

The Dark Side of the Truth

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The Dark Side of the Truth

Translated from the French by Sarah Lloyd

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This book is based on a true story. However, any similarity with any person, business or place is purely coincidental.

The author is not responsible for the opinions or claims of the narrator but has willingly, from the very first page, taken up her pen on Anna's behalf.

Preface

It has been through having access to personal diaries, documents and accounts of encounters, particularly those of women, along with examining how other people perceive mothers (and particularly mothers like Anna), that has led this account of several years of a woman's life finally being put down on paper.

Stories like this only ever happen to other people. That is, until one day, out of the blue, somebody else finds themselves dealing with a similar situation that they could never have imagined would happen to them.

It would not have been appropriate for me to tell this story myself.

However, it was Anna herself, surrounded by emotionally intelligent and loving women and showing no sign of bitterness or desire for revenge, who suggested that she might be best placed to do so. It is her personal story, her search for peace. The women around her have provided an air of positivity and affection; their experiences have enabled us to bring this story to light.

I hope you enjoy spending a little time with this gentle, unremarkable mother.

Victoria B. Lohay

Main characters

Georges. Head of personnel at one of the biggest organisations in the world, located right at the heart of this European capital. Grey hair girdles his balding head; he is slightly flat-nosed, and a white, grey and black tricolour moustache conceals his fine lips.

Me. I meet Georges when I go in to sign my contract to work at the institute. He is immediately charmed by my long blond hair, by my body and by the way I move; to him, everything hints at a generous, gentle, delicate and intelligent woman. My blue eyes, framed with long lashes are wide open to the world.

My son, Emerik. A gentle, adorable child who has a way with words and poetry, and who enjoys wordplay. I call him my “little ray of sunshine”. I love him.

My maternal grandparents emigrated to the Fiji Islands during the Second World War. The enemy, the war, had robbed them of everything. Everything.

Before the war, they had a butcher's shop in the rue de l'Abattoir, in Mons. The Americans landed and then everything had to be rebuilt. They won their tickets in a raffle; single tickets for two adults and four children on a passenger ship. My grandmother, Joséphine, had to choose between Oceania and North America. Thinking that her children would always be warm there, she plumped for the Fiji Islands, a place both beautiful and full of surprises. Being of Basque-Hispanic origins, Joséphine couldn't stand the cold and anyway, don't they say that the sunshine always makes things seem better?

Joséphine and Albert, her husband, opened a small butcher's shop in Nadi, the *Saint-Barthélemy boucherie-charcuterie*. Older members of the community will still remember it as it was the best - and only - butchers' shop within 100 kilometres.

There, everyone sang and danced at every possible opportunity.

In the starry night sky, fireflies lit up the heavens and crickets took up their bows, their rhythmic melody reflecting the season. Moths, bats and parakeets, danced around the houses' outside lights; another world in action all year long.

At dawn, I would hear the cockerel in the garden, imprisoned in his open-air pen a little way from the house. He always crowed on the hour as the sky gently brightened.

At dusk, some of the plants closed up their flowers, welcoming the evening, their petals gently enveloping their core as if to offer protection from the cold of the night.

Smells intensified, a myriad of colours merged; both the natural world and the sky came alive.

Sometimes, the calm, inviting sky became turbulent and stormy, spewing torrents of warm water onto the dry and arid ground.

The earth smelled of soil, of sugar cane. Pots smelled of water, of earth. The grass smelled of hay. Water simply smelled of water.

Each fruit had its own colour and smell, its own delicious flavour.

In Fiji, I learned to express myself clearly, to communicate, to share, to be honest and natural; I learnt to be myself. My grandmother, Joséphine, would often say:

“Just be yourself.”

One day, in May 1987, Australian paratroopers dropped on Sigatoka, not far from where I lived in Malomalo. Of course, it's all relative; a thirty-minute drive actually separated the two places. But that day, my father, my brother and I completely escaped the horror that was unfolding. As we were leaving Suva to return home, Viti Levu was invaded by a hoard of nameless thugs, dressed and armed like real soldiers. The servants of Her Majesty said that they were rebels. The government, that of the

Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra, was overthrown, and Elizabeth II was deposed as queen of Fiji.

“We’re at war! I was so worried about you!” cried our mother when we arrived home.

What would happen to us? What would become of us?

