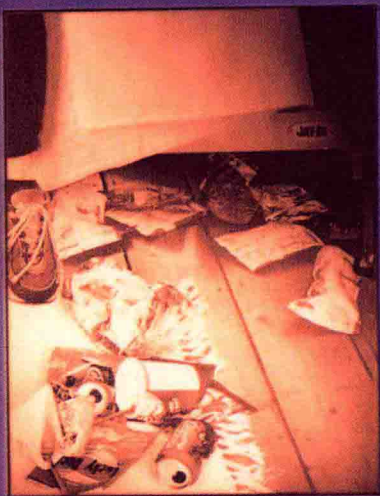
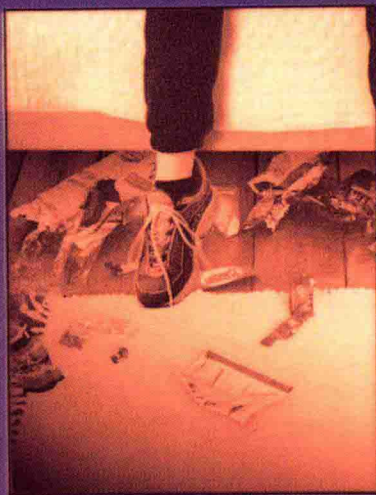
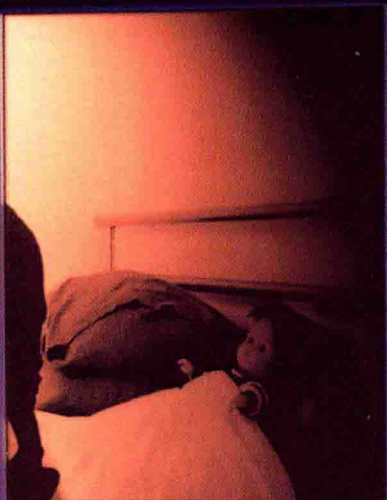
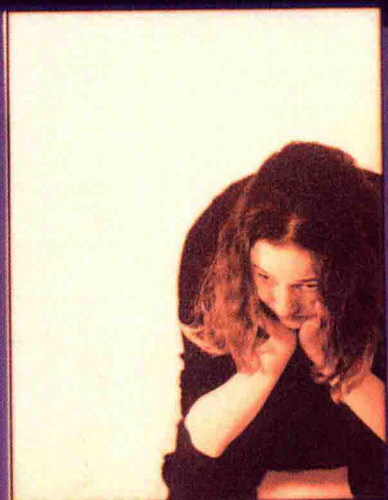


# Running on Empty



**Anna Paterson**

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**A story about three girls with  
eating disorders**

by

**Anna Paterson**

Lucky Duck is more than a publishing house and training agency. George Robinson and Barbara Maines founded the company in the 1980s when they worked together as a head and psychologist developing innovative strategies to support challenging students.

They have an international reputation for their work on bullying, self-esteem, emotional literacy and many other subjects of interest to the world of education.

George and Barbara have set up a regular news-spot on the website. Twice yearly these items will be printed as a newsletter. If you would like to go on the mailing list to receive this then please contact us:

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Fax: 44 (0)117 973 1707 website [www.luckyduck.co.uk](http://www.luckyduck.co.uk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-87394-294-9

Published by Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd.  
3 Thorndale Mews, Clifton, Bristol BS8 2HX, UK

[www.luckyduck.co.uk](http://www.luckyduck.co.uk)

Commissioned by George Robinson  
Cover designed by Barbara Maines and Ben Robinson  
Page layout designed by Helen Weller  
Proofread by Mel Maines

Reprinted December 2003.

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## Dedications

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I dedicate this book to Simon who as always has given me continuous support and help throughout its writing. Thank you also for being the best friend I've ever had.

I would also like to thank Mike Robeson for his constant help and encouragement. As ever, I couldn't have completed the book without you.

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## Biography

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*Running on Empty* is Anna Paterson's third book. Her first book, *Anorexic* (Westworld International 2000) was an autobiographical account of her 14 year struggle with anorexia. Her second book *Diet of Despair* (Lucky Duck Publishing, 2002) was a self-help book on eating disorders for young people and their families. Anna is now recovered and spends her time trying to help other eating disorder sufferers who contact her daily. She works to raise awareness about the reality of these illnesses and is regularly asked to speak about her experiences. Anna is currently writing her fourth book. She lives with her fiancé Simon, who helps her with all aspects of her work including editing her books and they are currently saving up for their first house.

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Part One

**End of the Summer Term (Year 10)**

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# 1

## Katee

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"Useless! That's what you are! Totally useless! A waste of space!"

