

CAMPSIE

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“So, Rosie. Tell me why you’re here today.”

I choke like I knew I would. I’ve been putting this off for years but Vi finally forced me into going by deliberately giving me time off with the false pretense that business was tight this time of year.

So here I sit on a doctor’s exam table, picking at my thumbnails and avoiding looking at Doctor Spritz. Doctors were meant to be trusted. If I can talk to anyone, it should be a doctor.

She looks over at me from the computer with what seems like barely contained impatience.

“Well...I have, uh...this problem.”

“A problem?” she repeats, immediately typing. I hate that--watching someone write about you, like being belittled while you watch.

It doesn't help that everything about this doctor is sharp. Closed. She puckers her lips like she tastes something sour. Her legs are crossed at the knee. It seems she doesn't want me here any more than I want to be.

She hasn't even finished typing when, still looking at the screen, she says, “Describe this problem for me.”

It isn't easy to come out and tell her. I couldn't tell Vi, or even Stacy. I'd kept it a secret for the three years that it had been going on. Part of it is visible to everyone--I mean, it's hard to hide the fact you've gained thirty pounds plus.

“I...think I have an eating disorder,” I say, exhaling heavily and determinedly staring at my hands. I’m tingling. I feel like leaving the room in the silence that comes after--well, silence save for the clacking of her inconsiderately loud keyboard. I’m more scared to move, though, so I wait in agony.

“And what would make you think that?”

“I eat a lot of food,” I say slowly, shakily. “I can’t stop. I see food and I feel I have to eat it.”

“Would you say you eat a lot of food often?”

“No. Well...I don’t know what often is.”

“How many times would you say you do it?”

“It happens at least once a week.”

“And how long would you say these binges have been occurring?”

With a bit of difficulty, I say: “When my neighbour’s daughter passed away.”

She finally looks over from her computer and unfolds her legs. “I’m sorry to hear that.” She doesn’t sound even the least bit moved by it.

“It’s all right. It was three years ago now. It hurt him far more than it hurt me.”

“Would you be willing to share the story?”

I look at my hands again. I find it odd that we can carry on a conversation without actually looking at each other but right now I’m thankful for it. “My neighbour is...was a single father. He’s been my neighbour for years. I moved in when she was six or seven. I babysat sometimes. When she hit

puberty...she changed? She didn't take well to it, I mean. She started to talk back and throw a lot of fits. She would run away. Then one time she never came back.

“Um. We organized a search party. It's not a very big community, but the bush surrounding us is bigger than all the lots combined, so.”

“The bush?”

“What we call the trees. Uh, it's like a small forest or grove, or...”

“I see. How big, would you say?”

“Oh, um, I don't know, maybe a few acres? The trees are tall and it's big enough to lose yourself in. Anyway, we figured she either hitchhiked or camped in the bush. Kids play in there all the time. The day after she went missing, I found her.”

I take a breath and scrunch my

forehead, trying to keep myself collected. “She was up in one of the treehouses, curled up in the corner. She took pills and whiskey. If that didn’t kill her first, the cold at night would have.”

“That must have been a very traumatic experience.”

“I had nightmares and couldn’t sleep. I spent my time eating. Then it sort of transformed into eating whenever I could get my hands on food.”

“Mhm.” She types another note and puckers her lips even closer together.

I fall silent and go back to my hands. I think about Henry. He’s never been an outgoing man, but it got even worse after Marian died. I can picture the countless times I walked into his trailer and found him staring out his window, his skin white as a

winter sky and eyes clear as fog.

“Henry?” I might say softly, and he’d start to turn his head but stop and go back to looking back out the window, as if he were waiting for his family to come home and would let everything else wait.

“And what would you say your relationship with your neighbour is now?”

“He’s still my friend.” I roll my eyes at myself and look at a picture on her wall--an old balding man and a little boy are smiling at me. “Well, I force myself upon him as a friend. I make sure he’s taken care of. I guess I pick up the loose ends he’s dropped.”

“The friendship isn’t reciprocated?”

I’m not sure what the word ‘reciprocated’ means but I have an idea, given how the rest of the conversation is going. I lock my eyes on the picture. “No, I

don't think so.”

Clack clack clack.

“Rosie, when you binge eat, are there certain things you think of? Do you feel happy or sad?”

I'd spent years bottling all of this up, and now she pops the cork and spills me all over the floor. It feels good and uncomfortable to just let it happen. “I feel...like I'm at the bottom of a gaping hole. Like I'll never get out. And I feel pathetic. Like I shouldn't be allowed to...”

“You have thoughts of suicide, then?”

I'm stunned for a moment before I reply. “No, I've never thought about that. I just...I cry, sometimes, you know, after I've eaten. I feel like someone is looking down on me and shaking their head at me.”

“Do you try to make those feelings go

away?”

“No. Sometimes I just want to stay there and feel miserable, if that makes sense.”

Doctor Spritz types a few more things then turns toward me and folds her hands neatly on her lap, looking at me as softly as her angular face allows. “Rosie, I believe you have depression and binge eating disorder. The best I can do for you is prescribe an antidepressant for the time being. The pharmacist will give you instructions on how often to take it. Do you drink?”

I ran my hands over my face and rest my chin in them. “No.”

“Good. Alcohol cannot be taken simultaneously with these. Are you on any other medications?”

“No.”

She hits a hotkey on the computer and the prescription prints next to her. She hands it to me and I take it gingerly. “Is there anything else you wish to discuss?” she asks.