

Amy stroked her palm across her concave stomach running her finger across the fake blue stone bulging from her belly button, she tugged at it and the metal bit gently into her flesh.

As she turned to stare at her body profile in the mirror she ran her hand around her bottom, she poked her forefinger into the flesh protruding from her panties and shuddered as it wobbled gently. This was the worst bit of her body, she appreciated her flat stomach, despaired at her inadequate breasts but hated with a vengeance only a fourteen year old could her pert bottom. The air was cool and it brought the hairs on her arms to attention, she watched her nipples pucker slightly and she reached for her sweatshirt.

Amy's eyes flicked to the newspaper lying on her desk. Elsa's grin stared back from the front page. The banner headline 'Local School Girl Found Stabbed' stared back at her. Why so many capital letters? Was each word so important? Elsa's full name and age were in a smaller type face tucked under her photograph. As a person, as Elsa Hallicon she wasn't important but as a news item she was something worthy of capital letters. Amy ran her finger along the printed image of Elsa's hair; she had luxurious hair, like a super model. What a waste Amy thought. The Headmaster had described it as; she scanned the article quickly, 'a tragedy'. A tragedy that 'someone so young, so full of life', she swallowed down her anger. Did he even know who she was? Elsa wasn't a 'someone', she was just Elsa.

Amy felt her anger build. Elsa wasn't a particularly good student or active in charity work, she was just a normal girl in Amy's class. It was enough to be that, to be just normal. Why did they have to embellish, if she wasn't a great student does that mean her death somehow didn't warrant the attention? Amy stroked her stomach; the fine hair covering her flesh was causing it to wrinkle in response to the cold November air. Amy reached for the eye pencil and drew a line on her flesh, then another, then again. She stared at the lines. There were five lines now in a clump near her left hip. She pressed her fingers into the space and gasped at the discomfort.

"Come on Amy, your tea is almost ready."

Her mother's voice seems distant as if from another world. She pressed harder this time pushing her finger nails into her flesh. The sound of her mother stomping up the stairs didn't wake her from her reverie. The door swung open and the silence extended.

Helena stared at her daughter's body; there she stood in her underwear staring at her image reflected back from the inside of her wardrobe. Helena watched Amy pressed hard onto her stomach and suddenly the newspaper caught her eye, she stepped forward and stared at the pencil marks on her body.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Helena shouted as rage rose up her body; she was unaware of how tightly she grasped her daughters arm and pulled her to the bathroom. The flannel left by the taps was cold and wet and smelt slightly of mould. Helena released her whilst she rubbed the flannel with soap, lunging forward to rub out the marks on her daughters flesh. Amy didn't resist, as Helena scrubbed her child's skin she calmed slightly.

"Mum," Amy whispered. "Do you think it hurt?"

She stared up at her mother's frightened face.

"Do you think every stab was as painful as the last? Was she in agony the whole time?"

Helena stopped rubbing and stared down at Amy's bewildered expression.

"Didn't you see a counsellor today? At school?"

Amy nodded as she stared back at the remnants of the marks on her skin.

"I couldn't ask this, they would think I'm weird."

She turned her face upwards to her mother. Helena saw her frightened child gaze back.

"Do *you* think I'm weird?"

Helena hugged her daughters head to her soft chest. Amy could feel her mother's damp flesh on her forehead.

"I think," Helena swallowed. "I think you're confused and sad about the death of your school friend and you're trying to make sense of it, to understand how she felt."

Amy could feel her eyes filling with tears. Her body seemed to be coping admirably; her body didn't care about Elsa. She knew she was hungry, that she may soon need to pee and that she felt cold. How could her body carry on without Elsa? What sort of friend was she?

Helena released her daughters head and brushed away her tear soaked hair.

"Ok this is what we'll do. You get some warm clothes on and I'll finish preparing your meal ok, then we'll sit and watch a dvd and cuddle up together ok. Amy, are you listening?"

Amy nodded and accepted the wet kiss on her forehead with good grace. How could she eat when Elsa was dead?

