

## Chapter Six

# Trudy

I looked out across the car park to the fields beyond. The fields looked like a patchwork quilt, sewn together using swatches of a host of different shades of green. Some fields were so light as to look yellow, whereas others were so dark they looked almost purple. It was beautiful. I shivered as the chill September wind tried to eat its way through my jacket but I didn't really mind. The fields, the sky, the hedges, even the car park – they all spelt life and hope. We'd had to change trains twice to get to Beaconsridge Station. And if ever a place looked like the middle of nowhere, then this was it. I wondered what the people who lived in Beaconsridge did for fun.

‘This is ridiculous. How much longer are we going to have to wait?’

I sighed inwardly as I looked at my mum. For the last four days, ever since Dr Bryce had come to see us, Mum hadn't opened her mouth except to snap or complain. I

knew that she was upset about the whole situation, but truth to tell, she was getting on my nerves. And from the look on Dad's face, I could see he felt exactly the same as me. He had tried to parry every complaint with a joke or a smile, but now his smile was beginning to wear thin.

'We've only been waiting fifteen minutes,' he soothed.

'Dr Bryce said we'd be met off the train. The train left twenty minutes ago. I'm not going to stand out here in the freezing cold for much longer,' Mum said sharply.

'Shall we stand inside by the ticket office then?' Dad suggested.

'That's not the point. Maybe we should just get on the next train back home,' said Mum.

'Cathy, for goodness' sake . . .'

'Mum, Dad, I think this might be him.' I pointed to the first car I could see that was coming our way.

I didn't want to listen to another argument. Not here. Not now. For heaven's sake! I was nervous enough as it was. The car I pointed to drove by. But the van behind it pulled onto the station forecourt and drove up to us.

Please let this be Dr Bryce. *Please*, I wished silently.

The driver pulled up alongside us and turned off her

engine. She leaned across the empty passenger seat and wound down the window. It wasn't Dr Bryce. It was some woman I'd never seen before. She had dancing dark-brown eyes, framed by a serious, studious face. Her black hair was pulled back into a pony-tail and she wore a white overall.

'Cameron Kelsey?'

'Yes.' I nodded eagerly.

'Mr and Mrs Kelsey?'

'Yes,' Dad replied.

'Who else would we be?' Mum muttered.

'Hi, I'm Dr Janice Ehrlich. I'm Dr Bryce's assistant. Sorry I'm late.'

'That's all right,' I said quickly. I didn't want Mum voicing her opinion about the doctor's punctuality.

Dr Ehrlich smiled. 'Hop in the back and we'll get going.'

I walked towards her, followed by Mum and Dad. When I saw inside of the MPV I was amazed. Comfortable wasn't the word. It was sumptuous. Two sets of black leather seats had been placed to face each other with a small, retractable central console in the middle of each one. Each console had been pushed down to display snacks and a

couple of bottles of soft drinks. There was a glass panel between the driver's and the front passenger's seats and those in the back. And the glass was tinted, as were the other windows in the back. No one from outside stood a chance of seeing the MPV's passengers. A quick examination of the display panel in the roof of the car above each back seat showed they could be used to set the lighting in the back, talk to the driver, even play music. What a car! I wanted one!

'What's with the tinted windows? Dr Bryce isn't taking any chances, is he?' Mum sniffed.

'All guests who come to our research centre have to travel in one of our company MPVs. It's a safety precaution. I hope you don't mind,' Dr Ehrlich said.

'Yes, I do,' sniffed Mum. 'But I'll get in anyway.'

We all got in the back of the car. Mum and I sat on one side, Dad sat opposite. Whilst we fastened our seat belts, the door slid almost silently shut.

'Is all this cloak and dagger stuff really necessary?' Mum asked no one in particular.

Dad shrugged. 'They obviously think so.'

The MPV began to move. I turned to look out of the

windows. We pulled out of the station forecourt then turned right. Due to the tinted glass, the sky, the buildings, even the odd person we saw along the way had all taken on a dark grey tinge. I reached up to press the button to switch on the light on my side of the car. I thought the light would help make the back of the MPV seem less shadowy and sombre. It didn't. The yellow light cast from overhead was pale and sickly. Mum, Dad and I sat in an uneasy silence as the car travelled on.

'This is ridiculous,' Mum muttered. 'Anyone would think this was *Mission Impossible* or something.'

