



# From the ashes



by the students of Year 8, 2008

## Table of contents

Table of contents .....	2
List of Authors.....	3
Copyright .....	4
Acknowledgements .....	5
Chapter 1 Daniel Matthews .....	6
Chapter 2 Underground Boyz.....	8
Chapter 3 Initiation.....	10
Chapter 4 One more chance .....	12
Chapter 5 Drifting Away .....	15
Chapter 6 The Party, the Fire, the Sadness.....	17
Chapter 7 A Hallucinated Epiphany .....	19
Chapter 8 .....	21
Chapter 9 Ashes.....	22
Chapter 10 Three Years Later .....	23

## List of Authors

### TEAM 2

Matthew Alessi  
Oliver Coorey  
Ted Dwyer  
Louis Dillon  
Callum Flitcroft  
Michale Lawler  
Tim Litherland  
Harry Maher  
Tim Palmer  
James Quinn

### PARAMETERS

Primary Character 1:	<b>A Down-and-Out</b>
Primary Character 2:	<b>Hair Dresser</b>
Non-Human Character:	<b>Butcher Bird or Magpie</b>
Setting:	<b>Bush Fire</b>
Issue:	<b>Peer Pressure</b>

Random Words which must appear at least once somewhere in the story:

**Nurse**  
**Heart**  
**Joy-ride**  
**Underground**  
**Sneeze**

## Copyright

Published by St. Joseph's College Team 2, Mark St., Hunters Hill, NSW 2110.

Copyright © 2008 St. Joseph's College.

All rights reserved. This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the College for their support with this event and for fundraising for the Westmead Children's Hospital.

## Chapter 1

## Daniel Matthews

Daniel Matthews was hypnotised by the charisma of the mundaneness of the rural road. The bleak colours of rotting bark and brown, dead grass seemed to appeal to Daniel's immeasurable boredom. The ice cold glass of the car window stung the side of his face, providing the perfect distraction from the miserable future that lay ahead. Daniel had short dark hair and pale blue eyes; he had a strong build and numerous scars as souvenirs of his many fights and brawls. Daniel was morally damaged, his father was nothing more than a memory of pain and loss and his mother constantly disappointed him, whether it be drugs or alcohol, Daniel rarely experienced his mother's true positive qualities that made him proud to be her son. At the present time, his mother was wearing a short, white shirt and cut off denim pants, she had long, black hair that was sprawled over the driver's seat head rest. She had pale white skin that displayed stress marks on her face, she was extremely thin and her skin seemed to cling to her stick like bones. Miss Matthews was riddled with anxiety and stress, her personality was damaged from the constant exposure to alcohol and drugs and her life was a story of disappointment, sadness and trouble. She was constantly attacked by the tell tale symptoms of anxiety attacks.

Daniel knew little of the town his fate had led him to. He assumed it would be a typical rural town, the kind you pass by and forget about when you go on long car trips in the holidays. He was left to guess what the country kids would be like, or what the small, run down boarding school that would be his home for the next four years would lead him to. His mother had told him barely anything apart from the "Pack your bags, we're leaving" part. He didn't even know the name of the town. He did understand, however, why they had left. It was several hours before the battered, red Holden Ute pulled in front of a shabby, green sign post, revealing the first part of the mystery, the name of the town. Wirraminah seemed the typical name for a country town. Daniel finally managed to get his tongue around the name after several poor attempts. Daniel dared not look at what his mother was doing; he felt depressed enough as he was. It wasn't another few minutes before he heard the rumble of the engine and felt the car fighting a war with the gravel that replaced the usual tarmac road. Wirraminah was a typical country town. The shops were old and falling apart with graffiti providing colour from the bleak whitewash that had blistered away from the lethal sun. The grass was replaced with brown dust and gravel and the cement was dirty and chipped. There was some considerable difference in the houses leading away from the main road and towards the boarding school, featuring carports, beautiful parks and gardens like a mirage compared to the slum Daniel had just passed through. In the distance, on the outskirts of town he noticed large rocks and cliff faces, as if this suburban paradise was literally caught between a rock and a hard place.



