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Human Tissue: An Exploration into How the Gothic and the Vampire Figure Can Be Used for Coping Mechanisms for Trauma

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Masters by Research Portfolio & Essay

by ALEXANDRA COOK

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***HUMAN TISSUE: AN EXPLORATION INTO HOW THE GOTHIC AND
THE VAMPIRE FIGURE
CAN BE USED AS COPING MECHANISMS FOR TRAUMA***

Thesis submitted by

ALEXANDRA COOK

0951038

In fulfilment of

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Human Tissue

I am alone in the room now. Adrian has disappeared, and I can just make out the sunlight behind the planks nailed to the windows and the black paint strewn on the hot glass. There is no air, and it is sweltering. I feel like I've been buried alive, but don't fear for me. I must see this to the end.

It was such a waste of energy trying to conceal it. You wouldn't have woken up in the middle of the night, wondering who I was speaking to in the dark and you wouldn't have noticed those little slips in conversation when I answered questions that no one had asked.

I remember you saying, Andrew, when we first met that I looked haunted, and I remember you laughing when I smiled at it. I will never forget that moment, because you were so right. I am haunted by something no one else can see.

I was sitting in the bar opposite St Mary's church. It was a Thursday night and it was quiet. Only the old regulars occupied their familiar spots in their cracked leather jackets and dirty jeans. Everybody wore sunglasses after dark. I sighed and drained my drink. The barman smiled at me and passed me another tumbler filled with cheap vodka and ice. He knew me too well. I heard the door open behind me and felt the chill of the wind on the back of my neck like a kiss, but I didn't look round. I wasn't interested. I lifted my glass and drained it again.

The first thing I noticed was your hands. You spread them out on the dark, oily wood of the bar, and your thumb teased the brass edge. I wanted to take your hands and hold them. They were the most beautiful things I had ever seen.

I looked up at you as you lowered your hood, and watched as your hair tumbled down over your shoulders and the back of your neck. I could smell the rain on you. You smelled of gardens and soil and changing weather. You nodded at the barman and he brought you a glass with ice, and topped it up with vodka. You knocked it back effortlessly and watched him fill up your glass again. Then you turned and looked at me.

I've always adored your eyes, Andrew. Whether you are smiling, laughing or raging, they are a violent shade of green, surrounded by long eyelashes and heavy lids that half-cover your eyes when you laugh or swoon or come in to kiss me.

"Hello again," you said.

I swallowed hard.

"Sorry?"

"I've seen you before, at the University. I'm in my second year now."

I tried to hide my disappointment.

"Oh, I see." I said.

You smiled at me again and took another drink.

"You're name is Amyas Dorè, isn't it? I'm Andrew. I'll be taking your module on the Gothic when we start back."

You held out your hand and I shook it weakly. Your skin was cold. For a long moment, you wouldn't let go of my hand, and when you did, I felt weak. I drained my glass immediately. I wanted to get out of there. I couldn't stand to be near you.

"Well, that's wonderful." I said. "I'm sure I'll be seeing you soon then."

I got up to go, but you reached over and took my arm. Your eyes burned into mine.

"Stay for one more at least."

You gestured at the barman and he filled my glass again. I looked at the shimmering liquid, and watched you as you took another gulp of your drink and grimaced. I sat back down on the stool. I looked slowly around the room. We may as well have been alone. The barman busied himself at the opposite end of the bar, humming quietly to himself.

You pushed my glass closer to me and I wrapped my hands around it. I could feel that I was sweating, and I felt loathsome as I saw our reflections in the mirror behind the bar. I could see you in the mirror, looking at me over the rim of your glass.

"You look haunted," you said.

I turned away from you and opened the door to the bar and went outside. I didn't stop until I was home and had bolted the door behind me. In my bed I pulled the sheets over my head. I sat there in my damp clothes and thought of you.

I closed my eyes, feeling something stir. I felt like there was a shape on the bed beside me, watching me and sighing against my chest as it moved to get comfortable.

You worry me, Amyas, it said.

I shook my head and touched the bed where I thought the figure was, but the bed was empty. The voice laughed gently and then moved inside my head.

I won't stop you, should you want to go back and bring him here. He is clever to know about you. He is even cleverer to know about me.

"I think you're wrong," I said to the silence. The voice laughed again and I felt a sensation on my wrist like an itch, only it wasn't an itch. I gritted my teeth as it grew stronger and I began scratching at my wrist with my other hand. My mouth watered and I licked my lips. The skin began to get hot and damp, and I could feel the blood wet on my fingertips. I lifted them to my lips and sucked them, tasting the oily wood of the bar and the scent of the rain on your clothes and hair. I sighed, feeling warmth crawling from the pit of my stomach to the space between my legs.

Yes, the voice said, making me grow hotter. My arm moved of its own accord, and my hand pressed against my jeans and stroked. I groaned and turned away into the bed, but then my body moved again, and I was lying flat on my back with one hand down my jeans, and my other wrist pressed against my lips as I sucked slowly on the blood.

It helps, doesn't it, brother? The voice said. I shivered with pleasure. *Think of him while you're feeding, yes. Think of him when you move your hand. Yes, think of him. You can't hurt him if he's not here, but you can think of him. Think of how warm he would be in your hands.*

"Stop," I said, trying to force my bleeding wrist away from my mouth and pull my hand out from my jeans, but he wouldn't let me. He overpowered my rebellious urge and I was pushed back into the gentle pleasure. He closed my eyes, and I saw you. I felt your lips over mine and the touch of

your kisses against my cheeks and eyelids. My back arched against the bed and I cried out. The voice retreated back into my head, satisfied, and I sat up slowly and pressed my hand to my wrist.

I want to see him again, my little brother whispered. I want to feel him with your skin.

I shook my head in disgust.

"It always ends like this. You ruin every good thing I have. Just leave him alone. Keep him away from me. Make it so I cannot do him any harm."

Oh, but my brother, he whispered, if only it was just me that wanted those things from him.

You loved two men, Andrew.

I'm sorry.

I am weak now, Andrew. I can barely hold the pen or see the words, and Adrian is stirring behind me. I thought he had vanished, but I can hear him breathing. His scent fills the stale air of this room and reminds me of you because you described it as being like night-blooming flowers. You were right, and he finds it amusing. I don't know if he feels anything else. He is beside me now and his cool hand is covering the back of my neck. I can barely sit upright with the weight of it, but I will do it for you.

He's coming for me now.

It won't be long.

Yours,

Amyas.

Dear Andrew,

I am still alive. I can't explain how or why.

He was here and he did something.

Adrian. The devil. Older than disease.

I was prepared to die when we last spoke. I would have laid down my tired body, however, the universe is perverse, and I honestly don't know what magic is keeping me alive. I do know, however, that I don't like how it makes me feel. Adrian is a sorcerer schooled in magic we in our darkest dreams would never understand, and I am here writing to you again.

I described our first meeting to you in that last letter because it is one of my most precious memories. I never told you about my little brother. I call him that because he was born of my mother as I was, but under very different circumstances.

We share the same body, Andrew. He is my alter. He speaks to me and touches me and sometimes, takes me over and walks in my skin. He did many things when he took me over, Andrew, and passed them off as my crimes. I want to explain to you where he came from. Our story begins with my mother.

Do you remember when she crept into our house that summer night and killed the cat with a butcher's knife? Of course you do. You are hardly likely to forget.

I didn't tell you that she had always been like that. I didn't give your intelligence the credit it deserved, or your agency as a human being, because I thought I could protect you from her, or at least things like her. I know now it was wrong of me to try. It is vanity and pride that shapes these thoughts, but it is true. My mother destroyed my life and shaped the man I am now and gave me my little brother as a cast-off, consequential gift.

What my mother did to me when I was growing up fractured my personality into shards. She murdered and buried my child self and my teenage self and spawned in me another being that she could play with and ensnare without fear. That was my little brother, and every time he walked in

my shape to address her advances and take her to bed, he was saving my life, because there were no other selves left in me to kill apart from my physical self.

I remember when we were first alone in my bed. You were upset that I wouldn't let you near me. You implored me and you kissed me so gently and wiped at my tears with your lovely hands.

"What is it, Amyas? Why do you flinch every time I touch you?"

I couldn't explain to you that every kiss you gave me and the touch of your hands on my skin was a vicious and violent trigger that encouraged my brother to take over me. Like some beast guarding his territory, I battled my brother for dominance over you.

One afternoon in April, it became too much to bear. You were growing tired of me. You had been out in a thunderstorm, and when you opened the door I could smell the warm rain and the grass and the flowers. You dragged your feet as you took off your coat, and I heard you muttering to yourself as you kicked off your shoes and closed the door. I had opened the bedroom windows. I enjoyed listening to the thunder and the rain, and as it churned outside, I rose up from our bed and stood in the doorway.

I watched you dry your hair and run your fingers through it. I watched you wipe the little droplets from your arms and face. I saw your bare, white feet against the warmth of the carpet and the shape of your shoulders and forearms beneath your wet clothes. You saw me watching and you stopped and mused at me with the towel in your hands.

You walked over and stood in front of me, and your damp curls gleamed in the grey light coming from the windows. Your lips were parted slightly, and your eyes burned. I recognised myself in your gaze. It was violent, stirred by the weather and the different sensations on your skin.

I took your face in my hands and kissed you. I bit lightly at your lips and the soft flesh of your upper arms.

Your hands cradled the back of my head as I kissed you on your throat and chest. My fingers slid up the wet fabric to part it and touch your stomach and your ribs. I traced the shape of your muscles under your clothes. You closed your eyes.

"You don't need to be shy with me," you said, "I will never hurt you or make you do anything you don't want to do."

"I wish I could make such promises," I said, but it wasn't me who had spoken.

I'm afraid it was inevitable that he would be present whenever we were together. Your touch and my arousal, Andrew, stirred such feelings of terror in me that I would be unable to resist him. I don't remember much of what happened during that first time in our bed, only that I woke up with you beside me and your hand was curled in my hair. What stood out to me the most then was my satisfaction, and how quiet my brother was. I was filled with such elation you were still there, but also because my brother was sleeping. For the first time in twenty years, my head was quiet.