Dad and I tittered and even Mum smiled, but it didn't last long. And still the car kept moving. Mum glanced down at her watch. I did the same. Forty minutes had passed. Mum reached up to press the button on the intercom above her head.

'How much longer before we get there?' Mum asked, irritation lending an edge to her voice.

'Not much longer now, Mrs Kelsey,' Dr Ehrlich's cheerful voice rang out. 'Another two kilometres and we're there.'

With a huff of frustrated indignation, Mum took her

finger off the intercom button. A few minutes later, the MPV came to a gentle stop. The doors on both sides of the car slid open. The sudden change in light made me blink rapidly. Dr Ehrlich hopped out first. I undid my seat belt and hopped out, feeling the uneven bump of the gravel beneath my feet.

'Thank goodness for that,' said Mum as she descended from the car with Dad's help.

'Here we are. Safe and sound.'

Mum and Dad exchanged a glance. I knew what they were thinking because I was thinking it too. Dr Ehrlich's constant cheery manner was beginning to get a bit wearing. I took a good look around. Green field after green field rolled away from us in every direction. The only relief to the landscape came from the darker green of the hedges that marked the perimeter of some of the fields. The fields reached out to the horizon. The only building in sight was the building directly behind us. I turned to give it a closer look. It was huge, like an old school building. The two security guards who stood outside the entrance to the building eyed our group speculatively.

'This way.' Dr Ehrlich strode towards the entrance,

beckoning to us as she went. Mum and Dad led the way, followed by me.

Entering the building was like entering another world. What had looked like an old school building from the outside was like something from a science fiction film on the inside. The reception area was completely enclosed by glass walls. There were a number of solid wooden doors beyond the glass walls, but each door was protected and controlled by an electronic keypad. The reception area was bright and airy with plenty of plants, each of which was at least a metre and a half high. Two burly men in uniforms sat at the reception desk. They were all smiles when they caught sight of Dr Ehrlich.

'Hello, Janice. You made good time,' said one of the men.

'You know me,' Dr Ehrlich replied. 'I don't hang about!' She turned to my parents. 'You'll have to sign in, I'm afraid. You too, Cameron. Or should I call you Cam?'

I shrugged. 'Whatever. I don't mind.'

As we all signed our names in the visitors book, the man who had joked with Dr Ehrlich smiled at my dad and said, 'D'you know the real reason why we black out all the

windows of the van? It's so you won't see Janice's terrible driving!'

'Thanks a lot, Chris!' Dr Ehrlich said indignantly. But the smile in her eyes showed that she'd heard it all before and didn't mind his teasing.

She walked over to the reception door which led to the rest of the building and placed the pass hanging from a chain around her neck against a black control pad with a flashing red light. The door clicked open immediately.

'This way. This way.' Dr Ehrlich waved us on through the door. Walking briskly around us, she led the way through another security door, then down a long corridor with closed doors on either side of it.

'Dr Bryce asked me to show you around our lab before you see Trudy and the others. He'll meet us at the pens.' Dr Ehrlich opened a door about halfway down the long corridor.

We entered a large, square room with long benches and tables covered with test-tubes and burners and centrifuges and PCs and a lot more equipment that looked very scientific, but I didn't have the first clue what any of it was used for.

'This is one of our labs which deals with perfusion.'

'What's that?' I asked, hoping fervently that Dr Ehrlich wasn't going to use jargon that would whiz straight over my head! I didn't want to be blinded with science and words I'd never heard before.

'In this context perfusion is the process of passing blood through an organ or tissue – in this case the heart,' she explained.

I looked around with interest. 'What's that?'

Suspended in a tank, attached to a number of tubes, was a beating heart. I walked over to it immediately. I'd seen pictures of healthy hearts beating. Healthy hearts were very red and beat with a strong, regular rhythm. This heart was in trouble. It was almost black and its beat was erratic and irregular.

'That's a normal pig's heart being flushed with human blood. We're trying to simulate a transplant operation using the heart from a non-genetically treated pig.'

'It's not going very well, is it?' I said.

'No, but we know why. As I said, this is an untreated, normal pig's heart. It can't absorb any of the oxygen from the blood. It's pumping. This heart will stop beating within

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an hour at most. What we're doing is analysing the process at every second to compare it to the heart of a genetically altered pig pumping human blood. It's an experiment for comparison.'