Daniel felt the eyes of the boys in his boarding dormitory staring at him, with a mixture of interest and suspicion. They weren't accustomed to a new kid arriving in the middle of term, especially from the city. It was a small school and even smaller dormitory but Daniel couldn't shake the felling of having nowhere to hide, or nowhere to avoid the damaging stare of the boys in his dormitory. His mother had abandoned him at the front gate without saying as much as goodbye, leaving him with the sound of his one hope, one love in life driving away without sympathy or remorse. He carried a simple carry bag and suitcase, and unceremoniously hurled it on his bed. He contemplated his situation, as the boys in the dormitory stared at him subtly. Daniel was in for a tough week and he knew it. The best way to escape this daunting situation was to find a group of friends, and fast. He assessed the candidates. Prior to today he would have been comfortable with making friends, as he was constantly put in this situation, but this time it was different, the boys attitude was hostile towards him compared to the usually friendly gestures of the city schools. It was like he was about to confront a different species. His nervous were getting to him, pressuring almost, to hide under his duvet and never emerge again. Daniel blessed his luck as a group of three kids approached him. They looked smug and confident and had a stride and stance that demanded respect. Daniel didn't like the instant arrogance and narcissism, but was desperate to make a strong first impression. Daniel sat attentively on the edge of his bed as the group of boys formed a semi-circle around him. Daniel waited for them to speak first, after a few seconds of awkward silence the boy in the middle stuck out his large, scared hand. Daniel hesitated, looking at the hand in front of him, before slowly reaching out and shaking it, not realising that the simple gesture would lead him into a world of trouble and suffering, starting that very recess.



## Chapter 2

## Underground Boyz

Daniel casually walked up to the group of boys gathering around the large containers at the edge of the school. The well-known school chant of “FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT” erupted from the circle of people gathering around. As Daniel walked over, he could easily tell that it wasn’t your normal fight. It was more like a kid getting the shit kicked out of him by the three older looking boys that looked like they needed to shave every couple of hours.

As Daniels natural hormones started pumping itself around his body he pushed through the ring. He pulled off the kids beating the other one up and the group went silent, and stared. The apparent leader wiped the blood off his knuckles as the kid sprinted off, just holding back tears. “Do you want a fight mate?” said the boy on his right, “because your going the right way for a broken nose”. Daniel shrugged and answered “Well, you don’t like you’ve won to many fights, so yeah I’ll go you”. The boys eyeballs widened and he took a lazy swing with his fist. Daniel was ready , and he ducked underneath the punch and connected an eruptive right hook into the boys nose. He felt blood splatter on his hand as the boy fell backwards. He didn’t dare another go so he stayed down. Daniel checked to see if he was unconcious but he was fine apart from a severely sore nose.

“Holy shit bra, calm down!” exclaimed the leader as the rest of the group suddenly started whispering and pointing to the boy. “I don’t fight unless you take a swing first” said Daniel , “ so I don’t have a problem if you don’t”. The boy got up from the ground holding his bleeding nose and said “You’ve got a pretty good punch!”. “I’ve had plenty of practise” grinned Daniel and slid his finger over the large moon shaped scar that traced down his eye. “Well, we’ve had a bit of a problem from the lads at the train station and we could use a bit of protection”. The boy smiled. “I’m Duncan and this is Johnno and Paul heres another guy in our group but he’s away. “Look, I’m willing to give you a chance to be one of the top dogs here, and you seem pretty cool so how about you meet us somewhere tonight”.

Daniels heart leapt. He’d just been in a fight and now he was being invited to be part of the cool group. Sure, Duncan never said he was part of it but it was a solid start. The rest of the school day drifted by and soon enough Daniel was deciding on what to wear to the school footy oval. He decided on something gangster so he slipped on skater shoes a hoody and tight jeans.

He went to bed in these clothes without the blanket on and his eyes stayed open as the Dormitory supervisor switched off the lights. We kept turning on his phone to see what the time was and at five to twelve, he slipped out of his bed and cautiously crept out of the dorm, so as to not wake anyone up. He run down to the oval and the un-mistakable flickering of cigarettes could be seen from 100 metres away. He tried not to show his enthusiasm as he strolled up to the group of boys. “Aye, Danny!” Duncan called out. Daniel looked up and nodded to the three boys and sat down next to Duncan. “Hey,



mate... I'm Luke", he pointed at Paul sitting on the ground scowling at him. Daniel stifled a laugh as he could see two tissues crudely stuck up Pauls nose. "You mashed his nose up pretty bad" laughed Luke. "You try that again and I'll smash your face in!" Paul growled. Daniel grinned "You swung the first punch!". "Fellas, fellas calm yourselves" Duncan said, "We're not here to fight.... that was at recess". The group erupted in laughter "Shut your face" Snarled Paul. "Shut your nose" laughed Johnno. "Okay thats enough" smirked Duncan. "Welcome, Daniel to our gang.... the underground boyz. Paul and Johnno made whooping noises.

"Now we're willing to offer you a place, aren't we boys". They all nodded, except for Paul. It was obvious Paul was going to be hard to win over. "But" exclaimed Duncan" we've decided that an initiation would be in order". "We've all discussed the options, and there is one you must do".

"Steal a car".



