

Chapter 2

Rosie: In Memoriam

*There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember:
and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.*

Hamlet. William Shakespeare

(Extract from a letter written by Dr John Kirkham to Joseph Richardson).

I look forward to meeting you on the date agreed. I had thought originally that our first meeting should take the form of an in-depth interview - at which I could first describe my work, its philosophy, and then take part in a question and answer session.

However, I believe you might find it more interesting to start off with observation of a regression - in this case involving a former patient who has since helped me by taking part in a number of pre-birth regression sessions.

(Notes by Joseph Richardson, including extracts from a taped interview with John Kirkham, observation of a regression and subsequent follow-up research).

THE subject of the first regression I witnessed was Emily Forbes, a pleasant, placid woman in her early 50s, a nurse by profession.

Kirkham told me: 'Mrs Forbes is a rare person, one of those who right from the start display an ability to quickly undergo deep level regression. She first came to me for hypnotherapy - she sought help to overcome a deep-grained fear of water.

'Such fears sometimes originate in an incident in an earlier life - and by exposing them we can may help eradicate the fear. This proved to be the case with Emily.

'In her first pre-birth regression she recalled memories as a Charlotte James, a child of three, who was pushed into a boating lake in Greenwich Park in southeast London by an unknown person, later described by witnesses to her mother as "a big rough lad". She was rescued with a boat hook by the lake attendant. She recalled the water was cold and deep black and that she was not frightened while in the water, but that she became so after being lifted out and the attendant began

to expel water from her chest.

‘When water gushed from her mouth she screamed until her mother, who was herself in a state of distress, cuddled her and dried her face and hair with a rough towel. She recalled the strong smell of cheap carbolic soap coming from the towel.’

Kirkham said: ‘At this stage in the regression I asked Emily to go forward in time three or four years. I’ll now play the tape which was made during the regression session:

Q How old are you and where are you?

A 25 Coniston Road, Lewisham, south London.

Q Do you sometimes visit Greenwich Park?

A Yes. But I don’t like to go near the lake. That’s where I had my accident.

Q How old are you now?

A I’m seven. I had a birthday party last week.

Q Can you tell me the date of your birthday?

A July 14.

Q And what year is it now?

A 1889.

Q Do you know what the date was when you had your accident?

A No. But my mummy says it was two days after my birthday.

Q Do you know what kind of work your Daddy does?

A It is something to do with insurance. But I don’t know what that means.

‘At this point,’ Kirkham said, ‘we finished the regression, and after discussing her Charlotte experience with Emily she gradually lost the deep-rooted fear of water that she’d obviously experienced all of her life as Charlotte, a fear which she’d inherited as Emily. Within weeks Emily was learning to swim!’

Kirkham added: ‘In that case we were able to get some confirmation of the facts by checking local street directories for the period, ratepayers’ lists, birth and death certificates and obituaries in

the local newspaper files. A James family lived at 25 Coniston Road on the appropriate dates and the only child in the family was a daughter, Charlotte.

‘We were able to check on the subsequent life of Charlotte. She never married, and lived in the house all her life. At 58 she was killed in a direct hit on a public air raid shelter where she ran a refreshment bar for her local church. That was during the September, 1940 London Blitz. It may be a coincidence - but Emily was born in October 1940. There have been similar death and birth date coincidences in other cases.’

Kirkham said, ‘Emily found the regression of interest, and agreed to other sessions. You are about to witness one.’

As Janine Greeson, Kirkham’s nurse-receptionist prepared a large tape recorder and Emily settled herself in a reclining couch that was a main feature of the consulting room, Kirkham asked me to go to an observation room located behind a one-way mirror which dominated one wall.

Kirkham explained: ‘I would like you stay in the observation room for the duration of the session. You will be able to see and hear everything that is going on.’

‘I find that most people undergoing regression settle down and relax more quickly when Janine and I are the only ones in the consulting room. Some people insist upon it. Emily is one of them. Although she knows you are watching, the barrier of the mirror seems to make her more comfortable.’

He turned at the door: ‘I know that certain things you have witnessed will have puzzled you, and there are many questions you will wish to put to me. I will try to explain when we hold the interviews. But bear in mind that regression is still the subject of widespread study - and experiences vary enormously according to different levels reached.’

As I settled in a softly padded chair in front of the mirror, I saw that Kirkham had seated himself near Emily. He pushed a switch, the tape deck drums began to move, and the relays in the observation room hummed into life.

Emily lay back on the angled couch, quite relaxed, eyes closed. This was something she had obviously done a number of times before.