'How long will the heart of a genetically altered pig beat for under the same circumstances?' Mum asked.

'So far, the longest time has been eight months.'

'That's not very long,' Mum said quietly.

Dad looked at her and glanced away again.

'Ah yes, but that heart hadn't been treated with our new anti-rejection therapy. We made a breakthrough several years ago. Dr Bryce has discovered a complement blocker which would—'

'A what?' I interrupted.

'Sorry.' Dr Ehrlich smiled. 'It's like this. The major problem with any transplant surgery is the human body rejecting the transplanted organ. There's one particular part of the immune system that's most responsible for attacking transplanted organs. It's a protein known as complement. Complement is produced by the liver and what it does is destroy any alien cells it might find in the body by punching a hole in them. Complement is like a

battalion of soldiers who never sleep. They whiz around the body on a search-and-destroy mission.'

'How does this complement stuff know which ones are alien cells and which ones aren't?' I asked.

'That's a very good question. Well, your body prevents itself from being attacked by its own complement by placing molecular markers on the...'

At my blank look, Dr Ehrlich shook her head ruefully. 'Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself again, aren't I? Basically, your body has a way of placing special markers on its own cells to let the complement know that those cells aren't to be touched. It's like telling the complement that the cells are on its side. What Dr Bryce has done is find a way to add these same markers to the DNA of the pigs we keep. That's why Trudy is our best bet for this operation. Her heart is perfect!'

'But isn't all this a case of fools rushing in where angels fear to tread?' Mum asked.

'I don't understand...' Dr Ehrlich frowned.

'All this... genetic engineering. I mean, you scientists are sailing full steam ahead into areas you know nothing about.'

'Mum, it's all right. This isn't *Jurassic Park!*' I said, more to lighten the tension that crackled from Mum than for any other reason.

'But that's exactly my point,' said Mum. 'It's a similar idea, isn't it? None of you doctors and scientists know exactly what you're letting the rest of us in for.'

'Mrs Kelsey, I can assure you—'

'But that's just it. You can't. And neither can Dr Bryce. He made it very clear that there are no guarantees. I read somewhere that there have been cases of . . . super mice! Mice that were injected with the DNA of a rat and grew to an abnormally large size.'

I looked at Mum in surprise. Where had she read that?

'But I also read that they tried to breed super pigs and the poor pigs ended up blind, diseased or much too heavy for their own legs to support them. How d'you know that what you're doing now won't have repercussions further down the line? How can you be sure of what you're doing? How d'you know that some defect in these pigs won't appear maybe five or ten or fifty years later on? And what about the possible diseases that pigs may carry? There may be diseases that a pig can take in its stride which

would be lethal to us humans. I read that a number of scientists now believe AIDS originated in monkeys and somehow jumped across the species barrier to us humans. And what about BSE? We now know that mad-cow disease can infect humans as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. And what about the flu? I read that every few years a new strain of the flu appears because it mutates in pigs and ducks and then we humans suffer the consequences. So how d'you know you won't be importing a retro-virus into my son when you put a pig's heart in his body?'

I stared at Mum. This was the first time I'd heard any of this.

'You're not the only one who looks things up on the Internet,' Mum told me, her tone defensive.

'All I can say is we're doing our best to make sure that we tackle or are at least aware of every potential problem,' said Dr Ehrlich.

'But as you said – you can't guarantee it.'

For the first time since we'd met her, Dr Ehrlich wasn't smiling. 'No, we can't.'

Mum nodded slowly. 'That's what I thought.'

'But Dr Bryce wouldn't be considering a xenograft if he

didn't truly believe that it stood every chance of success,' Dr Ehrlich argued.

'What's a xenograft?' I asked.

'Animal organ transplants are known as xenografts,' she explained quickly. Mum had all of her attention and it was as if she resented any second spent not arguing Dr Bryce's case.

'This complement blocker you were talking about,' Dad began. 'Has that been tested? D'you know for sure that it works?'

'We certainly do. We tested it on specially treated rabbits and the results were very encouraging.'

'So this complement blocker is your way of trying to make sure that the human body won't reject the foreign heart,' said Dad.

'Absolutely right.' Dr Ehrlich was all smiles again. 'And let me tell you, it works. This way.'

