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funny and uplifting'*
— Maggie Gee OBE

SALENA GODDEN

Springfield Road

unbound

Springfield Road

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footnote: this book has been separated into four pieces and named after the four seasons rather than the years. More for the emotional images that come with each season than the actual date or time. Whilst writing this I found there was a time of innocence and with it came sunshine and there was a time of grief and with it came the darkness. For me, whatever year it was, it was always spring-like and summery at Springfield Road and when I was there it always seemed to be alight and hopeful. Autumn and winter in my recollection were times of cold hardship and difficulties and so these sections reflect this. You will notice the summer section is longest, because of course the summers were longer in the seventies



mum and dad, springfield road, hastings

For my mother

The continuity of this love remains,
And shall remain unbroken.
There is nothing encountered big enough
To fracture or reduce, what's bigger than time
And shall outlive time's use.

Do not be afraid then, worry nor even
Miss me overmuch. Between us, over us
Longer than us both, this love.
Circumstance, separating miles
Or chance, but aspects of the one
Insoluble thing, this love.

Paul Godden

excerpt taken from *Birthday Ode A Month Late*
A poem written by my father, Paul Godden, to his mother,
22nd October 1964.

PART ONE - SUMMER



my brother gus and me, danesholme, corby, 1975

1 / Introduction - Andalucia / Spain 2010

**La Casa De Las Almendras
Andalucia, Spain
August 2010**

My Dear,

These are the memories of my life as a child. This is the story of the world before I was here, the universe I was born into, that I came to love before I had to grow up, find rent and suffer hangovers. This is the story of how I became this overgrown adult with crooked teeth and scars.

I am alone in the mountains behind Malaga, at the highest point of Andalucia. The truth is, I feel as though I am peeling myself off the ceiling, coming down from the gigs and festivals, and I'm swapping the microphone for a pen.

I came here with the sole intention of writing some new work. But something happened here yesterday, and I'm now compelled to open the pages of this memoir and share this story with you - and this new version I write for you - especially for you, who have waited so patiently to read it.

This is the memoir of our old house, our family home in Hastings. How I remember those first mornings of the

school holidays, stretching under musty blankets and cotton candy-striped sheets, in that house, in that bedroom, on Springfield Road. Awaking to the sounds of Grandpa's mantelpiece clock chiming downstairs, the distant church bells and seagulls.

This is the story of that home and those who lived here, namely my absent father - Paul Godden - who left such a trail of debris in his wake that as I read and write this memoir I feel like his personal road sweeper, picking through the litter and leaves, letters and photos, for nuggets of truth and revelation.

It's important you should know this is not written from the perspective of a time travelling superhero - quite the opposite - this is just how I can best remember my child self, how we have all changed, and yet not at all.

Now all I require you to do is read this and click your fingers and say *Hey! I remember, we did that too!* I want you to say you remember not how things could have been, but how they really were. You might say, I remember being closer to the ground, to the cracks in the pavement; I remember liking being upside down; I remember being afraid of the dark; I remember being lost in daydreams; I remember discovering life is unfair; I remember riding my bike with my feet off the pedals and I remember freewheeling down hills with the wind in my hair; I remember losing my front teeth; I remember being forced to eat my greens; I remember summers were longer and how oranges were bigger; I remember struggling to comprehend sex and death, heaven and hell, war and God and perhaps, you'll say, I remember I missed my dad too.

In my life as a writer, I have found it much easier over the past twenty years to get up on stage in front of people and talk openly, humorously, about cervical smears and one night stands, rather than reveal the story of my interior world, my childhood and especially my father. But someone once told me, you cannot climb a well from the middle, you must fall right to the bottom. Once you are there, in the cold, alone and ankle deep in slime, you'll look up and you'll get a real sense of the dark and the work involved to climb towards the light, the truth.

If this book were an animal, it would be a stray tomcat that has been passed around between us, fed and stroked. This story has grown into a strong and handsome alley cat, but an animal that will most likely bite and scratch you.