It wasn't always peaceful. I had woken up in the past with strangers that my brother had latched onto when he had walked in my skin, and some of the things he did to them, Andrew, it horrified me. I would sit in the shower at home after I had fled from them, and I would scrub blood from underneath my fingernails, and bathe my bruised limbs. I see fragments of those episodes now through the glass wall into my brother, and they sicken me. He is ashamed when I feel like that about him, and rightly so. He is my dark core, and he has done many things for me to keep me alive, some of which I will describe to you in better detail, because you were there, but you didn't know everything about what was going on in my head.

Please pray for me. I'm going to tell you where he came from.

When I was very little, my mother came into my room in the middle of the night. I pretended to be asleep when she came in, just peeping at her under my eyelids. As she climbed onto the bed, it moved and sagged with her weight and I thought for a moment that she would crush me beneath her. She was a giant compared to me, and I remember smiling to the darkness in anticipation of her, wondering why she was there. She touched my face and my lips with her thumb, and I smiled, feeling at once a swell of affection for her as she hardly ever touched me. I wanted to touch her hand, to show her that I wasn't really asleep and that I appreciated what she was doing, but then she began to move her hand under my clothes. The softness of her hand tickled me. It moved down

onto my chest and ribs and then further down until it touched my belly and hipbones and then between my legs.

I opened my eyes and stared at her in the darkness and tried to keep my breathing quiet. I was so young, Andrew, I didn't know what she was doing, but I knew that I was frightened and that I was trembling beneath her fingers. She looked at me when I murmured and tried to turn away, but I couldn't see her face. I got a sense from her that I had to let her do what she wanted, and that it was important to her, and if I didn't let her do what she wanted, she wouldn't love me anymore, so I didn't struggle.

She clasped me with her hand. Then her hand moved slowly up the inside of my leg and stroked the flesh. I couldn't deny that it felt strange, and gave me a shivery feeling, but it frightened me. I turned my face away into the pillow. I closed my eyes and cried. She was disturbed by my crying, and pulled at the skin on my leg with her nails but it just made me howl louder. In a rage, she pulled her hand out from under my clothes and slapped me, and then she climbed off the bed and went out of the room.

I lay there covering my face and went on crying. I didn't know what I had done to deserve it. I didn't know then that it was just the beginning of a long, futile and dangerous nurturing of symptoms that would gradually become my little brother and strengthen him, and that I would carry her abuse for the rest of my life. Maybe a part of me knew it, and that's why I went on crying, oblivious for the moment of the danger of her returning and hurting me again. I was grieving for the future.

That was when my little brother first moved in me. I heard someone say my name and then a warm feeling spread from the pit of my stomach, to the tips of my toes and the top of my head. It was a delicious drowsiness that soothed my fear and made me smile. When I closed my eyes and gave into it, I saw clouds and blue skies, and then a wide meadow full of wild flowers. I stood in the meadow smiling and then I heard the voice again, not as a whisper, but as a voice speaking inside my head.

Hush now, it said. The next time she comes, I will look after you. I will take you to the meadow and she will not hurt you. Would you like that?

I looked around the meadow, expecting to see someone sitting beside me, but I couldn't see anybody. I took a few steps forward, and then knelt beside a pond that was surrounded by tall reeds. I dipped my hand into it. I liked the feel of it against my fingers. I looked down at my reflection and saw it move of its own accord. The Amyas in the water was looking up at me and smiling. When he waved at me, I waved back.

I won't let her hurt you, my reflection said, I'm your little brother, Amyas, and I love you.

"I don't have a brother," I said. He laughed at me.

You do now. I'm a gift from your mother. She's the reason I was born.

I came back to life then. I went from being in the meadow with birdsong and the tall grass to being wrapped up in my own bed again with a sore head. I climbed out of bed and peered underneath it, looking for my little brother. I went over to the closet, but that was empty too. When I got into bed, I felt a hand take hold of mine and I jumped, because there was no one there.

Don't worry, he said as I felt him settle inside my head. I can do this. I can make you feel like I am there with you. I won't ever leave you alone, Amyas. I swear it. I will look after you and tell you secrets and help you with everything. I love you and I am not going to let you go.

"Is she going to come back?" I asked. I didn't want to think about what had happened to me. The voice in my head was frightening me as much as my mother had, and I knew that he knew it. He touched my forehead and I shivered, because it felt as if he was lying beside me with his arm around me, kissing the top of my head.

She'll come back for a long time. She's ill, and that's why she's doing it. She'd say sorry if she knew what she was doing was wrong.

"How can she not know?" I whispered. "I thought grown-ups knew everything."

My little brother sighed. *They don't, Amyas. They're not as lucky as you. They don't have a little brother looking after them and telling them what to do.*

I settled back into bed and my little brother went on stroking and kissing the top of my head.

"What will you do when she comes back?" I asked. He moved inside me, making me feel like he was sitting in front of me and looking into my face and touching my tears.

I will take you to the meadow, your body will go to sleep and I will make sure she doesn't hurt you.

"How?"

It's easy, Amyas. You will go to sleep when you get upset, and then I'll wake up and do the things you don't want to do or are frightened to experience.

I paused, thinking about it and then I smiled.

"That sounds good."

I'm glad you think so.

"Little brother?"

Yes?

"You won't hurt her, will you?"

He shook his head. *No, brother, I will never hurt her. Not unless she really deserves it.*

There you are then, Andrew. That was how my little brother and I first met, and I've carried him ever since. He moved in me when I was frightened, or under attack. Every time my mother hurt me, he put me in the meadow and dealt with everything. I never told her about him, but she knew. That is why I could never bear to have you touch me during those first months, and how I could only have you if my brother was encouraging me.

I don't want you to take that the wrong way. I don't mean that what we had was like abuse, or twisted. I'm telling you what the triggers are, and what my brother responds to. He takes his strength from pain and pleasure, whether physical or mental. He reigns as monarch in the kingdom of the repressed. I know that it sounds wrong, and complicated, and debauched, but the simple matter is that touching, removed from any thought, reminds me of her, and of course, of him.

You've seen the scars on my wrists and body.

I didn't do them all to myself. That was a white lie.

When you held my wrists and kissed those cold, white lines, you said that you never wanted me to feel that way again. I couldn't tell you that harming myself was as necessary as scratching an itch. There are layers and layers of scars from my mother and brother under the wounds. Really, they are both my abusers. Little brother is protesting now, throwing himself against my brain and making it ache, but what I say here is true. He started making me do things to myself when I was younger so he could come forward. He started making me hurt myself so he could get a foothold in my misery and take over me.

Again, he is pushing against me.

Stop it, you miserable shit, stop telling him those things.

I want him to love me.

I want to play along.

Do you see how easily he can come forward now, Andrew?

I am filled with despair, but grateful that my brother and I are the only ones in this sunless tomb. If Adrian were here, he would probably be amused by my struggle. If you were here, he would take out his anger on you. He is frightened of Adrian and that pleases me because it stops him doing anything reckless. While we are alone, I can hold him to myself and comfort him.

If I live long enough, I will write the story of my self-harm for you. I would like to tell you. I don't know how you'll feel about it. I'm at a stage in my life where I am unaware of the impact I have on other people. I am constantly under the impression that I do not matter and that I wouldn't be missed if I was gone. When I wrote about death and its appeal, and how it is used as a reprieve and a romantic ideal, I did not consider what it meant for those reading it. I have crossed a threshold where I do not care about what happens to me. Death is romantic. In the beyond, I cannot be injured any longer. It would just be quiet, and a still space in time, but I think even that is beyond my

reach now. Is there a fate worse than death, Andrew? Is there anything that could be kinder or more welcome? It occupies a strange, lonely place. I imagine if it were real, it would cry to be so alone and so feared, but I do not fear it. I would worship it if I thought it would do any good. Years of abuse pushed me to that conclusion, and the fact that I am a prisoner now stems from my obsessions.

My brother was right when he said that my mother would return to my room. She came into my room almost every night when I was a teenager. Sometimes as well, she tried to get me by day. She would say when she came towards me that she wanted to see my little brother look at her, so she would cut me, and he would emerge. They were only tiny cuts at first; a scratch on the wrist with her fingernails, or a knife in the leg at dinner, but once, she got me in the bath and held me down under the water while she cut my wrist with a razorblade. I remember carrying that wound for weeks because I was too frightened to go to hospital.

There was a St. John's Ambulance Manual of First Aid in the bookcase of our house, and it became my bible while I was growing up. Dettol and bandages made from old t-shirts became my saints, and my little brother became my God. I learned how to put pressure on a wound, and where the main arteries and veins were in my body. I learned that scabs were beautiful and delicate things and a sure sign that you were getting better, and that weeping wounds, pain and pus were things to worry about.

I only went to hospital when the wounds became infected, as they did when my mother opened them up again with her dirty fingernails. Sometimes however, they were serious. Once she slashed my arm with the edge of a tin can, and I had to go to hospital because it just would not stop bleeding. She was ingenious in her methods. There was a lot of blood that day, and it was bright on my clothes, but I didn't tell the truth even when I was in the hospital and the nurses were pressing me gently to find out where the other bruises and scratches on my body had come from. I didn't say anything because I was protecting her and my little brother. I didn't want to lose them because they were all that I knew. I didn't know that it wasn't normal to come home and find your mother naked in your bed.

It was a construct of normality for her, a bubble she had created for us both to live in. She was suffering as a victim of abuse at the hands of her father, or my father, I don't know. In the absence of her own abusers, she became my abuser, and down the line, I suppose I became yours.

How does it feel to read that, Andrew?

Do you agree, Andrew, or are you tearing at your hair now, insisting that it isn't true? I would love to know. Maybe I'm not an abuser because I've admitted it to you, but I can't help but think of the fits of temper I had sometimes and the whole process of hiding my other personality from you when I should have had no secrets at all. It is difficult, Andrew, because all of the bad things are connected by a thread. You pull at one, and they all fall out, like a terrible after-birth. I couldn't tell you of one thing without telling you all of it, and I think it is too much for anyone to bear. You can see it all for what it is, like I can now with my mother.