She left the lab and marched briskly to the very end of the corridor, opening up yet another security door. To my surprise, I saw that it was a changing room with lockers and shower cubicles.

'Cam, if you and your dad could strip off your clothes

and have a shower.' Dr Ehrlich pointed to one side of the changing rooms. 'Mrs Kelsey, I'll show you to the women's changing rooms.'

'I beg your pardon?' Dad said indignantly.

'Oh, I'm not accusing you of having offensive body odour or anything like that.' Dr Ehrlich grinned. 'But all of us have to have a shower immediately before and immediately after contact with our pigs.'

'You're joking.' I couldn't believe my ears.

Dr Ehrlich shook her head. 'Trudy and the others are very special pigs and we can't take the risk of them catching something and becoming infected.'

'You seriously expect us to shower just for some pigs?' Mum was scandalized. 'And what d'you mean you can't risk them catching something and becoming infected? We're more likely to catch something from *them* than the other way around.'

'I'm sorry, but it's something we all have to do. No one is allowed to see the pigs without showering and gowning-up first.'

'This is ridiculous.' Dad agreed with Mum and I agreed with both of them.

'I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. I'm sure you understand. We have to keep the pigs' environment as pure as possible. You wouldn't want us to give Cameron an already contaminated or infected heart, would you?' Dr Ehrlich smiled. 'Besides, Trudy and the others love all the fuss we make of them. They think it's a great game.'

I frowned. 'Sounds like Trudy and the others get treated better than I do!'

Mum frowned. 'Cam, d'you really want to go through with this?'

I nodded. 'Yes, I do. We've come this far. We can't turn back now.'

'Good. Good.' Dr Ehrlich's smile broadened. 'Once you've all had your showers, go out through the other door and put on one of the surgical outfits hanging up in bags on the wall. Make sure you put on the mask and gloves as well. Mrs Kelsey, your surgical outfit is already hanging up in the women's changing room.'

'Come on, Mum. Let's just get it over with.' I spoke before my mum could have another rant.

The doctor led Mum out of the door. Mum marched behind her without saying another word. I didn't need to

see her expression to know what she thought of the way we were being treated. With a sigh, I had a look around. The shower room looked a bit like the cubicles at the swimming baths.

'OK, Cam. Let's get going,' said Dad.

We each went to our own cubicles. I stripped off and hung my clothes carefully on the two pegs in the cubicle.

All this to see some pigs! It was bizarre. With each step, with each passing moment, I was getting drawn deeper and deeper into this other world. A world of hope and dreams all tied around the strangest set of circumstances – and a pig named Trudy. I left the cubicle and headed for the showers. From the sound of it, Dad had beaten me to it. Adjusting the temperature in my shower cubicle, I still couldn't believe what I was doing. Anyone would think I was going to operate on the pigs, for goodness' sake! All I wanted to do was look at them – at Trudy in particular.

Still, the water felt warm and soothing against my skin. I closed my eyes, allowing the water to play over my face and body. Each drop beat a tiny tattoo against my skin. For once, I wasn't aware of my heart. The world was the sensation of warm, running water. And it was so peaceful,

so good. I smiled, but my smile faded into sadness. For a brief but welcome moment I had forgotten why I was there in the first place.

I stepped out of the shower and looked around for a towel. Hanging up next to each shower cubicle was a towel in a polythene bag. Shaking my head, I tore the bag open and dried my skin. Tying the damp towel around my waist, I headed towards the second door. I stepped out into a room so bright that it made me blink a few times. Fluorescent strips covered the ceiling and the walls were an antiseptic white. Dad had already got dressed. I saw the bag with my name written on it. Opening the bag. I put on the green surgical trousers and top. There was even a cap which covered my entire head, a surgical mask and gloves. By the time I was finished there was no part of me left exposed except my eyes.

'What do we do now?' I asked Dad.

Dad shrugged and pointed to a different door to the one we had used to enter. We walked out to find Dr Ehrlich and Mum waiting for us in a corridor we'd not yet seen. Both of them were gowned up but I could see that my mum still hadn't cooled off.

'Ready?'

I swallowed hard and nodded.