I have often wondered if this book is cursed, sometimes I have believed it is haunted, for it has surely haunted me. This writing is my *Red Shoes* and when I hear its tune I dance, even though I know I am dangerously close to leaping off the edge. And as I fall, time and time again, I catch myself re-thinking and re-writing this book. We see what we want to see, and sometimes we are shown the threads that connect us all. I believe that if you are focused on a certain person or a particular time and place, if you listen keenly, the world will reveal clues, like bridges and doorways, that guide you onto the right trail and encourage you to keep going against all odds. No matter what I do, all roads lead me back to *Springfield Road*.

It's August 2010, I left London and came to Spain for a month, alone and quite impulsively. The solitude and silence were startling at first. As I write this, I am

overlooking almond and olive trees under big starry skies. The moon is full, white and hot. I've been working on new poetry, reading a stack of books and talking to myself out loud. On the drive from the airport and up the mountain I saw a sign with the word *Cardobe*. I couldn't figure out what memory it was tickling, then yesterday serendipity came knocking as I drank coffee and smoked - *Cardobe* - I threw the word into my computer's search engine and it led to the folder of the first ever draft of this book from 2006. My gaze fell upon a discarded letter from my dad to his mother, Edith, a letter we found in the basement of Springfield Road, that had been edited out of the manuscript, considered inconsequential, back story, because it was written before my father met my mother. But I now notice the postmark of this letter: my dad posted it from here, this very spot, in the mountains behind Malaga, Andalucia, 1965.

Did we forget that my father, as a young jazz poet and bachelor, ran away to Europe in 1965? Is this fate? Is this significant or even relevant? Am I being led by nostalgia? Am I grabbing at straws?

I phone home and speak to my mother. She believes that yet again my dad is watching over me, guiding me back on his trail, this trail.

'I have taken to myself a Spanish "Cardobe" hat. It is a wide brimmed black hat they use to dance flamenco in...' he writes, and yet again my present is illuminated by a light from the past, just like a lighthouse. In 1965 he is describing *the silent white houses, the twisting streets and the glittering sea*, it is the very view I can see now, as I

write this in 2010. So what choice do I have, but to continue pushing on with this story and for it to be told my way for you. Here I am quite literally walking in his footsteps, down narrow Andalucian streets. I sit at bars he must have drunk in more than forty years ago, for through the rise and fall of Franco, nothing much has changed in the heart of these tiny villages.

Like many of his letters it is written in a steady hand, in green ink, looped and slanted words like music notation on light thin paper. The envelope is marked with the red and blue striped edges of airmail. I am guessing 'Easter 1962' is the title of a poem but so far there are no clues who 'K' might be.

Casa Del Poeta

Pedragelejo, Malaga

Somewhere around 8th Dec.

Dearest Mum,

Thank you for your regular, encouraging and ultimately lovely letters. K- hasn't written still. Don't understand but maybe I am a little slow. Listen I shall telephone you Christmas Day at 4pm afternoon if you can pay for the call. It costs 10/- a minute. Is that OK? I shall probably just cry for three minutes but there you are. I feel so terribly lonely at the moment, I'm vastly terrified to come straight home. What would that prove? That I was just as weak as everybody else, wanting security and peace. I want peace but of a different kind. You understand, so why do I talk so much.

The Rector wrote and said he sent 'Easter 1962' to a publisher, just for an opinion. Might be very interesting. We must wait and see. There is a full moon tonight and it glitters silver on the sea and lights the white and silent houses and the twisting streets. On Saturday we went up into the mountains behind Malaga. Was very exciting, you looked down on the whole coast or so it seemed.

The trumpet is <unreadable> very well. All afternoon I have been practising carols. Incongruous in that I was sitting on the porch in a bathing costume at 65 in the shade, sweltering from the hot sun playing 'In the bleak mid winter'! Its early days though. We are thinking of going into Malaga at Christmas to perform and see if we can get any money.

