

# THE OTHER HALF OF AUGUSTA HOPE

Joanna Glen read Spanish at the University of London, with a stint at the Faculty of Arts at Córdoba University in the south of Spain. She went on to teach Spanish and English to all ages, and, latterly, was a school principal in London. She has edited a variety of non-fiction books and her short fiction has appeared in the Bath Flash Fiction Anthology. She lives with her husband and children on the River Thames in Battersea, returning to Andalusia whenever it gets too grey.



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*For Mark, Charlie and Nina.*



*A time to weep and a time to laugh,  
A time to mourn and a time to dance,  
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them . . .*

Ecclesiastes 3:4–5



# Augusta

My parents didn't seem the sort of people who would end up killing someone. Everyone would say that – except the boy who died, who isn't saying anything. He carried his story with him off the edges of the earth, like the others who died along the way.

This story, my story, belongs to them too.

My story starts, like all stories do, with a mother and a father, and here they are – Stanley and Jilly Hope.

Stanley, tall, and stooping to apologise for this, liked to wear a dark wool suit, which, when he sat down, would rise to reveal two white and entirely hairless shins. Jilly was well below his eyeline, squashy as marshmallow and keen on aprons. She had pale curly hair, cut to just above the shoulder, which she patted, to little effect.

My parents put down a deposit on the house in Willow Crescent, in Hedley Green, before there was a house there at all. The riskiest thing they ever did. Empty out their bank account for a pile of mud.

From then on, no more risks to be taken. Life best lived within the crescent, which was circular, and round and round they went with their lives, contented, with no desire for exit.

I, as soon as I was *out* of my mother's womb, looked to be *out* of anywhere I was put *in*, striving, with some success, to exit the cot, the playpen or the pram.

My first exit (out of my mother) was fraught. I'd turned the wrong

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My sister, born in July, was named Julia; I, born in August, would be Augusta. A thematic and paired approach, as advised by the library of books on naming babies which my mother had stacked on her bedside table throughout the long months of our gestation. Our double exit was complete. Exit was a word I liked, *ex* meaning out in Latin, and *x* meaning anything at all in maths, and exit signs in green and white everywhere at school, but with limited opportunities to do so.

Stanley and Jilly Hope were much more inclined towards the in than the out, the staying than the going. They were the first to move into the crescent, and they wore this like a badge amongst the neighbours. We live at *number 1*. As if this made them winners.

But the thought crept into my mind quite early on that they were losers.

'Go away!' I said to the thought, but it didn't.

I never told anyone about it, even Julia, though I know it showed in the expression on my face, and this made her sad – and I am truly sorry about that now, sorrier than you know.

She and I were Snow White and Rose Red: Julia, fair, quiet and contained, happy inside herself, inside the house, humming; and me, quite the opposite, straining to leave, dark, outspoken, walking in the wind, *railing*. Railing, from the Latin, to bray like a donkey (*ragulare*) and railing meaning barrier or fence from straight stick (*regula*), which is how I looked, skinny as a ruler.

Our fifth birthday, one year of school done, and my legs and arms narrowing as I rose an inch above Julia's head. We were given tricycles, mine, yellow, and Julia's, pink. Julia drew chalk lines on the drive and spent the day reversing into parking spaces. I rode out of the drive, turned left, curved around to number 13, at the top of the crescent, twelve o'clock, crossed the road precariously to the roundabout and

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drove my trike into the fishpond singing 'We All Live in a Yellow Submarine'.

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I've always loved words like other people love sweets or ice cream or puddings, words made of letters so that sounds turn into things, actual things. And miraculously we remember which sounds match which things, hundreds and thousands of sound-combinations – because that's language. It mesmerised me as a child, and I would hang about, spellbound, whenever I heard people speaking Spanish or French or Gujarati.

I realised with some pride that I must sound as clever to foreigners when I spoke English, rattling off the words like a total pro, as we all do – well most of us, not Graham Cook, who lived next door, whose mouth didn't manage to make any words at all.

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Julia shrugged and went on making some kind of woollen knitted rope which came out of the head of a painted wooden doll. I hated that thing. I had one too. Of course. Still sealed. Suffocating in her box. Like the rest of us.

My mother, inexplicably, tied Julia’s woollen rope onto the pull-on pull-off light string in the bathroom, to join the gallery of miscellany hung around the house. There were crêpe butterflies, paper mobiles on coat-hangers, doilies taped to windows and paintings magnetised to the fridge – a kind of shrine to us, the twins, their girls.

