



Jasper's wish

Jessica Munafò

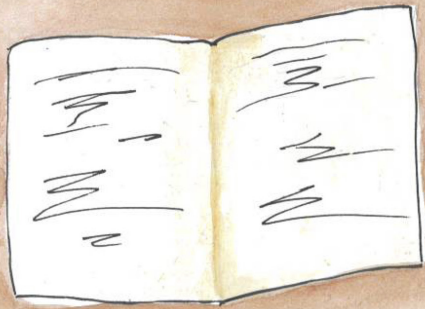
Jasper's Wish

By Dr Jessica Munafò

With  for
John Fenston



Helping everyone affected by
their parent's drinking



Jasper hoped he hadn't forgotten anything.

It was a Sunday night and, instead of getting ready for school, he was on his way to stay with his grandmothers, Nana Hannah and Nana Mindy.

He hadn't had long to pack his things but at least he had remembered to bring his special scribbling book, in which he wrote about all his hopes and worries.

It had...

Jasper's Book of Ups and Downs

...written on the front with shiny stickers.

Jasper had so many questions going around in his head that he almost felt dizzy, and it helped to write them down.

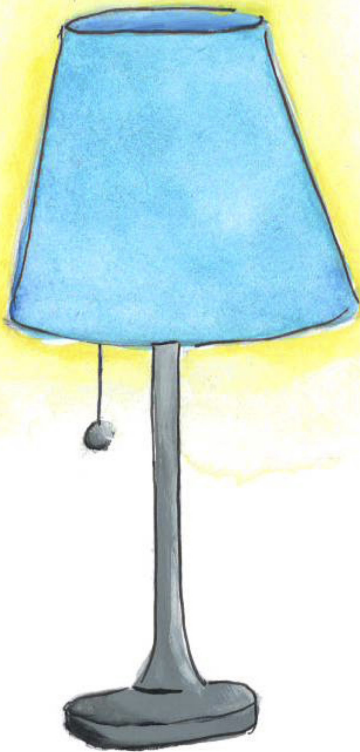
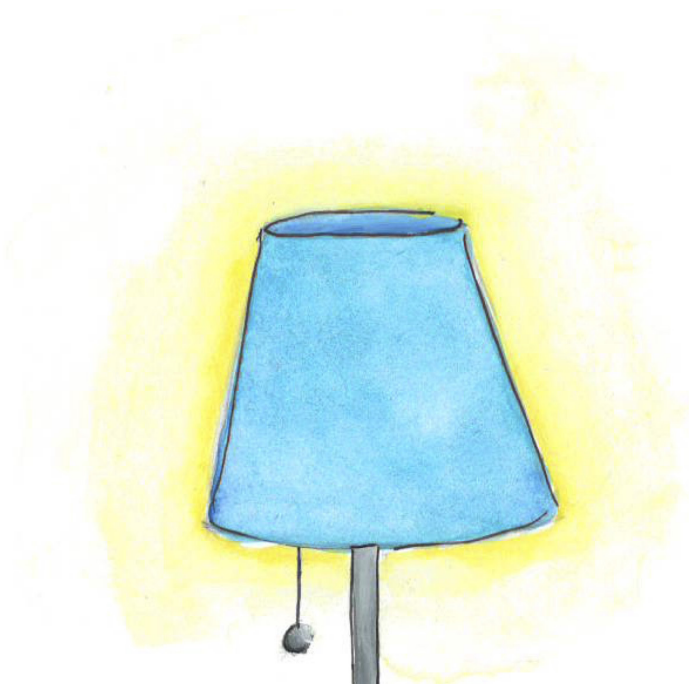


The taxi stopped outside a little red brick house with a cuddly tiger sitting on top of the gate post.

The Nanas always had a toy tiger hidden for Jasper somewhere, each time he visited, and it made him smile sleepily.

The front door was already open. Standing on the path were the Nanas, waiting to give him a big hug. He felt warm and glad to be somewhere safe with people he could trust.

It was late, so after a quick slice of toast and a warm mug of milk, he was tucked up under his blanket, fast asleep.



In the middle of the night, Jasper woke up, and, for a few minutes, didn't recognise the room.

Then he spotted the blue nightlight beside his bed and realised where he was.

He thought about what had happened that day. Just before bedtime, Jasper's mum had asked him to call an ambulance.

The man who came to help said that she had drunk too much alcohol and would need to see a doctor. After that, someone had called the Nanas.