Then Kirkham started the session:

‘I want you to go back in time, back to times before you were born.’

For a moment or two the only sound from Emily was deep, regular breathing picked up by the microphones and relayed to the observation room.

Q Who are you? Where are you?

(Emily’s eyelids flickered. Then faintly, almost in a whisper, there was a reply).

A It’s me. It’s only me. Who are you?

Q A friend. Hello. What’s your name?

A Rosie. Rosie Doolittle.

Q How old are you, Rosie?

A Eleven - at least, so I’ m told.

Q Do you know when your birthday is - the month, the day?

A I don’t know. I’ve never had a birthday present, though some of my mates do get them.

Although the old cook once gave me an orange on the old Queen’s birthday and said I could pretend it was my birthday. But she told me not to let Matron see it.

Q Do you know what year it is?

A 1899. Summer is ending and it’s getting colder, but old cook said never to mind ‘cos it meant a new year would soon be coming and it would be a very special year ‘cos it would be start of a new hundred years and the poor would have good times with plenty of brass and we’d all dress just like the folks who comes to stare at us some times.

Q Is the cook a friend of yours?

A Old cook’s just gone - she got the boot! Someone said new cook’s a mate of Matron’s. Food’s not so good any more - it’s more watery.

Q Where are you now?

A Behind the boiler in the back washhouse.

Q Why are you there?

A I'm hiding from them.

Q Who are you hiding from?

A The Matron and her Bully.

Q Who is the Matron?

A Mrs Boggay. She runs the workhouse.

Q Is this where you live?

A Yes...I've lived here as long as I can remember...I think my mum left me here.

Q Is the washhouse part of the workhouse?

A Yes. It's at the back.

Q Where is the workhouse?

A It's here!

Q But where is here?

A Southwark....south London....by the river.

Q What river is that?

A Everyone knows that.....it's the Thames.

Q Who is the Bully?

A He's the big Irish bloke who does what Matron tells him to do.....He hits us with a stick or a dog whip if Matron tells him to. Sometimes he just likes hitting us.

Q You mean he beats children?

A Nah! Not just kids. He hits everyone, especially the old people who can't work much no more.

Somebody once heard Matron tell him the more old perisherers who croaked the more she could put by.....But I don't know what that means.

Q Why are you hiding from Matron and Bully?

A. They want to thrash me with the whip.....I've never seen Matron so angry.....she turned so

red in the face, she did. She said I was a wicked liar and crazy.

(At this point Rosie began sobbing and her voice rose in a despairing wail): I'm not a liar. I do try to be a good girl. Please.....what am I to do? I don't want to be sent to the looney bin.....I'm not mad.....It's true.....It was the Bully who did it. He did do it!

(Kirkham halted the questioning for a while until the deep, rasping sobs died down into muted snuffles).

Q. When was the Matron so angry?

A. It was today...when the doctor saw me.

Q. Have you been sick?

A. I've been awful sick, every day.

Q. What happened when the doctor saw you?

A. The usual thing....he looked in my mouth, my eyes and my ears. But then he made me take my clothes off. He is a nice man but he made my face red when he pushed my belly and touched my titties....I said they were sore.....He said they were swollen....Then he made me lay on the Matron's table with my legs open and he looked there. The Matron said, 'Is she?' and he said, 'Yes, she is.' Then the doctor said to me, 'You've been sore between the legs for a long time. Do you remember when it started?' I told him.....I said it was the night the Bully came to the dormitory where us girls sleep and grabbed hold of me and took my clothes off.....He put his hand over my mouth and said he'd kill me if I didn't lay still....Then he hurt me and kept hurting me.....He was always creeping in and hurting the girls in the dark.....

It was then the Matron began screaming at me, saying I was a liar and lunatic and needed the wickedness beating out of me. Then she began slapping me until the doctor stopped her and told me to get dressed and to leave the room.....But as I ran down the passageway I could hear her yelling that she'd find me.

Q. How long ago did this happen?

A. A long time ago. After breakfast....I didn't have any....I was feeling too sick again. I wish I

could run away, but the gatekeepers won't let us out, they're too frightened of Matron and Bully....I know it's afternoon now because I heard the dinner bell go a long time since.....The Bully was out today but I know as soon as he comes back the Matron will tell him

Oh, God help me, please. I'm so frightened.....I can't stop wetting my drawers.....

There....there they are outside the door.....He's shouting something terrible 'Come out you little bitch I'm going to skin you'.....That's what he called me the night he hurt me in the dark when I bit his hand and he smacked me.....Oh God! There they are.....Leave me alone!.....Leave me alone!.....