## Chapter 3                      Initiation

Daniel's mind began to race. 'Steal a car?!' He thought to himself, 'what have I gotten myself into? If I do it, I'll get accepted. I'll be cool. But what if I get caught? I'll really be in the poo. I don't want to do it, but I do. Oh man what should I do...?'

With his mind swirling, Daniel said to the others "I'll do it. It can't be that hard. Which car should I nick?"

Duncan said in a mysterious voice, "Be at the front of the school where the cars are parked at ten p.m tomorrow. The details will be relieved then." He pulled his hood over his dark hair and wandered down the dark street with Luke, Jonno and Paul trailing behind him, rap music blasting from Jonno's mobile phone. Daniel starting running back to his boarding house. Images of hands gripping jail cell bars and handcuffed criminals being shoved into vans flashed through his mind.

After a night spent tossing and turning in his thin bed, Daniel sat down to his vegemite-on-toast breakfast. Another day of spit balls and mouthing off at the teachers awaited. But the butterflies had already arrived and Daniel's stomach was churning. He shoved his plate away and ran to his dorm where more pictures of jail, criminals and cars crossed his mind.

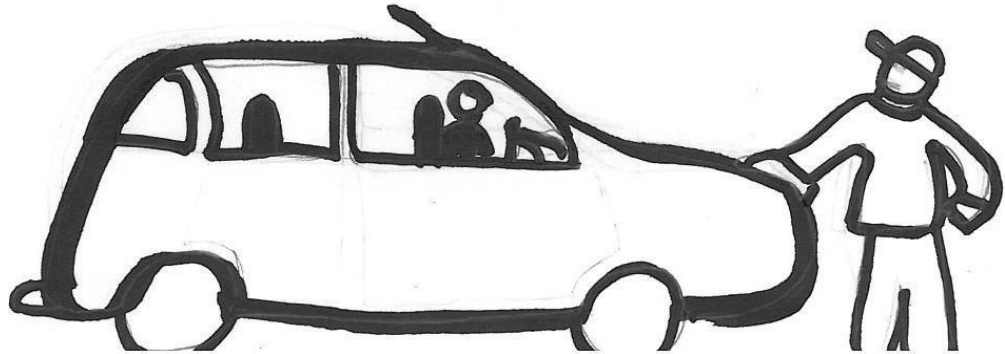
When nine thirty came around Daniel jumped from his chair where he had been watching telly. He pulled on dark clothes and a hoody and left the dorm. When he arrived he noticed the others in a circle around a small stereo.

"Hey guys," he said, "ready to do the deed?" On the outside Daniel looked pumped and ready, but on the inside he was all nerves. Snakes writhed in his stomach and his heart was pumping like he had just run a mile.

Duncan didn't answer straight away, he just pointed. "That Camry," he said, "the red one. Hears a ruler, you already know how to hotwire stuff."

"What's the ruler for?" Daniel asked.

"You stick it down the side of the window to pop the lock. Now get a move on." He and the rest of the Underground Boyz moved away.



“LET’S GO JOYRIDING!!!! WHOO!!”

Daniel moved and stood beside the red car. He slid the metal ruler down the gap between the window and the door. He jiggled it around and the car’s lock popped up. He hopped in and then he realised that what he was doing was wrong. After a moment’s hesitation he slid beneath the car’s steering wheel. He pulled a red and a blue wire together and they sparked. The Camry’s engine roared to life and Daniel leapt to his feet.

“Yes!!” he yelled. He jumped into the front seat and pushed the handbrake down. He put his foot on the accelerator and pressed. The car leapt away, but in the wrong direction. The car sped backwards and Daniel yelled, his heart almost leaping from his chest. The car went careering into a spin and then crashed straight into a metal street light pole. The juddering crash threw Daniel from his seat and onto the hard tarmac. His head bounced several times and he lay still, stone cold unconscious.

The rest of the Underground Boyz ran from the scene, not wanting to get involved in the disaster that had just occurred in front of their eyes. Daniel lay still, dead to the world.

## Chapter 4

## One more chance

Crisp white sheets. Everything smelt white and sterilised. Then the pain hit. Kane was almost doubled over in agony. His head! Surely he must be dead! How could you suffer so much pain and live! He rolled over and darkness overcame him, a welcome release from the pain that raged like a river in flood.

Slowly Kane woke. He chanced open an eye, and saw a nurse bent over him. She was dressed all in white, like the rest of his surroundings. He looked around and saw he was lying on a bed in a hospital ward. Suddenly everything came back to him. The joy ride! The car. He must escape. He tried to leap up, but fell back to his bed as the pain reared in his chest. He fell back to the bed with a thump. The nurse turned round to him.