You know my usual outfit, jeans, Pa's jacket, jumper, it has taken an addition. I have taken to myself a Spanish 'Cardobe' hat. It is a wide brimmed black hat they use to dance flamenco in. Anyway exhibitionist as oft— I am well known throughout the (dives) town as 'Cardobe Poeta'. Cardoba is the place where they dance most flamenco. Flamenco is just the <unreadable> dance. In the little bar in Pedragalejo on Sunday nights they have a sort of beano. The bar is no bigger than my bedroom at home. Last Sunday night two little girls aged 10 or 11 were dancing. It was quite beautiful but awfully disturbing for both before the age of puberty had all the bumps and grinds necessary. I have become vaguely acquainted with a Spanish girl but all that happens is an exchange of language lessons. I wonder why K hasn't written. Anyway I am writing quite a

lot, some not too bad. I miss you, shall hope 4pm Christmas day. OK? Lots of love. F in F. G.B.W.Y, Love Paul

I now have no choice but to open the kitchen door to this gnarly tomcat of a book. I will give it some food, some light, water and warmth knowing this is bound to hurt a bit. There are going to be things we all thought we had forgotten and also things we wish to forget. Things that will remind you of yourself. I came here to begin a new story, but maybe all my stories begin with this one story - this love story, this ghost story - and as I type that the tinny radio fizzes with Bob Marley singing 'Buffalo Soldier', his lyrics ask that if I know my history, then I will know where I am coming from, then they wouldn't have to ask me, who the heck do I think I am.

I was born in 1972. This means that I have been nurturing these stories for you for thirty-eight years. I never married and I do not have any children - yet. Home is a run-down fishing town by the sea called Hastings, East Sussex. And home is London. I didn't go to a posh school or even university. With my thesaurus and my first love Piers Thompson, I left Sussex and travelled to London at the age of nineteen. I began my big city life by working two jobs - backstage at the Drury Lane Theatre at night and as an A&R assistant at Acid Jazz Records by day. As a young poet in the 1990s I lived predominantly on Marmite on toast and instant noodles. I was constantly hungry, I feasted on books, nourishing my writing in the warmth of Swiss Cottage and St Pancras libraries on masculine literature - namely Hemingway, Bukowski, Orwell, Fitzgerald,

Brautigan, Maupassant and Fante – at night I read my early poetry in the backrooms of pubs and bars for free wine and laughs; or I spat lyrics over beats in clubs and raves hiding under the punk-poet moniker, Salena Saliva. I always called myself Jamish: Jamaican, Irish, English. I have very few regrets, I have nothing to lose and I have no savings. They say that it is always poets that die in wars, and I never got over a sense of being in the trenches. I rarely quit anything or anyone and I am too forgiving. I have a bizarre and outdated sense of fair play and team spirit. I am my own worst enemy. My heart is wide open. I have fallen in love too quickly, too often and too easily. I believe we are running out of time, I don't believe we have any time to waste. For this I give myself a hard time and people tell me I am impatient. I am impulsive. I throw in all I have in a game of poker, but I reckon that is the only way to truly win. And these are some of the phrases I use to define who the heck I think I am.

I spent the latter half of the last decade dwelling in the flesh and blood of this story, our history. It ought to make a person a special kind of weird to live in the past for so long. I feel a special kind of strange every time I sit here reading through these pages. But the past is here in the present and on the tip of my tongue. I now know I was always heading to this very ledge here today, on a mountain top. I contemplate the space I inhabit between the past and the future, between the deep night sky and the rocky drop below. And as I do so, I remember home and Springfield Road.