Dr Ehrlich led the way down the corridor and we entered a small, white room, empty apart from a phone on one wall with a large red button next to it. At the opposite side of the room was something that looked like a metal door frame. A faint buzzing noise came from it, the same sort of noise a fluorescent light gives off. I could tell from the smell that the pigs were near by. In a strange way, the smell was reassuring. It smelt normal – as normal as pig manure could smell! But at least they weren't dealing with super pigs or pigs who didn't do what normal pigs did!

Dr Bryce was already there, gowned and waiting. 'Welcome!'

I could see from the twinkle in his eyes and the creases around them that he was smiling and happy to see us.

'This way. We each have to pass through the scanner over there.' He pointed to the metal frame. 'Then Trudy is in a pen just beyond.'

'Just a minute, Dr Bryce,' Mum began. 'Is it safe? I mean, there's no chance of any of us . . . catching anything from these pigs, is there?'

'You're more likely to pass your germs on to the pigs than the other way around,' Dr Bryce said, just a hint of a sharp edge to his voice. 'Let me assure you that the pigs and their pens are cleaned regularly. The pens are properly ventilated, the temperature is regulated and our pigs are very clean.'

'But is it safe?' Mum persisted.

'Of course it's safe. You've had a shower and changed into sterile surgical gowns so there's no danger to either the pigs or yourself.' He led the way towards the scanner.

'Why do we have to be scanned?' Mum protested. 'We've already showered and got dressed in these surgical gowns. D'you think I've got some apple sauce tucked under my hat or something?'

'It's just a precaution. And we each have to do it,' Dr Bryce soothed. 'It's just that we have been fooled before and we can't afford to take any chances. We've had someone try to smuggle a knife into the pens before now.'

'What type of scanner is that?' Mum's tone was sharp.

'It scans for metal objects.'

'Using what? X-rays?'

'That's right. But they're of a low dosage.'

'X-rays . . .' Mum was horrified.

'A very low dosage.' Dr Bryce tried to reassure Mum.

'I'm not going through that thing.' Even though I couldn't see all of Mum's face, I recognized the tone at once.

'Mrs Kelsey, I can assure you—' Dr Bryce began.

'No, I'm not setting foot near that thing.' Mum insisted.

'But . . .'

'You don't understand.' Mum looked at Dad and me and took a deep breath before turning back to the doctor. 'Dr Bryce, I'm pregnant and I'm not taking another step until you turn that thing off and assure me that there's nothing around here that could harm my baby.'

I stared at Mum. I couldn't believe it.

*Mum was going to have a baby.*

Why hadn't she said anything before now? How could she and Dad keep it a secret? I was going to have a brother or sister. Pure joy erupted in me like an exploding volcano.

*I was going to have a brother or sister.*

'Dad, why didn't you tell me?' I grinned.

But Dad wasn't smiling. He was watching Mum. 'I didn't know, Cam. I'm just as surprised as you are,' he replied

quietly.

Dad had a look on his face I'd never seen before. And all at once the look was gone and his face was a mask. His face looked as if it would crumble if he tried to smile or frown or even speak now.

'Congratulations.' Dr Ehrlich beamed at Mum. 'When's the baby due?'

'In the New Year – April,' Mum replied.

I noticed that she still hadn't looked at Dad. And Dad hadn't taken his eyes off her.

'Congratulations, Mrs Kelsey,' Dr Bryce said. 'And let me assure you, you're perfectly safe. I'm sure the scanner would do your baby no harm at all, but as these are exceptional circumstances, I'll have it switched off for you.'

Dr Bryce walked over to the phone, picked it up and immediately started talking into it. Within a few seconds the scanner buzzed loudly, then the buzzing stopped.

Dr Bryce smiled. 'Go ahead, Mrs Kelsey.'

Mum walked through the scanner but I could tell she still wasn't too happy about it. Dr Bryce spoke into the phone again and the scanner was re-activated. 'I've told them that I'll let them know when we're ready to leave the

pigs, so they'll turn the scanner off again for you,' he told Mum as he put the phone down.

'We'd best get going,' Mum said.

I walked through the scanner with Dr Bryce. Dad was a step or two behind us.

'Mum, that's great news.' I grinned at Mum.

'Yes, it is.' She smiled back at me.

Beyond the room there was a short corridor which bent round to the right. As we turned the corner, there were medium-sized pens lined against one wall, each one sectioned off from its neighbour by solid partitions of about a metre high.