"You're awake. Welcome back," she said. "Gave us quite a scare you did. Very nasty accident that. Don't think you'll be joy riding again." Kane felt his heart thumping in his chest. How much longer did he have till the police came knocking on his ward's door? Did he have enough energy to escape? Even if he did, what would happen then?

The nurse spoke again, breaking his thoughts. "There's someone waiting to see you." The nurse disappeared through a door, and before he could react, she returned, with another woman in tow. She was of a small build, and had flowing blond hair down her shoulders. She looked about thirty, and had blue eyes and a kindly face. "What could she want with me?" wondered Daniel.

The woman smiled at Daniel. "Aren't you lucky that I took out car insurance." It suddenly clicked with Daniel. "Your car," stammered Daniel. "That's right," answered the woman, flashing him a bright smile. "My car." Daniel was once more reduced to stammers. "It was not meant to be like that. It was an accident. They forced me. It wasn't my fault," Daniel moaned. The lady nodded, and said one word. "Peer Pressure."

Daniel plucked up his courage, and asked, in a whimpering voice "What's going to happen to me." The woman looked at him long and hard, holding his gaze. Kane flinched as arrows flew from her eyes. She sucked in a breath to deliver the damning judgment. Just as Kane thought he was a condemned man, she suffered a sudden flash back. She remembered a day long ago, when she had been the frightened little girl, awaiting the judgement of another. She remembered the fear she had felt, and the relief she felt when he had shown her mercy. That was the turning point in her life, that was how she got where she was today.

She looked down at the quivering boy before her. How could she condemn him. She drew breath. "There's no need to go to the police. You've learnt your lesson by the look of it. The police will only confuse matters. Daniel smiled. "Thank-you erm?"

"Felicity, Felicity Heart," she answered, shaking his hand. She turned to leave, but then a thought struck her. What was going to happen to him now?

He'd just get worse. After joy-riding, who knows what next? Robbery, gang fighting- even murder! He needed guidance. Then another idea struck her.

She turned to Daniel. "To make up for my car, you can do some time working at my salon." Kane eye's lightened. He liked this kind woman; she had shown him much mercy. Kane nodded. "What kind of work?"

"I'm always looking for extra help in my hair salon, Felicity's cuts. You can come and help out."

Daniel nodded. "I'm okay with that."

\*\*\*\*\*

Two weeks later, Daniel found himself pulling on an apron in the hot interior of Felicity's Cut's. Felicity pointed at the floor. "Could you sweep that hair into the corner?" asked Felicity. Daniel nodded, and set to work. Over the next few days Daniel worked very hard, sweeping the floors, cleaning equipment and even cutting hair. It was hard work, but Daniel didn't mind. It was as good as he could hope for. He deserved a lot worse.

Then, Felicity went to the supermarket for two hours, and left Daniel in charge of the salon. He absolutely worked to the ground, cutting, trimming and blowing for the ungrateful customers. "What I have to suffer," mumbled Daniel to himself. "First, that customer moaning on about how I was not qualified to cut there hair. Then the customer who had the cold, and kept having to sneeze halfway through his cut. And, on top of all that, that ungrateful man who started shouting at me for making a mistake in the cashier. It's not as if I did it on purpose!"

Felicity returned to find a disgruntled Daniel, who hurried off with his head down after the salon closed. That night, for the first time since the initiation, Daniel met with the underground boyz.

Daniel sat around the circle of the gang behind the boy's toilet. Someone passed him a bottle of beer, and another a lit cigarette. Daniel took a long swig from the beer, and tried not to cough too much on the cigarette and not make it too obvious it was the first one he had ever had. "Party tonight," drawled Paul, the gang leader. "At my place. Be there, Daniel. Unless mummy won't let you, of course."

Daniel scowled. "I have no mother."

\*\*\*\*\*

That night, Daniel got punch drunk. He woke up with a terrible headache, his drunken slumber cut by the ring of the alarm clock. That day, for the first time ever, he was late for work, and slowly his rate and quality of work went downhill. That night, he returned to the Underground Boyz.

Soon, once more, they were all drunk. Paul turned to him, and handed him a needle. "Here, take this."

"What's this," asked Daniel.

"What do y' think it is, doofer, a flying machine. Its drugs, idiot. Take it. Not to scared are you?" Daniel thought of Felicity. What would she think? Peer pressure immediately sprung to his mind. He was being influenced badly, and he didn't like it. But then he thought of Felicity abandoning him to run the salon. Misusing him. Taking advantage. Forget her, thought Daniel, and injected the drugs.

He was on a downward spiral.





