heard the news, and they were devastated when I told them I was going to have an abortion.

'Please,' his mother begged me. 'I know it's your life, Katie, and I understand that you haven't got over your recent loss. But ...' She hesitated, then took a deep breath and said, 'What if this is the only other chance to have a child you ever get? Don't throw it away. Please. It would be our first grandchild. You can't imagine how we've longed for this. We'll help you. I promise.'

I already felt a tremendous sense of guilt towards the child that was never going to be born, and now I also felt guilty about disappointing Tom's parents, who'd always been so kind and so good to me. But I knew I simply couldn't face going through with the pregnancy. I was obsessed with the thought of being able to feel the baby growing and developing inside me and then my body rejecting it, killing it instead of nurturing and protecting it. And there was something else that was worrying me, too. I often had fleeting impressions of my own childhood that I could never capture for long enough to be able to make sense of them,

and although I didn't know what those unremembered images were, I knew that somehow they were linked to my fear of being responsible for a child of my own.

I went for the obligatory counselling session and then booked an appointment to have an abortion. But when I woke up on the appointed morning, I phoned the clinic and said, 'I've changed my mind. I'm not coming. I can't do it.'

When I told Tom's parents that I'd cancelled my appointment, his dad mumbled something gruffly kind and patted my shoulder, and his mother enveloped me in a warm, breath-expelling hug and, with tears in her eyes, repeated her promise that they'd help us in any way they could. And although none of us could have known it at the time, it was a promise for which I was one day going to be immeasurably grateful.

I had a horrendous pregnancy, and at about four months I fainted again. Tom was with me this time and he rushed me into hospital, weaving through the traffic and sounding the horn of his van in a way I'd never seen him do before. Despite his efforts, though, I was bleeding by the time we reached the hospital, and the doctor told me I was going into early labour. It seemed that all my worst nightmares were coming true. I'd been so afraid of being pregnant and of becoming a parent that I'd almost had an abortion. But I'd changed my mind, because, in the end, my own fears hadn't seemed to constitute an adequate reason for snuffing out a life that was only just beginning. And it was only then, when I'd made the decision to go ahead with the pregnancy, that

I'd realised how desperately I wanted the child that was growing inside me. I knew Tom wanted it too, and that he'd tried to convince himself that he'd come to terms with the possibility of never having a son or daughter of his own simply because he loved me.

What made what was happening even more difficult to bear was the fact that I thought I was almost through the most dangerous period of my pregnancy, and I'd only just dared to allow myself to start believing that I might actually be going to carry my baby to full term. For the last few weeks, I'd felt sick most of the time, and although the constant nausea and occasional bouts of vomiting were really hard to live with every day, I'd comforted myself with the thought that perhaps they were good signs, because at least they probably meant that my hormones were doing what they ought to be doing.

In the hospital, they gave me drugs to try to prevent my going into labour prematurely. I knew that babies born at four months couldn't survive, and it was clear that they didn't really hold out much hope. But, by some miracle, the contractions gradually became less frequent and finally stopped, and the following day I was allowed to go home.

Everything seemed to settle down after that. The rest of my pregnancy was relatively uneventful and I went into labour two weeks after my due date.

The labour itself was horrible. Tom held my hand, wiped away the sweat that was streaming out of every pore in my body,

and counted 'In – two – three; out – two – three – four,' as I tried to breathe away the pain and suppress the panic. But it soon became clear that no amount of controlled breathing was going to push the baby out of my body, and I was given a spinal block so that it could be literally dragged out of me with forceps. And, ironically, it was at that point that Tom forgot to follow the breathing technique he'd been counting out so carefully for me, and he fainted and had to be half-carried out of the room. Which meant that, sadly, he wasn't there to see our child emerge into the world or to hear its first feeble cry.

Immediately the baby was born, it was whisked away to a corner of the delivery room, and I lay back, exhausted, on the bed, listening and waiting for the more vigorous wailing I knew would begin as soon its tiny lungs had filled with air.

The seconds and then the minutes ticked by, and still the only sounds I could hear were the hushed, urgent voices of the doctor and one of the nurses. Eventually, I lifted my head to try to see what they were doing, and – because, for some reason, no one had thought to tell me – asked, 'Is it a boy or a girl?'

For a moment, no one answered. Then a nurse walked towards me, placed a tightly wrapped bundle on my chest and said, 'It's a boy,' and I looked down for the first time into the huge blue eyes and wrinkled, blue-tinged face of my son.

The doctor came and stood beside the bed. 'He's having some problems breathing,' he told me. 'We need to get him into intensive care.' He leaned towards me and reached out to lift the

baby from my arms, and I just had time to touch the skin of my son's cheek and whisper 'Hello' before he was rushed out of the room.