How I would peer from that attic window and imagine my father looking out of that very same window when he was a boy. Outside, Hastings would be easterly, fresh with spring, the buds and pale blossoms hanging on the apple and pear trees. That attic room was my father's bedroom when he was a boy and I suppose I was always looking for him, the materials of his existence. I remember the lavender mothballed paper-lined drawers of the furniture in that particular room. I remember once finding a king-size marble, how I held it up to the light, squinting with one eye into the swirling blue and green glass. It was well scuffed and a sure winner. I told myself it was once my father's marble, I gave it a squeeze as I tucked it safely into the pocket of my pink pedal pusher jeans, convinced it would be lucky some day. In the distance I could make out the steel-blue line of sea on the horizon and overhead I heard the constant cry of seagulls on the slanted slate roof. I imagined what it might be like to call the house on Springfield Road my home and what it would be like to live in the holiday forever.

Salena Godden / Spain, 2010

2 / *When We Were Three*

The day we left my father I remember orange lights. I was wrapped in the familiarity of my soft blanket, and the lights, the luminous orange streetlights, were wrapped in their own black blanket of night. Lying on the back seat, I watched them pass the car window like the blips of a life support machine. They sped towards me and then slowed down. We were on a long journey. We were in motion, moving forwards, fast, and we would never go back.

Stars dangled, I saw the lights dancing on see-through strings. I called out for my mother. She turned to pat me and made a *shush* noise, *there, there*, she said, *shush*. Her face, though smiling, was strange, contorted with shadows and ghosts of amber lights. I struggled to sit up to see the world the right way round, to see where we were, and she said,

Lie still, be a good girl, we are nearly there now love.

My eyes fixed on a yellowish light moving towards me from the other side of the road, it was a lighter orange than the others. It stuttered like a falling star, disappearing into the distance. I tried to stay awake to watch this particular light as long as I could. My eyelids grew heavier until it was pin-sized and lost, the hypnotic lights blurred and the monotony of the car engine lulled me back to sleep.

I remember I was in a jungle one hot afternoon. At least, I believed I was in a jungle, and there in the tall grass nothing kept still for a minute. It was crawling in there, fizzing with life. Millions of tiny bugs buzzed and jumped, flew and hopped about me. I could not see over the top of the long grass, with its spikes and thorns. My nose tingled with the smell of earth and grass. There were fluffy spores in the air, dandelion clocks. A white butterfly settled on a cowslip and as I moved to touch it, I can recall my chubby hand reaching out as it flew away, up into the endless blue above me. Down in the grass it was cool, shadowy. I looked up into the cloudless sky and listened. There were no human voices, nothing familiar, just the rustling of insect monsters and a humming of six-legged traffic. Suddenly for me it was all over, it was the end of the world, I was lost and I was crying. I dropped my empty jam jar and sobbed. It was hay-yellow in every direction and my ears burned with the itch of grass life as something jumped on my arm. I cried out, then stopped to listen, then cried out louder. Suddenly he appeared like a giant saviour, the sun his halo,

Ah, come, Salena, don't cry, look.

My big brother Gus, my hero,

Don't cry, look, I caught two grasshoppers!

His jam jar was filled with grass and spindly legs. He was proud but I didn't know what a grasshopper was. He started singing the song from *Pinocchio*.

My name is Jiminy Cricket! Jiminy Jiminy Cricket! Come on...

He lay down and rolled off down the hill. My big brother Gus, four years older than me, and hurtling ahead. Outstretched pointed fingers, we rolled fast down the slope, tumbled down the bank laughing. Until the grass was suddenly soft, short and green and I now knew where we were, we were at the front door of our new home.

Then this is one beginning. I was coming up to my third birthday in the early spring of 1975 and this was our fresh start. We were three, my brother, my mother and me. Our dad went away to play in the resident jazz band on a ship called the *QE2*. My mother had moved us to a house on an ugly concrete council estate called Danesholme, near Corby, Northamptonshire. Northamptonshire is in the midlands, the green and flat middle of England's waist.

