

# “LOSING MY MUM 'MADE' ME A PROSTITUTE”

Clare Gee's life spiralled totally out of control – but the man she loves must never know

“D uring the lowest points in my life – the vodka-and-cocaine-induced hazes or the times I accepted cash in exchange for sex with a man I'd just met, there was only one other person on my mind. It wasn't my dad I thought of – he'd brought me up to be a respectable, well-educated young woman. It was my mum. I hated her. I blamed her for everything that was wrong with me and my life.

“It was only much later that I was able to accept the fact that I'd made my own decisions, and that ultimately I was responsible for what had happened to me. That's when I finally realised that it wasn't my mum – a woman who only existed in my vaguest childhood memories – who I hated, but rather the void that not having her in my life had left.

“My story starts in Zambia, one week after my fifth birthday. Mum and I caught a bus from our little village and, as it bumped along the road, she kept dabbing her face with a tissue. It was the first time I'd seen her cry; she was usually so stern and silent. I knew that something was very wrong.

“We arrived at Lusaka airport and she handed me to an air hostess. 'Be good for Daddy,' she said. As I was led away, I looked back at her over my shoulder, and watched her wave a tissue in my direction. Little did I know this was the last time I'd ever see her. I sat on the plane terrified and confused, with no idea where I was going or why.

“Mum had met my dad, a white Englishman, while he was working as a



Now free of her demons, Clare, 33, has rebuilt her life. Left: as a child in Yorkshire

teacher in Zambia. They fell in love and married, but divorced a year later. Mum remarried, but she and Dad slept together one more time, and I was the result. As soon as I was born, with honey-coloured skin, her new Zambian husband saw the evidence of her affair. Just by being there, I was a reminder of the shame my mother had brought on her family, so when my father moved back to England she chose to send me too.

“I arrived at Heathrow airport alone, with no luggage and wearing just a cotton summer dress. I didn't speak a word of English, only Lozi, the language spoken in my village in Zambia. My father, who hadn't even known I existed until I was 15 months

old, was there to greet me, holding a small beige jacket to protect me against the English weather. I had no concept of where I was and, since my father was unable to speak my language, no one could explain. So, armed with nothing but a teddy bear, I was thrust into a new life without my mum.

“Understandably, I was a clingy child, happiest when I could see Dad. I was obsessed with the idea that he'd disappear as my mum had. When he started work as a supply teacher three months after I arrived in England, I cried hysterically. He assured me he'd only be gone a few hours but I was convinced he'd never come back.

“Despite my fears, I soon adjusted to life with Dad in North Yorkshire. I made >



friends easily and started to do well at school. Although Dad and I never spoke about my mother, I'd think about her all the time, wondering what she was doing back in Zambia and whether she was missing me. On the rare occasions I received a letter from her – perhaps once or twice a year – they'd always begin, 'To My Darling Daughter'. I would blink back the tears, determined not to cry because I didn't want Dad to think he wasn't enough. Mum's letters never explained why she sent me away, and she never made any apologies. I was 11 years old when I received the last one. I wrote to her three times after that but never heard from her again. The possibility that she could have died didn't cross my mind for years – I just assumed she didn't want to write any more.

"My childhood was essentially a normal, happy one, but there was always a cloud hanging over me. I know Mum might have sent me to England because she felt I'd have a better life, but I was never able to believe that. Growing up, I felt jealous of my friends when their mums picked them up from the school gates or from swimming lessons, even though Dad was with me constantly. When my periods started, it was my dad who heard my scream and rushed into the bathroom; it was my dad who took me to buy my first bra and, on Mother's Day, my dad to whom I handed a heartfelt card. It seemed right – after all, he'd been both a mum and a dad to me.

"But during my early teens, the emotions I felt about being abandoned began to fester. My mum had left me. I felt like she'd thrown me away. Why? Ignoring the love and attention he gave me, I started to take my anger out on my father, who was totally bewildered by the sudden change in my behaviour. He didn't know, but I'd occasionally pinch booze from his drinks cabinet. It made me feel as though I was funny, cool and attractive, and it also made my already-unpredictable behaviour even more erratic.

"It wasn't long before I came into contact with drugs, at parties or nights out. Looking back, I think I wanted to be anaesthetised against all the pain and upset, and the drugs seemed to work. But all too quickly the quantity needed to be upped to achieve the calmness I craved. When I was 16, a boy called Stephen\* introduced me to heroin. I immediately loved the warm, fuzzy feeling it gave me. I stopped going to school and only took a few of my GCSEs. Soon



Clare now wants to know what happened to her mum

## 'I HATED THESE MEN AND I HATED MYSELF FOR WHAT I WAS DOING'

afterwards, I moved to London to live in a squat with Stephen. I cut myself off from my friends in Yorkshire and, without a backward glance, I did to my father what had been done to me. I left him.

"By the time Stephen and I split up a year later, my life revolved around drugs, drink and finding money for my next hit. If people asked about my mother, I'd give such a curt response that they never asked again. I couldn't bear to talk about her.

"I was lonely, desperate and strapped for cash; it only took someone to suggest escorting for the seed to plant itself in my drug-addled mind. I placed an ad in a local paper and my first client rang the same night. I was completely wasted but still felt terrified. I arrived at his flat, took a deep breath and walked in. Twenty minutes later I left with some cash. The next day I was consumed with guilt and the horror of what I'd done. How could a normal girl like me – someone whose first experience of earning money was playing the organ in church – be selling herself? What would Dad think? But soon the money I'd earned was gone, so when the next call came, I answered.

"Most men I saw were professionals in their 30s; average guys who didn't want to 'date' women to get sex. Despite what Belle De Jour would have you believe,

there's nothing glamorous about prostitution. It's a sordid and miserable business that strips the women involved of what little self-esteem they have. I hated these men. I hated myself for what I was doing. And all the while I hated my mum for what I saw as her contribution to my self-destruction.

"There wasn't one specific moment when I decided to stop, but after 12 years, the drugs and booze simply stopped numbing me. I was exhausted by panic attacks, mood swings and the constant fear in my stomach. I called a rehab centre I knew about and was admitted two days later.

"When I started the 12-step rehab programme in 2003, I was broken. I'd lost contact with my father and I hated my mother obsessively. I tried to touch on my feelings about her in my counselling sessions, but it was too painful and all I could do was cry. Instead I spoke about the dark times and eventually things started to click into place. I realised that prostitution isn't just about money; it's about validation and insecurity. Any woman who sells her body is emotionally messed up – whether they do it for £300 or £30 an hour. They're trying to fill a void, and not just financially. I now realise my feelings of abandonment had created a void in me. I certainly made a lot of bad decisions along the way – but I do wonder if things would have turned out differently had my mum been in my life.

"It's been a long and rocky road. The two years after completing rehab were the hardest, but I stuck with it. My father and I have slowly rebuilt a relationship and our trust is stronger today than I could ever have hoped for. He knows about the drugs, but I've never told him I was a prostitute, and I hope he never finds out. It would hurt him too much. I have a career as a writer, great friends and a personality that isn't diluted by drugs and drink. I can have fun without being high and be strong without being violent. I'm finally growing into the woman my father brought me up to be.

"I'm now feeling a stronger urge to try to find out what happened to my mum. Of course – if she's still alive – she might not want me to track her down and I'd have to respect this. Do I love her? I think so. I also know my sense of resentment could surface very easily if I let it, but I'll never let my feelings towards a woman that I've never known threaten to destroy me again."

• **Hooked by Clare Gee is out this month (£7.99, Mainstream Publishing) ©**