Because of the spinal anaesthetic I'd been given, I had to lie flat on my back for the next 24 hours, which meant that I couldn't get out of bed to have a shower, and when my mother came in to see me, she took one look at my tangled, matted hair, said, 'Look at the state of you!' and burst into tears. It wasn't the greeting I'd expected, but I think she'd been more worried about me and about the baby than I'd realised.

For the next few minutes, she concentrated on getting me tidied up and 'presentable', which was probably her way of dealing with the sudden rush of relief and emotion she was feeling.

As soon as I was able to get out of bed, I had a wash and waited for my son to be brought in to me so that I could feed him. When the nurse handed him to me, I felt nervous and excited. I pulled back the edge of the blanket the baby was wrapped in and looked down into a huge, moon-like face framed by a shock of bright red hair.

'This isn't my child!' I told the nurse.

'Of course he's your child,' she said. Her tone was briskly coaxing, as though she was speaking to a small child or a very stupid adult. Then she gave a quick, nervous laugh and patted my shoulder as she added, 'Who else's child would he be? Isn't he just the spitting image of his father?'

‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘He may well look exactly like his father.’ I spoke slowly, trying to control the hysteria and panic that were rising up inside me. ‘But I’ve never seen his father, because this isn’t my child. My child doesn’t have red hair and he’s less than half the size of this baby.’

‘There, there.’ The nurse’s tone was so patronisingly patient that I had a strong, but mercifully fleeting, desire to throw the baby at her. She looked at me warily, patted my shoulder again and assured me, ‘He is your baby. There’s no question about that.’

Suddenly, all the pain, worry and exhaustion of the last few hours hit me with full force and I burst into tears. I didn’t have the strength to argue with her, but I knew that if I didn’t, I was going to go home with someone else’s baby – and, even more importantly, someone else was going to go home with mine.

At that moment, another nurse strode purposefully down the ward towards us, holding another, slightly smaller, white bundle in her arms.

‘Well, here we are, Mummy!’ she said, in a no-nonsense, nursery-teacher’s voice. ‘Here’s your little one all ready for his first feed.’

As she spoke, she reached across and almost snatched the red-haired monster of a baby from my arms, deftly replacing him with my son. Then both nurses turned and scuttled away, and I looked down for the second time at my baby and couldn’t believe how beautiful he was.

When Tom came into the hospital later that day, he was like

the cat that got the cream. I was touched by his obvious and immediate love for his son, and by his gratitude to me for having given him the child he could only now admit to having wanted.

Over the next couple of days, we tried to decide on a name. While I was pregnant, we'd already narrowed down our choices of boys' names to either Daniel or Richard. But the more we looked at our baby, the less the names seemed to suit him, and eventually we agreed on Sam. I wasn't sure whether he really looked like a Sam, but everyone else seemed to think he did, and as it was a name I liked, and one that had no negative associations for either of us, I was happy to agree to it.

Strangely, it seemed that as soon as he had a name, Sam had his own identity. It was a thought that, for some reason, sent a bolt of pain through my heart. And then I realised that what I was feeling wasn't pain but fear: I was afraid of the enormity of being responsible for a life that was already far more precious to me than anyone else's, including my own.

At visiting time the next day, the double doors at the end of the maternity ward crashed open and I looked up to see my father striding towards me. He was almost completely hidden behind a huge bouquet of flowers and his girlfriend, Gillian, was scurrying along behind him, looking tentative and hesitant.

I glanced anxiously at my mother, silently cursing my father for flaunting Gillian in front of her in a clearly deliberate act of spite that was completely out of place at what should have been a family time. My mother took a step away from my bed and

started fussing with her handbag, as though to indicate that she had no intention of trying to fight for her rightful place in the pecking order.

‘So, what are you calling it?’ my father bellowed, leaning down towards me and offering his cheek for me to kiss. The whole ward had fallen silent. Even the sucking sounds made by the newborn babies when they were feeding and their gentle murmuring when they weren’t seemed momentarily to have stopped. Everyone’s eyes were on my father. Some people were regarding him with open admiration, and some were watching him with expressions of hostile disapproval at the loudness of his self-assurance. But it was clear that all of them were impressed, despite themselves.

‘We’ve decided to call him Sam,’ I told my father, reaching out to place a subconsciously protective hand on the cot beside the bed.

‘Sam!’ My father almost spat out the word in disgust. ‘What sort of a name is Sam for Christ’s sake? It’s a fucking dog’s name. I thought you’d call him Harold, after me and after my father. You’re fucking useless.’

Then, without even glancing towards his first-born grandchild, he threw the ridiculously ostentatious bouquet of flowers on to the bed, turned on his heels, barked ‘Gillian!’ and marched back down the ward, letting the doors swing shut behind him.

My father didn’t see Sam again until he was nine months old. But, by that time, everything had changed, nothing would ever be the same again, and I could hardly bear to watch him put his

hands on my beloved son.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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