

Remember me?

When Mary's husband went bush, she expected at least the odd postcard ...

It was a typical barbie – all the men on one side and all the women on the other. We were chatting away, when suddenly I felt an arm slip around my shoulder.

"Everything okay?" said a voice, and I smiled up at my husband, John.

A friend rolled her eyes. "It's the 'happy couple' again," she said and another woman laughed.

"You know, every time my hubby and I have an argument, I end up yelling: 'Why can't you treat me the way John treats Mary?'" she continued.

I grinned. We'd been together since we were teenagers in Ireland and John always made me feel so loved and cherished.

We worked hard and played hard – I was working for a credit card company and John had his own construction business.

We'd come to South Africa for work and our life was perfect until suddenly, about eight years into our marriage, I noticed that

John seemed stressed and pre-occupied all the time.

"What's up?" I kept asking, until finally he explained.

"The business is in trouble. I'm going to wind it up," he told me.

I was still reeling from that bombshell, when he dropped another.

"You're going where?" I exclaimed.

"Australia," John replied, "only for three months ... I really need to clear my head."

He said he planned to come back afterwards and we'd work together renovating old houses.

I wasn't happy with him going off without me – especially as he hadn't even talked it over with me first – but I understood his reasoning and could see that he needed some time to himself.

Because he was six years younger than me, and I'd been backpacking before and he hadn't, I understood why taking off and going camping around Australia would appeal.

John, then 29, booked an open ticket and I agreed I'd sell our house, pay the debts and buy a property ready for him to renovate when he returned.

"Don't come to see me off at the airport," he begged. "I don't want to see you crying. I want to see

your happy face when I come back."

Sobbing, I reluctantly agreed, and John arranged for his friend, Nigel, to drive him to the airport. It was January 1993.

The next three months dragged terribly.

John went bush in Australia, and as it was in the days before mobile phones, I only heard from him once – on my birthday in April.

"I've found a place for you to do up," I told him. "But I need someone to paint it before I move in."

"No, don't do that," John insisted. "I want to do everything. I'll be back next month."

And then he was gone. The only way I had of even knowing he was alive was purchases on his credit card.

The three months John said he'd be away passed

without any sign of him coming home.

As the weeks went on, I grew more anxious – not least because I was struggling financially.

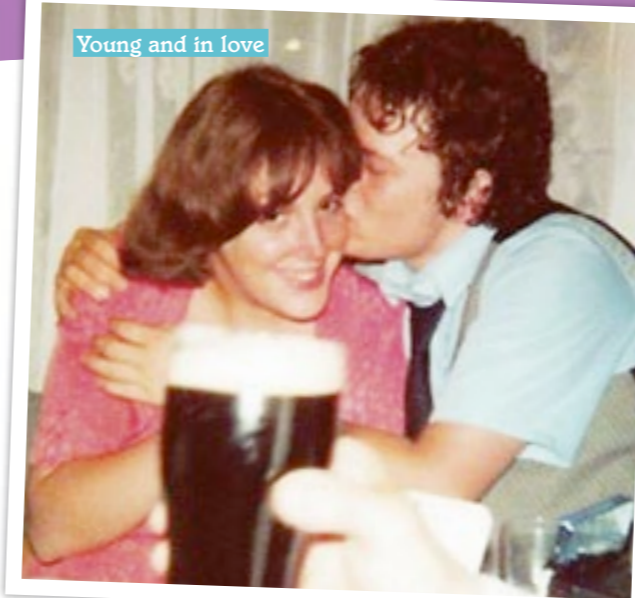
By now John's credit card had expired so I had no idea if he was still alive, and when I started reading reports about a murderer targeting hitchhikers in Australia, I felt a shiver of fear run up my spine.

I rang his parents in Ireland. "No, we haven't heard from him," they said.

I called his Aunt Elizabeth. "Sorry Mary," she said. "I don't know where he is."

"I don't understand it," I said. "Has he had an accident and lost his memory? Has he decided to disappear? If he doesn't want to come back, he'd let me know. All he has to do is scribble on a postcard."

I grew more desperate, so I contacted Interpol and hired private investigators.



Young and in love

AS TOLD TO BEVERLEY HADGRAFT

The Australian police drew a blank and advised me to put notices in the papers. I was comforted that at least a dead body hadn't been found matching John's appearance.

The newspaper ads asking *Have you seen my husband?* weren't a success either.

Eventually, I started to listen to the inner thoughts I had been ignoring up until now.

He's done a runner, I realised.