The rebels invaded the south, pillaged, killed, tortured, raped, and burned. Many inhabitants, of all nationalities, fled to the island of Vanua Levu, using any available mode of transport; people escaped on foot, on bikes and motorbikes, in cars, rowing boats, dinghies, sailboats, rafts, planes, and helicopters.

Those who stayed behind on Viti Levu tried to escape the bullets by hiding in the void between the ceilings and the roofs, in fridges and in bathtubs or by leaning mattresses up against windows... it didn’t stop the shells maiming and killing them too.

Two armed Belgian soldiers burst into our house. They gave us an hour to say our goodbyes. We had no idea then that we would be separated from our father for four, long years.

I hugged my father and he held me close. I loved him and didn’t want to leave him there all alone. I didn’t usually say very much as it was, but in the future, I would talk less and less, only when absolutely necessary, and even then in short, curt sentences. I became afraid of making snap judgements, of judging people too quickly. I felt that I was different, and my mother often reproached me for it. She told me to grab my yellow teddy bear and a flask of water.

The soldiers split us up and we were taken to the airport separately, using different modes of transport.

There were many roadblocks. The rebels stopped and searched every vehicle, cars and ambulances, machine guns in hand. They shouted at us, their breath stinking and acrid. Their clothes didn't fit properly, and they were dirty. They looked like total thugs.

Sister Cécile, a dispensary nurse, and Father Agnello, got me into an ambulance, a battered, white station wagon that had been simply fitted out with a stretcher. They asked me to pretend to be ill and above all, to not speak or cry out.

Every roadblock was an ordeal. Lying on the stretcher, with my eyes closed and my arms underneath a blanket that had been pulled right up to my neck, I was scared. Every time we were stopped, the rebels burst through the rear doors. With force and determination, Sister Cécile spoke to them in Bauan, the local dialect. Glaring at her, they closed the ambulance doors and stepped away. She had convinced them that I had a terrible and highly infectious virus.

I arrived at Nadi Airport. The ambulance dropped me off right in front of the entrance. I raced up the staircase four steps at a time and went into a huge room with yellowing walls that they called the airport concourse.

I looked for my mother in the crowded chaos. I wasn't very tall, so it wasn't easy. Every so often I would try to jump, hoping that I might be able to spot her more easily.

A definite sense of fear amongst the hundreds of people packed into this space created a pervasive odour of dripping sweat. People were scouring the room, looking to reunite their families and get to the Boeings waiting on the tarmac. The Hindus were reciting prayers, counting their prayer beads and the Fijians were shouting. People were jostling and clambering over each other.

It was mayhem.

On the runway, several aeroplanes were waiting, their propeller engines roaring, ready to take off. There was also a British military plane standing by.

Outside, shells came crashing down. Bullets whistled past our ears.

Night began to fall. It was neither light nor dark. It was extremely hot. It was the month of May, at the end of the rainy season. It was five o'clock in the evening.

The night had truly fallen; it was 6 o'clock in the evening and very dark. Silence. No more noise, no more bats, birds, or butterflies. As if they too were scared, as if they knew.

Hooray! I spotted my mother in her little brown dress, adorned with yellow flowers.

We were being forced to leave... but to go where? To Belgium or to England?

Ravu, a Fijian friend of my parents was also searching for us on the concourse. He found us and, with the help of another friend, Tina, got us through customs. We were friends with Ravu and his family. Little Paul was my father's godson, and we often ate at each other's houses. My parents lent him a large amount of money interest-free, so that he could set up his transport company.

Paul had a flourishing and rewarding business. He died of AIDS.

Tina was an officer in the Fijian police force. She was the country's first ever female officer and rose through the ranks due

to her fierce desire to help abused women and children. She suffered as a woman in a man's world.

We just managed to get to the steps up to the aeroplane, pulling ourselves up whilst still holding hands so as not to get lost. We found four seats on the central aisle. Flora sat on my mother's lap. She was only three years old. Everything happened very quickly. The plane rapidly filled with passengers, gathered speed and took off.

The captain announced that the flight would take thirty-six hours; we were exhausted.

The flight crew were great, handing out multicoloured sweets, chewing gum and chocolates to the passengers. A little human warmth in the midst of this miserable nightmare.