In this new house, we lived around the corner from my mother's parents, Nanny and Grandad, and my Uncle Gerry. My brother had gone ahead of us and was waiting for us when we arrived. He was so relieved to see us again that he cried at first. He missed us horribly - I could tell by the way he clung to Mum - he hadn't done that so much before. The houses in Danesholme were grey boxes, built in squares facing each other, with a hump of grass and bush in the middle of each, identical to the last. It was a Legoland of concrete play bricks. It was very different from the pastel fishermen's cottages of Ramsgate and the seaside where we had lived in a marshmallow-pink house with my father before.

I remember we didn't have much furniture, and certainly not enough to fill an entire house. When I ran across the

uneven wooden floorboards the rooms echoed, resounded hollow. I can picture my mother with her headscarf on, smiling, the portable radio playing. She was always busy, my mum. She'd smoke her ciggy and she'd whistle and sing along to the radio. She'd wink down at me, then take a swig of tea from a pint glass and gasp, *Ah that's better*.

She threw the doors and windows open while she painted the house. I remember the kitchen was bright green and she painted a hippy daisy chain along the wall. This is a borrowed memory, I don't remember the daisy chain - she does. I do however remember this industrious DIY period. Most of all I remember she painted my bedroom in tones of violet and lavender. My mother taught me the words for colours, the names of rare and subtle hues. I loved these pretty words my mother used. The words for my new bedroom were indigo, lilac and purple, and when she put me to bed for my afternoon nap those particular colours were lit in shafts of sunshine, ultraviolet swam behind the backs of my eyes and etched into my memory forever.

I had a friend, her name was Mary and she lived across the square from me. She was Irish, with black hair and I never forgot her vivid violet-blue eyes. I recall we played together every day, pushing our prams, wearing our mother's beads and high heels. We collected and squashed berries with sticks. Whilst we played, we listened out for the ice cream van, the tinny trickle of the 'Teddy Bears' Picnic'. Although we were not to talk to strangers, the ice cream man was a pink and jolly man, I remember he took us by the wrists

and ankles and gave us swings and aeroplanes. He gave us penny sweets and drumstick lollies for nothing.

One day Mary and I wandered further away from our square than we had before, we were hiding and spying on my brother and his friends. We followed them through the tunnel that led under the motorway and towards the woods on the edge of the estate. We weren't allowed to go there. It was dark and cool beneath the underpass, with the steady roar of traffic above us, we made a racket, roaring and shouting as we ran through the dark and the urine stench towards the sunlight.

We believed that there were real grizzly bears in Danesholme woods, so we didn't follow my brother any further at first. We stayed safe in the sunshine, peering at the edge where the trees started, before the long forest shadows began. We ran back excited and scared, we jumped and squealed at the sound of anything rustling in the bushes. *It's the bears*, we repeated to each other, clutching each other's hot hands, dipping into the cool gloom of forest and then dashing back into the sunshine.

Our bare arms goosepimpled as we eventually dared to step through puddles of shadows, dapples of sunlight trickling through the canopy of forest above us. Gus and some boys were looking up into a tree.

Shushh! I've found some chicks... be very quiet or you'll scare them, my brother Gus said, as he very carefully gathered the tiny creatures in his jumper. He set off and we followed him, the chicks cheeping as we were chirping and begging to hold one.

Once at home, we looked at the three chicks on the kitchen table, fragile, purple and papery, their eyes were hardly open. Their beaks were wide, letting out tiny croaks and cries. I asked,

Where's their mummy gone Gus?

Don't know, they've been abandoned...

Why?

Don't know, maybe the mother was scared off or something...

Our mother said softly, *Poor things!*

The mother bird would smell us humans on them now, wouldn't she, if she came back, wouldn't she, Mum? Mum?

Mum didn't say anything as Gus continued urgently,

Mum, we can't take them back to the woods, they'll perish out there in the wild.

Mummy, would the mummy-bird smell human bean on them now?

Human bean? It's human being!

Yes, I am afraid she would and then she'd abandon them...

Yeah, so we best keep them, hey? Mum, can we, hey?

Gus butted in and then we pleaded at a high pitch until Mum smiled and said we could keep them if we looked after them properly. Gus said,

They'll be eaten by cats or foxes if we don't take them in, hey Mum...