## Chapter 5

## Drifting Away

Daniel had been working for Felicity in the salon for 2 weeks now. He was slowly starting to regret joining the underground boyz but becoming popular and cool had a small price to pay. He was slipping with his work in the salon and Felicity was not happy with the effort Daniel was contributing. Felicity's Cuts was under financial pressure and Daniel wasn't helping.

The Underground boyz were a bad influence on Daniel, but he couldn't help himself when they went after school to drink and take drugs. They Underground Boyz told Daniel "now your initiated mate, you have to take twice the load". Daniel knew what he was doing was wrong, but the Underground Boyz were too much of an intimidating force for Daniel to handle.

After work on Wednesday Felicity approached Daniel. She was worried about Daniel because he was on a down hill spiral and she knew she needed to do something about it fast. She said "Daniel I thought we had an agreement. At the moment you're slacking off and I'm not impressed". Felicity gives Daniel one last chance and then storms out of the room. Daniel isn't happy with what Felicity has done and wants to get her back.





During 5th period, Duncan and the Underground Boyz approach Daniel and persuasively say “yo D-Dog, what’s chilling bro. The boys and I were thinking of having an all night rave”, Daniel looks at them suspiciously and then notices what they’re trying to do. Duncan then says “but the problem is that we don’t have any where to have it, you got any idea’s dog”. Daniel uses this as a perfect opportunity to get back at Felicity and then answers smoothly to the Underground Boyz and Duncan “I’ve got the perfect place we can do it at. I work for this hairdresser and her salon would be a mad place for a rave”. Duncan is impressed with Daniel, but Daniel still doesn’t realise that the Underground boyz are using him as a tool for their own pleasure.

Later that afternoon Daniel and the Underground Boyz go to Joes – a lolly shop by day and liquor and drug shop by night, to steal goods for the rave. They sneak in the back door of the shop with black hoodies and baklava’s and take as much as their huge pockets and backpacks can manage. They picked a good night to raid Joes as most of the police had their eyes on Duncan’s brother’s party, which are usually out of control.

It was the night of the rave and hundreds of people turn up to Felicity’s Cuts for a night that was expected to never end. Daniel and the Underground Boyz bring all the goods they stole and get ready for a night that they would never forget.

## Chapter 6

## The Party, the Fire, the Sadness

“Sweet party bro’!!” exclaimed Duncan as he walked into Daniel’s brilliantly decorated salon. There were beer cartons and bottles of spirits on a table marked ‘The Good Times Table’. As Underground bounced into Daniel’s ‘crib’ their jaws sprung around their ankles at the sight of The Good Times Table and the good times that were most definitely going to follow. Not mentioning the bad ones.

The rain was pouring down with inhuman-like force; pelting on the roof and leaving an indistinctive tone which mimicked the stomping of huge giants darting from one end of the world to the other. The thunder crackled through the vast valley echoing off cliff faces and large rocks whilst lightning ripped and tore through the sky within the blink of an eye.

“Geez, God’s lettin’ loose tonight!!” Screeched Paul in an attempt to be heard over the pelting of the rain and the crackle of the thunder.

“I reckon ay’!” screamed Johnno, “So when are we goin to get into the booze???” The question hung loose in the air and nobody grabbed it or responded.

The party got off to a slow start as only two bottles of beer were drunk in the first three hours. After the three hour mark the party started building as more and more bottles of beer were getting drunk dry. Hundreds of people turned up to the raid party.

“Wow ddude, this ppparty is totally aawesome,” stuttered Paul as the alcohol was starting to take charge. He sprung up and wobbled towards the bathroom with no balance or co-ordination.

Suddenly everything went pitch black as the power failed and all electronic appliances switched off. Then a huge crack of thunder whipped through the salon with an in mountable amount of force and as loud as a jumbo jet.

“Oh My God!” said Luke in a petrified voice.

“Ddon’t wworrery,” said Daniel in an arrogant tone as he flicked a pack of matches out of his pocket. He lit a candle and head for the main power board to switch on the power. He staggered towards the power switch. By this point only one bottle of spirits was left and there were bottles of alcohol spilt all over the floor. There was smashed glass all over the couch, tables and floor. The hair salon had gone from beautiful to dreadful, and it was about to get even worse.

“Oh snap!!!” screeched Daniel as he tripped over with the candle in his hand. The candle went flying out of his hand and straight next to a power point. Sparks flew out of the power point and straight into the pool of smashed glass and alcohol.

“Run!!!” howled Daniel.

Everyone charged out the door, and some jumped through windows, just as the whole salon went up in monstrous flames and a gigantic mushroom cloud of dirt, dust, hair and burning ash. The fire was massive and it quickly

spread throughout the whole town and in the forest beyond leaving nothing in its wake, like a huge wave of sizzling heat!!!