Once reunited with their families, the passengers spent the night watching the in-flight movies. I lay down on the floor in the main aisle, next to my mother's seat, with a pillow under my head and snuggled into a soft blanket, tucked in by an air hostess. My once pretty, collarless, yellow dress was filthy. I carefully stowed my brown boots under my mother's seat. The next day, the flight captain offered each child the chance to spend some time with him in the cockpit.

Obviously, everyone, including me, had to wait their turn. I loved aeroplanes and was always over the moon when my Uncle Camille allowed me to go with him on the plane that he piloted. I felt a sense of total freedom, of well-being and of harmony with the Heavens and the Earth. Standing next to the captain, I leant my arm on the co-pilot's headrest. The plane was flying close to the ground directly above tons of sand imported to Singapore as part of their land reclamation project.

“Ladies and gentlemen. We are flying over the Singapore desert. In order to get the best view possible, we will be flying at low altitude.”

“Look!” I exclaimed, pointing my finger. “There’s a fox running on the sand!”

There was also grass growing.

It was amazing! The desert was full of life! What a revelation!

The captain did the same thing when we flew over the Neva marshes, upon which Saint Petersburg had been built.

“Look! Shoals of shiny white fish!”

“It’s *korushka* season” explained the pilot.

We had stopovers in London and Munich before finally arriving in Brussels. No-one was waiting for us when we stepped off the plane. It was a bit of a shock.

Just picture it. I arrived in Belgium in May 1987 at nine o’clock in the morning. I stepped off the plane in my little summer dress, clutching my yellow teddy bear; a fellow passenger had snatched my water bottle from me when I boarded the plane. It was foggy and I was really cold. The sky was grey, and the predominant colour of my natural surroundings was dark green. The air smelled slightly bitter, almost like mushrooms. A bus transferred us to the arrivals’ hall of Zaventem airport. No-one acknowledged us and no-one was waiting for us. I thought people were rude. I said “hello” to them and they didn’t reply.

After leaving the luggage reclamation hall, we sat on a bench. We had no luggage. A paracommando had given my mother, Marie, some change so that she could call someone to come and fetch us.

Someone... but who?

Moving towards a telephone box, my mother picked up the directory and looked for the name of an old friend of my father. I saw her finger search for “B” for Brussels, Brussels...P...P...P... Ah! There he was. Remi Patris. There were several Remi Patris in the directory.

“Which is the right one?” I asked.

My mother chose a number at random and luckily got the right person. She had written our surname in capitals on one of the pages of the directory. She held it up high so that it could be seen from a distance. A little man, with a grey moustache, grey hair, blue eyes and wearing a blue suit and tie introduced himself.

“I am Remi Patris, Paul’s friend. Have you any luggage?”

We all shook our heads.

“Okay. Follow me.”

We left the arrivals’ hall and made our way to the car park.

“Oh my! It’s huge!” I exclaimed. “There are cars everywhere!”

When we got to Remi’s metallic blue car, we all came to a halt. Inside it was a big, black, barking dog.

“He’s called Boy. Boy! Be quiet! Don’t worry - he’s just doing what dogs do,” Remi reassured us, from under his big, smiling moustache.

“He’s the best anti-car theft device ever,” he continued, “but he’s very good with children. That’s why I brought him with me.”

He opened the driver’s door and the dog bounded out and fussed around us. He ran around our legs, sniffing, and wagged his tail in delight.

Terrified, me and my brothers and sisters all instinctively drew our hands to our chests, but then gradually lowered them so that we could stroke him. We all ended up cuddling him.

Ah! Boy. Finally, a little bit of physical contact!

I really liked the dog. In the car, my brothers and I sat on the back seat with our sisters on our laps, sticking our hands into the boot underneath the headrests, trying to touch the big ball of black fur with our fingertips.

We didn’t put our seatbelts on because we didn’t know what they were for, and anyway, the small Toyota only had two seatbelts between the five of us.

Little by little, I would discover that Europe was not the land of milk and honey that my teachers had extolled; it wasn’t heaven on earth. It was simply different to everything I had ever known. Fiji.

Here, the supermarkets were big - and I mean really, really huge. You could find mountains of crisps, sweets and even dog food! It was incredible! I thought it was a terrible waste.

I would also find out the hard way that attitudes were very different.

My mother had given me a traditional, French education, very *vieille France*, wholly unsuited to this new country. My maternal grandparents were of noble background and this teaching was passed down from mother to daughter.

Girls were taught that wives should be patient, that ‘woman maketh the man’.