At this point Emily was thrashing about on the couch, her arms waving wildly - and screaming the words over and over: 'Leave me alone! Leave me alone! I'm hurting! I'm hurting so bad!'

Kirkham swiftly ended the regression, and Janine, her arms around Emily's shoulders tried to get her to drink some water. But it was some time before she could do so; for Emily, still emotionally linked with Rosie, sobbed and sobbed.

Following the regression session with Emily I spent three days carrying out research at the British Museum Newspaper Library and at the offices of the 'Southwark Observer'. I soon found that little Rosemary Doolittle may have made an unnoticed entry into the world, but her tortured leaving had left more of a mark. Not much of a mark - but at least something.

The hairs at the back of my neck began to rise as the microfilmed front page of the 'Southwark Observer' for February 16, 1900, came into view and a top of the page headline told me that Rosie had indeed lived - and in her dying had left an echo of her being: 'WORKHOUSE GIRL'S DEATH: TRIAL OPENS'.

The report read:

THE trial of Patrick Harrigan, 46, on a charge of manslaughter, opened at the Old Bailey today. Harrigan, a boilerman/ laundry overseer at the Southwark Workhouse, is accused of killing Rosemary Doolittle, 11, on September 10, 1899. The girl was an inmate at the Workhouse at the

time of her death. Harrigan pleads not guilty.

Doctor J. McLachlan, head of the Department of Forensic Medicine at Guys Hospital, testified that he carried out an autopsy on Doolittle at Guys on September 12 last year. The girl, who had been brought to the hospital outpatients' department on September 10 with severe injuries, died a few hours after admittance.

Mr H. Robinson QC, for the Crown: What was the immediate cause of death?

Dr McLachlan: Loss of blood - and septicaemia. The primary cause was the death of an embryonic child. The girl was three months pregnant - and her womb and pelvis had been ruptured. This brought about a rapid onset of septicaemia, which was followed by heart failure.

Mr Robinson: What else were you able to establish from your examination?

Dr McLachlan: The girl had three broken ribs, a fractured wrist and severe bruising to the face, neck, arms, legs, chest and stomach.

Mr Robinson: Were they all fresh bruises?

Dr McLachlan: The majority were. There were healed fractures in the arms.

Mr Robinson: Would the girl have died from her injuries if it had not been for on-set of septicaemia.

Dr McLachlan: Possibly - but I think it's equally possible, indeed likely, that she would not have survived for long. She was extremely ill-nourished, and even if she had carried the baby to full term it is very possible both she and the child would have died at time of delivery. Her bones were very brittle and the pelvic arch and hips tiny even for an 11-year-old child.

Mr Robinson: What happened to the girl's body?

Dr McLachlan: Following a coroner's inquest, which resulted in today's proceedings, the body was released for disposal by the hospital. Normally, if unclaimed by relatives, bodies in such cases are buried in a pauper's grave or used by the hospital's training school. In this case we agreed to release the body to the workhouse physician, Doctor Charles Highams, as he wished the girl to be interred in his own family's grave at Nunhead Cemetery.

Mr Robinson: Wasn't that unusual?

Dr McLachlan: We are always willing to oblige a colleague.

Judge Ruperts: Yes, yes, yes. This is immaterial. Can we get on with the trial.

William Petty, a mason/bricklayer, testified that on the afternoon of 10 September, 1899, he was carrying out repair work to the top of the main laundry chimney at Southwark Workhouse, when he heard a disturbance in the laundry.

Mr Robinson: Please tell His Lordship what you saw and heard.

Petty: There seemed to be a lot of hollerin' and screeching coming from the laundry.

Judge Ruperts: What do you mean by 'seemed to be'? Did you hear shouting and screaming, or did you not?

Petty: I did hear it, my lord.

Mr Robinson: What happened then?

Petty: I saw the Matron and Harrigan come out of the laundry, and Harrigan was carrying a little girl under one arm. The girl was struggling and screaming and Harrigan seemed to be smacking her with his free hand - but I couldn't see too clearly. The girl's legs were waving about and the Matron kept punching her legs- I saw that clearly. I know you have to slap a kid sometimes when they're not behaving but that pair went too far!

Judge Ruperts: Stop giving your opinions, Mr Petty - just stick to the facts!

Mr Robinson: Did you not call out to the Matron and Harrigan and ask them to stop beating the child? Could you not have descended to the ground to help the girl?

Petty: It wasn't my business to interfere. I get a lot of trade from the Workhouse.