And the bears will eat them all up, won't they, Gus?

Yes, Salena, if you say so.

We made the chicks a cosy nest in the airing cupboard where Mum said it was warmest. Mum remembers we let

them free and they cheeped and hopped along the top landing of the house. We gave them tiny pieces of bread dipped in warm milk and broken-up cereals.

Then, one chilly morning before Gus left for school, we went to feed them their breakfast but found the corridor silent. When we opened the airing cupboard door they were all dead, probably scared to death in the dark airing cupboard. My brother and I had shaken hands, choosing which chick was to be whose. We had imagined a future with our bird-chicks for pets. One day, they were to be our own tame birds. We could have trained them to follow us to school, to sit on the school fence and then follow us home again. Now, wiping our eyes, absorbed in our young grief, my brother and I made the necessary arrangements. We filled a shoebox with toilet paper and tissue, and an old cotton handkerchief to cover the chicks up and keep them snug. We dug a hole with spoons and buried them in the public front garden, right by our front door. Mum led with a sombre funeral speech, then helped us say our prayers, and said,

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

Mum told us the chicks went to God in bird heaven. I squinted up into the cold morning sky to see bird heaven. I imagined it was behind the clouds and just before the stars. We made a lollipop stick cross to mark the final resting place, but a few days later they were dug up by cats.

3 / The Right Excellent Nanny Of The Maroons

Every morning in Danesholme, my mother dropped me off at my grandmother's on her way to her new job working in the local Co-op supermarket. She sat me quietly in my grandmother's living room and told me to be good and put the radio on very low for me. I knew that I had to be very quiet, Nanny worked nights as a nurse in a hospital and I had to wait for her to wake up to see to me. I'd play alone, taking in the spicy smells, the tall leaves of the rubber plants and the exotic red ginger flowers. I remember the collection of wooden ducks on the stairway, the maps of Jamaica on bamboo trays, and a blue and yellow budgie in a cage. I'd lift the night-cover on the cage to see if the budgie was sleeping. I chattered to the little bird, hearing the rustle of its feathers, I'd poke my fingers into the cage to feed him seeds as he nipped me with his beak. Whenever his cage door was opened, he'd fly aimlessly around the living room and perch on the curtain rail.

Waiting for Nanny to get up, I'd listen to the radio whilst spinning around in a circle for hours. This was my favourite game - to try to stand for as long as I could no matter how dizzy I became. I loved the melodies of 'Lazing on a Sunny

Afternoon' and 'Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head'. I sang, spinning on the spot, until the fuzzy shagpile carpet came up to meet me, orange waves of brown circles and red patterns rising. I stood there fixed, trying not to fall over, with the room spinning about. Once I had fallen and the room stopped racing before my eyes, I struggled up to do it again and again. I never grew tired of the rush of blood to my head and making myself dizzy, either by spinning or hanging upside down off the back of the sofa and being drawn to these sensations, enjoying being dizzy and upside down has followed me into adulthood.

Eventually I'd hear my grandmother in the bathroom upstairs. I'd creep up to the L-shaped landing halfway up the stairs to watch her. I crouched and spied on her, ducking down out of sight when she looked over, though I think she must have known I was there, it was all part of the game. Watching my grandmother dressing fascinated me; the preparation and piecing together of this magnificent tiger-eyed woman. Just out of the bath, she was engulfed in clouds of powder, a sweet dusting of sweet scents of lavender, lily of the valley or roses. Chalky white talc against her soft brown skin.

I studied my grandmother and her underwear. My nanny's bra was just like my mother's, but so much bigger and stiffer to hold her wondrous bosoms in pointed peaks. Each breast was protected, separated and mountainous. Even though I had seen this a hundred times, I was mystified by my nanny's pillowy bosoms. She'd put on another contraption, a girdle, with a million hooks and buttons, until it seemed she was bound in with bone and