I know that she had mechanisms to help her deal with her pain, and they involved me as a child and her coming into my room in the middle of the night. That was how she came to terms with her suffering, and I understand now that no one in full control of their faculties does those things to their own children. She may well have been ill, but she also knew that she was ill, and even with that knowledge, she chose to do nothing about it; nothing, except injure me and encourage the carnal embraces of my little brother and to make him strong.

I want to let those feeling go, but I feel them as a quiet rage, a pressure that builds slowly behind my eyes. In spite of myself, I have a temper, and things that should not disturb me push me to the limit. I fear that you saw that side of me too much.

On the last day of term before Christmas, you appeared in the doorway of my office. You entered without a sound and closed it behind you. It was already dark outside and the building was deserted.

I looked up at you and jumped, and you started to laugh. My cheeks were burning. I scowled and cleared my throat and started arranging the papers on my desk.

"I'm sorry," you said. I looked up at you.

"I should think so too."

"I wasn't talking about now, I was talking about before."

You stepped forwards and sat down in the chair opposite my desk. I clenched my fists under the desk. I was struggling to breathe.

This is interesting, very interesting, my brother whispered, settling inside my head. I leaned back in my chair.

"I made you feel uncomfortable in the bar. I came on a little too strongly."

I looked at your hand and bit my lip. You had rolled up your sleeves and I could see your small wrists. The skin of your inner arm was delicate and untouched. I clenched my fists tighter under the table. I was in agony.

"That was months ago," I said. "I haven't really thought about it."

Liar.

I rocked with my brother's voice. A pain crept down the back of my neck and down my spine and I gritted my teeth.

You think about him every night. Let me move in you. I'll tell him how much he means to you and what you'd like to do him.

"No," I said, slamming my hand on the table. You stared at me, then slowly folded your arms and leaned forward against the desk.

"You're a moral man, aren't you, Amyas? That must hurt every day."

"Please," I said, "stop this. You don't know what you're doing."

"I think I do," you said. "I took someone home when you left me in that bar, but all I could think about was you."

My skin prickled. The idea of someone else touching you made me furious. I twisted in my chair, feeling my brother boil in my brain. He sent the warmth to my stomach and between my legs, and I braced myself against the table.

"I can see it in you," you said, "I can see how much you're fighting it, but it doesn't have to be like that. We could keep it a secret."

Yes, we could. Yes, we could. You could be satisfied and no one need ever know. Amyas, listen to him.

I could feel the tension in all of my muscles and my chest heaved. My brother stalked inside me and smiled.

There's no one else here. No one would ever know.

"I've been with other men," you said, lowering your eyes. "I know it's what I want. As soon as I saw you, I knew I wanted you. I was just waiting for the right moment. That's why I approached you."

"So you could just throw me away afterwards?" I snarled. My brother sent another wave of pain down my spine and I groaned, and fell against the desk. I rose up slowly, and wiped my face.

"You come in here, and tell me those things when I've seen you out there, musing and mixing with the other students. You don't really care."

Don't say those things to him. You're ruining it. You'll make him leave.

You sat back in your chair, and rage crept across your face and settled behind your eyes. I wanted to look away, but I was too angry. Your gaze was menacing, but satisfied. You leaned forward again and I glared at you.

"Are you jealous?"

My brother started laughing.

You stood up and glared down at me with your hands pressed against the table.

"Good, I hope that you are. That's why I did it, to make you jealous. To make you feel something and act on it."

How could you do that to me?

I was afraid. I was afraid of my own feelings. I was afraid of what could happen to you. I was afraid that if I told you the truth about my divided soul and my history you would turn away from me

and I would lose everything. It was as if you saw the tension in me and couldn't resist baiting it, just to see how far you could push it.

This is delicious. It won't be long now.

I felt you touch me on the shoulder, and I immediately recoiled. I looked up at you. You towered over me. Your green eyes were furiously bright and driving into me. I couldn't stand to look at you. I turned my face away and stared off.

I know where this is going.

You touched your temples.

"Fuck everyone else and what they think. Why should they stop you being happy?"

I didn't say anything. I shut my eyes.

Let it grow. You know what will happen. You know what it means when you get the white hot flash of rage and you have to make that little problem go away.

"You're ashamed of what we could be together."

I bowed my head, and felt my brother rise as if he had stood up from a chair. He filled my body and my consciousness, but he didn't push me away. He kept me awake so I would witness what happened next.

"Shame?" I said, turning my head and looking up at you calmly. *"And what would you know about my shame, little boy?"*

"Amyas, your eyes-"

The lights switched off in the building. The whole campus went dark as the wind and the rain drove at the windows. I moved from where I was sitting and stood looking down at you, watching as you seemed to crumble under the weight of my gaze. I reached out and touched the back of your neck and pulled you towards me and touched my forehead against yours. I could feel you trembling.

"Let me show you the extent of my shame."

I turned with you and forced you down onto the desk, enjoying the sound you made as I pressed down on your throat and leaned down into your face. You were stammering, trying to get

enough breath to form words, but I wouldn't let you. I squeezed harder, smiling as you struggled against me. Your hands tore at my hands.

"I feel such things for you," I whispered as you clawed at me. "I feel them with all of my soul, but you stand there and lecture me. I could crush you. We do things my way. If I want to pretend that you are nothing to me, that is what I will do and you will accept that and do as you are told."

I released you, and little brother sank back inside of me. I swayed on my feet. I turned away from the desk and wiped at my face. I wanted to cover my ears as you gagged and spluttered and struggled up from the desk. I could feel you looking at me, but I didn't move. I could smell your sweat and fear and it made me want to die. I spread out my fingers over my wrist and started to scratch. I didn't dare look at you.

The lights stammered back on overhead, and I blinked.

I heard you move. You scrambled off the table, and ran out of the room. I walked over to the window and pressed my forehead against it, watching as you ran across the car park. You stopped at the far side and looked at my window, and then slowly, you turned away.

He'll be back.

I'm sorry, Andrew. I will always be sorry for letting him do that to you. I remember thinking that I deserved anything you wanted to throw at me for that. You could have done anything and told anyone, but you didn't. You came back after Christmas and sat back down in my office as if nothing had happened and you invited me for a drink.

You sick little fuck.

I was relieved you were still interested. I thought that maybe you could be the one to see through my darkness. You could be the one I would tell my secrets to. I wanted to tell you. Really, I did. You deserved better treatment. I let you down, but I'm trying now. If I am to live out any more days in this prison, I must put them to good use and turn the other cheek.

I need to sleep now, Andrew.

Good night, my beautiful one. See you in my dreams.

Amyas.

Dear Andrew,

I can hear violins playing. When it goes dark, there are two singing to each other, their voices mingling with grief in that shrill, piercing voice that only the violin has. It's the only time this room doesn't feel like a tomb. I have tried to escape from here today, but the door is so heavy, I can't even make it rattle, and there are bars on the windows, and boards on the outside and black paint over every crack and crevice to chase the sun away, but it still finds its way into the room through the edges of the glass and through gaps in the boards. I think he's done that on purpose. He hasn't been back for two nights.

It is cool now and my soul is cold and I can't endure the pain in my body much longer. My lips are starting to crack and it feels like my gums are shrinking. I haven't seen the sun properly for a while. My eyes hurt when the sun rises and I spend most of the day in the corner of the room where the shadows are deepest. I am hungry too, Andrew, so hungry that I've started chewing on my own flesh. Oh, don't be alarmed, I haven't done anything serious. I just gnaw and bite and get a taste for the skin and the blood.

It is all coming out now. The secrets you're pulling out of me. It is so easy to talk to you from this distance now the trappings of convention, politeness and respect have fallen away. I should have just had you whenever I felt like it, none of this meek bullshit. I should have done what I wanted. If I'd known it was going to end like this, I would have done everything I warned myself against doing. There is nothing beyond. Do you need me to spell it out? You cannot reach back over time or over the void and tell me what's worth what because there's no point is there? There is no meaning to any of it.

Let me tell you another story. I was talking to you about my mother before, wasn't I?

That old bitch. That old, suckling sow.

Sorry about that. You know he seems to be getting stronger and it worries me.

Do you remember the last time my mother broke into my house?

Of course you remember.

When she came in, my brother heard her and woke me up quickly enough to catch a glimpse of her edging towards the bed with a kitchen knife poised. You were there with me, and I was filled with a rush of panic because I couldn't let her see you. I saw the ripples of her seeing you and me together spreading out and destroying everything, but it was already too late, she had the knife over you. I rushed for her, watching her as she watched you, but as I got to her, she struck me in the face with her free hand and I fell onto the carpet.

When she had me down, she cut my wrist. I heard you scream and I heard my brother scream and I heard my mother laugh as she knelt on my chest and squeezed my face. The cut on my wrist was an old and familiar pain. The steady spurt of blood and the stinging of the flesh reminded me of a lullaby. It transported me to being a teenager again, crushed beneath her swollen stomach and scarred thighs.

"Get off him. Get off him, for God's sake."

I heard the thunder of your steps as you charged at her, but she brandished the knife at you. I saw your hand go out to stop it and then you reeled back onto the bed.

"Leave him alone!"

You came at her again, but she swung the knife at you, and you faltered. I could see you kneeling against the bed, poised and baring your teeth like an animal.

"Do it again, and I'll kill him," she said, pointing the knife at you. I could see you shaking your head.

"Fuck you."

You moved towards me, and she lowered the knife so that it hovered an inch above my eye. You paused, staring at her. She touched the blade against my brow bone and moved the tip over my eye and down my cheek. You backed away to the bed with your hands up.

"That's better," she said. "Just do as you're told, like a good boy."

My mother turned back towards me and took hold of my wrist.

"Make him come out," she said as my blood dripped onto the carpet and flowed between her grasping fingers. "Make him talk to me."

The smell of her rank breath in my face disgusted me. I thought as I had many times before that she could not be the woman who gave birth to me and I wished beyond hope that you weren't actually there. I desperately wanted it to be a nightmare. I hadn't known it was her then who had killed the cat, but as she sweltered on top of me, it all became clear. She had been testing the water with that small act of barbarity, and this was what she had been waiting for. She was cunning and vengeful, and I think I didn't tell you about her because I didn't want you to recognise how much of her there was in me.