Mr Robinson: Quite. What happened next?

Petty: Harrigan dropped the girl. I think he kicked her - but I couldn't see clearly. The girl stopped screaming, but I thought I could hear her moaning. Then Harrigan grabbed the girl by the wrists, and dragged her across the exercise yard from the laundry and in to the workhouse. I could hear Matron cursing the girl as she walked beside her. That's the last I saw of them.

Mr Robinson: You mean Harrigan did not pick the girl up - he dragged her across the ground?

Petty: Yes, sir. That's what he did.

Mr Francis (Defending): You didn't have a very clear view of what was going on perched as you were on a high chimney. Did you?

Petty: Clear enough.

Mr Francis: But you've said the defendant 'seemed' to hit the girl and you 'thought' he kicked her. Is that right?

Petty: Yes. But I saw the Matron clear enough.

Mr Francis: The Matron is not on trial here.

Petty (muttering): She ought to be.

Petty was rebuked by the judge before being dismissed from the witness box.

(A report on the continuation of the trial appeared in the following day's edition of the 'Southwark Observer'):

MRS Ada Boggay, Matron at the Southwark Workhouse gave evidence today in the case of Patrick Harrigan, who is on trial in connection with the death of Rosemary Doolittle, 11. He denies a charge of manslaughter

Mrs Boggay, 52, a short, stout woman, was dressed completely in black; a large bonnet covered her grey hair with the exception of a tight bun protruding from the back. Her choleric features and fierce grey eyes seemed to indicate a volatile temper being repressed with difficulty.

Mr Robinson QC: It has been said that you punched and otherwise beat Doolittle as Harrigan carried her out of the laundry. Is that true?

Mrs Boggay: It isn't so. I may have slapped her from time to time - she was a wild thing who needed restraining. I was concerned that she would hurt herself - as well as Mr Harrigan - if she was not brought to her senses.

Mr Robinson: Did you see Harrigan punch or kick Doolittle?

Mrs Boggay: No, I didn't!

Mr Robinson: Other witnesses have said that he did.

Mrs Boggay: They were mistaken. I was close by him the whole time. He shook her from time to time, and slapped her face - but she was hysterical.

Mr Robinson: What happened when you and Harrigan got the girl inside the Workhouse?

Mrs Boggay: I put leather straps round her wrists and ankles.

Mr Robinson: What happened then? Did you or Harrigan hit Doolittle?

Mrs Boggay: We did not! Her eyes were closed, her face was swelling and turning blue and blood was coming from her mouth. I told Harrigan to get the pony and trap and take her to Guys hospital.

Mr Francis (defending): How long have you known Harrigan?

Mrs Boggay: Three years.

Mr Francis: What is your relationship with Harrigan?

Mrs Boggay: Why he's the boilerman - and acts as laundry overseer.

Mr Francis: Would you say he is a violent man?

Mrs Boggay: Not at all - he's a very good natured sort of a man. I wouldn't keep him on if he were not so!

Mr Francis: But is it not true that Harrigan used a cane or whip with which to beat inmates?

Mrs Boggay: It's true he would sometimes chastise delinquent or lazy inmates - but no more severely than I would myself. The bible itself tells us sparing the rod can have sinful consequences.....I am a widow and need the strong arm of a man to make sure the institution is run in an orderly, God-fearing manner.

Mr Robinson: One last question. There has been testimony as to your relationship with Harrigan. I'd like it clarified. Did you and Harrigan share the same bed?

At this point Mrs Boggay screamed and covered her face with a handkerchief.

Judge Ruperts: That is a disgraceful question, Mr Robinson. I'll see you in my chambers later. You may leave the witness box, Mrs Boggay.

Mr Francis said he did not propose to call Harrigan to the witness stand.

In his summing up, Judge Ruperts told the jury they had to decide whose evidence they trusted most - that of a man who saw events from atop a very high chimney, or Mrs Boggay, who was a participant in the events and had denied that Harrigan used excessive force in restraining Doolittle. They had to decide for themselves what weight to give to the fact that Harrigan had not given evidence in his own behalf.

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A STOP PRESS item said the jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty after being out for three hours.

Having read this far I assumed the case of little Rosemary Doolittle was closed, but I continued to browse through the 'Observer' files and on the front page of the issue for April 12, 1900, found the report for a coroner's inquest: subject Patrick Harrigan. Under the headline STRANGE DEATH OF LAUNDRY OVERSEER the paper's report said:

A CORONER'S jury today ruled that Patrick Harrigan, the Southwark Workhouse man recently cleared in the Rosemary Doolittle manslaughter case, was murdered by a person or persons unknown.