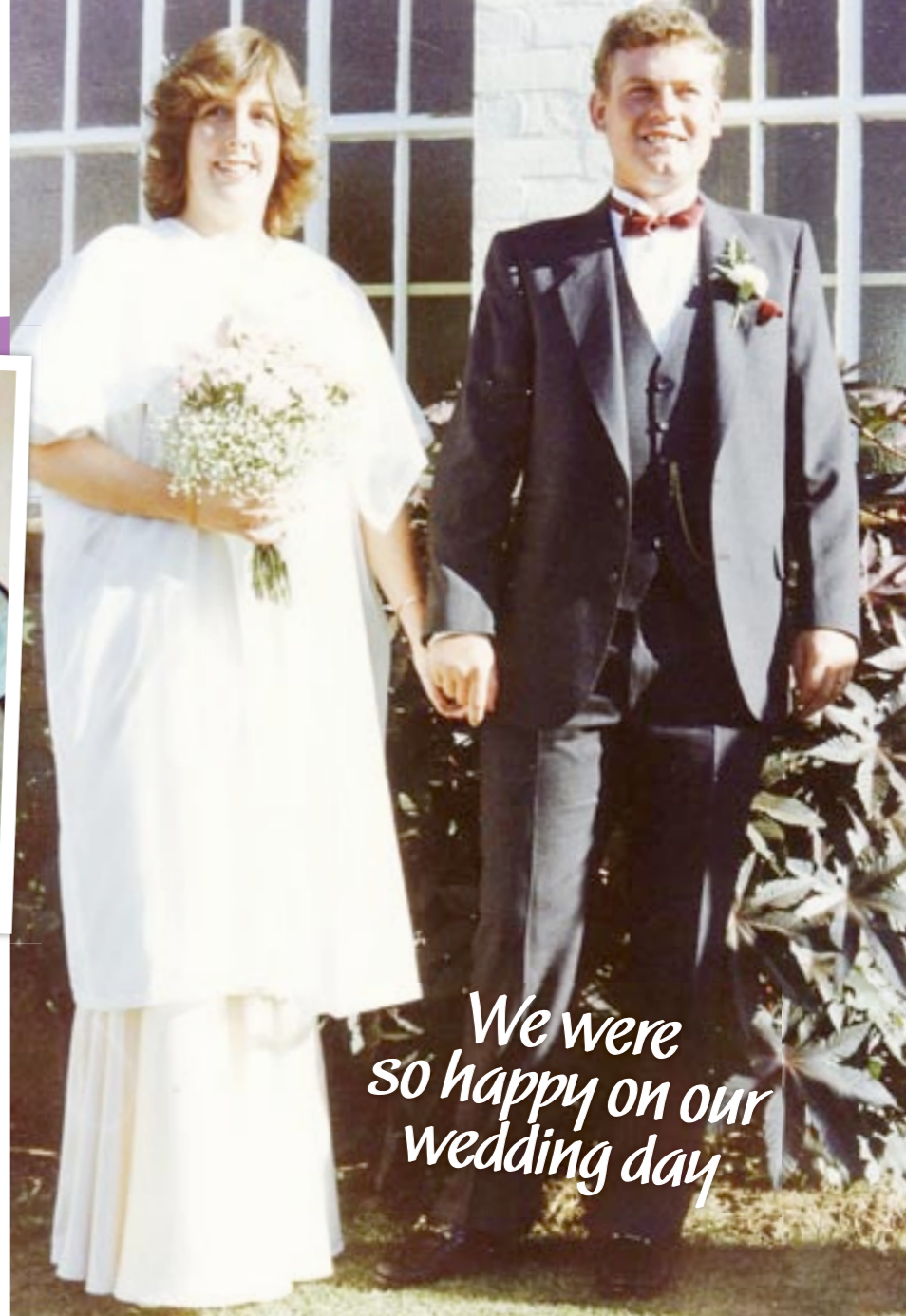
It had been three years since he'd gone missing. I understood that people thought I was crazy to hang on for so long, but I was a strict Catholic and had very strong faith that he'd

come back to me. Soon after, John's friend Nigel visited me.

He took a deep breath. "You know I dropped John off at the airport? Well ... he wasn't alone."

"What do you mean? I asked, my heart thumping. "He was with another woman, an Australian. I'm sorry, John swore me to secrecy, but I couldn't bear to see you suffer any longer."

To say I was stunned would be a complete understatement. John



We were so happy on our wedding day

had been leading a double life. That would explain why he was so stressed!

It was such a shock, I broke down in tears.

"Do you know where he is?" I asked. But Nigel hadn't heard from him.

That night, I decided to end our marriage. I'd loved John for too long.

By this time, I had a new job with a bigger salary, so I could get rid of the shack I'd moved into at my cheating husband's request.

The divorce went ahead and just before Christmas

1998, I got a call from John's Aunt Elizabeth.