In this new country, their teaching subjugated women to men rather than enabling them to complement each other and share roles.

Today is my birthday. It's the fifteenth of August, and I am thirty-two years old.

I can't bear my husband's constant violence. I have been putting up with it for three years. Three years is a long time.

Although brief, life before marriage was pretty good. Georges was kind and attentive. We got married on the twenty-third of August, but sadly, the fairy tale came to an abrupt end. I had been forced into marrying him as a result of my parents' emotional abuse. When I was four months pregnant, Emerik's biological father left me, saying that he had met his soul mate. My mother begged me to have an abortion and booked an appointment with a doctor in the Netherlands. I kept my son against all the odds.

When Emerik was born, my brother Maté visited me at the clinic and called me awful names, as if I was a prostitute. He argued that because he didn't know my son's father, my baby was a bastard. He spoke as if my son was the offspring of a human being and some other species! It made no sense to me.

My mother often says that I don't love my son and, like my brother, also considers him to be a bastard. My father joins in as well, saying that my son doesn't have a real name because he has my surname. I wonder about the relevance of the surname given to girls. If they aren't given one, does it mean that girls don't have a name? And if girls don't have a name, do they actually exist?

My parents already know Georges when I first meet him, but I don't know where from. They just do. The pressure mounts. Georges seizes the opportunity offered to him by my parents and insists that Emerik takes his name. I have always been honest with Georges. I never wanted to marry him; living together was good enough for me. Under pressure, I married him and agreed that he should recognised my son as his own. So that Emerik had a name.

“God, you’re so ugly” Georges often says, taunting me.

When I get undressed, he’ll say, “Turn around so I don’t have to look at you.”

“You’re so fat! Nobody else is going to want you!”

Really? At five foot four and weighing forty-eight kilos, with my pretty hair and big eyes, I don’t think I’m too bad, if do I say so myself.

“You can do yourself up all you like - you’re still ugly!” he continues.

Georges always has excuses to justify his violence, his nastiness. He says that he had problems with his sons, his eldest with running away and blackmail, and the youngest with drugs and stealing money. Vague excuses.

His eldest son, Mathieu, is always around and is constantly asking for money; Georges gives in to him every time he asks. Every discussion between father and son becomes heated. I often wonder why.

Mathieu told me that one day, when he was little, he remembers that his dad kidnapped him and that he didn’t see his mum for ages. And then, one day, to the delight of the children, she came home again. When Mathieu turned eighteen, their mum left the

marital home for good and to this day, no-one really knows why. Georges helped her to move. He found her an apartment which he considered suitable for her, bought her furniture, and acted as guarantor for the rent.

I don't get involved. I speak to both Georges and Mathieu separately to ask that at the very least they should be civil in the presence of both me and my son. I don't want any violence in my house; I want it to be a happy place, a house that exudes happiness.

I agreed that Georges should leave his house to his children and come to live with me in my beautiful apartment which is just opposite my workplace, and I again made it a condition that my home should be a 'peaceful' and 'happy' place. The entrance hall is big, and it serves as Emerik's playroom. It's the heart of our home. Old wooden glazed doors lead into a pretty living room with floor to ceiling windows and a parquet floor, the blocks made of different shades of wood. It's a very pleasant and well-lit room. I really like my apartment and I put my heart and soul into decorating it. Up to now, it's been a haven of peace and joy; I don't want that to change.

Georges went to great lengths to get us to move out of my apartment and buy a rundown house that he claims to have fallen for in the Walloon Brabant province.

The house is just below a station. Every time a train goes past, both the house and the furniture shake. All day and all night. It's awful. Georges assures me that I will get used to it. I'm a light sleeper though, and he's not...

The first time I saw this house, I couldn't stop my hand from going up to my mouth in shock, my eyes reflecting my horror. It needed everything doing to it.

He swears that things will be better because he'll be making a long-standing dream a reality, owning his home and doing it up exactly as he wants. He says that the project will keep him busy when he retires. He's very keen. I just hope for better times for us, as a couple. I promise myself that buying this dump will be my last attempt at making my husband happy.

"This house is my dream - and the only thing we have together," says Georges. "I'm going to ask for early retirement as soon as possible; I'm fed up of working. My dream is to renovate this place."