You know though now that Adrian enjoyed seeing those horrible qualities in me because he told you that I was a terrible void of a man who was capable of killing and not feeling anything, just like my stale bitch of a mother?

My mother was on top of me, strangling me and pressing the knife edge to my throat.

"Let him speak to me. Let him take over you, like he used to. I know when you're pretending."

I could just make you out huddled beside the bed, your hand out towards me. I struggled against my mother, but I was weakened by the wound. It wasn't bad, but the shock of it was making my heart tremble and I was afraid that she was going to get you. I prayed that I could find the strength to get you to safety, and then my own God moved inside of me in answer to my calling.

Do as she says, brother.

My little brother placed his hand on my forehead, and I felt myself go still, the shock and the pain and the panic falling away.

Let me move in you.

I exhaled slowly, and felt him fill my brain, the warmth of him pouring through my bones and down to the tips of my fingers and toes, drowning out everything else that moved. I could feel him

smiling as he pushed me gently back to the dream of the meadow where I could linger until it was over.

I was in the meadow, dimly aware that I was in pain. I could hear my little brother whispering in the real world, the shape of his words and the intonation slightly different from my own, but hardly detectable to anyone on the outside. I was grateful for the fact that there wasn't much difference between us, but I knew that you would see through him. Would you find him more attractive, or more terrifying?

I should have stayed in the meadow, shouldn't I?

I felt the weight of my mother shifting, and then the soft touch of her lips on mine, but then there was nothing as my little brother took me over completely and closed the door.

Then, when it was all happening and I didn't have the clarity I have now, I heard talking and crying in the meadow echoing around me as if the sounds were falling from the sky and I knew that they were from my brother. I tasted blood in my mouth, even from where I lay amongst the grass and wildflowers beside the pond. I stirred and watched as the stars grew brighter and brighter and the moon became full in the sky, swelling like a spotlight. I shut my eyes and saw a shape struggling in the darkness and heard my name being called. I could smell blood, and it made my mouth water.

Then it was over.

My brother's warmth overwhelmed me again, and when I opened my eyes, I was back in my body on the bedroom floor. The wound on my wrist that my mother had made with the knife was still bleeding, and I pressed it to my stomach as I sat up. The room was dark and I could hear whimpering coming from the corner.

You need to be quick, my brother whispered, the sensation of his hands brushing across my lips and wrist before he slunk back into my mind and watched everything through my eyes.

"Andrew?" I called out, stumbling. I got to my feet and reached for the light switch.

Beware.

I blinked as I turned on the light and saw my mother huddled in the corner with her arm pressed against her chest. There was a gash and bruising on the side of her neck. She cried, her gasping sobs setting my teeth on edge. She looked up at me standing over her like she didn't know who I was. I knelt down beside her and reached for her. She stared at me petrified.

"Are those teeth marks?" I whispered, staring at the bruises on her throat.

Die, mother, die, because I will kill you if you hurt him again.

"Stop talking," I said, and clawed at my temple. I looked over towards you on the floor. You were pale and trembling. I'm sorry that I didn't go to you first. That must have affected you, but I had to deal with my mother. I had felt something of what my brother had done while I had been unconscious in the meadow, and I was shocked by it. It seldom happened that his energy could reach me in that place, so I knew even before I woke up that I would awaken to something dreadful.

I moved to touch my mother, but she recoiled and pushed herself further into the wall. Her eyes were wide and crazed and I fought the revulsion inside me and the urge to turn away from her and retreat. My brother paced inside my head.

Good isn't it, the taste of revenge?

"Mum, I'm not going to hurt you. I need to look at your arm. I need to see how bad it is."

"You stay away from me, you fucking freak. You should be locked up. You shouldn't be allowed to roam the streets," she cried. "What do you know about anything?"

I know how to stitch myself up, my brother said, bitterly. I know that super-glue is cheaper and less embarrassing than going to hospital. They never believed me, you know. They laughed at me when I told them it was you.

"Come here," I said and pulled at my mother's arm. She came at me, and tried to bite me, but I held her and looked at the cut while she scratched me. The cut on her wrist was shallow, but bubbling blood, and the wound on her throat looked angry and sore. I could see the shape of my teeth in the bruising.

I got her where she got you, see? I wanted her to know how much you were hurting. Her blood tastes like shit, you know.

I ignored my little brother, and I cursed as I reached over and pressed a towel to my mother's arm, watching with loathing as she thrashed and screamed when I touched her.

"Keep it on there," I said, forcing her back against the wall. I was losing my patience. She had left grazes all over my neck and shoulders with her yellow nails.

"Press on it, or you'll die."

She looked up at me and her face was calm, like someone had turned off a switch inside her and I felt a pang of sympathy for the vulnerable, elderly, obviously disturbed woman who had carried me for months and months and nursed me. At the same time, I felt my brother shaking his head, and the hatred came back.

"You'd like it if I died because of something that he did, wouldn't you, Amyas? After all of the trouble I took to find you, he does this to me. Why couldn't I have had a normal son?"

Don't listen, my brother said. Don't let her draw you in. I am sorry, brother. I didn't mean for it to go so far.

"We don't do that to anyone, brother. You know it."

But I'm sick of her and I was hungry.

He flinched inside my head and glared at her again. I could imagine him kneeling in front of her and staring into her face with his eyes narrowed, as if he were trying to see inside her.

I want to know why she came. Last time, it was Cookie getting the knife and I loved that cat. She tasted blood first, Amyas.

I hissed as I looked at the cut on my arm and pressed it back against my stomach. My lips still tasted of blood, and I wiped them with the back of my hand.

"Fuck it," I said and shrugged my shoulders. "I don't think you'll be back here again, will you?" I eyed her, and she smiled at me.

"You still talk to each other, don't you?" she said gently. "What do you have to talk about when you're together all of the time?"

I looked over at you, Andrew, but it was as if you couldn't hear us.

Who is this tender creature? My brother asked, leaning forward in my mind and staring at my mother. *Who is she that speaks so kindly?*

I didn't answer either of them. I was weary and light-headed and I didn't want to think about what you had seen, or how you would feel. I could see it, and I didn't want to face it. I reached over to my mother and pulled her to her feet. She was lighter than I remembered, like a woman made of sticks, and I gasped with the ease at which I got her up.

She pressed the towel down on her arm and looked slyly towards you. You didn't look at her, but you looked at me. She glanced sideways at me.

"I always suspected."

I moved towards her, my rage flaring. She stammered as I grabbed her by the shoulders.

"How old is he, Amyas? Do you drink his blood too?"

She leered at me as she had many times before. I slapped her hard and she crashed into the dressing table, knocking a pile of books onto the floor, where they lay in a heap with their spines broken. I closed my eyes at the noise and felt my brother cover his ears. He hated noise. His lack of pity seeped through into me as she clawed herself up and stood glaring at me, defiant. My hand had caught her on the lip. The blood was the only colour in her wretched, grey face. I felt a pang of guilt, but my brother swallowed it up as if it were a tasty morsel. I didn't look at you. I didn't want to see what you thought of me. Seeing your face would have only made me angrier.

I moved towards my mother again, but my brother stopped me, knowing how badly I wanted to hurt her and drive my face into that wound on her throat and widen it.

Don't, he said gently, his hands on my arms. *Don't give the bitch the time of day.*

I stepped back and looked at the floor. I could see the angry mess on her throat and it made my stomach fall away. I was sweating with panic.

"Get out," I said, and gestured towards the front door.

My mother eyed me warily and then made her way out, but not before looking at you again and shaking her head. I stepped to take hold of her and drag her out of my house, but she pulled away from me and ran out onto the landing and down the stairs.

"Jesus Christ," I said as I slammed the front door after her and twisted every lock, chain and key there was. I even pulled the sofa in front of the door and as I did, I saw you get up and move into the middle of the room. I turned, and saw you kneeling by the streak of my blood on the carpet. I swallowed hard and came towards you, touching your shoulder as you touched the stain on the carpet and then looked at the print of my blood on your hand.

"What the fuck was that?" you said, gesturing wildly towards the door. "I thought you'd died. You went limp and you closed your eyes, and she was all over you, ramming her tongue down your throat. I tried to get her off you. I called your name, and swung at her, but then you moved, and God, Amyas, something was wrong."

You looked into my eyes. Your expression was like my mother's, weary and terrified.

Get the words out, little one. I know what you're going to say.

"What?" I said. "Tell me."

"When you got up, it wasn't *you*. There was something wrong with your eyes, just the way you looked at me, and the way you moved. I called out to you, but you wouldn't stop."

I slumped back onto the bed. Your words were hitting me like stones.

He saw me, my brother said gleefully inside my head. It sounded like he was crying with joy.

He saw me take my revenge.

"Why did you bite her, Amyas? Jesus. You looked at me as you did it. I could see you smiling as you licked at her blood. Have you any idea how insane that is?"

I stood up and went into the bathroom. You called after me, but I was already there with my fingers down my throat.

No, Amyas, don't. I want you to keep it. I want to feel her move through me.

I touched the back of my throat with my fingers and gagged. My mouth filled with bile and my stomach trembled. I pressed down again, and felt my stomach leap, and I saw the vomit splash in the bowl. I turned my face away from it, but I could see the bright streaks of blood in it. I flushed the toilet as you touched my shoulders, and I collapsed against you and wrapped my arms around your legs.

I sobbed like I hadn't done for years. My brother was pacing inside me.

I can't believe you got rid of it, Amyas. I worked so hard to get that for you, and you just chucked it up as if it were nothing. Don't you like the taste of blood anymore?

I shook my head.

"I don't know what's happening to me." I said.

You stood there staring at me. I felt your cold hand touching my wrist and wrapping something around it.

"You're not a monster, Amyas," you said quietly. "Listen to me, you're fine. You're sane, and you're alive, and you have me here with you."

"For how much longer though?" I said, scratching at my face. "You will just leave me when it gets too much. You will listen, and you will say nice things, and then you will go."

"Amyas," you said, squeezing my hand. "I know you better than you think you do."

Stupid little boy.

"You don't know me at all." I said.

I'm insane, just like my mother, and it won't be long until you find that out.

I shook my head.

"I can't do this anymore." I whispered.

"No, Amyas, please."

"I'm not going to argue with you."

