

*Trigger Warning: This written work contains reference to suicidal thoughts.*

## *Bad Thing*

**Diana Harley**

Short Story

She picks up a photo album from the pile and opens a page at random.

She pulls out one of the photos.

She sees a time past, happy smiling faces, youth, vitality, hand-holding and love.

So much to look forward to. So much to hope for. So much to live for.

She feels the joy of that time.

And then, like so many times before, she feels herself tumbling.

Falling into the hole. The big, black hole of despair and sadness.

Facing, once again, the division of time that has been held in her head for years.

The "before" time.

And the "after" time.

She looks again at the photo in her hand and automatically allocates it to the "before" time.

The time before the bad thing happened.

The time before her world fell apart.

The time before she wanted to kill herself

The time before, when the future held such promise and such hope.

The time she didn't really realise how lucky she was.

She's not going to tell you what the "bad thing" is. Suffice to say that this bad thing turned her life upside down, pushed her into the abyss of depression and self-loathing, goaded her with guilt and sadness, deprived her of precious time with her family and her world.

At the very worst of it all, she remembers driving her car into town, with her 2 year old strapped into his child seat in the back. Fat, salty tears seeped from the corners of her eyes.

The road was straight and long. Decades-old eucalypts lined both sides.

Her hands gripped the steering wheel so tightly that her veins bulged.

She was a wound-up spring ready to explode.

In a bubble of silence, with the prattle of her son and the noises of driving no longer audible to her in her despair, she thought about how easy it would be.

All she had to do was steer straight into one of those enormous gum trees, planted years ago to commemorate the return of the brave soldiers of the surrounding district.

How ironic that the memorial to those who died so that she could live could now be used in such a futile way.

She could just plough head-on into the girth of one of those trees, and the sadness would stop. She wouldn't have to deal with "me" anymore. She could be free.

Steely-eyed, she felt her conviction deep inside.

And then, her son spoke. He called her name - over and over and over again. "Mummy, mummy, mmmmm!"

Her son's insistent calls broke the spell. What right had she to deprive her beautiful son of his life? And of his mother's love?

She came back from the brink.

Once they had cleared the eucalypt memorial drive, she pulled the car over to the side of the road, turned the engine off, and sobbed.

She gently places the photo back in the album. Careses the plastic sheeting over its face and slowly closes the book.

She thinks about how many other people have a "bad thing" in their lives - and how they deal with it, day in, day out.

She thinks about how some people's "bad things" are so much worse than hers. And how so many innocent people suffer through no fault of their own and still, they keep going.

And yet classifying a "bad thing" as a first-world problem or as self-inflicted doesn't help.

Everyone feels their own.

She's still dealing with her "bad thing", and some days are worse than others.

But she's been lucky.

A little boy's voice opened her eyes.

And she's still here.