

## **FROM UP HERE YOU CAN SEE WHAT A LIFE LOOKS LIKE**

and ours seems so small and pointless. We remember standing on the roof of a block of flats. The flats on the estate where our grandmother lived. We were a child, six maybe seven years old and she would take us up there. As she pegged out her washing, we would jump up trying to touch the planes flying into Yeadon airport. And now here we are in the sky where the planes used to be... though part of us is somewhere else. Ours is a naked sky, blue with puffs of cloud in the distance. Like thoughts the sky is having at the back of its mind. Such an incredible mind. And we are naked too, perfectly naked. We are that instance just before a woman turns into a statue, her skin as smooth and white as marble yet warm to the touch. It feels like we are swimming underwater up here in our sky. The air is like a second skin, holding us the way we long to be held, touching us the way we long to be touched. But we are not air. We are so much more than air. We are eyes and ears, a nose and tongue, a clit and skin. We are miles and miles of endless female skin. Feeling everything, feeling nothing. Our sky is a place of everythingness and nothingness. Where you want everything and nothing. Where you have everything and nothing.

It's beautiful up here, empty, silent but for a brisk breeze like a wave of whispered secrets. We put our hand in the breeze, feeling around inside, wanting to find out more. Up here we have no idea what we are thinking or doing, and it feels good. This is the place where lost and found feel like the same thing. This is the place you go to when it all gets too much. Perhaps you have been here too, or maybe you'd rather not say; we don't want people to know we are up here either. It's our secret. Not that we are ashamed of course. Anyone can find themselves here in this place. And our not-being-able-to-cope is no different from anyone else's. It just feels that way because it belongs to us.

We are not sure how long we are going to be here, but we think the answer has something to do with the piece of string. It's attached to our head, goes all the way down to the ground and is knotted round our heart. We are tied up and tied down by this piece of string. The string is our unravelling. Through it we weigh each other up, feeling the tug and pull simultaneously. When we look down we can see ourselves. On the ground we are a thin layer of red rubber stretched round a huge oval scream. The string is our lifeline but only in the sense that it's keeping us apart. We don't know much right now, but we do know that if we ever came together, we would know madness; it would become us.

Up here, despite our size, our weight, we are drifting. It's a motionless kind of drifting, but a drifting nonetheless. On the ground we are fixed, immobile and yet how fragile, how impermanent the ground feels. Only the scream moves inside us. Such a violent moving. We feel so small down there with all that space above us. Like photographers taking pictures of one another, we observe ourselves. It's disorienting being the subject and the object at the same time. Like sleeping the wrong way round in your bed. We have convinced ourselves over the years that we need each other, but now we know the opposite is true. Who we are is not both of us. And there is a wrong way to need someone of course.

We are not sure how long we are going to be here, but our eyes when you look at them, are like scoreboards showing the final score in the middle of the game. It feels like things are starting to end. Up here something is growing beneath us. Something solid like the earth. And down on the ground, we are starting to feel less small, less contained, less insignificant. When we look around us down there, it's like we are seeing the same view on the ground as we are seeing in our sky.

It's beautiful up here, empty, silent, but suddenly it feels like we are in the wrong place, intruding. Like we have walked into a room and disturbed a private conversation between the portraits on the wall. We pull on the string and feel just that, the pull, us pulling, no tug. So we keep pulling and pulling, gathering in the string until eventually we come to the end. Tied to the string, just a withered bit of rubber quivering like a dying fish in our hands. But where is the scream that was inside? We look down, trying to find it and suddenly we can't see the ground anymore. Below us, just our bare feet. Dirty, raw with cold, toes gripping the edge of the roof.

From up here you can see what a life looks like and ours seems so small and pointless. But for all its smallness, for all its pointlessness, it's ours and that has to mean something, surely. And it's not all too much either, not really. Our toes gripping the edge of a roof 20 storeys above the estate, that's too much. We wipe our eyes. The cool air soaks into our bare skin, turning the warm smooth marble into cold goose-bumped flesh. The bruises are still there of course, on our thighs and upper arms. All the places no one can see. They are like faded pansies blooming under the skin. They are reminders that someone thinks we are no good – frigid, can't cook, getting fat. We are standing on the roof of a block of flats. The flats on the estate where our grandmother lived. We are an adult, thirty-four years old, nearly thirty-five. Tomorrow in fact. Yes, tomorrow. Tomorrow we will be thirty-five. We step back from the edge of the roof feeling full of ourselves suddenly. The way an egg fills its own shell. Around us, the crack of washing flapping in the breeze. A brisk breeze like a wave of whispered secrets... and now with one more

inside. Above us, a plane flying in towards the airport. So we jump, trying to touch it. And that's when we hear it, the scream. But it isn't a scream, not this time. It's a shout: "Yes!" We touched it. We touched the plane. And we smile to ourselves as we walk back to the pile of clothes we left by the roof door.