

## SOUL HUGS

### *A visit to my daughter ...*

I weave my way to my daughter's house via a route I've never taken before. She is not expecting me, and when I arrive, I am overcome by her sorrow. She is not aware I am there, and as I watch the tears fall from her eyes I am astounded to see how much she is like me. I've never seen her from this angle before, but the way she sits, the expression on her face ... it's as if I am looking at myself, and it's a little disconcerting because I'm no longer that self at all. Even though I have been in her house many times, I feel disoriented, like a newcomer. I guess that's because I am paying her a different kind of visit today.

Without sobs or sounds, she cries, and there is just stillness and silence and heaving shoulders. Tears stream down her face, like a relentless water wheel. After a while, her eyes look up at me, sad and disbelieving. It's the same look she gave me the other night when she told me I should go. I want to reach out and hug her, tell her that it's ok, but it's impossible. The face she sees is mine, but it is just an image in an ornate frame. The arms I want to hug her with are grey ashes hidden within a matching urn. It's a week since I was cremated, so there can be no more knowing looks between us, and no more human hugs.

For her, there can now only be nostalgia and recollections wrapped up in photographs, with special memories lurking beyond the paper on which they are printed, known only by those who know me.

Is it harder for her, or for me, to bear this ordeal? Being in my world doesn't make the letting go and anguish any easier. It's just different.

Ever so softly, as her tears continue to fall, I let my soul envelop her body. It's the first time I've done this, and I sense a feeling of apprehension and joy all at once. I want to squeeze the raw grief out of her, but I know I must let it take its own course. Time is a great healer, they say. Whose time? What time? A ticking clock might count down the last

breaths of a dying loved one, but which clock or calendar tells you when grief is complete?

As if her body is wired to my soul, receiving my thoughts, my daughter's eyes flick to the clocks on her kitchen wall. There are many, lined up above the window, announcing the time in Paris, London, New York. I had never actually counted them, all those times I had stood in her kitchen, but she has quite a collection. I helped her choose the Melbourne clock on a shopping spree not long ago. She has Hawaiian time and Rome time. There's even Fiji time where all the numbers are in the wrong place. Who cares what time it is in Fiji, as long as you know when cocktail time ticks round? Of course, you tell that by the sunset, not by the clock. How we loved our cocktails, my daughter and I. A little bit of decadence never hurt anyone, we always agreed, with a surreptitious laugh and a hearty "cheers" and clinking of glasses. I will miss our moments of indulgence, but I guess she will miss them more. In my realm, there is no need to distinguish between necessity and luxury, because the soul requires neither.

She stares vacantly at the clocks, and eventually I sense her register the time. Chronos time ... a concept that doesn't matter to me any more. In my new place, routine and deadlines don't exist, and only kyros time has relevance. The right time. And at this moment, I am sure it is the right time to be with my daughter. My beautiful inconsolable girl, the quiet wee thing who flourished into a capable, and somewhat chaotic, woman. She knows how proud I am of her, but that doesn't help her grief right now.

I sense that she is going to sob out loud. It comes as just a small whimper at first, but within seconds she is covering her face in her hands and howling. Strangled sounds leave her lips, sounds of turmoil and distress that would have broken my beating heart if I'd had one. But my heart is already broken into a zillion pieces and now rests as cold grey dust, and it's my soul that is aching. I'm not sure which is harder to endure ... human



heartache, or spiritual soul ache. I guess I will have time to work it out, now that I am in a position to compare.

She shakes her head and howls some more, her body wracked with sobs. She mutters something I can't comprehend, but I can guess its sentiments. I cradle her firmly with every ounce of my soul, trying to comfort her with an ethereal blanket of love. I'm aware that, at this very point, she can't imagine her grief will ever leave her, or that release from this torment is possible. Every part of me is with her, wrapped around her. I want to absorb her pain, to extract it from her body, and toss it into oblivion, but I have no way to do it. Can a soul ever do this, I wonder? I will have plenty of time to find out.

As I embrace my daughter in this special extended soul hug, I remember my own mother's passing. So shocking, so unfair, so final. It's wonderful to lock spirits with her again, here in this realm, but that doesn't help my daughter who, even though she believes it is so, isn't aware that, yes, you really do connect again, after death.