'This is Greta,' Dr Bryce announced as we passed the first pig. 'She is Trudy's grandmother. When Greta became pregnant, we implanted some of her embryos with human DNA.'

I stared at the pink pig who totally ignored us, her snout in the food trough that lined one side of her small sty. I would have stayed longer to watch her but Dr Bryce swept on.

'And here she is! Our star – Trudy! Trudy is one of the fourth generation of pigs that have key human

characteristics to some of their hormones. We truly believe that Trudy is as close as we've come to having a viable heart for transplantation into a human being.'

*Well, Cameron – this is it. Keep your own heart and count every beat in case it's your last. Or have a heart transplant. Simple.*

I watched as the huge pig came whiffling up us. Trudy looked straight at me. I looked back at her. She was going to die so that I could live. I told myself that pigs died every day to make bacon and pork pies and chops and sausages. This wasn't any different – except for the fact that I'd seen the pig first.

She was going to die so that I could live. Wasn't that a fair exchange?

So why did I feel so . . . guilty? More than guilty, I felt horrible – almost like a murderer. I told myself not to be so stupid. Trudy was just a pig. Just a pig . . . The words sounded like an excuse in my head.

*Just a pig . . .*

People always used that argument whenever they wanted to use and abuse animals – or even other people. Part of the excuse used to justify slavery was that we black

people were 'less than human'. And the Nazis said the same things about Jewish people. Like Mum said, it was such a convenient excuse. If other people and animals were different but *equal*, then you had to treat them with the same respect that you wanted for yourself. Different but 'less than' was an entirely different proposition. To some people, animals were 'less than' human in the way that tables and chairs were 'less than' human.

It all boiled down to what I believed. And the trouble was, I did believe that animals had rights – just the same as we humans. So what was I doing here? I had the answer to that one. I was trying to save my own life. And what did that make me? Someone who was the biggest hypocrite in the world, or just someone who was desperate?

But what about Trudy? What was her choice? If she hadn't been specifically bred to help me and others like me, she would've ended up as someone's Sunday roast or morning breakfast. If only there was some way she could help me without paying for it with her life. Somehow it didn't seem fair. It didn't seem right to assume that we could treat her like this, just because she couldn't protest – at least not in a way that we humans could understand. As

I watched the pig, I began to wonder if seeing her wasn't a mistake.

'Hello, Trudy,' I said. 'My name is Cameron.'

It felt so weird. I shook my head, wondering what on earth I was doing. What had I hoped to achieve?

'What's she like, Dr Bryce?' I asked.

'Trudy?'

I nodded.

'Oh, she's a fine pig. She used to boss all her brothers and sisters around until we separated them off. She's independent and strong and extremely intelligent. She can be a bit stubborn...'

I smiled. 'You mean, pig-headed!'

Dr Bryce laughed. 'Yes, exactly. Pig-headed – but she's got a heart of gold.'

*A heart of gold...*

'And if you did operate, when would that be?' I asked.

'Just as soon as we could arrange it,' Dr Bryce replied immediately. 'You still want to go ahead?'

The silence stretched on and on as everyone waited for my answer.

I looked at Dad. He'd started the ball rolling but, from

the look on his face, I think he was beginning to wonder what he'd let us all in for. I looked at Mum and reached my decision. 'More than ever,' I replied.

It was simple. I had to live now. I had to live long enough to see my brother or sister. Mum was pregnant, maybe even with more than one! It would be terrific if Mum had twins. And with Trudy's help I would be able to see them and help Mum and Dad look after them. I couldn't wait.

I looked at Trudy. If I'd been alone, I would've hugged her and thanked her properly. She looked straight at me. And I hoped she knew what I was thinking. And I prayed she didn't mind. I looked at Dad and turned back to Mum. Now Dad was looking everywhere but at Mum and I could feel the tension between the two of them. And slowly the joyous feeling that swirled within me dissipated, to be replaced by something less pleasant.

My stomach churned and turned like a tumble-drier and I actually felt sick. Seconds passed before I realized what was wrong. For the first time since Dr Bryce had come into our lives, I was afraid. Not of the transplant operation – although that was scary enough – but I was afraid of what

would happen afterwards. Once the operation was over, what would happen to my family? I couldn't help feeling that my family was disintegrating before my eyes and there was nothing I could do about it.