No more children followed.

‘When you have two perfect children,’ said my father, ‘why ask for trouble?’

‘Perfect, are we?’ said Julia, smiling, and stretching on the sofa like a cat, with that lovely aura of contentment she had, a kind of giant body-shaped halo.

‘No complications, I mean,’ said my father, nodding towards number 2, and reaching out his small pale hand to Julia’s shoulder. ‘All there. Not – you know.’

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'Can you slow down, Augusta? I can't think straight,' said my father. '—things in the world?'

I kept going because I loved the sound of my own voice even though I was scarcely seven years old, and I could only imagine how clever I would sound if someone foreign was listening. Someone from one of the many countries in the world that was not our boring country, afloat on a grey ocean, when other countries got turquoise and aquamarine and azure blue as the colour of *their* sea.

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The way I was made was wanting to write a book. From as far back as I can remember.

But first I wanted to memorise as many words as I could, so that I could write it with precision and a bit of pzazz – which is the only word in the dictionary starting with *pz*, acronyms excepted.

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When I started my research into the sky, a cloud seemed a simple

thing to me – a puff of floating water-vapour, and that was that. But the more I researched, the more cloud meant. The five letters were elastic, and they stretched through the years, as I realised that someone somewhere was probably doing their PhD on clouds, or on one tiny aspect of clouds, and maybe that would take up half their brain for their whole life.

It made me feel dizzy when I realised everything the simple word *cloud* carried around inside it. It made me feel dizzy when I realised that this was true of every word there is. It made me feel both dizzy and small – and, in my dizziness and smallness, I watched the clouds go by, and they looked like speech bubbles. As I grew older and started to spend more time inside the row of dictionaries lined up on the reference shelves of the library, I put words inside them, words I loved, in alphabetical order A–Z. Acanthus, admiral, aeronaut, beanstalk, bergamot, chrysanthemum, calabash, cicada. I thought about the size of different words – or should I say the depth, or the space they take up? I wasn't referring to the number of letters they had but to what manner of thing or things were held within those letters.

I thought of hundreds and thousands of words all meaning hundreds and thousands of things, and it made me realise that, in the course of my own life, I would end up knowing almost nothing. But the almost nothing I ended up knowing would, I supposed, be different from the almost nothing other people would end up knowing, and between us all, I thought we would know a bit more than almost nothing. And, of course, death would come along, and everything we'd found out would be buried with us. Which seemed a terrible waste. Shouldn't we first be tipped upside down to let all our knowledge out – like when you empty a piggy bank of its coins?

For days, I went around chewing Burundi like you might chew gum. Burundi, I discovered, was a big, capacious word, and it stretched, stretched, stretched. Because Burundi meant a million things.

It was made up of 27,816 square kilometres, much of it hilly and

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mountainous, and 10 per cent of it water, mainly the huge Lake Tanganyika which contained 250 species of cichlid fish, rainbow-striped and dazzling.

There were about ten and a half million people living in Burundi – Hutu (85 per cent), Tutsi (14 per cent) and Twa (1 per cent) – and most of them were sad. Their land was running out of soil, their forests were running out of trees and the ones who hadn't been killed by each other were dying of AIDs.

Only the other day, when they did one of those world happiness surveys, Burundi turned out to be the world's least happy nation in 2016.

Burundi was my first unlikely choice before I realised how much I like unlikely choices – and, once I'd picked it, I couldn't let it go. I tried to imagine how different my life would have been if I'd been born there and not here. And I did my best to keep up with what was going on there through the years, including writing letters to each one of its American ambassadors.

The American ambassadors never so much as replied to me, so I turned my attention back to words, which seemed more readily available.

The word Asda was created in 1965, when the *Asquith* brothers approached Associated *Dairies* to run the butchery departments in their chain of shops.

If you made a similar combination out of *Julia* and *Augusta*, I worked out that you could call us *Justa* – and we would be one. Like we were, we really were – back in 1999 when we were both nine years old and wearing matching pleated skirts, modelled on Jane in the interminable *Peter and Jane* series, from my mother's second-hand Ladybird book collection.

*Justa*, I would later discover, is the feminine of *justus*, a Latin adjective meaning just and fair and proper and reasonable and a load of other things besides.

