

“I'm honestly shocked!” Harper joked, “Every person on this planet has had meat loaf as some time in their life. I will not stand for this.”

A smile played on her peach lips, her thick hair twisted into a precarious bun on top of her head. Even in the dark I could see that look in her eyes. It was the same look that convinced me to run away with her the night before my mom moved me out to Austin- even though I knew our efforts were futile, and that I'd be gone by morning. Even when we were kids, Harper knew the power she had over me. She wore persuasion like a silk robe and she wore it well.

“Well not me.” I replied, “I'm not really one to consume meat in loaf form. I took an oath many years ago... you wouldn't understand...”

“Oh yeah? And what's that?” She pulled me out of a mass of blankets and sheets twisted around me. Just like that the argument was over. She had a way of making me feel better. I got to my feet and shut my mouth just as Harper wiped an overlooked tear from the corner of my eye with the gentle touch of a mother. She then continued to poke me in the nose with a pink paint-chipped fingernail. This is what I love about my best friend: it's been over two years since we'd seen each other yet we acted like not a moment had passed.

As we moved across Harper's room I caught a glimpse of the two of us in her full length mirror. Some people used to say we looked like sisters when we were younger; we had the same blond bob and plump bodies. Now I don't recognize the two girls standing side by side in the mirror. Harper has grown to be the kind of girl I've always wanted to look like. She's taller and

curvier than I remember, with wide set hips and a round, inviting face. She looks like the kind of person you wanted to tell all your secrets.

I, on the other hand, have become so pale and brittle that I resemble a twig ready to snap more than a person. My hair is thin and lifeless, and my skin hugs my skeletal structure like nylon. The once round face Harper and I had in common has been replaced with gaunt cheeks and sunken, shifting eyes. I instinctively sucked in my stomach, aware of the space between my thighs where my legs don't touch. I'll never look like Harper, and hopefully, she'll never look like me.

“C'mon, Smella, let's get something to eat. Oh my God, I bet you haven't heard that in a while, huh? What do they call you down there in hickville? The Prestigious Elanor Marie the fourth?” Harper giggled. Her voice reverberates through my bones.

“Just Ella.” I find the strength to answer. “Austin's the only place they don't call me Smella or Elanor, which is refreshing. Oh my God, Harper, you're so weird; I hate you.” I say just as Harper prances into the kitchen like a gazelle. I move cautiously. Aware of my movements and the exact placement of my tee shirt over my protruding collarbones. It was only a few moments later before a steaming plate of cheesy potatoes and microwaved meatloaf was set down before me. Harper glided over with her plate and sat down at the table across from me. She took a Bic lighter and lit a lopsided candle between us. She winked at me.

“Romantic.” I said in a flat tone to show my annoyance. Harper waited expectantly for me to take a bite, the exact moment I was dreading. I would try, for her.

I took a tiny forkful, swallowed it- painfully aware of every morsel I was consuming. I took a bite of potatoes, followed by a miniscule sip water. I could feel Harper's eyes boring into me. *I have to keep this down*, I thought to myself, *I have to, or she'll know. She can't know.* But my stomach was already churning. I closed my eyes and tried to breathe more evenly, willing away my nausea.

Harper focused on me, “Ella, are you okay?” with concern in her voice. I opened my eyes and forced a tight smile onto my lips. It didn't work. Harper put her fork down, placing her hand on mine.

“What did you eat today?”

I couldn't look her in the eyes. “Enough.” I replied shortly. My stomach continued to churn.

“You mean nothing.” Harper replied, her voice cut through the stillness. Her grip on my hand tightened.

“Ella. Ella please look at me!” Harper pleaded.

But I couldn't. I couldn't look at her and I couldn't tell her just like she couldn't ask why I'd woke up in the middle of the night crying. She couldn't help me, and that's what I hated the most. I looked at her; my best friend. She had a crease in her forehead.

Then I was running to the bathroom. I could feel the food rising up in me, the all too familiar feeling. Harper was screaming after me, her voice frantic. I managed to lock myself in the bathroom before she caught up to me. Falling to my knees in front of the toilet the food came up before I could stop it. Between heavens I could hear Harper pleading with me to stop, her voice muffled but the pain in her voice was as loud as thunder.

“Why are you doing this to yourself?!” My best friend sobbed against the door. I slumped next to the toilet, the tile cool on my forehead, my vision blurry, senses dulled. I stared into the ever dimming bulb in the ceiling.

“I'm not doing this to me”, I managed to murmur before the darkness consumed my vision, “it's the goddamn chemo”.