

Chrysalis

Louise lies back in her bed, feeling the cool cotton sheet as she floats it across her skin. It's the middle of summer, and the nights are sticky and damp. She regrets not having aircon in this small, mid-floor apartment with its double bricks trapping thermal heat as if it's an igloo.

She feels relaxed and safe as she stretches her legs down the bed and feels the rumpled sheet with her feet. Looking over at her husband, she senses a small smile curling at her mouth as her throat contracts with the sound of contentment. She sighs happiness.

They have been through a lot together, and Louise allows her mind to wonder if life is finally starting to make some sense. She's been forever apart from herself, and has only experienced a handful of moments where she has felt like herself. Felt like she wasn't some stranger, peeling open her mind and heart while judging her body.

She raises her arms above her head and drinks in the breath of freedom. Freedom to feel how she wants to feel. Freedom to do whatever she wants. Freedom to love.

Louise lies like this for some time. Tomorrow is a workday, but she doesn't stress about not being able to fall asleep. She is feeling more revived now than any night's sleep can give her. That's saying something, because sleep is one of Louise's real talents. She needs a lot of it, and can usually do it anytime and anywhere.

But not tonight. Something feels different tonight. She notices her heart beating blood through her veins as it nourishes her muscles and tendons. She feels her toes and fingertips tingle with life. She feels as if she is floating along a relaxed high on the power of this life.

As her eyelids start to waver and droop, Louise starts to feel something funny at the pit of her core. It's as if an array of fireworks are lighting up the depths of her belly. She thinks fondly of that old TV advert for Rice Bubbles – Snap, Crackle and Pop – and feels a little pixie dancing, spinning and rolling across her abdomen, tying a rope to her belly button. It tugs on her core as it climbs up, trying to get a peak into her world.

The wave of relaxation that was flowing over Louise starts to bubble as it breaks on her mind. She feels a shattering rumble flow through her veins as her breath and heart beat pick up pace. It's as if she can smell the pressure blasting out of her body. Her skin starts to seep sweat as she digs her fingernails into her palms through clenched cotton sheets.

Louise has never felt anything like this, and her mind catches up to her body and starts racing with possibilities as to what this could be. Is it stress about something she's forgotten she needs to do tomorrow? Did she push her abs too hard in Pilates? Is it simply excitement about the new apartment they have just moved into? Did she eat too many mulberries for dessert? Or is it someone else ...?

Louise stops her mind's race to allow that last question to pause on her mind. She is confused about how she feels. There is a thick mixture of joy and fear swirling behind her wide-open eyes.

She tries to dismiss it and fall asleep. Instead of the big bang party going on under her belly button, she tries to concentrate on her breath and allow soft heaviness to set on top of her eyes. She tries to imagine herself buried in a pit of soft, damp sand, with the sound of gentle waves lapping near her feet.

Of course this mindfulness practice doesn't work. It never does when she needs it. Louise pushes a forceful sigh through her teeth, and scrunches herself up in the fetal position, allowing as much of her weight as possible to push against her husband's

sleeping back. His presence on her skin helps her feel grounded once more; helps her feel strong, for a moment.

Louise feels the fireworks again, and imagines a tiny cluster of cells, blooming and multiplying at a ferocious speed, clinging together as a ball of life. She feels the life ball nesting itself into her chrysalis.

Allowing a sense of awe to wash over her pulsing nerves, she remembers something amazing that she learnt recently. When a caterpillar goes into its chrysalis, it actually turns to goo before it becomes a butterfly. Louise thinks about all the times in her chameleon life that she has transformed, and wonders nervously if she has the energy to melt and morph her identity into someone else, yet again.

Then she remembers something else she'd learnt when she was at high school. Ever since Louise was burying herself into her mother's chrysalis, she has always carried part of this stranger inside her core. Her mother even carried it as Louise herself grew all her organs, blood and bones.

So this ball of cells is no stranger at all. They have always been part of her, and always will be. Instead transforming into someone else, Louise's mind starts spinning like the Earth on its own axis. She begins to see her life's rotating cycle through a different lens – one that belongs in this skin, warmed by her own son.