He makes my life difficult, increasingly difficult. I cook our meals on a tiny camping gas stove... simply because Georges, a qualified electrician, hasn't installed either the electric hob or the sinks in the kitchen. I've put the camping stove on the stained white floor tiles in the room that we're using as a dining room. It is total chaos. A complete mess.

In some of the rooms there's nothing but dusty screed and dirt floors. You can see the external brickwork from the inside.

In the room that would later become the living room, you can actually see the garden through the gaps in the window frame. In winter, living in this house is torture... it's awful.

Every morning, on the way to work, Georges drops Emerik off at the infant school and then me at the office. He then swings by the bank to withdraw money from both his account and mine, all

before getting to work. He has demanded control of my accounts and keeps hold of all my cards.

I gave in to keep the peace. Since then, we've not had any more arguments about money.

I have to beg to get enough money to buy bread and, it's only after much persuasion that Georges gives me the exact amount I need. He does the shopping and decides whether we need things or not. Whenever Emerik is ill, I have to be sneaky because Georges will do everything possible to prevent me from going to the doctors or to buy medicine. My neighbour, Kim, pays for Emerik's visits to the doctor and pharmacy bills, saying:

“You must come and see me every time you need something. I will take care of the little one's medical costs.”

Gradually, Georges starts to do even more things that he says are in the family's best interests, and best for our well-being.

He commandeers the family car. When Emerik and I are at home, Georges double-locks the doors and keeps the keys. He never leaves me any money. He rings on the hour every hour and insists that I pick up. It's not easy. When I'm hanging out the washing or preparing a meal, I can't always drop what I'm doing. He gets angry; he doesn't understand.

Over time, Georges rings every half hour in order to check that I'm at home. I have to pick up. If I don't, he will retaliate. He threatens to throw furniture at me, or to hurt the little one. He hits me. He shouts.

Georges also humiliates Emerik.

Ever since we moved to this hellhole, Emerik has always needed to go to the toilet as soon as we get back from school and work. The drive takes about an hour as Georges takes the back roads rather than the motorway or main roads. Georges is always the first one out of the car. He opens the front door unbearably slowly and when the little one starts to complain that he can't hold on any longer, Georges says:

“Go on! Do it in your pants!”

I get angry at my husband. He's humiliating Emerik.

“Are you going to open the door or what?” I shout.

One evening, when I see that Georges is again making no effort to open the door, I pick my son up and put him down against the front wall of the house. “Emerik. Go ahead, sweetheart - go against the wall. It's ok.”

Georges always gets furious when he sees me standing up for my child. I think he's jealous.

He threatens to cut us off from the rest of the world, to split us up. He often talks about orphanages and mental institutions. In the night, he elbows me so violently that I find myself on the floor, lying on the parquet with its patches of old carpet glue. One night, he hits me so hard that he cracks my L5 vertebrae. He also hits me when I'm asleep, claiming that he's dreaming. The day after it happens, he makes me tell them at work that I bumped into a box of tiles whilst working on the house... I am now incapable of going against his demands and wishes. What's even worse is that the thought never even crosses my mind.

This time though, he's gone too far. I'm in too much pain and worse still, I can't even pick up my child. I go to see a doctor at the company clinic to get a medical certificate confirming assault and battery.

"You do understand, Madame, that your husband knows everyone here. I need to keep my job. I'm afraid I can't record this as assault and battery. But I can assure you that we can see that you have been beaten," whispers the doctor.

That doctor would soon die from stage four cancer. All those medical reports that he refused to write simply out of fear must have gnawed away at him from the inside...

A few nights later, I am woken up by a strange sensation of heat and of suffocation. I see Georges on his knees above my face, staring at me, his hands tightening around my neck. The seconds seem to last a lifetime before I attempt to knee him where it hurts the most. Georges lets me go, not out of pain but out of fear. Because I had missed. It must be a nightmare! I must be dreaming...

But it's not - my neck really does hurt! Can you get physically injured in a dream? I've got bruises. I'm in pain. He really did try to strangle me!

Obviously, ever since that night, I try not to fall asleep. I prop myself up in my bed with pillows and keep vigil. I leave the alabaster bedside lamp on, placing it at the bottom of the bed on my side so that the light doesn't disturb Georges when he's sleeping. I place a book on a pretty, white lace doily on the bedside table.