"It's my choice, don't I have a say?"

Let me out. Let me show him again.

I pressed down on the towel and grimaced.

"It's not safe for you," I said. "I can't hold back these things much longer, and I don't want them to touch you. They'll make you like me, and I can't stand that."

You held onto me.

"Come to bed," you said, "pretend it was all a dream."

I looked up at you and shook my head, but I was weakening.

"I won't ask you about it again. Not if it hurts you. I don't need to know if it causes you pain."

You always knew what to say, Andrew.

I let you guide me to the bed and I let you put the quilt over me and wipe the hair from my eyes.

"Does it hurt?" you asked as you touched my arm. Your hands were always cold.

"Not very much," I said.

"You should go to hospital."

I wish you would find me, Andrew. I would love to talk to you here instead of writing everything down. I'm hungry for so much more than food and water and blood. I hope you don't think that's vulgar.

I imagine you will be going to sleep soon. Do you have someone else beside you? I wonder what you talk about. I am a little jealous.

He won't talk about you, brother.

He'll never talk to anyone about you ever again.

I like playing this game.

But what's the point of it?

I am going to leave you now. My little brother is getting restless.

Goodbye, my blessed one.

Amyas.

Amyas isn't the only one that resides in these writings.

Dear Andrew,

It's another scorching day and I can't bear it. Adrian still hasn't come back. Did you ever notice his lips and teeth? All the better to eat you with, my dear. I'm so hungry, I feel like cutting chunks of my own flesh and pouring my own blood out and having a small banquet before he comes again. At least then my death would be on my own terms, and not his.

But you shouldn't argue with angels.

I didn't know what real hunger was until now. It comes and goes in waves of crippling pain and then fades, and then you just feel numb and heavy, as if you're carrying stones in your belly.

'If you need to keep me here, you need to keep me alive' your heart says, with every stammering beat.

'You and me both, miserable heart,' I say in return, 'but we're chasing ghosts.'

What is a man, that he can die like a rat in a black hole and no one even notices? I imagine you're rolling your eyes. You used to call my ravings 'whistling for the black dog.'

I don't have the energy for being pleasant. I guess if I'm going to be honest with all this, as I set out to do, you need to see the deepness and expanse of my temper and of my despair.

I went to the hospital, you know. The morning after my mother attacked me.

When it was dawn, I left you sleeping and I retreated to that mausoleum; that ancient, star-studded, gleaming, violent tomb.

They knew me by name.

Those bleary-eyed doctors and nurses, staggering after a night filled with blood and guts and broken glass. They looked up and saw me and welcomed me in and sat me down and were attentive.

Let's have a look. Oh my goodness, another laceration. How did you do this one then? Cut yourself on the cat food tin, doing the washing up, shaving your arms?

I'm slipping, Andrew.

I am slipping so far and so fast, I don't know what's real.

This could be Hell's waiting room and Adrian is the devil.

"What's the story this time?" The nurse said as she knelt in front of me and examined my arm. Her fingers sent chills down my spine and I shifted on the bed and tapped my foot on the floor.

You don't like being touched. Tell her that you don't like it, or let me tell her. She won't forget then. She'll get it.

"I'm sorry," I said, looking down at the floor. The nurse was staring at me.

"What?"

Amyas, you know that look. Shut up.

"I'm sorry for being here again."

The nurse sighed and started bathing my arm, shaking her head as she did so.

Ask for something for the pain.

She put down her bowl and readied an injection. The sweat broke out on my skin.

"What's that?" I asked. My throat was very dry. The air felt sharp as I breathed it in.

"You know what it is, you've had one before."

"I haven't."

She raised her eyebrows, and wiped the base of my arm in the crease.

"Sharp scratch," she said and then sunk the needle in. I clenched my teeth and held onto the side of the bed, fighting the urge to run out of the room.

"You can't keep doing this, Amyas," she said, without looking up. She finished the injection and put the needle to one side, pressing the skin around the wound with her fingers and pinching it together. I could feel my cheeks reddening. She looked up at me.

"You're wasting everybody's time with things like this. This place is for emergencies only, you know, proper accidents. I should be out there, helping other people who can't help what's happened to them. Do you understand?"

I didn't move but my brother shifted, distressed to see me so uncomfortable. I realised suddenly that it had been him moving in my body the last time we had been here and I recoiled from the memory of our last visit to A&E.

I was never honest about my scars to anyone. You thought you kept me away from those thoughts, but they were with me when I woke, when I saw my own face in a mirror, answered someone incorrectly, felt stupid, and before I went to sleep.

The scars cut across everything and I never did wear short sleeves again.

The nurse looked up at me. "Come on, what's wrong? Last time you were in here, you weren't scared of needles. If you're struggling, ask for help. We can't just keep picking up the pieces."

She adjusted her gloves and I saw that her hands were shaking and that there was someone lingering outside the curtain, listening and watching. That's procedure now for me; two or none at all.

They're watching you. They think you're dangerous.

"You know, your mother is down the ward."

I closed my eyes, Andrew, and fought back the tears. I felt stupid and weak and exposed. Here it comes, I thought. She's told them everything. I'll go back home and there'll be a police car outside my house, and then there'll be phone calls and hate mail and voice mails whispering 'Amyas, what have you done? How could you? You didn't seem the type. And that boy, so young as well, I thought you were responsible. What else did you get up to? Huh? Huh? Huh?' Questions like fingers in my ribs, the circle going round and round and round.

My brother hovered behind my eyes, filled with rage, watching the nurse.

They're not stupid, but they're blind. Maybe this will make her understand your pain about your stinking mother.

I clenched my fist as he moved to take control and strike out at the nurse, but I pulled my arm out of her grip.

"Don't," I said, "leave it."

"I can't leave it," she said, "It'll get infected if I do."

My brother smouldered and his rage made me grind my teeth with the strain of holding him back as she pulled at my arm and pinched the skin together to close up the wound and glue it back together. I tried to pull my arm away again, but she pulled me roughly and it hurt. The feeling of her hands through the gloves made me want to scream. It was a trigger, but she didn't know it and I couldn't tell her.

"She broke into my house," I whispered, swallowing hard, "she came at me with a knife."

"And what, you thought you'd teach her a lesson?"

"No, I was trying to stop her!" I cried, pulling my arm out of the nurse's grip and tucking it inside my coat. I stared at the curtain around the cubicle and tried to distract myself and my brother. He wanted to take over. He was staring at the nurse and licking his lips. I saw myself pinning her down, my hand reaching up her clothes as she kicked and screamed and the tray of needles smashed onto the floor.

"Don't make me think those things. Don't do it. I need you on my side."

I rocked on the edge of the bed. The nurse stared at me, and I don't know what was going through her mind. I think she acted against her better judgement when she tried to take hold of my arm again.

"Touch me and I'll come after you."

I flinched and pushed the nurse's hand away.

"Don't," I said to her, my teeth were chattering, "stop it."

The nurse stopped and looked me up and down. I watched her face slowly change with realisation and I felt sick to my stomach.

"Right," she said, "I think I understand now."

What do you understand? My brother snapped, lurching forward. My body shuddered, and I almost lost my balance. The nurse moved away from me.

"You weren't talking to me then, were you? You're talking to something else, what is it?"

"You're imagining things."

"Am I?"

She folded her arms and squared up to me.

"Your mother said something about you having a little brother, only there's no record of his birth, or anything like that. Could you tell me why that is?"

I didn't answer her.

I looked at her and our eyes met. My brother was silent, staring out at her. He was weakened by her tenderness and by the offhand address. He felt like applauding her for coming to the conclusion so quickly.

"You write about that sort of stuff. I've read it on the internet." She sighed and looked at me again, her face suddenly stern.

"You shouldn't be teaching people though, Amyas. Not if you're not seeking help. You could give them ideas. And biting people? That's not right, Amyas. That's fucked up."

I was alone under that nurse's scrutiny, and in that moment, I wanted to tell her everything. I wanted to tell her about my little brother, and you, and the relationship I had with my mother. I watched her, imagining if she could take the strain, and slowly came to the conclusion that she couldn't. She couldn't absorb it like you could and she couldn't face my malice like a furnace and let it burn her. She was too jaded, too tired and frustrated; a sum of the system's flaws.

I laughed and got up off the bed, oddly calm and collected, my mind working like a machine. I've always been a good liar, although my whole body was trembling as I faced the nurse and adjusted my clothes.

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm stable and I always have been. Don't listen to another word my mother says and for God's sake, don't dwell on it. It makes you look a fool."

"I'm not just taking it on face value," she said. "I and all of the nurses remember you from last time."

"Give me a dressing and a bandage," I said.

She shook her head. "It won't be enough if you keep biting at your wounds."

My head snapped up to stare at her and she backed up against the curtain, her hand out towards me as if she were holding me back. My face must have changed, because she looked afraid, and she reminded me of you.

"I don't know what you mean," I said quickly, too quickly.

"Oh yes, you do," she said, opening the curtain and gesturing. "And I'm not the only one who knows."

My brother stared, and then retreated inside of me.

Leave them, brother. Let them burn. We can sort out that wound at home. He paused, and I felt him coil around my heart. *I know what will make you feel better.*

I pulled on my coat and stormed out of the cubicle. I didn't look anybody in the eye as I left, but the nurse touched my shoulder as I went past.

"Your mother is just down the ward in her own room, Amyas."

I shrugged off her hand and left the ward. I could feel her eyes on the back of my head. The security guard who had been watching us outside the cubicle followed me at a distance and his footsteps rang out deliberately as I pushed open the ward doors and went down the corridor.

That was the first time I was aware, and I mean really aware of how stupid what we were doing was. I thought we could keep it a secret, but it wasn't possible. My mother could expose us, merely with a suggestion and my mind was racing trying to gather the pieces of what she knew and what she could have possibly said about the circumstances in which she'd received her injuries. Of course, she had seen you and she was gross and manipulative. She knew what to say and who to say it to and how to play the circumstances and she would have made it look good too, that's what hurt me the most. She would have wept and stammered and wiped at her eyes. She would have spun some tale about being attacked by her little boy who she loved so much. She would insist they not take it any further, but by then, the damage would have been done.