*Joanna Glen*

Asda is a word which sums up the life I was born into, a life in which Asda was news. And the news was that there was going to be a *massive* new Asda as part of the *massive* new shopping centre in Hedley Green, out on the main road. This was *massive* news in our house, in Willow Crescent, in the school playground, in Hedley Green high street – in 1999.

This new Asda would be the biggest Asda in Hertfordshire, or the South of England, or the whole world, depending who you were listening to. It was going to be huge and white and made of curved glass – like a great big UFO. Everyone was excited. Except me. They saw Asda as a big word, but I saw it as small. Size had nothing to do with it.

‘I can’t think of anything *less exciting* than the new Asda,’ I said to my mother and Julia. Because I liked to be dramatic and difficult, my mother would say. And *oppositional*, I would say, because I like finding new words.

‘Don’t be such an old grump, Augusta,’ said my mother, icing cupcakes in pastel colours, at breakfast, to eat at tea, like fashion houses show their autumn collections in the spring. She liked to be at least one meal ahead, sometimes more, which makes you feel breathless, if you think about it too hard. She rarely sat down.

Despite what I said, I quickly thought of about twenty-five things that *were* less exciting than the new Asda. Lard and washing up liquid and fingernail clippings and trowels and the hymn that begins ‘Forty Days and Forty Nights’ which we had to sing at school.

Although everyone called the new development Asda, there was going to be (eventually if all went to plan) a Homebase, a Next, a Mothercare and, rumour had it – because rumour *has* a lot of things – a cinema complex, possibly, and even a bowling alley. The cinema and bowling alley never came, as I might have predicted. (Think what a huge word rumour is, positively bulging with stuff, like a massive delusional warehouse.)

When I was a child and I told people my name, they said back at

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me, 'Augusta?' They said it with as big a question mark in their voice as you can imagine. Like they thought I'd got my own name wrong.

I replied, 'Yes, Augusta.'

They said, 'Oh, I see.'

Some people said, 'And what are you actually called?'

I said, again, 'Augusta.'

They said, 'I haven't heard that name before.'

But I soon grew to like my name.

It fits with my unusual choices.

Augusta, feminine version of Augustus – majestic, grand, venerable – a name originally given to the female relatives of Roman emperors.

Just saying.

Antsy Augusta, my mother used to call me.

'Ants in your pants, can you please sit still and stop talking all the time?'

My mother kept saying over and over again how much she wished the Mothercare had come when we were little. I couldn't see the point of saying this even once.

Julia reminded me that having twins was my mother's idea of heaven: pastel-coloured Babygros, pin-tucked girls' dresses and gingham bloomers.

I wondered what *my* heaven would be full of. But then I thought that I probably wouldn't get a choice, bearing in mind the communal aspect of the project.

I prefer the word *paradise* to heaven, a word which joins us all the way from the Greek *paradeisos*, giving us one of my favourite ever adjectives – *paradisiacal* – a word which nobody actually uses.

My grandmother Nellie (who gave me her middle name, and her straight dark hair and skinny limbs) said that in heaven we'd be in white, wearing crowns and waiting around, like in the carol. I knew I didn't want to wear a crown and I *hated* waiting around. So I hoped

she was wrong. I still have no idea how it works, and I'd like to find out. Like we all would, I guess.

Julia said that heaven would be full of roses and waterfalls and flocks of white doves, which were three of her favourite things.

'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest,' said my grandmother, who liked to talk in bible verses, set off by a word or a thought or a curse on somebody she didn't like. She particularly liked to divide people into sheep and goats, popping my goat grandfather into the jaws of hell at every possible opportunity because he had gone off with his secretary soon after my mother was born.

My grandmother would sit in the corner of the lounge on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons, commenting on our lives like a one-woman Greek chorus, whilst also playing with the silver crucifix which she wore around her neck. It had a little Jesus Christ on it, permanently dying. It bothered me.

To make room for the magical *Asda Development*, the terraced houses on the main road were being taken down, with the residents compensated, *very generously*, everybody said. The way they did it looked like slicing a rectangular block of Wall's ice cream, one oblong at a time, and I thought that this was one of my best similes (bearing in mind the name of the brand of ice cream), though nobody else in the family appreciated my brilliance.

Mrs Venditti, who was married to the ice cream-van man, cried as number 3 was sliced, and my mother explained that this was because her baby had died inside that house of cot death. I'd heard this was to do with lying babies on their front, and I asked my mother if Mrs Venditti had done this, by mistake, but my mother said, 'Can we change the subject?'

'Why?' I said.

'Because I don't like thinking about dead babies,' she said.