The court heard that the last person to see Harrigan alive, apart from his killer, was William Petty, a mason/bricklayer, who was working at the top of the Workhouse's high boiler house chimney on the afternoon that Harrigan died in a most horrible fashion.

Petty testified that he saw Harrigan enter the laundry and shortly afterwards he was followed into the building by some six or seven elderly inmates.

Petty said he heard what sounded like screaming and shortly afterwards the inmates left the laundry and returned to the main Workhouse building.

He said he was unable to identify the men - he was much too high in the air to make out their

features. And, in any case, he said, their heads were bowed to the ground. He had noticed that three of them used walking sticks - but so did half of the men in the wards for the elderly.

An hour later he saw the Matron go in to the laundry -it wasn't until she came running out into the exercise yard, waving her arms and screaming, that he realised something was amiss.

Police Sergeant B. Holmes told the court that he'd gone to the Workhouse laundry where he'd seen the body of Harrigan floating in a large laundry pool used for soaking linen and clothes. Five empty carboys which had contained ammonia were laying by the pool.

Sgt Holmes said, 'The water stank of ammonia and it was some time before we could remove the body. Harrigan's wrists and ankles had been bound with leather straps and a rag was stuffed into his mouth. His face was burned almost beyond recognition. It was later established he'd been hit on the head with a stick - possibly a walking stick.

'Despite intensive questioning we have been unable to get information from any of the inmates at the Workhouse, despite a reward being offered,' he said.

He looked at the coroner, the jury and members of the public, a scowl on his face, as though challenging some unspoken criticism. 'What else could we have done?' he snarled. 'Arrest 150 senile cripples on suspicion?'

While finishing my research in South London, Kirkham telephoned to find out how the work was progressing, and at the same time he told me that Emily had contacted him to say she no longer wished to take part in his work.

I said I wasn't surprised. Then I told him I'd found the last record - the final words to do with little Rosie Doolittle. 'They may be of some comfort to Emily,' I said. I read to him the lines that I'd just finished writing in my notebook.....

I went to Nunhead Cemetery this morning. It used to be South London's biggest cemetery. But it's closed now, and in some parts it's a bit like a jungle.

It is a city of the dead intersected with paved avenues and weed-covered gravel by-paths. Much of the time there is a deep, intense expectant silence, as though somewhere in the forest of granite crosses, weeping marble angels and serried tombs there is an angelic conductor, arm eternally upraised and ready for the first downward beat of a baton that will signal the opening of some great anthem - a wake-up call for the sleeping citizenry. It is also the sort of place where one sees, or is aware of, unidentifiable somethings moving out of the corner of the eye. The rounding of an unexpected corner opening up a new path reveals no person approaching or receding at a distance, yet one feels that there ought to be. And there is often the sense that someone has just vanished round the far bend in the path. For some reason a picture of Martha and Mary hurrying home to Bethany keeps coming to mind.

After some searching I had managed to find a record of the family plot of Doctor Charles Highams - you remember the kindly doctor?

As I cleared the tall grass and weeds away from the Highams family memorial stone, a miniature Cleopatra's needle, I saw that wars and influenza epidemics had swept away quite a few Highams since 1900. The good doctor himself went in 1935.

For a while I thought Rosie had not, after all, had a line of remembrance; but then at the bottom I found more than a line carved on the stained stone. As I cleaned the mud and green stains from the gritty, rough granite the barely visible letters and words came slowly to life. Like a faint whisper from the distant past I thought I heard a girlish giggle, and above the dank odour of rank grass and rotting vegetation there arose a sharp, sweet smell. The smell of a little girl's newly sliced juicy birthday orange. But then I shook my head. It was easy in that silent, isolated city of the dead to fall into a spell-binding reverie. Back in the real world of my sceptical journalist's mind I knew the 'giggle' for what it must be - the murmured cheeping of a drowsy bird perched on a nearby one-armed angel; the birthday orange scent nothing more than the last drifting petals of a wild rose bush colonizing the next abandoned grave.

There were no ghosts as I finished cleaning the grave - at least not yet. Just lines of remembrance

telling me that I had heard a little girl screaming down the corridors of time for help. And shivering in the knowledge that this might not be the only time that I'd be powerless to reach out and help. The good doctor's chosen words were:

Sacred to the memory of two Innocents

Rosemary (Rosie) Doolittle

Died September 10, 1899 Aged 11

And her baby

Safe in the arms of Jesus

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