You told me I was haunted. Now I think you understand what I'm haunted by.

I went out of the hospital into the grounds and then out onto the street. The wind made the tears spill from my eyes, and I wiped them angrily as I marched down the street, oblivious to everyone and everything.

Amyas, you need to slow down. You lost some blood last night, and I think you're going to keel over now the shock has worn off and you're so frightened. Amyas, listen to me.

"Will you fuck off?" I said through gritted teeth, feeling my brother retreat back inside me and go quiet. The wind bit me, and the wound on my arm rubbed and gaped under my coat. My brother moved forward in me again and pulled me back as I stepped out into the road and almost under a bus.

Stop it now, what's the matter with you?

"You know what the matter is," I said, shrugging him off impatiently and ignoring the whirl of traffic around me as I picked my way across the road and back onto the pavement. "They think I did it." I punched the wall beside me and dragged my knuckles across it as I walked.

"They think I did it to her and that I did this to myself. It's a joke. Why don't they ever listen to me?"

Be quiet now, you're roaring, my brother said anxiously, watching people eye me warily and cross to the other side of the street as I went on dragging my hand across the wall and digging my nails into the bricks.

"And they're starting to put the pieces together, about me and Andrew. I may as well kill myself if that comes to light. There will be no way out of it." I said.

I thought about telling you then, slowly making up my mind to sit you down when I got home and tell you all about my little brother and what my mother had said and where she was and that we couldn't continue. Yes, I would tell you where the scars on my wrists were from and what triggered my anxiety and what gave my brother strength and how I was a divided soul. It looked easy. I felt strong and brave, but then my brother moved in me.

It's your fault they don't believe you now in the hospital, he said as if he were commenting on the weather. *Why would they not believe you could do it again? You're seasoned at self-attack.*

I closed my eyes and wiped my face, feeling the old weight of despair settle over my heart. That is what he does, my dearest. He waits and waits, with the patience of a Saint, and then he says just one thing and sends me plummeting into Hell. My strength and resolve fall away, and I feel the terror and the weight of my own cowardice.

You shouldn't have done it to yourself last time. It destroyed everything you had built. Once a self-harmer, always a self-harmer, at least in their eyes. As for Andrew, he's bound to get tired of you and then blab about how you seduced him, and how he didn't know any better, and how he thought he could trust you.

I tried to push him away but I didn't have the strength. He always preyed upon me when I was at my weakest. I remembered my last trip to hospital and the absolute blind panic as I had trudged through the snow and into A&E under my brother's control. My clothes were streaked with my own blood and I'd burned them later. The scent had been something else. I can't explain it, not without showing you and even then you wouldn't understand. Blood smells like dirty metal to most people, but to me, it is succulent and rich, like the juices from roasted meat.

My brother moved inside me as I walked and caused traffic and people to swerve around me. I just wanted to lock myself away. The memory of trying to kill myself, coupled with the attack from my mother and the thought that she could drive you and me apart was too much to bear. I was going into overdrive, and it made me vulnerable to my brother's advances.

I saved you then, but only because you invited me into you, he said, pushing against me as I walked, making me trip on the pavement. *You'll invite other things in too if you're not careful. Bigger monsters that will come into your room in the middle of the night like she did, only this time, I won't move to help you. I'll leave you alone to fight them.*

I didn't answer him. I could feel his rage and smell the neglect of my mother as if she were standing there in front of me. I could feel her lank hair between my fingers and the touch of her lips

on my hipbones underneath my clothes. I lashed out. I took hold of my temples as my brother moved inside my head, distorting my vision and making the shadows of the street appear longer and filled with eyes. I could hear my mother moaning in my ear and I stumbled and cracked my knees on the pavement. The pain gave way to the blackness and an overwhelming sense of worthlessness. I felt utterly alone and that I could not be saved. I could not even kill myself without him intervening. I had no control over anything.

And then there was you.

I pulled myself up from the floor and pressed on, desperate for relief. I didn't want to talk to you anymore. I was itching to slash myself open, or drink myself to oblivion, but even those acts could do nothing to dull the knowledge that I had no control over my body. My agency of it had been shattered first by my mother and then by my little brother.

I enjoyed your mother every night when you were growing up. She liked it when your body was maturing, when the hairs grew and your cock doubled and was aware of her. She only hurt you to make me come out. You sickened her, but I am not her son, am I Amyas? She's not ashamed of me. I don't fuck little boys and girls.

I ignored him and fought to reach my flat. The wound grated against my shirt and I could feel the dampness and the heat of it on my skin.

You're still alive because of me. No one else will love you as I do. No one will ever sacrifice what I have sacrificed on your behalf. Andrew is young and stupid. Do yourself a favour, and give into the urge again. I like the shape of your despair because it looks a lot like me.

I reached my flat, and pulled myself up the stairs. My legs were shaking so badly, it was difficult just to put one step in front of the other.

Let me wear your body, Amyas. Let me go to the hospital and lie in your mother's bed as she dies. Let me go to your office and touch more of those little girls and boys. Let me do all those things you want to do but can't.

I hit the side of my head with my fist. When I moved to do it again, my brother stopped me. It felt like his face was in front of mine, leering at me, and I swung at him as if he was there. I fell onto the tile floor outside of my front door, and pressed my palms against it. It soothed my sweating body and numbed the ache in my wrist and head. My brother raged, and pushed me towards the familiar blackness of despair that always lingered inside me and made every beat of my heart seem like more than I could stand.

Die here. No one will find you until it is too late.

I crawled to my front door and slid the key into the lock, moving slowly as if I didn't know what I was doing. I was weary, and filled with bleak thoughts, and when I got through the door, I collapsed on the carpet in the hallway. It was dark and warm, and I lay there for a moment as my brother stalked through me like a panther, eying up his prey.

You know what to do, little boy. You know how this has to end.

"Andrew," I said, imploring the silence. "Andrew, help me. Just hold on to me, Andrew."

I covered my head with my hands and drew my legs up to my chest. I felt like my little brother was standing over me and leering down at me from an impossible height with the shadows hiding his face.

There are knives in the kitchen, or scissors on your desk. There are also painkillers in your bedroom and that trusty bottle of vodka. You can choose any of them you like. I'll not take that away from you.

"Andrew, where are you?"

He's not here, you idiot. Of course he's not here. He has left you.

I crawled along the carpet into my bedroom and pulled the sheets off the bed. I crawled into them on the floor and wrapped them around me, pulling them over my head to hide me from my brother's gaze which followed me around the room.

I pulled off my coat and my shirt, and covered the wound with my hand. It burned when I touched it and the skin of my hand felt like shards of broken glass digging deeper and deeper into

the surface of the skin and tearing it wider. It had stopped bleeding, but my skin was wet with gore and sweat from the fever that was throbbing in my entire body. I pulled off all my clothes and sat there sweating and shivering, feeling the light touch of my brother's hand on the inside of my leg and on my hip bones, and then between my legs. I snapped at him and curled up into a ball with the inside of my arm where the wound was pressed against my lips.

Little boy, he whispered, his voice sultry as his hand moved across my shoulders and ribs. I shuddered and pressed my face further into my arm, feeling the flesh grow taut underneath my lips. I licked carefully at the skin around the wound, feeling its coarseness and tasting disinfectant as I lapped at it gently and then covered the wound with my mouth.

Does it help, little one?

I lingered, fighting the urge for just a moment, and then I buried my face into my arm, biting lightly at the cut to make the blood flow into my mouth. I sighed at the silky texture of the blood and the heat of it against my lips. It was bliss.

This is where the self-destructive behaviour started for me, Andrew. I did it to appease my little brother, and the blood drinking pulled us closer together. My loneliness and isolation made me pull him towards me, but I didn't realise how sick I was. I just wanted someone to love me, it's as simple as that, but the last time when I had slit my wrists, I had gone too far. Death had seemed more appealing than waiting for the next injury. I hadn't wanted it to go on, and now with this second lease of life, I felt like I didn't deserve it. I was ashamed that drinking my own blood was the only thing I could think of to do with my life. Everything else was ugly. That was why I was so appalled when he had gone after my mother for blood. I had never tasted blood from anyone else before.

I won't lie and say that I didn't want it, because I did. A part of me had awoken and was stoked by him and fed by my mother's blood. That hunger was what drove me to try and kill myself last time. I had wanted more blood then, but I couldn't stand the idea. I had survived cutting myself open because of my brother, but I had the scars to prove how close I had been to death. In spite of

you and what you made me feel, the hunger and therefore the desire to die never went away, even when you and I were together. I don't want to lie to you, but really, I think you knew it all anyway.

You did so many good things I never really gave you credit for, but that's the thing with separation. It makes you notice all of your own failings. It's an eternal cliché that you don't realise what you have until it is no longer there, but I don't think that applies totally to me. I was well aware of how good I had it. What brought the despair was the thought of losing it. There's no cure for that. There's no cure for the being that my brother and I are together.

We should have been aborted.

No one should have let my mother have children.

I was alone that last time I sucked on the wound and chewed on the scab and I didn't know where you were. I should have been suspicious, but it didn't even enter my mind. I should have been worried, but I was too wrapped up in my own suffering. I imagined for a moment while I lay there talking to you and then slowly taking you in my arms, my lips open against your throat as you sighed and grew hard beneath me. I wiped the blood off my lips, and covered the wound with my hand. The pain had gone quiet in my gut and in the wound itself, and I was aroused by the sensation feeding had caused in me. All of the hairs on my body were standing on end.

The difference feeding makes to your heart rate and your blood pressure is unbelievable, Amyas. You doing that reminds me of babies drinking their mother's milk. Ironic, isn't it, the pleasure you can take from the wounds your mother leaves on you?

I shrugged, embarrassed. I didn't want to answer him because I was bruised about what he had said before, but I felt obligated, as if a black hole would swallow me up if I didn't speak to him and invite him back into my life. I was an addict for him.

"It doesn't matter," I said, "it just makes me feel better."

What will your little one think? He'll probably be aroused, the little sick bastard.

He held my face in his hand and I scratched at him and bared my teeth. He laughed at me again.

"I don't care. No one else has to know."

