

EM

My world was perfect. I had to be perfect to live in it. I was so afraid that I would do something less than perfect, and no longer be acceptable in the kingdom that was my home. I can remember being seven, and so tired, because streams of bad words would enter my head, and I had to fight them all the time. The only way that I could cope with this constant battering was by confessing all the bad words to my mother, who was the Queen of Perfection. Once I had confessed them, then I was purified, for a while, because I knew that I was still acceptable, and no longer a bad person. Pretty soon though, later on in the day, new bad words would scream their way into my brain. If I did anything wrong, like telling a rude joke, or thinking a bad thought, I was compelled to write down the evil, and confess that too. Things became harder and harder as I grew older, and developed a personality of my own. Everything had to be good and pure – or else it was evil. There was no in-between. I began to feel unacceptable. Every day, I became more and more afraid that I would do something to spoil the perfection of our kingdom. Fears forced their way into my mind, hour after hour, minute after minute. I took them on, trying to reason with them. I knew they were illogical, but I couldn't be sure that bad things weren't going to happen and destroy the perfection.

There was no reasoning with the thoughts, every time I managed to work through one particular fear and reach the end of it – it just began again, only more powerful. I was trapped inside my mind, condemned to do battle with each new terror. I can remember going on a school trip, and staying away for the first time. I was thirteen years old. My friend and I shared a room, and during the evening two boys came in to see us and joke about. I couldn't handle it at all. The boys were only sitting on the floor, but I dragged one by the hair and threw him out. Then, I stripped the bed because it felt filthy, although only I had been in it. I couldn't sleep in it, and I had to share my friend's bed. I also woke up one of the teachers and asked her if I could have a shower. The following day, I had to confess the boys' presence in the room to the teacher, and explain why I had needed a shower, I couldn't explain. There was no logic whatsoever. I just knew I had to be clean. Things became so bad at home, that I could no longer cope. I felt like an

impostor in the perfect kingdom. Everything that went wrong appeared to be my fault. The more I tried to be myself, the worse things became.

Often violence

erupted, and I began to dream about running away from the castle as fast as I could. I felt like such a bad person, because I had begun to develop sexually. I was no longer a child under the Queen's ultimate control, and although I had no

sexual experience whatsoever, the Queen decided that I was no longer Princess Innocent, and the seal of unworthiness was finally stamped. I was not able to slide gently into adolescence – it was one big leap across the castle moat, into a pit of fire. Confused and angry, I ran from the castle, and met all the wrong people. I had no idea who I was, and my mind was tying itself in knots. In this place of horror, someone I had chosen to trust horribly abused me. I could never confess that to the Queen, she would

banish me forever ... I could never go home again.

I had poisoned perfection, smashed purity,
and it was all my fault.
Now I really was contaminated.

Determined to create another castle where I could live happily ever after, I married the first Prince who came along. However, he turned out to be Prince Jailer, and I was in no fit state to deal with him. We had two children – and my contamination fears spiralled out of control. I was now responsible for two other people. Everything felt threatening. I was terrified to make a mistake of any kind, because I believed that someone would die as a result. However, by chance, I met up with a band of musicians, who helped me to believe in myself. I found the courage to escape Prince Jailer, and married Prince Freedom.

Now my life was good, but my OCD became worse than it had ever been before.

If we went out on a special occasion, I was convinced that I would ruin it. I had a

terrible feeling of guilt that I could not pin to anything I had ever done. My 'what if?'s' turned into gigantic monsters that stalked my every move. If I couldn't remember every second of every day, I became convinced that I must have done something terrible so I retraced my steps mentally often physically, day in, day out.

I couldn't concentrate on anything at all except making sure I had not made any mistakes. I had to be perfect. Whilst my husband was at work, I would take endless showers, but I still felt bad. Then, I learned about AIDS, and I honestly believed that I must have it. How could I not? Had I not allowed myself, through carelessness to be abused? So, I began having tests to make sure I did not have AIDS. However, one test was not enough, and after fourteen tests, and countless telephone calls to the AIDS help line, I still was not satisfied. I couldn't clean the house enough to get rid of the germs.

They were simply too powerful, and they were everywhere.

I needed to constantly ask Prince Freedom for reassurance, that things were clean, and that I was not a bad person. He stood by me every step of the way.

Slowly, but surely, I began to learn who I was.

I began to talk to people about how I felt, something I had never dared do before, because I believed they would think I was a lunatic.

I went to see a doctor, and he referred me to a day hospital, where I could learn all about what was happening to me, and how to deal with it. I discovered, that I had a disorder, and was not a bad, contaminated person, responsible for every ill in the world. I also discovered that there are thousands of people like me.

I had been terrified to tell the Queen what had happened to me when I ran from the castle, terrified to carry out the compulsion of confessing it, because I believed it would kill her.

I did talk to the Queen, and learned that she was not The Queen of Perfection at all, but The Queen of Survival.

When she was very young, just on the cusp of turning teenager, she had been abused too. She had felt like such a bad person, and had wanted to build a Castle of Innocence, where her children could be safe.

She had tried to make everything
perfect ...