

Prologue

'A day in my life'

As I approach the bus, the symptoms become much worse. It's like being hit by a tornado. My mouth goes dry, my heart starts pounding, I feel sick in my stomach, I can hardly breathe, and my hands are shaking. I am sure that I am going to faint. I don't know how I manage to reach my seat – I feel as if I am just a spectator, everything seems a bit unreal and distant. Am I going crazy? I bet the other people on the bus have noticed. I really can't control my breathing any more, I feel like I am going to suffocate and die. When will it end?

By the time I get off the bus, the symptoms have lessened. Why do these attacks start and stop for no reason? I feel drained, exhausted and weak. I can't think straight. Maybe I should give up taking the bus for a while. Or should I go to the hospital for another check-up? I don't know. I can't cope with this anymore. All I know is that I spend most of my time worrying about having another attack. I can't go on like this or my whole life will be ruined.

That night I lie in bed tossing and turning, and the next morning I awake exhausted. It seems ridiculous, but my mind keeps wandering back to those dreadful feelings I had on the bus. What if

OVERCOMING PANIC

I have an attack when I'm out shopping? Will I be able to escape before it gets so bad that I can't reach home? I keep checking my body for symptoms. I think about those strange tingling and numb feelings I had in my hands and feet. I have heard that you can have funny feelings down your arms when you are having a heart attack. Perhaps that's what is wrong with me.

At last, I drag myself out of bed. I have that hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach and I feel a bit light-headed. I know the doctor said, 'Everything is OK', but it is hard to believe that. There must be something seriously wrong with me. Maybe I should insist on seeing a specialist. They must have more accurate tests to pick up something wrong with your brain or your heart.

I am irritable with the kids at breakfast. They seem bewildered about my moodiness, but I can't tell them about my worries. What if I am seriously ill? It's better to keep it from them until I am sure. Anyway, they will just say the usual things about my worrying too much. I have an extra few cups of coffee to wake me up so that I can cope with the day. We talk about visiting mother in hospital and that seems to upset me even more. She has always been so healthy and now she has suddenly been taken ill. Life seems so unpredictable.

After seeing the kids off to school I rush to get the bus. I notice that the 'clamping' sensation is starting in my chest. I am having difficulty breathing and I feel hot and sweaty. I just hope that I don't have that 'spaced out' feeling on the bus. Why do I keep feeling like this? It seems to be getting worse. Why can't I be confident and in control the way I used to be? I must pull myself together.