The people at the hospital see the bite marks and the tears you make on your skin with your teeth and nails. It's not a secret indulgence anymore. Coupled with these, he touched the dead scars on my wrists, you're a basket case. They've got you nailed down.

I thought about going back to the hospital again and explaining myself to the Nurse. I wanted to take her hand and hold it against my forehead to see if she felt anything of my brother pounding and beating inside my head. I wanted to do it. I wanted to be exposed. It didn't matter if I was met with disdain or horror as long as someone else knew the truth. I thought as well about going back and holding a pillow over my mother's face.

But if you did that, all those things you want to do, you would have to tell them everything. No one would come near you ever again. You'd be locked up, and even I wouldn't be able to see you. They'd give you drugs to keep me away. They'd tell you I wasn't real, but I am, aren't I?

He touched my face again. *I'm as real as you are, perhaps even more real than you. I wonder sometimes if they got us the wrong way round. Maybe it should be me walking and talking and living and fucking.*

I didn't answer him. He sounded desperate, and I liked it. I wanted him to feel as I was feeling. He saw my thoughts and the pain and he smiled at me.

I'll be your confessional, he said, gently. I wanted him to touch me so I could feel his icy hands on the most intimate shapes of me and I could pretend it was you, but I was disgusted by the impulse. I hated it when my little brother was kind, because it made me forget what he was like when he was angry. His kisses and caresses and kind words made me forgive him instantly for all his trespasses against me, and it was a weakness.

I settled in his embrace, letting the urge to bite at the wound wash over me as he willed it. He was arousing me, guiding my hand as if it were his own. I didn't want it, not really, but there was nothing I could do. I was weak and dazed, and I needed him and he was hungry for me.

Tell me, he whispered. *What you say will never leave this room.*

"I need to do it," I said, powerless in his hands. "I bite at the wounds, because then it means I made them. I can forget what she did and I can forget that she's insane. It soothes the pain and if they want to think I made them, fine. It's easier than telling them it was her. They never believed that either."

My brother nodded slowly and his warmth filled me from the pit of my stomach, leaving me breathless. He showed me the image again of me on top of the nurse, her chest and neck exposed, my face nestled into the flesh beneath her chin.

I gasped and sat up, pulling the sheets from over my head. The spell had been broken.

"Stop doing that," I said, "I don't want that from anyone. It's a ridiculous and stupid thing."

I got up and moved onto the bed, dragging the sheet behind me. Lights flashed in front of my eyes and I felt dizzy and hungry. My brother felt cheated and humiliated. He watched me with disdain and then pressed against me, forcing my hand to claw at the soft flesh of my belly and pull at it. I gritted my teeth, but I couldn't stop myself. My nails scratched at the skin, digging deep and ripping.

Do you know why you dream about vampires? He said. *Do you know how much of your own blood you have drunk over the years?* He tightened his grip on my stomach and I cried with my back arched against the bed.

The light from the window faded in and out and I could hear the flowing of water in the meadow and feel the warmth of the sun on my skin as he moved to drown me out and take over.

Wouldn't you like to try someone else? Wouldn't you like to feel them struggle?

His other hand wrapped around my throat, and he raised my face to the stars that blinked through the window.

He always loved the stars.

"Not Andrew, you stay away from him, brother. I will kill you if you go after him."

How will you kill me? I can do what I like.

"I'll kill us both, I swear to God, I'll do it."

I writhed and shook him off and curled up on the bed and spread my palms over my stomach. I was sweating and my mouth was watering in spite of the pain. He was lingering on the cusp of my mind, toying with me, threatening to overwhelm me, but every part of me was alive, desperate and hungry, and the pain in my stomach was changing from agony to something delicious and deep that made my skin tingle.

He stepped forward, and put out the lights of sensation like so many candles, but I clung on to my consciousness. He wanted another in his arms, he wanted to see what their blood tasted like in comparison to mine; he wanted to feed on someone else. I saw images of my mother and the nurse, both of them screaming as my hands and my fingers pulled at their hair and clawed at their skin, but then I saw something else. I saw a man with long blonde hair in a clearing with snow and blood all around him. When he looked at me, I tried to scream, but then I looked down and saw my own nails long and covered in glittering blood. I felt the despair as I looked at the blonde man and the small shape in his arms, but then I also felt the ecstasy and I sighed in spite of myself, intrigued but appalled. My brother was almost upon me; his shape was filling my skin.

You remember, do you? That's funny, how arousal makes you think of him and not your little Andrew.

"It's not like that," I said, covering my eyes with my hand.

What is it then? My brother said, forcing me further back. I groaned. It felt like he was climbing on top of me, stroking my skin and lapping at the blood on my stomach. *I thought I had buried him, but I think he left a mark on you, didn't he?*

"I don't know, I can't see everything. I think it's your dream. I think you're trying to trick me."

I can't conceive the kind of horror that he is and embodies my beloved. He is as he is, and I don't want you to remember how he made you feel or what he did to you.

"Is it my father?" I whispered. I was drowsy as my brother held me, his hands gliding over the insides of my arms. He laughed quietly.

No, Amyas, not your father, something far more intimate and terrifying than that. An image you've carried since you were very young.

"What?"

I was growing weaker. My brother was biting at my throat, teasing the flesh. I was becoming desperate, clinging to my conscience despite the waves of ecstasy moving through my body.

"Don't do it to someone else, brother, it isn't natural. I'll never forgive you if you do it."

Oh yes, you will. Besides, if you don't forgive me, I won't tell you where Andrew is.

I tried to snap out of it, to rage and to scream at him at that. I didn't know what he meant, but it sounded ominous and his tone betrayed his knowledge. I tried to fight him, but he was rising in my body and I was helpless. As he took me over, I saw again the blonde man in a whirl of snow under stars and trees, his chin covered in blood. I groaned and turned my face into the bed. I was disgusted with myself and him, but I wanted it to happen. I saw the familiar blackness, and then felt the grass of the meadow between my fingers.

Sweet dreams, my beloved.

Amyas.

******(The next section is part of the concluding section to the novel)******

I opened my eyes.

I saw the bed, the dressing table and the bleak light coming from the windows. I ran my hands over my body, shuddering as my fingertips traced the scratches I had made on my stomach and the intense heat of the blood as the skin swelled and screamed and attempted to heal itself. I could hear the skin merging together and the thunder of my heartbeat as the blood clotted and all the little voices spoke at once.

I went to the window. I liked the feel of the breeze on my skin and how it made the scratches tingle. I pressed my wrist to my lips and sucked on it as I looked at the stars, tracing my favourite constellations.

I always loved the stars.

I thought of Amyas and the meadow. I felt him dreaming, stirring on the edge of my sight. He was there but not visible. His panic over you, Andrew, was like a tempest. It pulled at me and arranged me in his image. I felt the rush of sympathy and remorse and hatred and it made me buckle against the window, my hand splayed against the cold glass. It was an enormous headache. It made my whole body feel heavy and wretched and unknown.

He was always too soft and delicious.

That's why, Andrew, I couldn't resist him, and you couldn't resist him and everybody else couldn't resist him. I am not completely to blame for his vulnerability. If anything, I made him stronger. I made him better and more rounded.

You know it. I know you do. If I had a name, you would have called it every time I took you to bed. You would have written my name in the fog on windows, and then wiped it away so no one else could see. I always admired your capacity for jealousy. We're not so very different, you and I.

I went away from the window and pulled on some clothes, enjoying the sensation as the scratches rubbed. I wanted to feel you, Andrew. I wanted you there in my arms while Amyas slept. I

wanted to cheat on him with you, because he would never have known. Not then at least. Now the walls between us are thin, but before, I could do what I wanted.

There were so many things I hid from him, but that night when I took over him more completely than I ever had before. That was when it started to unravel.

Autumn always smells of burning. Have you ever noticed that, Andrew? Did you say once that it was your favourite season because you liked the colours? I knew something wasn't right as soon as I got outside and smelled the air.

As I walked, I was hungry and pining for you. I hadn't really known where you were. I had just said that to antagonise Amyas, but I knew that something was wrong. The atmosphere of the world seemed heavier, and I swear that I could smell jasmine on the air as I made my way to hospital, although there was nothing around but the bare, wiry trees. The scent stirred something inside of me, and I felt Amyas shift with discomfort, as if he was beside me having a nightmare. I pushed him away from my consciousness, feeling a pang when the scent suddenly disappeared.

I stopped walking and looked around, wary. The orange street lights did little to illuminate the shadows between the houses, and I could have sworn for a moment that multitude of eyes had blinked at me and then vanished. I shuddered. Fear is not something I'm accustomed to. I nourish it and care for it, but I don't take it in. I turned away from the shadows and rolled up my sleeve and sucked on the wound again, pausing only a moment to swallow the blood before I entered the hospital.

I slipped in amongst a throng of people surrounding a girl with a bloodied wrist. The noise and the throb of people set my teeth on edge, but I pulled up my hood, and vanished amongst the swarm. I slipped past everybody like a shadow as the doctors and nurses whizzed backwards and forwards over the squeaking floors. The scent of blood was powerful. I resisted the urge to touch myself every time.

I want it so badly, Andrew.

I always have.

My hunger as I sit with Amyas in this fetid room is deep, sensuous and weakening. I want it to go on, even though I know that my body is failing and some magic is uncoiling and weaving into my human tissue. It is a slow and painful process. Amyas's body is racked with pain and everything is starting to change for him. He hates it and fears it, but I love it. He isn't clever enough to understand what it means yet, and I'm not going to tell him. I want to stand over him when it finally begins to take hold and laugh in his face and just holler at him; "This is what you wanted, you fucking weakling! This is what you craved and treasured when all of the world split apart. This is what I wanted for you all along!"

I went quietly into her room and closed the door, pinning myself to the wall. My eyes adjusted to the darkness. She was sleeping propped upright in the middle of the bed, wired to a machine that purred and hummed beside her, flashing little green lights on the walls and ceiling. There was a small lamp on the table beside her bed and a book and a pair of glasses. I paused for a moment, taking in every tiny detail. The blinds were open and the heavens were full. I resisted the urge to draw towards the glass and press my face against it. Instead I glided over to her bedside and stood there watching the rise and fall of her chest.