My father added, 'Mrs Venditti is also Italian.'

I said, 'What do you mean?'

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He said, 'Stop asking questions all the time.'

A driver in an old Renault 5 crashed into a minibus of school children because he was watching number 8 fall down, but nobody was badly hurt. A sign went up saying, 'Keep your eyes on the road,' except you had to take your eyes off the road to look at the sign. Sometimes, I thought, adults just don't think things through.

My mother let me wait on the main road in the evenings to meet our father on his way home from work. It made her feel that everything about our life was utterly perfect. Like the families in her second-hand Ladybird books, which continued to proliferate along the shelves of the somewhat over-varnished pine dresser.

The Greens' house was the last to come down, and all six Greens stood on the opposite pavement watching, as I waited for my father, who soon came walking past, whistling, on his way back from Stanley Hope Uniforms.

'This must be a very sad day for you,' he said to Mr Green cheerfully, as if the thought of Mr Green's sadness made him feel safer inside his own happiness.

'It's only bricks and mortar,' said Mr Green, with his hands in his pockets.

'It's a *home*,' said my father.

'That's sentimental, Stanley,' said Mr Green.

My father didn't seem to be able to find an answer for that.

'Aren't you worried?' said Mr Green to my father as his old house crashed to the ground.

'Why would *I* be *worried*?' said my father.

'Too much *worry*, Jilly,' my father would say when my mother suggested owning a dog, or going on an aeroplane, or having another baby, which was her favourite suggestion through the years.

'School uniform!' shouted Mr Green over the noise of the crashing bricks, jerking his head at the place behind the hoarding where the biggest Asda in the whole universe would be.

'School uniform?' shouted my father back.

Then the crashing stopped for a moment.

'Asda sells school uniform,' said Mr Green very slowly and very loudly as if my father had special needs. 'Lots of it. And cheap. The whole shaboodle.'

I watched my father's face, and I saw, for a tiny fragment of a second, a crack run across it, a hairline fracture, like on a china pot. I looked down at the pavement. I didn't like to see my father's face break like that. When I looked up, the hairline crack was gone. But my father's face was covered in a layer of sweat like see-through Uhu glue, which I hoped might mend the crack, although I knew the truth, that cracks grow and split rather than shrink or mend. I had a premonition of my father's face splitting in two.

'Better be on our way then,' said my father to Mr Green, and he shot his arm up in a wave to Mrs Green and the four bored children.

'What's a *shaboodle*?' I said, thinking I had a new word to add to my S page.

My father didn't answer Mr Green, and he didn't answer me. He practically ran home, whereas normally we walked along together, talking about how my day had been at school. His fingers were trembling, and I could tell he wanted to see my mother really badly.

'Peas in a pod,' says my mother – still, despite, or maybe because of, everything. 'That's what marriage is. For better. For worse. In sickness. And in health.'

'I need to talk to you, Jilly,' said my father, with his key still in the door, and I noticed he was panting with worry. I took up my position underneath the serving hatch (an arched hole in the wall) on the lounge side, which enabled me to listen to all their kitchen conversations.

'Oh, darling,' said my mother, laughing. 'Asda can't compete with Stanley Hope Uniforms!'

'Really?' said my father. 'Really?'

'It's the personal service,' said my mother. 'Who's going to measure

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the kids up at Asda? Who's going to sew initials onto their shoe bags at Asda?'

'Really?' said my father again. 'So nothing to worry about?'

And he walked into the hall saying under his breath, 'Nothing to worry about. Nothing to worry about.'

'Were the Greens sad to see their home come crashing down?' said my mother when we were eating supper.

'Mr Green said it was only bricks and mortar,' I said.

'How heartless,' said my mother. 'It's where they brought up their children.'

'Mr Green told Dad he was being sentimental,' I said.

My father blushed.

'I like you sentimental,' said my mother.

Julia and I looked at each other, waiting for my mother to kiss my father on his head, on his sweaty hair – which she did. I always found that my father's hair smelled a bit funny.

'We have something to tell you, Daddy,' said my mother.

'Oh yes,' said my father, spearing his fifth sausage with his fork.

'Julia has come home with the Poet of the Week certificate,' said my mother. 'It's a very special *award* from school.'

'Well done,' said my father, before adding, 'I'm sure Augusta's poem was good too.'

'Julia is going to read it to you,' said my mother to my father.