Daniel was running away when he tripped and fell on hard rock. He was shocked, terrified, alarmed, and crawling away from the truth, the reality of what had happened before he fell into a deep, drunken sleep.



## Chapter 7

## A Hallucinated Epiphany

Daniel opened his eyes and looked around. He saw a vast green landscape trailing into the distance. He turned on the spot and saw the magnificent fields of flowers stretching for miles, like a giant patchwork quilt. There was a small lake of clear blue water surrounded by petite ruby red rose bushes. The sun was shining brightly and the light was shimmering on the small ripples of lake's surface. There was a light breeze which melted perfectly into the sun's heat to make the temperature at a state of faultlessness. The smell of fresh flowers soothed his senses as he lay down on the luscious emerald grass and stared up to the sky.

There were clouds shaped in wonderful tufts of fluff which floated in a daydreaming manner across the pale azure sky. A butterfly flew across his vision and momentarily clouded his sight with colours of deepest red and gold. He twisted his head and saw a tall man sitting on a spherical marble boulder by the edge of the cobalt blue pool. He motioned with his head towards the pool and he smiled. The smile looked fine and bright but it also looked like it was forced, as if it wasn't true. The boy on the floor stood up and walked cautiously towards the man, who looked like he was smiling with a gun pointed to his back. It all looked very fake. The boy peered over the shoulder of the man who was gazing entranced at the pond. Daniel thought he saw a boy run across the pond but he thought he must be seeing things. He shook his head but when he looked back instead of seeing a boy he saw a group police men rushing across in a large pack. They all seemed to be silently shouting and the boy walked around the pool to get a better look. He crouched down to study the men and as he did his nose touched the surface of the water.

A large jolt seemed to throw him straight from the shore and into the centre of the lake. Water surrounded him as he spun around in the water trying to break the surface. Hands seemed to claw at him and drag him down, down into the water, down to the floor, down to his death. He felt the air inside him rush out of his mouth and just as his vision started to blur he found a floor under his feet. He kicked out, ripping the hands off him, and broke at last through the surface into the light and safety of the green field, or so he thought.

Daniel looked at the scene he had just entered. He was in a dark damp room with water dripping from the roof. The only light came from three holes drilled into the wall which let in small rays of light. They reflected on the walls of the room and hit the figure of a boy sitting on a steel frame of a bed.

He was wearing a green hoody and grey jeans and he had a rugged look about him. He looked up straight at Daniel and as Daniel stared into the boy's eyes he felt as if a weight had dropped into his heart. The eyes were dead black and lifeless far beyond a corpse's. He looked at him and shook his head in disgust. It was as if the boy knew that Daniel had done wrong. Daniel walked back in fright but hit a wall. He jumped again but only hit another

wall. All four walls were squeezing him and pushing him. He breathed in and shut his eyes ready for whatever was about to happen. Then the walls disappeared, he could breathe again but he was not in the room anymore.

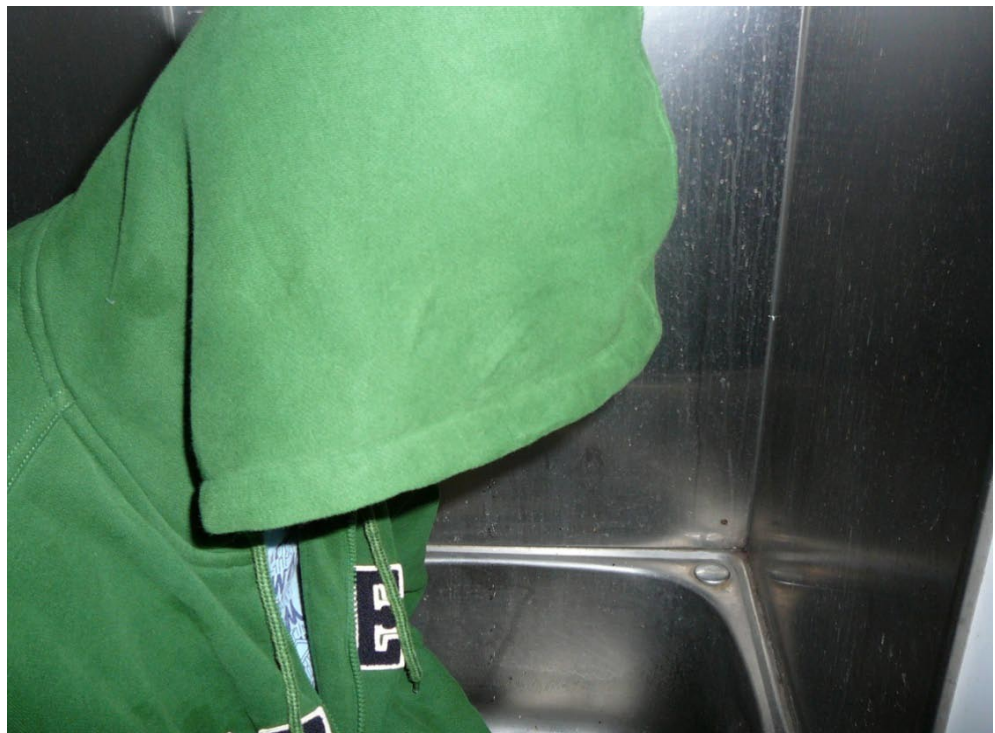
Daniel stared around in shock. He had appeared not in his perfect state-of-serenity fields but surrounded by black ashes. He saw the remains of what once could have been a wonderful house. It was burned to cinders and all around him the flakes of the remains were floating in the wind. A few pieces stuck to a brick wall standing a couple of metres off in the distance. Daniel walked over to the wall and saw that the rubble was forming words on the bricks.