She looks up towards the ceiling, almost looking straight at me. I stroke her face with invisible caresses. "There, there, I'm all right. Don't cry for me. It's you who hurts now. My suffering is over ... don't let yourself suffer too ..."

The sobs subside, as if she hears me. She wipes the tears from her face in big sweeping motions. She sees the ring, my ring, the one I gave her just before I died. As she touches it, it seems to give her strength, and after one last squeeze, I let my soul retreat from her being, sensing she is gathering herself together to move on with her day.

I hover near for a short time, and then, reluctantly but purposefully, I float away. I have another daughter to visit ...

### *A visit from my mother ...*

I'm glad I'm alone in the house. I don't want anyone to see my grief today. I've cried all the tears I think I have inside me, but if there are more, I want to be alone when they come. They came earlier, just when I most expected them. And now I think they are here again ...

With my eyes cast downward, I sit and cry yet I don't make a sound. Somehow, without noise or movement, my body releases its strangled emotions, letting them out of the depths in which they live inside me. It seems controlled, but I am a mess.

I glance up at the photo of my mother that sits on top of the piano and think how lovely she looks. Nothing can stop the tears come pouring out, and all I can hear in my head are those words on that cold bleak night, forever etched in my memory. "You have to go now Mum ... it's time to leave us ... we'll be ok ... fly free ... goodbye my darling mum ..." And then she was gone. And now she is ashes and memories on earth, and an angel and inspiration in heaven.

The tears run fast down my cheeks and neck, little rivulets dribbling down towards my collar like a flooding delta, completely beyond my control. Nothing will stop them as I relive that moment when Mum slipped from life to death ... a moment too precious to ever want to lose, yet too fleeting to ever be able to keep. All I have now are memories to clutch onto, to try to make sense of something that is there yet is not.

As I cry, I feel a soft blanket of warmth wrap around me. It feels like Mum is near. It's as if invisible cotton wool is cuddling me, gently soothing me, and even though I am distraught, I also feel comforted at a time when I think nothing can comfort. Is she watching over me right now, as I cry? Is her spirit embracing me? That's what it seems like, so that is what I shall choose to believe.

I sit there for ages, tears streaming, embraced by an invisible hug, unwilling to



move. And then reality gets in the way and I check the time. The day is passing by, and I have things to do, but I just want to sit and cry. I've done nothing all day but cry. Nothing else is as important to me right now as crying, even though the grief doesn't seem to be waning. Isn't crying supposed to help you overcome grief? My grief just gets worse as each day dawns; I think it may be here to stay. Words cannot convey this grief, which is why I want to cry alone. I think it's a form of communication with your own soul that no one can quite understand.

My eyes flick over my clock collection. People think I'm mad arriving home with a new clock or two in my suitcase, but they are great reminders of people and places. The time they tell is irrelevant, the stories they tell are much more marvellous.

I recall buying the Melbourne clock with Mum. I wasn't sure about it, but she encouraged me to buy it. Now, of course, it holds a million memories within its delicate golden hands.

All of a sudden I know I am going to bawl out loud. No more silence, no more stillness. Instantly, my body is racked with sobbing and the noises I make seem like they are coming from someone else. My shoulders heave and I bury my face in my hands, smearing the tears all over my skin. I mutter something into my hands. I don't even know what I am saying, but I know what it means. The invisible embrace around me strengthens, as if squeezing me to say it's ok ... cry, sob, blither to your heart's content. Oh, I am, I assure the invisibleness. I want to rip this pain right out of myself, but have no idea how I might do it. And if I did, I would probably just create more grief for others to cope with and then it would all be even worse.

My hands are clasped behind my neck by now, and I'm looking upwards, trying to stifle the sobs. I'm astonished by a gentle touch on my face. I am quiet, wiping the tears away, and wonder if it is my own touch that I felt.

As my hands move to my lap, I notice my mother's sapphire eternity ring. She had pressed it into my hand not long before she died and I have worn it ever since. From her finger to mine, many cherished moments have been transferred. I fondle the ring, turning it this way and that to admire its many facets. The poignancy of all those memories contained within it gives me tingles.

I feel a short squeeze around me, and then I am alone. Silently I farewell my mother's soul, thank her for her hugs, and get on with my day ... my life ...