



JOSEPH'S LADDER

GINA WILCOX

Joseph's Ladder

Written by

Gina Wilcox

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About the Author



Gina Wilcox studied Fine Art at University and gained a 2:1 BA (Hons) degree. After graduating, she exhibited her paintings in London but when her son became seriously ill she had to stop and devote most of her time to his wellbeing.

She describes herself as a creative person with a fertile imagination. Writing and Art are equally important to her and she sees her two creative gifts as having much in common.

"Writing and painting follow the same pattern. Painting is composed of overlaying, scraping back, reapplying, infusing

elements of the creator's psyche to create a composition that works as a whole. Writing is little different; similar elements go into composing the written word. As the artist creates a painting, so too does the author create a written work with words which form a whole. Both require the spectator to view them visually and spiritually."

When she was little, Gina wrote sad poetry and as an adult many of her art works share her childhood penchant for thought provoking imagery.

Gina's first novel 'Joseph's Ladder' is a true story and portrays one woman's battle to retain her own identity while coping with her son's serious mental decline.

What the reviewers said

"I was given a copy of this book just before going on a business trip and started reading it the night before I left, that was a mistake as I couldn't put it down. I really wanted to know the outcome of the story and the fate of Lily and her family. I ended up reading it for the whole of the plane trip and every night after working on documents for ten hour days! The action of the story is complex and interwoven with Lily's personal view on life, art, friendships and family values. It is a sad story centred on a life interrupted by traumatic events but has moments of humour and self recognition that make you smile and shake your head. Lily's family are easily recognisable as "that could be us". That realisation, which comes over well in the writing of this book, makes the whole thing poignant as it is based on a real family. Highly recommended to anyone, but particularly to those who are interested in art and the engagement of art in everyday life."

Sarah Touchstone

"I really enjoyed this book which was well structured, intelligently written, and kept my interest.

The novel manages effectively to convey to the reader the complexity of the practical and emotional problems which can unexpectedly happen within a close family group when a mental health problem strikes one of them. In this particular case the person struck is a young adult, Joe."

Marie Harris

"This novel tells the story of one family's journey. But it's an uncompleted journey – the parents cannot know what is around the corner for their damaged son, Joe. The main point is this: the facts ring true. You can feel the mother's agony at every twist and turn."

Clive Hedley

Chapter 1

'Please not now!' Lily is overcome with anxiety. Her heart begins to pound rapidly when her phone rings and, as she panics, she is unable to take a deep breath. Her blood begins to swoosh through her head so she can hear it and her imagination begins to run amok as she visualises her heart gaining more and more speed. Maybe, if it goes any faster it might burst straight out of her chest and splatter on to the wall. 'Don't be silly', she tells herself, 'concentrate on your breathing just like the counsellor has taught you....breathe out for eleven and slowly in for seven'. After a minute, her heartbeat slows down to normal and she manages to regain her composure.

It is strange, even weird that she sometimes takes comfort in pain. Pain makes her feel alive, it is unpleasant but far better than the emptiness she had suffered from. Emptiness is nothingness, non-existence, death; it's completely overwhelming.

Struggling to keep an outward show of control because she is in her local hair salon, she rummages frantically in her handbag which seems to have turned into a black hole and swallowed everything up. She scrabbles around and eventually her phone emerges but it is too late; the caller has rung off.

"Coffee, Lily?"

Trying to appear calm and reasonably normal, she looks up. "Oh Jessica, hello, sorry I was miles away. Yes, I would love a coffee, white with no sugar, please."

'Oh God, who was trying to get hold of her? It could be St. Michael's or even Joe himself; should she ring someone to check? No, better not,' she thinks, reason returning. 'After all, wouldn't they try again if it was that urgent? If they couldn't get hold of her, surely they would contact George, although George is often hard to get hold of and he never answers his mobile phone.' 'No!' Her inner voice pulls her up; 'Stop this or you will drive yourself mad.'

Her heartbeat has started to quicken again as her mind tries to cover all the possibilities and she finds it hard once again to take a deep breath. She checks the call log and looks at the last missed number but, being 'sod's law', it's one she doesn't know. Unaware of how rigidly upright she is sitting, her knuckles slowly become white as she clenches her fists, her mind in turmoil. She feels so hot that small salty beads of water burst out on her upper lip and a trickle of sweat runs down between her breasts causing her camisole to stick to her.

'Oh no, not again, please not a hot sweat now!' Trying to calm herself she concentrates on her breathing. Aware that other people are sitting near to her, she hopes they haven't noticed how red and lobster like she has become. Luckily, it doesn't last for long, only a couple of minutes, then once the adrenalin begins to disperse, her panic too subsides and, as the tenseness begins to leave her body, she allows herself to slump back into the chair and relax into a heap, exhausted, just as Jessica returns with her coffee. She knows she has had another panic attack. She has lots of them nowadays; maybe it's her age.

“Could you put in on the table for me please?” she says, not wanting Jessica to see that her hands are trembling.

“Yes, of course. I’ll be back in a minute, Lily. Take a while to enjoy your coffee. You look a little tired today, is everything all right?”

“Yes, fine thanks.” She knows she doesn’t sound convincing.

Picking up the cup of coffee, she slowly begins to sip it. It has the lovely velvety bitter taste that good fresh coffee has. Now that her heart has stopped racing, she begins to cool down, the sweat starts to evaporate and even the trembling ceases. She takes the biscuit from the saucer and struggles to break open the cellophane wrapper.

“Goodness, why do they make opening packets so difficult?” Lily doesn’t realise she has said this out loud and a couple of women who are sitting nearby smile. Lily laughs, eventually managing to tear open the wrapper, and begins to nibble the biscuit, savouring its thin crispy texture and gingery flavour. She occasionally takes another sip of coffee while her mind begins to fret about the missed call again.

Jessica is back after a few minutes. “Are you going to have both the blond and copper highlights today Lily?”

It takes a couple of seconds to register with Lily that she is being spoken to. She pulls herself together and comes back sharply to reality. “What? Oh, sorry Jessica. Yes, I will have both, my hair needs cheering up. I’ll have the ‘full monty’ please!”

Jessica laughs. “I hope you are not in too much of a hurry, because Claire, the junior, is off sick today which means me