'The title,' said Julia, glancing at me, slightly flushed, as, strictly speaking, poetry was my thing, 'is "My Mother's Name".'

'Everyone's title was the same,' I said, by way of information, though my mother took it as a slight against Julia, and left her eyes on me that fraction too long.

'Fire away,' said my father.

Julia stood up, and she started to read, though she wasn't excellent at reading out and tended to stumble a bit, which made me clench my jaw.

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My mother's name is Jilly  
And she likes things that are frilly  
In summer she can be silly  
And in winter she's rather chilly.'

'Bravo,' said my father, laughing, ignoring the stumbles.

'She's just got me, hasn't she?' said my mother. 'Down to a tee. I do like things that are frilly, don't I, Stan?'

I was so happy that Julia got the Poet of the Week certificate, and I loved the way her little nose wrinkled like a rabbit when she read it, but I knew that this was not a good poem. Either the teacher had no idea about poetry or she had some other motive like balancing out the awards.

My mother and father laughed for some time together after Julia read the poem, which made me think they must be losing their minds. Even if you liked the rhymes, the poem was really not that funny.

'I do get chilly in winter,' laughed my mother, wiping her eyes, 'and I am a bit silly in summer.'

Summer was coming, and my father would close the shop on 30 or 31 July (Julia's birthday) for two weeks because so many people went away, and because my mother required that we too took a fortnight's holiday.

My mother spent fifty weeks of the year planning our two-week holiday, which would be the only one my father was prepared to take because he never liked anyone else to run the shop, the way some mothers won't pass their babies around. He had a sign in the window showing the whole calendar year. OPEN, it said in luminous ruled capital letters, with a single spindly pencil line through his holiday fortnight.

'Six months until we go away,' my mother would say.

'Five'

'Four'

'Three'

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'Two'

'One'

When we left for our holiday, my father would leave lights on timer switches around the house, mimicking our family routines, and he would go around checking them about five times before we left, and then one for luck. I told him that I'd never seen any burglars lurking about in Willow Crescent, and he said that they didn't carry swag bags and wear striped T-shirts – burglars could be anyone, even people we knew and liked, even neighbours in Willow Crescent.

'Even Barbara Cook?' I said.

'Obviously not Barbara Cook,' he said.

'You're the Neighbourhood Watch man,' I said. 'Shouldn't you have found out if any of our neighbours are burglars?'

'Don't worry your father when he's so busy,' said my mother, with her holiday glow, hoping my insolence wouldn't make my father's fingers start shaking, as it sometimes did, particularly on the day we left for our holiday, when he was taut with tension.

My mother started her trips to the travel agent in the autumn. She kept an eye on the newsagent board. She scoured the Sunday papers. She also used the school magazine where people advertised holiday homes and caravans.

Julia's poem ended up being published in the school magazine. My mother cut it out and framed it, and my father nailed it to the hall wall. Julia put a chewy Werther's toffee under my pillow with a note saying, 'You are the real poet in the family.'

I chewed it with great humility as Julia said (not incorrectly), 'My poem is actually quite bad.'

I wanted my mouth to make the words, 'No it isn't.' But my mouth didn't seem able to make those words, and, if it had, Julia would have known it was a total fib.

That's the thing with being a twin, and maybe it's the same with all brothers and sisters. You know the outside of each other, the body you bath with every night of your life, until you become too big to

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fit in together. Then one of you sits on the toilet lid and chats to the other in the bath until you run some more hot water and swap around.

You know the little splodge of birthmark on Julia's right upper arm and the dark freckle on her left ring finger that helps her tell her right from her left, and you know her inside too just the same. You feel her tears before they fall – and you want to stop them, you so want to stop them, though you can't, that's the truth of it. You hear her laugh before it comes, and hearing her laugh makes you laugh too. Her lovely bright laugh.

In this way, your twin is your home.

Or mine was, anyway.

Far more than my home was ever my home.

What a word it is – home – a million meanings packed up in a giant handkerchief and hanging from a pole which we carry across our shoulder.

'Didn't you write a poem, Augusta?' said my mother.

I nodded.

'You must show me it,' she said.

'Don't worry,' I said.

'I will worry,' said my mother, which meant I had to go and get my English exercise book although I really didn't want to.

'Here it is,' I said. 'Miss Rae didn't especially like it.'

'I'm sure she did,' said my mother, who obviously couldn't be sure she did, especially as I could be absolutely sure she didn't.

I opened the exercise book at the right page.