Elsa had been found by a jogger in the park. A small sob escaped from her throat. That wasn't very original, Elsa would have hated that her death was a cliché. If she was going to die a violent death she would have wanted to end her life in a blaze of glory like Bonny and Clyde, dying to a great sound track in a hail of bullets wearing a gorgeous dress and heels, not stuck like a pig in her school uniform and dumped in the park. Elsa wouldn't want to die in a polyester cotton mix.

Amy imagined her lying on a bed of crisp dry leaves her hair spread out, perfectly encircling her head, smiling like the photograph in the newspaper. She sobbed again, it wouldn't have been like that; she had watched enough detective films to know it would have been messy and dirty and unbelievably sad. It had rained most of the evening so she would have been sodden and grubby. People huddled in their waterproof coats would have trudged through the park oblivious to her frail curled body. It was a jogger with a dog that found her; the dog would have been attracted to her smell.

Amy couldn't bare it; she couldn't stop the sobs now as she gasped for breath. How could someone have hated Elsa so much? She turned to hide her face in the partially damp towel and let her body take control.

18:29

Helena watched Amy's hand shake, the knife squeaked sharply as it scratched the plate, she turned to her own dinner and sliced through the carrots and stabbed them with her fork. Her wine glass looked remarkably empty, she reached for the bottle and let the red wine slosh into her glass, creating waves up the sides. A drop of wine gathered speed sliding down the outside of the glass; Helena gathered it on her finger and licked it clean.

Amy watched the knife slice into the chicken goujon, she could feel the flesh resist under the pressure of the knife. Vomit rose into her mouth. Amy knew her mother couldn't understand how she felt. The meat, the knife, the red wine, everywhere Amy glanced she was reminded of what had happened to Elsa. Amy gave up cutting the meat and stabbed a carrot forcing it into her mouth as she scrunched her eyes closed chewing deliberately. She then tried several times to swallow it down. She guzzled her water eventually confusing her body into accepting the food.

"I've finished mum." Amy whispered.

Helena stared at her daughter's plate; she had learnt to watch her daughters eating habits carefully.

Amy had learnt to disguise her lack of consumption with judicious piling and cutting of food, so only a good inspection of her plate would confirm how much she had eaten, a cursory glance wasn't enough. Helena watched her daughter wrap her arms across her body and hunch over as if she had stomach cramps. Amy started to rock slowly.

"Stop it!" Helena shouted frightened by Amy's actions.

"No!" Amy shouted back. "You made me cut meat, after what happened to Elsa, how could I put meat in my mouth? And a knife, mum a knife!"

Helena stared at her cutlery bewildered; suddenly it became clear, everything became clear.

"If I was fat, if I had fat, would?"

Amy whispered, Helena gathered her close.

"Oh god he didn't kill her because she was fat!"

"No mum, I mean would it have hurt less? If I had more fat would it hurt less?"

Helena started to cry, she was becoming confused, she didn't know the answers to any of these questions. Surely these questions were bizarre? These weren't normal were they?

Amy relaxed into her mother's arms and closed her eyes, would it be so bad to sleep forever? She had so many questions; questions she knew no one could answer. She had dreamed of being an adult of having self-determination but now she approached that time all she had was questions. Amy let her mind go blank as she relaxed into her mother's flesh. She hugged her mother tight willing herself to be absorbed back into that body, she felt vulnerable; all she wanted was to be safe and warm but above all safe.

Amy stared at the clock. 18:49, she waited as the digit flipped over, 18:50. Her life was slowly ticking away, she was unable to stop it, to give herself some time to step away from the world, step away from her homework, her mother, her lack of self-esteem; she had to step back and try to understand. 18:51, time wouldn't stop, wouldn't even slow down, the electricity continued to force the digits to move ever onwards.

18:52, the world was slowing until eventually there was just the white numbers, 18:53. There was nothing but the numbers, just her slow quiet breathing and the numbers flipping over and her life slipping by. 18:54. Amy wondered what time Elsa had died. Her eyelids felt heavy, weighted down by the world and its worries. 18:56. Amy felt her forehead pucker in a frown, what was happening to her? 18:57, the digits slipped behind her eyelids as the darkness smothered her. Amy sighed and slipped into a dreamless sleep.