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**LOUDNESS
OF UNSAID
THINGS**



Hilde Hinton

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**TO SAM AND THE BOYS FOR RUNNING AROUND THE BACK PORCH
WITH WINDMILL ARMS WHEN I REVEALED THIS BOOK WAS GOING
TO BE AN ACTUAL BOOK.**

THE INSTITUTE

The Institute. For the damaged, the dangerous, the not-quite-rights. The big mistake-makers, the ill at ease, the outliers. A hot pot. They use surnames in The Institute. Impersonal; respectful. Everyone was called Miss. The women. The workers. Miss this. Miss that. When Miss Kaye first started working at The Institute, she found 'Miss' odd. It was far from a school. Further than Mars.

The Institute had well-manicured gardens. The women worked on them during the day between appointments. Miss Kaye never knew where she was going to work within The Institute until she arrived for the day. Or night. It's a twenty-four-hour business. She looked at the running sheet and was not disappointed to see her name on 'the grounds'. Walk, make sure all was in order, chat idly to the clients, admire the odd flower. Time goes slower in the grounds. Non-eventful. The grounds, like the buildings, don't contain time. It could be 1950 or 2050. Utilitarian buildings – grey. Concrete rooms. No sign of era. No soft furnishings. Likewise, the gardens. Plants could be from 1950,

and unless there's an apocalypse, a flower will be a flower in 2050. No sign of time in the clients either. Uniformed; unmanicured. Same with staff. Waiting. Wandering. No time.

Miss Kaye tried to make herself smaller in the gardens, just as she needed to be bigger in the buildings. Her presence was an intrusion as she walked past the women clipping shrubs or shovelling tan bark. There was an edging plant that turned up everywhere. The leaves didn't know if they were grey or green. The flowers pure white sousaphones.

'What are those called?' she asked a waif pulling weeds.

'Silver Moons, Miss Kaye,' the waif said in a barely-there voice.

'How do you know?' Not a lot of trust in The Institute.

'I'm learning horticulture,' she said as she stood and put her hand on her mini hip. Hard not to be defensive when it's in the air. Pea soup.

'Good for you,' Miss Kaye said as she nodded approval. In fifty steps she would reach her favourite rock. It was so flat. A stage. And as big as a car; if it was flat. It was elevated and surrounded by Silver Moons and smaller rocks. Although they weren't symmetrical, it didn't disturb her. She glanced ahead. There was a woman standing on the rock. That was against the rules. The meander became a brisk walk.

'Get down, Miss,' Miss Kaye said firmly.

'NOOooo waaaay, there's a snake Miss Kaye. A fuckin' snaaAAAake!' she said, dancing on the rock stage. Miss Kaye fought back her absolute desire to join her on the rock. It was not the rules. The yelling and dancing brought more women over. Tentatively getting closer. Miss Kaye put one hand on her radio. As the women drifted in, Dancing Girl told them there was a snake. An older lady with a water-stained

leather face stood up straight and asked how big it was. Dancing Girl put out her pointer fingers like someone had scored a goal, but her hands weren't that far apart.

'It's a baby,' Leather Lady said, 'we need to be more concerned about the mother.' Commanding. Like Miss Kaye should be. She darted her leather face from rock to rock. Everyone else froze. She took a step to the left, crouched down, stood up, took a step to the right, crouched down. Everyone else only breathed. But only when it was necessary. For a moment Miss Kaye questioned her professionalism. It was time for her to take charge, to direct the women away from the baby snake. But she didn't. Baby snakes still bite. Leather Lady took a large step south-west, away from the group, and swooped down to the ground. She shot her arm out like lightning. When it emerged from a group of Silver Moons, it held a wriggling mini snake. The girls screamed and ran. Except Dancing Girl, who threw her drink bottle to Miss Kaye.

'PUT IT IN THERE,' she said loudly, crouching down into a ball. Beyoncé.