This is what my mother read:

'My Mother's Name' by Augusta Hope

'My mother's name is Jilly

Which (apparently) is an affectionate

Shortened version of Jill

Although it is longer by y

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Which makes me ask y  
You don't call a pill you love  
Such as aspirin  
(which removes head-aches)  
A pilly  
Or a hill you love  
Such as Old John Brown's  
A hilly  
Or a window sill you love  
A window silly  
But that would just be silly.'

Underneath, the teacher had written:

*'This is quite a strange poem, Augusta, and your rhyme pattern is not regular. Well done!'*

My mother stared at the teacher's comment.

Then she stared at the ruled grey line underneath. She was trying to read the indentations, and she was also trying to think what on earth she could say to me about my weird poem.

Underneath the teacher's comment I had written:

*'I didn't actually want a regular rhyme pattern FYI (which I'd discovered meant for your information).* Then I'd rubbed it out because I knew that, though it was true, it was also a bit rude – and precocious.

My mother went on straining her eyes to read underneath the rubbing out.

'What did it say here?' she said.

'I can't remember,' I said.

'It's . . .' said my mother, and she couldn't think what to say.

'It's OK,' I said. 'You don't have to like it. I know it's a bit strange.'

'Sometimes I wonder what is going on in that little head of yours,' said my mother.

She did not frame my poem.

# Parfait

My mother was called Aurore, which means dawn.

And my motherland, still waiting for its dawn, is called Burundi.

Burundi carries its poetry in the hummingbirds drinking from the purple throats of flowers, the leaves glistening green after a night of rain; in the cichlid fish which flash like jewels deep beneath the surface of Lake Tanganyika, where crocodiles slumber like logs, still and deceptive, and hippos paddle downriver, in a line.

It carries its spirit in the dignified faces of all who are willing to forgive in the belief that Burundi will one day be beautiful again.

Dignified faces like my father's.

I was his first son, and he prayed that by the time I was grown, we'd be living in peace.

'You were born smiling,' he told me. 'And you were so perfect. Everything we'd ever dreamt of.'

'So we called you Parfait,' said my mother.

'Parfait Nduwimana,' said my father (which means *I'm in God's hands*).

'You were the most beautiful baby,' said my mother 'with those little dimples in your cheeks.'

'Why would dimples be beautiful?' I said.

'Just because!' she answered, hopping over to me on her wiry legs, and stroking my left-hand dimple with her right hand.

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She reminded me of a bird, my mother.

I loved to spot birds when I was out and about: the hoopoe, or the Malachite kingfisher, or my favourite, the Fischer's lovebird – a little rainbow-feathered parrot which used to bathe in the stream up above our homestead.

'That bird is so . . .' I said.

And my father said, 'Unnecessary.'

Which I suppose is what beauty is.

Yet later I found I couldn't live without it.

Then my father said, 'Unnecessarily extravagant.'

I said, 'What's extravagant?'

He said, 'This is,' turning in a circle and pointing all around him, at the sky and the trees and the water running, clear, over the pebbles.

My family went on washing in the stream, like the birds.

There were nine of us in the beginning.

The girl twins: Gloria and Douce, who liked to dress up in the shiny bridesmaid dresses brought down the hill by the Baptists in plastic sacks.

The boy twins: Wilfred, named after an English missionary who lived (and died) on our *colline*, and Claude, named after a French one.

Pierre was strong and stubborn, and you couldn't tell what he was thinking.

Zion was the baby, and you could. Even from when he was tiny, he wore his heart on his sleeve, as they say in English.

My father's face always had a glow about it as if he had a candle inside him, shining light through his eyes. I see his smile, so wide it seemed to reach from one earlobe to the other, and I hear his laughter, bubbling up from some mysterious source inside him. I see his fingers sculpting a whistle from a stick, or fashioning a football for us out of coconut and twine.

I feel my mother's arms around me, the slight damp of her armpits on my shoulders, the warmth of my cheek against her soft chest and

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the deep shiver of belonging running down my spine to the soles of my feet.

All of us would sit around the fire, the twin girls singing; the twin boys tied together at the ankle and refusing to separate; Pierre quiet and brooding; the baby in my mother's arms, with something still of heaven about him.

'We'll call him Zion,' said my father, as my mother pushed him out between her legs to the sound of gunfire in the homestead on the left.

The women tied the umbilical cord into his navel.

'Yes, Zion!' said my father. 'And we'll all keep dreaming of the city that is to come!'