‘No good shall come,

From those who dwindle from the light’

Daniel realised that this was meant to tell him what he was doing wrong. He was the one who was drawing away from the light. He was the one who had encountered bad things. He had been dark and demented, trying to fit into the groups that had wanted to change him, to mould him into a creature that had no control. He had been drawn away from his light at the end of the tunnel, the light that was Felicity, the light that was his second chance. He realised what had happened to him and that he needed to change.

He awoke with a start, gazing around at what he knew was his world, his reality, his home. The fire had died out and all that was left was rubble. The bush around was scorched from the massive bushfire that had raged through, an unstoppable torrent. Remembering the dream he looked with a caring eye over towards the road and saw a tree standing solitary above a large boulder. Getting up hesitantly he saw a magpie on the floor by the tree, a nest beside it and its eggs splattered on the grass.



## Chapter 8

Daniel ran over to the magpie shouting out loud. He ran over and picked it up crying. The magpies eggs had cracked all over the ground and this immediately made him sad reminding him of how much a family means to someone. He had to save it. He couldn't abandon it and let it die. It deserved another chance. One more chance.

Felicity! He needed another chance, just like the magpie. And Felicity had given him that chance. How could he have misused the second chance? And now look what he had done. Burnt down her house! What would she say?

He bent over the magpie, weeping. "You deserve another chance, magpie. And I can give you that. Just like Felicity gave me another chance. He swept up the magpie in his arms. "I will save you." He thought of how bad his life would be without Felicity by his side he would go back to his old life as a down and out.

He shuddered as he imagined where his life was going. A downward spiral. He had no doubt that in a few years time he would have been in jail. Just like his dream.

Jail! How would Felicity react when she returned home and found her salon burnt down. It was her livelihood. Could she forgive him this time? He could only pray!





## Chapter 9

## Ashes

Felicity returned to the house the next day. When she got there, she felt her heart sink under the weight of sadness and shock. She looked around and saw the remains of her house. Everything was covered in ashes. Daniel was kneeling near a dying magpie, surrounded by a flood of tears. “I am so sorry!” Daniel cried, “I can’t believe this happened! Everything is my fault! Kill me! My life is not worth living!”

“Settle down. Don’t worry. Once you’ve stopped crying, you can talk to me and tell me what has happened. I won’t get angry,” replied Felicity.

Five hours later, Daniel was still crying. However, this time it was in happiness. The magpie had survived. Felicity had amputated the magpie’s burnt leg and took it to the vet. The vet had said that the magpie would be able to live but would need to make a steel cage its home for the next year. “It will also need surgery in the next few days, and for the next few months, it will need weekly check ups,” added the vet.

Felicity found it an extremely difficult task to get Daniel to calm down. Just after Felicity had arrived, Daniel collapsed into her arms. “I’ve made a terrible mistake. I don’t expect you to forgive me. I know I have let so many people down, particularly you. I’ll do anything for you to try to make up for my mistakes, but it won’t be enough to completely fix them.”

“Daniel, we both know that you have made a big mistake. However, all people make mistakes. What you need to do is learn from those mistakes and make sure you don’t make them again. I’m not going to make you do more work or anything, I’m going to guide you through the next few years of your life,” replied Felicity.

“How are you going to do this when I am at boarding school? I’ll hardly ever be with you. How is this going to work?” asked Daniel.

“Daniel... I am going to adopt you.”





## Chapter 10

## Three Years Later

Summer came quickly to the town of Wirraminah. The trees were full of golden leaves, the sun in the sky had a smile on his face and all was well. The town was quiet and empty yet welcoming thanks to the new shrubbery lining its paths. At number twelve Falklands Road Daniel Matthews was pouring some tea into a cup for his mother in the small kitchen.