Miss Kaye just stood there watching the running women and wishing she was one of them. Parched with fear, she opened the bottle and held it out to Leather Lady. She turned her head towards the snake just enough to look brave. Leather Lady dropped the baby snake into the bottle. Plop. Miss Kaye slammed the lid on, turned it more tightly than she'd ever turned a lid and held the bottle between two fingers at its very top.

'You can get down now,' Leather Lady said to Dancing Girl, who jumped down from the rock and stood as close to the snake catcher as she could. Her protector.

'Oh. My. God. You. Are. A. Hero!' Dancing Girl said. Miss Kaye could see the Chinese whisper line that would follow this yarn. Umbilical cord thick. Hopefully the story would get so much larger than life that she would be portrayed as the opposite of how she felt. There's no visible fear when you work in The Institute. Or you don't work in The Institute. Other staff members approached and said the snake catcher was on his way. Word had spread. Miss Kaye tried to hand over the bottle, but other things became more important to the others. Things in the distance. Pretend things.

'Open the lid, we don't want to suffocate it,' Leather Lady called over her shoulder.

'Yeah, we don't want it to, like, diiiieee,' Dancing Girl added, her arm draped over her new friend. Morals get bigger with distance. Miss Kaye mimicked the motion of a partial bottle opening. The women nodded in approval and went on their way. It was normally one hundred and sixty steps down to the front gate, but it was a lot less with a snake in a bottle.

PART 1

THE GIRL

CHAPTER 1

The girl crawled into the space between the glove box and the floor of the HR Holden and curled herself up as tight as she could – but not before she'd checked that all four door locks were firmly pressed down. The tops of the locks looked like golf tees and they had perfect swirls cut into the plastic. They felt like fingerprints looked.

'I'm just going to the chemist,' her father had said, 'I'll only be a few minutes.'

The amusement dancing around his eyes annoyed her. She had told him her fears and he explained that facing them was character building. Although she was only seven, she'd had her fill of character building.

Boland and Eastwood were criminals who had kidnapped a bunch of kids from a nearby town just a few months ago and it had frightened her to the end of her toes. Whether it had been coincidence or not, she had been given a golden

Labrador within a few days of the kidnapping. She'd been on and on about having a dog for as long as she could remember. For at least half her life anyway. Whether or not the dog was related to the kidnapping no longer concerned her. He was handsome and his tongue was big and floppy, it made her laugh. She knew she would never tire of him for as long as she liked aniseed ice cream – and that was at least forever.

Ever since the kidnapping she had been waiting for Boland and Eastwood to escape from jail and kidnap her. Life had changed. When she was alone, the threat became so imminent and inevitable that she had taken to hiding, as she was now in the car, balled up so tight she could surely fit in a matchbox. Since the kidnapping, sleeping between her Holly Hobbie sheets had become fitful and difficult and lengthy. Catching the Hepburn to Daylesford school bus was now a test of how long she could hold her breath. She could probably swim the whole pool underwater now. Not the local pool – the one they used in the Olympics. She would picture how far along the pool she would get as she waited for Boland and Eastwood to come to take her bus, hoping all the while that she wouldn't blow up like the blueberry girl in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

The taunting of the kids who went to the state school didn't bother her anymore. Nor did the fact that she had to wear a dumb tie and they could wear whatever they wanted. No one would care about that stuff once Boland and Eastwood were

on the bus. The other kids would like her once they were all on the same side against the kidnappers. She wondered if kidnappers ever kidnapped grown-ups and, if they did, what those kidnappers were called. There was no way her dad would be this scared. Or her mum.

There was no thought required when her dad asked her what name suited the dog.

‘Boland, so when he kidnaps me he’ll let me go because I named a whole dog after him,’ she said as she tugged on his velvety ears. When it happened, she would stand tall and pretend not to be scared – she’d push her fear to the ends of her fingers. Boland would be so impressed he wouldn’t notice her fingers were blue because she was so scared. Not many people had dogs named after them.