She revealed that his girlfriend's mother, suspicious about his past, had secretly made contact with his parents.

"I'll get you his number," Elizabeth added.

I dialled and after a couple of goes on a very poor line, a familiar voice responded.

My heart leapt. "Remember me?"

I said to John

How has Mary turned her heartache around? Turn over to find out ...



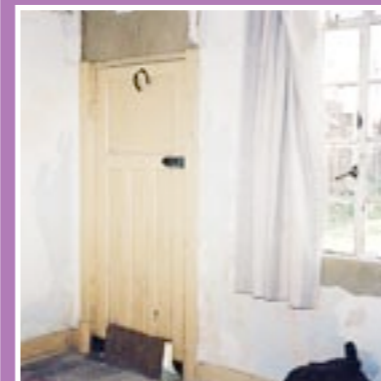
John

Nigel



HOUSE OF HORRORS

While John went travelling in Australia, I lived in this run-down shack he promised to renovate on his return.



Remember me?

It was almost as if he had been waiting for this moment. “Yes I do. Mary, you didn’t deserve what I did to you.”

Before I could respond, the line went dead.

I was at work by the time he called back, so it was difficult to speak, but I had one burning question.

“Did you mean to come back?” I asked.

“I never meant to do this. Things just got on top of me,” he confessed.

“But why didn’t you tell me, or send me a note?”

We were both in tears.

“I can’t tell you why,” he said. “I’ll contact you another

time, or maybe it’s easier to write to you to explain.”

I agreed because it was a very disjointed conversation – we were both all over the place. But again, months then years passed and I heard nothing from him but hollow silence.

This was the ultimate betrayal, because I really trusted him to get in touch and explain.

“It’s like a soapie, you should write a book about it,” friends kept saying, and in the end I did. Instead of getting even, I got writing, and soon discovered it helped me to analyse what had happened and put it behind me.

My book was published in June last year and called *Remember me?*

Writing my story was scary, as I’d always been such a private person. Very few people knew what had happened.

“He went away and just never came back,” I told people who asked after John. “You can read my book to find out more.”

A journalist friend offered to help me promote it in my

home country of Ireland. I decided to go over and give interviews, and I even organised a signing in John’s home town of Ballyshannon in Donegal.

“I’ll drop some books off to you in advance,” I told the stores. In July, I’d just left one of the bookshops, when I saw a familiar figure walking towards me. It was John.

I was so stunned, I wanted to run away, but my feet took root on the spot – I was literally paralysed with shock.

I turned my face away but then felt a hand on my shoulder – it was John’s Aunt Elizabeth. He’d come to visit her.

“Maybe you should go over to the hotel and talk,” she said quietly.

John looked awkward. He’d hardly changed at all in the 14 years since he’d left. There was no attraction there – I felt nothing for him. By now he was merely a character from my book.

“You don’t have to talk to me if you don’t want to,”



One last dance before John left for Australia

John said. But after all that time it seemed so extraordinary to bump into him under these circumstances that I just couldn’t say no.

Also, in a strange way, I felt sorry for him.

Here he was, at home in Ireland from Queensland, hoping for a quiet holiday to see his family, and he’d walked straight into a media scrum declaring how awful he was.

Once again, our conversation was short.

He’d heard I’d written the book so wasn’t that surprised when I handed him a signed copy.

“Oh, good. I suppose you always said you wanted to

be an author. Now you are,” he said, stating the absolute obvious.

I suppose I shouldn’t really have been surprised by his calm reaction, but still, I was.

There I was in his home town, telling everyone how much of a rat he was, and he didn’t care.

We went on to talk briefly about his new life north of Brisbane and about his son, who was now seven years old.

“Why did you do it, John?” I finally asked.

He gave me the answer he always gave me.

“I don’t know, Mary.”

I realised then I no longer cared anyway.

We exchanged email addresses.

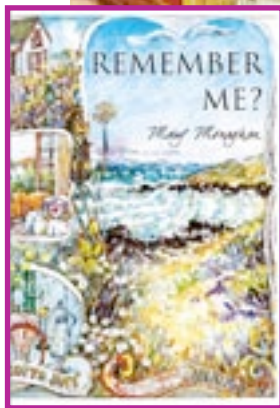
“I’ll be in touch,” John said. Today, seven months on, I haven’t heard a peep from him.

I know part of me will always love John, now 44, but he’s in my past.

As I walked away that day, a strange thought hit me: he couldn’t even write a postcard to explain he wasn’t coming back. So I’d written a whole book to explain it to myself.

Mary Monaghan, 50, Cape Town, South Africa.

I saw a familiar figure walking towards me



Me today: the book helped me come to terms with my ordeal

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