Georges is becoming more and more unpleasant, violent and crude. I get the feeling that he's drinking. His friend, Olivier, appears to confirm this when he asks me to help Georges get back on the right track. I try to find out where he is hiding his bottles of wine and whisky, first of all searching the house. I find neither full bottles nor empties. Whilst looking in the spare room in the attic, decorated in Western-style, I find several knives, along with news clippings which implicate my then twenty-year-old husband in the death of a young person in a car accident. In large letters, just above the photo of Georges it says:

“Having already beaten her up because she wanted to leave him, Georges X killed Sandra M by driving at her in his car.”

I re-read this article several times. It's him! And it's him in the photo. Bloody hell!

I put the newspaper back exactly where, and how, I found it.

Today is the nineteenth of November, and Emerik is behaving even more strangely than normal. He's not feeling very well... I finish the washing up in the round, blue plastic containers on the dining room table. It's eight thirty in the evening. I hear Emerik crying really loudly, so I race up the stairs, taking them four by four.

“Get back to the kitchen! I don't need you!” yells Georges from my little boy's bedroom.

The walls of his bedroom are painted a pale sky blue with white and blue patches around the window. The teddy bears that are set against the white background are blowing kisses.

I get to the landing but I'm too late. I see Georges leaving the little one's room. He's furious.

"What are you doing?"

"Mummy, mummy!" pleads Emerik, who's lying on his bed.

I can see him through the open door.

Georges goes back into Emerik's room and I follow. Georges is leaning over him.

"I wanted to read Emerik a story. He said his bottom was itching so I was just having a look."

"It's not true mummy. Mummy, help!"

In order to get a proper look, Georges gets really very, very close.

"Go and get me the peri-peri powder! That'll get rid of the worms!" he orders.

"Don't be daft! Don't you think it's odd that Emerik hasn't said anything since we got back? If he has got worms, I'll go and fetch some proper medication from the pharmacy tomorrow."

"I know what I'm talking about!" yells Georges.

He pushes me away with his right arm to stop me getting nearer to my son.

"Please leave the room," I asked him, calmly, "and let Emerik go to sleep."

Georges gets Emerik into his pyjamas, throws the covers over his little body and leaves. Under his watchful eye, I kiss my treasure on the forehead.

“Will you come back and give me more kisses, mummy?”

“Yes. I’ll come back and give you another kiss before I go to bed, just like I do every night.”

That evening, I go to bed early. I’m scared for Emerik. As he often does, Georges asks me to leave him to watch the TV on his own and I read in bed. Emerik is still not asleep; he’s crying. No sooner have I got up to go to him, than Georges is already behind me. I jump. I hadn’t heard him come up the stairs.

“Leave him alone! You woke him up!” shouts Georges. “Let me deal with this!”

I brush my lips against Emerik’s hot little forehead. “He’s got a temperature, it’s quite high,” I tell him.

When Emerik was still a little baby, I bought an electronic thermometer that you place on the hand for a few seconds. It beeps and displays the temperature. The thermometer reads 39.5°C. Georges is standing at the back of the room, opposite Emerik’s bed, standing firm, his legs slightly apart and his arms crossed.

“No, you’re wrong! There’s nothing wrong with him. You’re always looking after him - never after me!” yells Georges. “I can’t say anything in this house anymore! I soon won’t even have the right to sleep in my own bed. You are going to have to sleep in here with him.”

“Mummy! I want to sleep with you!” cries Emerik. “Mummy, I’m scared!”

“Good idea, Georges. I hadn’t thought of that but, since you insist, I’ll sleep in Emerik’s room tonight. I’ll put a mattress on the floor, and you can sleep on your own.”

I’m afraid. I’m speaking in a low, monotone voice.

“You’re going to sleep with me!” yells Georges. “I forbid you to sleep on a mattress on the floor.”

I start to feel overwhelmed with fear. I don’t want Emerik to see. I hope I’m hiding it well.

“Georges, I’m going to sleep in Emerik’s room tonight. He’s not very well and he’s got a temperature - he might have a seizure. I’m going to stay with him.”

Georges continues to shout that that he will sleep with me. Emerik is still crying, and I can’t get my husband to listen to me.

I let my arms drop alongside my body and with clenched hands, I explode; this time, it’s me shouting.

“That’s enough!”

A heavy silence descends.

“Babe, you’re going to sleep on your own tonight. I’ll sleep in YOUR bed with Emerik and you can sleep in his bed. Enough is enough.”