Then it happened.

Boland was at the chemist too. He had gone behind the car and he was so stealthy that she hadn’t even heard him trying the door handles. But mastermind criminals aren’t stupid enough to make a sound while trying the doors. He must have used his eyes and seen that the golf tees were firmly pushed down before he realised he needed a plan B to kidnap her. The only option he had left was to push the car to wherever kidnappers take kids. Panic sat at the bottom of her stomach with the cream puff she’d eaten ten minutes before. It was tight in there and she wished she hadn’t eaten it, even though cream puffs were her favourite after aniseed ice cream. The car was moving. Boland and Eastwood must be pushing it.

She reminded herself to remember Boland was the boss and to make sure she gave him more attention than Eastwood. But where to? Probably a barn. That's usually where victims were taken. Even though she lived in the country, she didn't know what a barn looked like. Except that they were big, and no one would hear her scream.

Before she could process her actions, she peeked her eyes over the dash and through the bottom of the windscreen. The car was heading straight for the chemist. In Daylesford, people parked perpendicular in the middle of the street as well as alongside the shops. Perpendicular was one of her new favourite words. Maths always made the best words, like equilateral. Maths even found a new way to say pie.

'Oh my god,' she thought to herself. She'd never really believed in God, even though she did her holy communion. She didn't believe in God because she couldn't see him, but she could believe in Boland even though she hadn't *actually* seen him herself; because the bus full of kids he took *had* seen him. Besides, even if God was real he wouldn't like her because she hadn't respected the wafer. If only she had swallowed them instead of seeing how long she could keep them in her mouth before they disintegrated. She and her friend Claire always poked their tongues out at each other from across the church aisles with the wafers balanced on them, to see whose could last longest. One time, Sister Sylvester had seen their competition and she had her bum smacked with the metre ruler for being disrespectful to

God. Sister Sylvester had lifted her skirt to hit her in front of the whole school. She was wearing her orange undies on that day and everyone saw them. It made the ruler hurt less because the orangeness of her undies was so much more painful. Fat Donna put an orange on her desk for a week after that. No; God was not going to help her now, so she put her head down as far as she could and hoped Boland would make a mistake.

BANG!

The side of her head hit the glove box so hard it hurt more than the orange undies. Through the throbbing she tried to stay calm and think of dog Boland's big floppy tongue that somehow managed to fit in his mouth, even though it was so big. She tried to focus on the humour dancing in her dad's eyes, even though it usually made her mad. Her dad's eyes were a happy place. She wanted to see his face so badly. She told herself to think of the stupid orange curl that always stuck out of Sister Sylvester's head thing. That always made her giggle; but not today.

She didn't know whether she was going to be sick in her own lap when she realised the car was no longer moving. All her bravery was summoned and she peeked her eyes up above the dash again. The front of their car was in the side door of another car parked alongside the shops. There wasn't any sign of Boland or Eastwood. Cool. Boland buggered up, like the time she got caught pouring sand in the back of fat Donna's chair-bag so her books would be all gritty. She'd

only wanted to get even because Donna left oranges on her desk and dobbed on her, even for thoughts. Boland and Eastwood must have had to run away when all the shoppers and shopkeepers came rushing out to see what was going on. She couldn't believe they had made a mistake.

'Unlock the door,' her dad kept saying really loudly as he pelted his hands on the driver-side window. His eyes weren't full of fun.

She put her fingers either side of the golf tee lock and lifted. He pulled her up through the car and past the steering wheel and gave her a huge hug. She felt like she was in heaven, even though she didn't believe in it.

'Boland came and tried to get me, Dad,' she said in between small gasps because her chest was squashed. 'But he ran away when we hit the other car,' she added, boiling with relief. She thought she heard him say a naughty word and something about the handbrake, but she was so full of happy and relief that she didn't have enough room to listen.