The words hit Katee like a slap in the face. She started to back away from her father into the furthest corner of the room. His anger was frightening as the words continued to race from his mouth, his face growing a deeper red with every passing minute.

"Why can't you be more like your brother? He's a success, but you – YOU ARE JUST A FAILURE!"

The tears started to trickle down Katee's face. She'd tried to hold them inside because she knew that any show of emotion angered her father even more. Moving further away from him, she found herself backed up against an armchair. Quietly, she climbed into it and tried to curl up into a tiny ball so that he would no longer notice her.

Seeing the tears in her eyes, her father started to shout even louder, waving his arms and her exam paper in the air. With one final mad flourish, he threw the neat pages of writing at his daughter and stormed out of the house.

Katee slowly breathed out but she felt no relief. He wouldn't be gone long. These days, he never left the house for any length of time. He had lost his job a few months earlier and with it his friends, although they hadn't really been friends. They were just work colleagues and their loyalty was to the company of Burton Computing, not to her father.

Sitting alone in the chair, she finally allowed the tears to flow unchecked. His words had hurt so much but he was right. She had received only 82% for her English exam. She was a failure. Her brother always received 90% or more for every test he took. His words echoed around her head – “A waste of space!” Yes that was what she was. A total waste of space. She wished she could just disappear. Why couldn't she ever make her father proud any more?

Brian Quinn had always been a workaholic. For most of her childhood he'd been a distant figure and even when he was at home, he spent more time with David, her brother. They shared the same interests and would spend hours together, playing computer games or watching sport. Katee knew that she wouldn't be included in these activities so instead would spend her free time with her mother.

Then, just a few short months ago, they'd heard the news that Burton Computing was struggling. Her father had always been a dependable worker but not outstanding and he had been upstaged by the young University graduates. He found himself receiving a very generous redundancy cheque and a firm farewell.

From that point on, everything had changed in Katee's life. At first, her father had tried to find a new job but time and again he was told that he was just too old. After a couple of months even the interviews started to dry up and it became obvious that he was not going to step into another job any time soon. Her mother became the only wage earner and increased her working hours whilst Katee took on many of the household tasks. Katee glanced at the clock and realised she'd been sitting and thinking for too long. She was already late putting the dinner on.

Grabbing a bag of potatoes, she started to count out the correct number for each person. Two for Mum, three for Dad, three for David and two for herself. As she reached into the sack for her second potato, she paused. She suddenly felt that she didn't deserve food like the rest of her family. She'd done badly in the exam and felt a need to punish herself. She decided to have one less potato that night. After all, they were her favourite part of the meal.

As she prepared the potatoes, Katee's mind started to wander. Words that her father had shouted at her during the last few months filled her head. "You're a lazy, ugly girl! I wish you weren't my daughter... Why can't you be clever like your brother?... You want more money for clothes? Have you grown out of your other ones? Putting on weight are you?"

A faint idea started to form in the back of her mind. What if she lost a little weight? The more she thought about it, the more it seemed like a good idea. After all, her Dad thought that she was fat and ugly. Maybe he would love her more if she were thinner. If she lost weight, she would also be smaller and less noticeable. He might not shout at her so much.

She finished peeling the potatoes and reached into the freezer, where she chose a large chicken pie for her parents and brother. She was vegetarian and had been for a year now – another reason why Dad picked on her. That day, instead of scrabbling further into the freezer for a vegetable burger for herself though, she started to build an elaborate salad on her plate instead.

With the potatoes, vegetables and pie cooking, Katee heard a key turning in the front door. She jumped with fright, as she knew it could only be one of three people. She prayed that it was her Mum or David and not her Dad back early.

"Katee! It's only me. Give us a hand with the shopping will you love?"

With relief, Katee scurried into the hall to help her mother with the bags. Distractedly, Jane Quinn handed a few of them to her daughter and shut the door behind her. She caught a brief glimpse of Katee's face and thought she noticed red-rimmed eyes.

"You alright love? You look like you've been crying," she called after her.

"No, I'm fine Mum. I've just peeled an onion and it made my eyes water. I have to do my homework now. The dinner's on and I'll be down in twenty minutes to serve up for you."

Katee felt a desperate need to protect her Mum and didn't want to talk about the earlier scene with her Dad. She felt too ashamed to repeat what he'd said because every word seemed to ring true. She was lazy and didn't work hard enough at school. 82% was a disgraceful mark and she really was a failure and a waste of space. Every day she was growing to hate herself just that little bit more.

