

# Lockdown Nell

JANE ELSON



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by Jane Elson



For



Helping everyone affected by their  
parent's drinking



*Lockdown Nell* is written in memory of  
Viola Clarke (11th July 1928 - 19th July 2016)  
Who sailed from Jamaica to England arriving  
on these shores 2nd February 1952,  
beloved mother of Sharon D. Clarke MBE  
& Aunty Vie to us all.  
We love you and miss you and were so  
blessed to have you in our lives.

## From Jane Elson

My children's book *Will You Catch Me?* about Nell, the child of an alcoholic was published by Hachette Children's Group in August 2018, long before the pandemic hit the world.

Hilary Henriques the CEO of Nacoa has described Nell as Nacoa's Angel. She asked me, 'How would Nell cope in lockdown?'

This story is my response for Nacoa with love.

This story is for all Children of Alcoholics who have struggled during lockdown. Please reach out to Nacoa and remember You Are Not Alone.



# Lockdown Nell

Standing on my head during lockdown stops me thinking scary thoughts, like WILL I BE LOCKED IN HERE FOR EVER WITH MY DRUNK MUM? And, SUPPOSING WE GET THE CORONAVIRUS? And, WHO WILL LOOK AFTER MY ANIMAL FAMILY IF I GET SICK?

I squint sideways at the phone number scribbled on my arm: 0800 358 3456. I want to call it, I really do it's just ...

The blood rushes to my head and I drop my body down and when I sit the right way up it's like my bedroom walls are closing in on me.

I grope for my phone under my pillow where I keep it hidden in case Mum tries to sell it.

I dial the number, and almost immediately a kind lady's voice says, 'Hello Nacoa.'

I ring off. My heart thudding.

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics.

I feel like I've betrayed my Mum just dialling their number.

I take a deep breath and smooth down my knotty-knotty black curls, my fingers getting caught in the tangles.

I would always try to escape when Auntie Lou next door brought out THE COMB. Now I'd do anything to feel the pain of the tugs as she combs my hair, just to have her close to me. But she's been in hospital for a week with the virus, and my best friend Michael has been sent to live with his dad in lockdown. I am all alone.

I check on my animal family. I am nearly out of food for them. Fiz and Tyrone, my gerbils, are asleep. Beyoncé and Destiny are swimming round and round and round their goldfish bowl. Bob Marley the tortoise is crawling over my bed, and my guinea pigs, Asbo and Chaos, are chasing each other around their cage. They do not understand about social distancing.



I love my animal family. They are all I have. But how am I going to feed them?

Mum is still passed out, flopped over the kitchen table. I put the sick bowl and a glass of water and packet of headache tablets next to her hand for when she wakes up. Then I will put her to bed. It is

my job.

My tummy gurgles. I open all the kitchen cupboards again, just in case I missed some food. I didn't. They are empty. Then I spy a single pink hundreds-and-thousands sprinkle in the corner. It must have come off a bun. I lick my finger so it sticks to it and place it on the tip of my tongue, loving the sugary taste.

Mum spent all our food money on drink. Every last penny.

‘We will have a little lockdown party for two,’ she said. ‘Lockdown will be fun, my Nelly Nell Nell.’



Mum put on that Beyoncé song about being crazy and in love. Only it was crazy, truly crazy, and the party went on and on and on for days, but it wasn't a party for two, it was a party for one because I wasn't invited into her drink world.

I am proud to be the only naturalist on the Beckham Estate. I want to be free running over the wasteland by our estate, feeling the wind on my face – not trapped in my flat prison with my dancing drunk mum.



I pull the kitchen blind down just in case the postman, or anyone, looks through the window and sees Mum slumped over the kitchen table.

I then go to her bedroom and get her favourite pink jumper and drape it round her shoulders, just in case she gets cold.

‘I love you, Mum,’ I whisper in her ear and try and link my little finger with her sleeping little finger, which is the special thing we do when she makes me a pinkie promise – before she goes and breaks it over and over and over.

There’s a knock on the door. I run and open it. There’s a bag at my foot with a note:

*For Your Animal Family.  
From Mr and Mrs Patel x*

I see Mrs Patel hurrying away, a mask over her face.

‘Thank you, Mrs Patel,’ I call after her. ‘Thank you for your kindness.’

A tear escapes. I can’t stop it.

I wipe the outside of the package, open it up and then wash my hands. There is some lettuce and carrots and before I can stop it I have stuffed a handful of lettuce leaves into my mouth and I am filled with hate, hate, hate for what I have just done. What kind of naturalist am I to eat my animal family’s food? I look down at my

drunk mum and I just can't take it anymore and I run, run, run, to my bedroom swallowing and choking on the lettuce leaves and dial Nacoa.

'Hello I am Nell,' I say. 'Please can you help me,' I say.

As the listening lady tells me You Are Not Alone and I tell her about how I am guilty of eating Bob Marley's lettuce, I start to feel safe and like I am swimming in her kindness and that I no longer need to stand on my head.





*Lockdown Nell* was written by Jane Elson in aid of Nacoa UK

Illustrations kindly donated by Michelle Brackenborough

Produced by Piers Henriques



Free helpline: 0800 358 3456  
[nacoa.org.uk](http://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

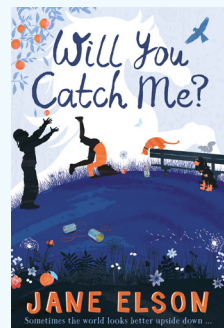
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For more adventures with Nell, go to:

[aroomfullofwords.com](http://aroomfullofwords.com)

&

Read the full length novel *Will You Catch Me?*



'Hello, I am Nell. Please can you help me?'

Nacoa is the national helpline charity for everyone affected by their parent's drinking. A free and confidential lifeline for young people like Nell, who keep a parent's secret.

Since coronavirus turned her world upside down, Nell's mum has started drinking again. It is scary. Nell decides to call Nacoa, but is anxious about it. This is her story of reaching out while being totally locked in.



Helpline: 0800 358 3456  
[helpline@nacoa.org.uk](mailto:helpline@nacoa.org.uk)

A @NacoaUK story  
for everyone affected by their parent's drinking