His face had changed since the fire three years ago, with just one cleanly cut scar running down his left cheek. He was now clean shaven, with short, cut hair. Busying himself over the breakfast that he was preparing, he thought about the life that had passed since the inferno at the hairdresser's.

His mother's hairdressers shop had been destroyed, so Daniel had been helping a team of four builders recreate the shop. The place had been redesigned and funded for by the insurance companies. Felicity Heart had been overjoyed by the renovations and was now working there once again, doing what she loved.

Daniel put the finishing touches on the prepared breakfast, then loaded it onto a tray and took it up to his mother's room. She was lying in bed, sleeping quietly like a mouse. Daniel put down the tray and slowly shook her awake. Felicity Heart awoke with a start and then laughed as she saw Daniel and the breakfast tray.

"Always the thoughtful" she said, propping herself up and plonking a kiss on her son. He picked up the tray and placed it on her lap. She looked at the spread before her and grinned broadly. Then she picked up the knife and fork and began to eat. Daniel watched his adopted mother for a moment. Then he heard a squawk.

"Oh, Legless is up. I better get him some food."

"You know, I don't totally agree with that name," said Felicity, wiping away crumbs of jam toast away from her mouth as she spoke. Daniel just smiled and exited the room.

Legless the rescued magpie was now kept in Daniel's bedroom, in a cage. She had learnt to fly on just the one leg. When she learnt to fly Daniel released him into the garden every day. As soon as Daniel had done this, Legless had fallen for a young magpie male who had visited the property before. Not too long after Legless had met the male she had laid eggs. Daniel and Felicity had been overjoyed.

Today, Daniel was in for a surprise. Clutching the bird seed bag, he walked into his room and looked over at the magpie cage. He let out a shriek of surprise, for sitting there where four eggs used to be sat four young magpies all squawking away noisily. And almost as if he was standing guard over her newest and favourite treasures, was Legless.

Felicity ran into the room. "What's happened Daniel?" she asked. "I heard you scr..." And then her eyes laid on the four young chicks and she shrieked too.

"Oh Daniel, they're beautiful," she said, tears starting to fall.

“I know. And look at Legless, standing guard!” He laughed, with tears falling down his face as well.

“Hey! What about the father? He’d like to meet them!” said Felicity.

Daniel walked out to the yard and saw the male sitting on his usual fencepost. Daniel whistled and held out the hand that still had bird seed in it close to the magpie. He looked around inquisitively with his bright yellow eyes, and then jumped out. Daniel continued to whistle as he carried the bird inside, which was too busy chipping away at the seed to notice. Daniel carried the bird into the bedroom, who then saw his love and chirped. Felicity opened the cage and in a loving reunion of the new parents, Legless and his lover came together.

“Awww,” said Felicity, tears still rolling down her pink cheeks.

Daniel peered into the cage and bent down to try and pat the newborns. One of them bit his finger hard. Daniel retracted out his finger and laughed, saying “That bird doesn’t get breakfast!”

---

Two hours later on a picturesque Sunday that had gone entirely perfect, Daniel Matthews heading out to the backyard. Felicity was inside reading the paper content. Daniel sat down next to the cage containing the new arrivals to a family that had formed less than three years ago thanks to Felicity and adoption.

Felicity Heart, Daniel thought. She was Mum. His real mother – the one who had abandoned him when he was young, didn’t deserve to be his mother. Felicity did. She was the only who knew him for he truly was – a soft hearted little boy who just wanted to belong. She was the only one who took him in when no one else would. She was the jewel in the crown, the diamond in his life, the sparkle in the rainbow.

Everyone deserves a chance, thought Daniel. I didn’t take the first, but Felicity gave me a second. He had a little sneeze, wiped away the mist forming in his eyes, and smiled as Bird looked questioningly up towards him. Daniel Matthews reached into his cage and pulled out the tame bird that had gone through so much and survived. Daniel stroked his black and white feathers, knowing in his heart what must be done.

Every thing deserves to be free.

Holding the magpie in his arms, Daniel stood up and walked into the middle of the garden. He looked straight up into the blazing orange sun that had begun to set far away across the horizon. A slight zephyr hit his cheeks as he let the bird go. The friend he loved, the friend he saved, flew away into the shining sunset, flying, flying away, free at last, from the ashes.

The End



From the Ashes is a book about peer pressure, friendships and the love of a family. Its main character is a 14 year old boy named Daniel Matthews. It deals with teen issues such peer pressure, drugs and feeling secure. What will Daniel do in his desperate quest to find friends and a stable family?