Watching her daughter leave the room, Mrs. Quinn felt sad. She knew that Katee was growing up much too fast and had too many responsibilities already. After the school day ended she should be having fun with her friends, wandering around the mall looking at clothes and make-up instead of preparing family meals. Perhaps things would change when Brian found a job.

The key sounded in the lock again and a moment later, her husband walked into the kitchen. Jane looked at his face and sighed quietly. These days it just seemed to be permanently grey.

From the safety of her bedroom, Katee heard him return. A shudder ran through her body as she realised that she had become very afraid of her

Dad. She reached for her books and tried to settle down to her homework. Looking again at the now crumpled exam paper, she felt hopeless. She had let everyone down and her mind returned to the idea of losing weight. The exam paper swam before her eyes as her thoughts drifted away.

Maybe exercise would help her lose weight even faster.

Katee pushed her books to one side and after clearing a space on the floor, started to do sit-ups. By the time she reached her tenth one, she was in agony. Her stomach and back were aching painfully but she wasn't going to give up. She was determined to complete fifty before she had to go back downstairs and serve the dinner. Ignoring the pain, she continued to push herself harder. As she counted higher, each sit-up took longer. Her muscles ached and sweat was pouring off her face and body but she would not give up. Her father was always telling her that she was a quitter and this time she would prove him wrong.

Finally, Katee reached fifty sit-ups and allowed herself to stop. Her muscles were not used to this kind of exercise and she couldn't stop shaking. As she tried to stand, she had to reach out for a chair to balance herself. She sat on the bed and took some deep breaths to calm herself down. Her head was spinning and her heart racing but she felt a sense of achievement. She hadn't given up. She had completed her task. Grabbing a sheet of paper and a pen, she began to draw up her first exercise plan.

A knock on her door stopped her in her tracks. It was probably David wanting to borrow her Walkman again. But David never knocked on her door – he usually just walked in, chatting as he went. Katee looked up to find herself staring straight into her father's eyes. She quickly hid the exercise plan underneath her notebook and started to rise from the bed.

"Sorry Dad. I lost track of the time. I must serve up dinner."

"Why can't you ever do anything right Katee?" he sneered. "First the exam and now dinner. Get your head OUT of the clouds and join us in the real world OKAY?"

His voice rose with each word until he was shouting at her again. All the anger he felt about his life was suddenly flooding out onto his daughter. Not even able to look at her again, he turned on his heels and disappeared, slamming the door behind him.

Katee swallowed back her tears and hurriedly pulled on a sweatshirt before running down the stairs to serve up dinner. Cutting the pie and dividing the potatoes, she left her own plate until last. She added a pile of carrots, broccoli and beans to the colourful salad already arranged neatly on her plate. Finally, she slipped her single potato onto David's plate before handing out the meals. She then slid quietly into her seat in the corner and listened while David talked about the new sports team he had been chosen for that day. He was doing so well at school. It really was only her who seemed to be failing. With a deep sigh, she pushed away her half eaten plate of vegetables and salad. Her appetite had completely vanished.

---

## 2

### Gemma

---

"I spoke with your French teacher yesterday and I was very disappointed with what she said". Gemma's mother, Clare Williams, looked across the table at her daughter who was nibbling on a piece of dry toast.

"She said that your grades were not as good this year so I think it may be time for you to start having extra lessons. You're nearly sixteen years



old Gemma. Next year you'll be taking your GCSEs and you can't afford to fall behind."

With a deep sigh, Gemma nodded her head and took her plate over to the sink. Throwing away the remains of her breakfast, she could hear her mother still talking but the words were no longer registering in her head. Her mother seemed permanently disappointed with her this term. Nothing she did was ever good enough, whereas her mother was always such a success.

Mrs. Williams had just secured a promotion. Starting in September she'd be the new headteacher of Weatherbrook High School for Girls. This meant they were moving house during the summer holidays and Gemma was dreading the change of schools next term. She was certain that being the Headteacher's daughter was not going to be easy. Her mother would expect her to do well and set a good example to all the other girls at school. Gemma thought that her classmates would either tease or ignore her. Turning back to the table, she realised that her mother was still talking.

"I have to go in early this morning for a staff meeting. Can you do the washing up before you go please? And don't forget your lunch money I put it on the mantelpiece."

Gemma nodded and gave her mother a quick peck on the cheek before she hurried out of the kitchen, saying that she needed to pack her books for school. When she reached her room, Gemma shut the door and then pushed a chair against it. Her mother had a very annoying habit of just walking into the room without knocking. Reaching under the bed, Gemma pulled out two books. One was a diary and the other was a very well thumbed magazine entitled "Getting To Know Your Calories". Opening the diary, she wrote: "Three quarters of a slice of dry toast – 50 calories".