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reversing adversity



## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE ME? – I AM DID



by Carolyn Spring

What is it like to be me? What is it like to be the me that is me-not-you, different, alone, DID? You – in my minds you are you-not-us, but who am I to you? Can you know me?

Each day me – tip-toeing through life (your life, your world, your complex unknowable system of rules and experiences), a desperate yet futile quest to hide my oddness. I smell urine when you do not, feel blood trickling when you see none, shiver with cold when you are warm – and all the time a compulsion (need or die) to HIDE. Shame – thick, black, tar-like, slithery shame – that I am not like you and I don't want to admit why. Shame – because someone (all of them) chose me to hate, me to humiliate, hurt and revile, and you might join with them (why wouldn't you?) and react with tummy-sick disgust at my foulness and evil.

Shadows: a ghosting of fragment-memories that are true/not-true (how true I cannot know), images – flitting, wraith-like, colour-blanced – that make me gasp for breath and are gone, or replay in sadistic slow-mo in the terrifying here-and-now sense of what you as therapist/husband/friend will say was THEN.

I hear noises (threat, alarm, signal) that you barely register and I am ashamed that I do. How can I be like you? I am tense, overalert, strained and uncomprehending; your gaze is gulp-dangerous, a torturing touch. Your presence is threatening, your absence death. When you leave, I cannot remember you: you are not. Sometimes you are happy (no screwed-up tension of dread) – you smile and I sicken with fear; kindness rims with suspicion; so I hide-hide-hide the terror in my eyelids of sights and sounds, all fragments of horror



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that I cannot explain, must not speak of, cannot escape. I smuggle it away or the dread-shock nausea of what I am will so repulse you that this one brief moment of un-aloneness will flee like every one always did when pain and hurt and yuk and evil was better (always better) than the nothing of no-one and I am not.

How can I tell you about pain? – the shrill-shriek scream of unbearable burning, ache of twisting, writhing, molten-metal-in-me pain. How can I tell you of terror of night, of sleep and sleepless darkness and dreams of brutal, chasing, hurting, abandoned void of me? You sleep and rarely even dream; my nights stretch out across an interminable lagoon of unspoken pain. Then the flood-rush scabble in my head of voices, of parts, of fragments of me: cacophony of ego-alien memory-shivers that hurt like hurt should not hurt. Burrowing, burning pain in me that I cannot remember – why is it there?! why won't it go?! – and morning comes and normal life comes (your normal) and I hide the stretched-out exhaustion of night because I HATE ME that I cannot even sleep.

And doubt. I do not know who I am; I cannot begin to construct who I was. My head is an album of bleeped-out memory blanks and reconstructions (nice mummy, good mummy) and a threatening frown of no-don't-look. Have I made it all up?

Memories? – but snatches and half-sequences of dim-dark horror and bodily reactions and a terror I cannot explain, a knowing what I cannot (dare not) know, but nothing fresh-firm or solid or real. Just shadows and voices I hear speaking – they tell of unknown horrors that I know to be true. Then from others: denials – fierce, furious, the couldn't-be of a four-bedroomed upbringing, parents who threaten and blame with sinister anger. What happened?! My witness-therapist knows more than I do. I mustn't know. I mustn't know.

Gang-rape, photos, sadism, murder: is this the now-me? – the Next-dressed, decaff-coffee, ensuite-shower me of children's homework, cheese and onion crisps me? And the parent-accomplice: cut-glass, bowls' club, shampoo and set, library-book mother? The frightening ordinariness of extraordinary evil in a Marks and Spencer's cardigan. Or have I made it all up? I don't know who I am.

I don't know how to show you what I am because I am not you, not like you, never been like you, never will. The torture, pain, torment and fear of a little girl all naked and hurt is nothing compared to the differentness of me that I cannot communicate: alone-in-myself, chasm of abandonment, the me-not-you that just wants to tell and be heard and not be different any more. •