He wondered about how his mum was. And as he drifted off to sleep again, he made a wish.



On Monday morning, Jasper came downstairs to find the Nanas making his favourite breakfast—apple pancakes with syrup.

He wanted to say ‘mmm yummy’, but the first words that tumbled out of his mouth were, ‘is it my fault that my mummy drinks too much?’

The Nanas looked at him kindly. Then Nana Hannah said gently, ‘No my darling. You can never make another person drink too much. It’s absolutely not your fault.’

Nana Mindy pointed at an umbrella beside the front door: ‘It’s difficult to explain but perhaps you could think of it being a bit like the weather. They say that it may rain today but we cannot be sure so let’s take the brolly out with us later.

‘You may not be able to stop the rain falling, but you can keep yourself warm and dry if it does. And remember that there will be sunnier skies again one day.’

Jasper felt sad but he understood.



On Tuesday, Jasper said, ‘So, if it isn’t my fault, then why does my mummy drink too much?’

The Nanas were making pancakes again. Nana Mindy said, ‘There are lots of reasons why a person might drink too much alcohol. But mostly it’s because they think it might make them feel better, even if it’s only for a short while.’

Nana Hannah picked up the syrup and said, ‘It’s a bit like when you add a little of this to your pancakes to make them taste extra yummy. If you put on too much then it might make you feel sick. Some people like syrup so much that they will nearly always put too much on, and they can forget that there are other ways of feeling better.’

Jasper felt worried but he understood.



On Wednesday, Jasper asked, ‘Can I stop her drinking too much?’

The Nanas were quiet for a while. Jasper thought about the times he had tried to hide the bottles that his mummy kept behind the pile of books in her bedroom.

Nana Hannah said ‘You cannot stop someone from drinking. They need to be ready to help themselves first. But it’s really normal to want to make your mummy better. I wish I could, too.’

Nana Mindy pointed to a tap that was dripping in the bathroom: ‘You see that tap? It keeps on dripping and whatever I try to do to help, it just carries on. Sometimes it even keeps me awake at night. There is a problem somewhere that I cannot see and until that is fixed, I just need to make sure that I can get the peace I need.’

Jasper felt disappointed but he understood.



On Thursday, Jasper couldn't stop thinking about his mummy. He didn't like being on his own and while sitting between the Nanas on the sofa, he said, 'If she doesn't stop drinking, will she die?'

They held him close and let him cry until he didn't need to any more.

Then Nana Mindy said, 'When we really care about someone, we just want them to be happy and healthy. At the moment, your mummy doesn't know how to stop drinking too much and we cannot know for certain what will happen. We can only hope!'

Nana Hannah said, 'Sometimes a butterfly will fly into a house and find it tricky to get out again. They fly around and around trying to find a way out. And they nearly always do.'

Jasper felt afraid but he understood.



On Friday, something exciting happened. The Nanas' cat had kittens!

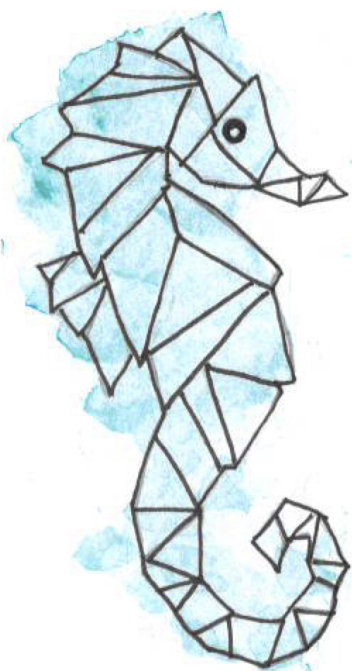
While they fetched some extra snuggly towels, Jasper said, 'Will I drink too much alcohol like my mummy one day?'

'That would be sad, wouldn't it? I really hope you'll find other ways of feeling happy', Nana Hannah said kindly.

While they sat beside the basket of black and white fluffy kittens, Nana Mindy said, 'Can you see any that look exactly the same?' Jasper looked carefully. They all had slightly different spots and patches. He said, 'It's like me and mummy. We both have freckles on our noses, but not all in the same places. Maybe I'm like her in some ways but not in all ways.'

The Nanas smiled and looked at him proudly.

Jasper felt relieved because he understood.



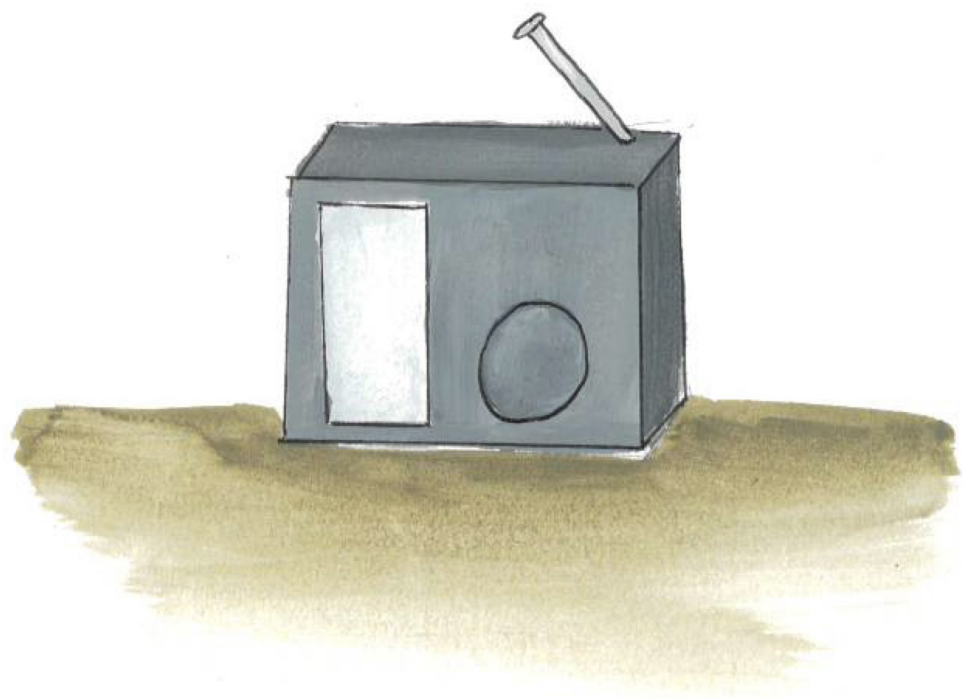
On Saturday, Jasper watched the neighbourhood children playing outside from his bedroom window. He wanted to play with them.

Instead, Jasper went downstairs and found the Nanas knitting blankets for the kittens. He sat on the floor in silence, and then suddenly said, 'Am I the only one with a mummy who drinks too much?'

Nana Mindy put her knitting needles down, and said, 'There are a lot of people who drink too much, and a lot of them are parents, which means that there are a lot of children who are worried about their mummy or daddy's drinking.' Jasper blinked and said, 'Nana? But I've never met any children like that.'

Nana Hannah said 'Are you sure? Did you know that I have a tiny seahorse tattoo under my watch?' Jasper's eyes widened. She continued, 'No one knows everything about everyone.'

Jasper felt surprised but he understood.

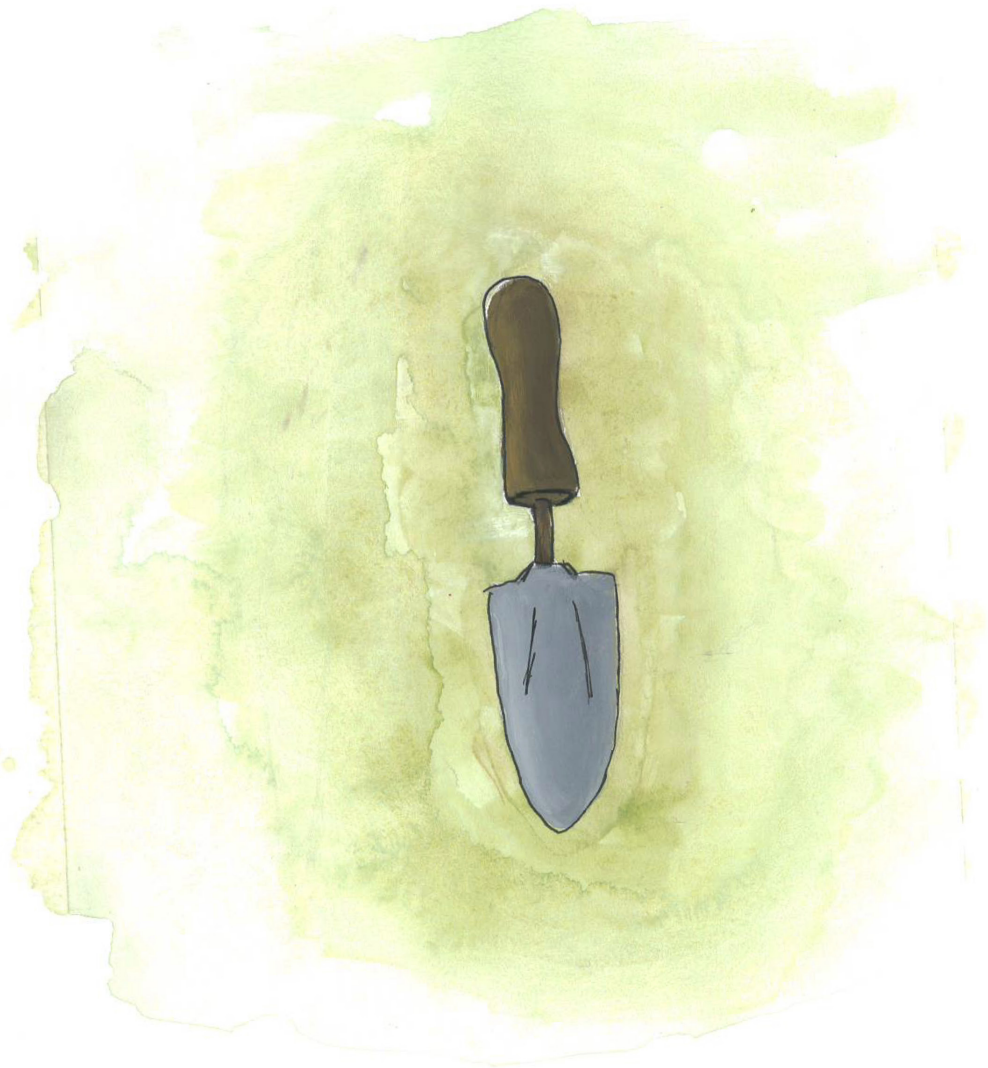


On Sunday, Jasper spoke to his mummy on the phone. Afterwards, he didn't know what to think, so he went to help the Nanas with their crossword in the kitchen. In a small voice, Jasper asked, 'Does my mummy still love me?'

Nana Mindy took his hand and softly said, 'None of us can ever really know what is in another person's heart. But my feeling is that she does love you very much, even if it doesn't always seem like she does. Drinking too much alcohol can do strange things to people. It can make them forget what is really important to them, or make them say or do things that they wish they hadn't.'

Nana Hannah said, 'Do you remember why we don't have the radio on while we do our crossword?' Jasper replied, 'Because it's too distracting.' 'That's right, and, for some people, drinking alcohol is just too distracting for them to be able to do almost anything else. But please remember that whatever is happening in your life, you are a lovable person. Whether or not you feel loved, you are worthy of love.'

Jasper felt a bit befuddled but he understood.



Over the next few weeks, Jasper needed to ask fewer and fewer questions, and he started going out to play with the neighbourhood children.

His mummy came home from hospital, and did stop drinking for a while. Jasper was pleased, because his wish had come true.

It took her a few more years to completely learn how to live without drinking too much. Jasper had many different feelings about this.

When he felt confused or lonely or afraid, he wrote things down in his book, or did some digging in the garden, or spoke to the Nanas. But most of all, he reminded himself that there would be sunnier skies again one day.

Jasper's Wish is written by Dr Jessica Munafò, who worked for many years as a Nacoa Volunteer Helpline Counsellor and is now a member of the Consultative Council. Her research studies are published at nacoa.org.uk/research

Illustrated by Evelina Calhaem, age 14 years

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Dedicated to the memory of John Fenston,
Nacoa Trustee between 1995-2020



Free helpline: 0800 358 3456
nacoa.org.uk

Nacoa was founded in 1990 to address the problems faced by children growing up in families where one or both parents suffer from alcohol dependency or a similar addictive problem. This includes children of all ages, many of whose problems only become apparent in adulthood

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Jasper made a wish...

After he finds himself, all of a sudden, having to stay with his two Nanas, Jasper has quite a few worries: ‘Is it my fault my mummy drinks too much?...Am I the only one?’

In his scribbling book, Jasper writes down all his hopes and worries, and makes a wish. With the kind support of Nana Hannah and Nana Mindy, he begins to feel better, because he begins to understand that mummy’s drinking is not his fault.