I remembered her when she was beautiful. I remembered her, naked against the sheets of Amyas's bed. Her stomach and thighs were scarred and jagged against my fingers, but the insides of her arms and her hands were soft and unblemished. I liked those most of all. Now she was a woman of sticks, brittle against the pillows. Her neck and her wrist were bandaged, and her mouth sagged as she slept. Her breath rattled in her chest as if it didn't want to come out.

I sat down on the edge of the bed, and wrapped my fingers around her wrist. She moved a little and murmured, but she didn't wake up. I felt the flare of hunger rise in me again. My teeth and gums ached as I lifted her wrist to my mouth and bit into the bandage, and twisted it. The dressing was stained yellow, but it didn't matter to me. The scab was weak, and crumbled on my tongue as I pried away the dressing and bit down on the flesh. I felt the gentle flowing of blood against my lips as I massaged the wound with my tongue. My fingers rubbed and squeezed at her arm encouraging the

blood to flow. I lost myself as I chewed and tore at the wound, and she flailed against me when she awoke with a startled cry.

I didn't stop feeding. I held her wrist in my mouth as her face changed from surprise to warm, teasing satisfaction. She reached out with her other hand and pushed the hair back from my face, watching with fascination as I went on sucking her blood. Her heartbeat quickened. I could feel it against my lips. Her hands were coiling tight around my hair, pulling at it and making my scalp tingle.

I let her go and turned my face away as she pressed her wrist to her stomach. I was dizzy with the sensation and my own thundering heartbeat. I licked my lips. For the moment, I was alive.

"I knew you would come and find me again," she said, her voice thick, her breathing coming in gasps. "I knew that you wouldn't be able to resist it."

I wanted to do her violence. I hated the satisfaction of her tone.

"You don't know me at all," I said quietly. A tremor went through her, but she was defiant.

"I knew that it wouldn't be long," she said. "I knew as soon as I got Amyas, and he realised how sick I was, it wouldn't be long until you appeared, if only to say goodbye."

I tilted my head back and laughed.

"I didn't come here to say goodbye, you miserable bitch. I came here because you were vulnerable." I leaned closer to her so our eyes were level. "I came here because I can kill you and no one will notice."

She shrank back into the pillows and touched the bandage on her throat.

"He didn't like that you'd bitten me. How do you know he won't stop you again?"

"You're talking like he's still in there." I said. "Maybe we've switched places. Maybe this is who I am now. Maybe, you hurt him for the last time."

I rolled up my sleeve and showed her the wound. She turned her face into the pillows.

"I only did it for you," she said.

"I doubt it, mother. I doubt it very much," I said.

"I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that."

"Why not, mother? Isn't it what you want?"

"You sound too much like him."

"It's his fucking voice, mother."

"Don't even mention him."

"He's your son."

She bolted upright in the bed and glared at me. I felt as Amyas had a thousand times before I had moved in him and took him over. I felt like I was looking at death. I felt like I was watching myself die.

"There is just you," she whispered. "That's all that matters to me now."

"What do you think my being here means?" I said, snapping at her, pulling close to her on the bed. "It's not about a reunion or a quick danger fuck while you're dying. What do you think it really means?"

She shook her head.

"I don't want to talk about it if you're going to drag him into it."

"We need to talk about this, mother, right now. It's all I'm interested in."

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because you're dying," I said. I smiled. "And because I want to ask you something. I want to ask you what it's like to have a baby you didn't really want."

She looked at me. For a moment, there was a dull flash of pain in her eyes and her body went rigid. I pulled closer to her, my face inches away from hers. I leered at her, and ran my hand through my hair, holding it taut in front of her eyes.

"I want to know about the blonde-haired man."

"I don't know who you mean."

"Lying cow," I hissed.

Her hand stretched across her stomach. Her bones stuck out under her nightdress at odd angles as if she was filled with broken glass. Her lips were trembling. She massaged her stomach and then looked up at me.

"The cancer started in my womb," she said. "I remember thinking I was pregnant again, and that Amyas was in there, wrapping himself around my insides. The pain was exactly the same."

She looked up at me. "They took my womb away, but it was too late. The cancer had spread, and even now, I feel like I'm pregnant. It feels like Amyas is in me, and not here. Not here in front of me, and buried somewhere behind your eyes."

She pulled her knees up to her chest and rested her head on them. The light from the windows cast long orange streaks across her face and the bed. I had a flash inside my head of lines of blood, and I felt Amyas tremble.

"Lines of blood in snow," I said. I saw her flinch as if I was going to hit her. "And a blonde man with blood on his lips. He's the stuff of Amyas's nightmares. I want you to tell me what it means."

She closed her eyes and shook her head over and over again. It made me violent, her distress. I hated it.

"Tell me what it means," I growled. She went loose beneath me, and I felt the heat and the warmth surround me and the acrid, putrid smell that made me stagger backwards off the bed. She had pissed herself. I could see the stain swelling around her. She started to cry.

"There's no way you were there then!" she howled, her voice distorted with her sobbing, "He was just a baby. He won't remember what happened."

I shook my head. "I was always there," I said. "It's probably only because of me that he does remember. I need to hear you say it. I need to understand it."

She went on crying, her teeth clenched and her fists boring into the sides of her head. I pulled her up off the bed. I gagged as the smell of stale piss hit me and I gagged. She didn't fight me. She didn't care anymore.

"You're dying, you stupid bitch. Tell me, or I'll keep you alive. I won't let you die until you spill your fucking guts all over this room. What did you do?"

"I gave him away," she cried.

I pulled her up further off the bed. Her eyes rolled in her head.

"What?" I shouted.

"I gave him away." She said, her lips trembling.

Her breath was rasping. I put her back on the bed and propped her against the pillows. She was trembling, almost convulsing. Her heart was hammering against her ribs. The lines connected to the machine had come out, and I forced them back into her. She cried out when I did it, and I watched the ribbons of blood come streaking down the inside of her arm.

"I didn't want to live when he was born," she said. "I didn't want to do it on my own. It hurt me so much as he grew up to see how much he looked like his father. I couldn't stand it."

"I don't believe that," I said, "not when you started coming for your little visits. You were looking for something familiar."

She swallowed hard and closed her eyes.

"You're a lot more like him than Amyas is," she said. "You're twisted, and handsome, and devious. Amyas is soft. He's the broken one. I never dreamed that what I did would spurn the two of you in that body. I had no idea."

She leaned back against the pillows and cradled her stomach again.

"I didn't sleep. I couldn't eat. Amyas used to cry all the time. All he wanted was to be held, but I couldn't do it. I didn't love him at all. He disgusted me. It got too much."

"When he was about three months old, he messed himself badly. It was everywhere. I dipped him in the sink and scrubbed him so hard, his skin bled. I wanted to hold him under the water. I couldn't stand the noise."

I stared at her. Her hands were twisting at her nightdress, clawing at it as if she couldn't stand to have it touching her.

"It all became clear in my mind then," she said. "I needed to get rid of him. It was going to kill me to keep him. I would hide him somewhere, and maybe someone else would find him or maybe he'd die. I was desperate, hoping beyond hope when I went down the stairs to the front door with Amyas in a blanket that I would find his father on the doorstep, and that he would stop me. I couldn't stand to be on my own with him. It felt like I was being punished."

"He was a baby," I said, quietly. I was surprised at myself for speaking at all. It was as if Amyas had stood up inside of me, and was shaping my brain and my heart in response to her. I was struggling with listening to her pain, but I was hooked in.

It was unusual for me, Andrew, to think of myself and Amyas as parts of a unified whole. I tried to define us. I tried to keep us distinct, but listening to her talk about him like that, I was grieved.

A small sad smile lifted her face.

"I know he was just a baby, but you don't know what it's like," she said. "It's completely different for men. You can just pass from one woman to another. We're the ones who have to deal with the consequences. We're the ones who bring up the children that you don't even think about."

I didn't say anything. She looked away.

"I didn't want Amyas by myself. In my head, if it was ever going to happen, if I was ever going to have children, I was going to have someone there with me. I couldn't face it on my own. When I opened the door that night, and Amyas's father wasn't there, as I had dreamed he would be, it strengthened my resolve. I slammed the door behind me, and walked through the snow to the park that backed onto our street. It went on for miles did that park. It was a hopeless thing for me to do to Amyas. I knew that no one would find him there until it was too late."

"I went out in my slippers, and pushed through the trees; shaking the snow off the branches and feeling them scratch at my bare arms and legs. It was so dark, even with the snow, and after a few minutes walking, I came out of the press of trees to a little hilltop amongst an outcropping of sheer rocks."

She stopped and smiled wistfully. I wanted to shake her, but then she touched my hand. I stared at it in amazement.

"The sky was full of stars," she whispered. "I had never seen so many. I stood with Amyas in my arms. He was damp in my arms, and very warm despite the cold, and I like to think he was looking at them with me, but maybe it was you. I don't know."

I shrugged my shoulders and looked away. I didn't know, but I was stirred that she remembered my affection for the stars.

"I started to cry," she said, "stupid really. I thought for a minute about turning back, and just trying to make the best of it. It was what everyone had told me to do, but I couldn't. I knew in a few days, maybe weeks, we would be exactly where we were now. Maybe it would be worse. Maybe we wouldn't get this far."

She sniffled and covered my hand with her own. I didn't like the feel of her fingers, clasping at mine, but I endured it.

"I put Amyas under the trees by the edge of the rocks. He began to whimper as soon as I put him down, and his cries echoed around the clearing. I remember pressing my hands to my ears and staring off into the trees. Then I saw something move."

I glanced up at her. She was transfixed, staring forwards.

"I saw something move in the dark, and the gleam of something that looked like eyes. I moved into the trees, leaving Amyas behind me. I wanted to see if there was anyone there. If anyone had seen what I'd done. I heard something move behind me, and then Amyas fell silent."

She pressed her hand to her lips.

"It was horrible, hearing him crying and then nothing. I fell over in the rush to get back to him, but he was gone. Only his blanket, damp with blood and snow remained."

She wiped her cheeks, and then leaned over and took me by the shoulders. I moved with her, weakened, and turned to face her. She was studying my face, taking in every detail as if she was

seeing me for the first time, and then she let go. She composed herself amongst the pillows and sat collected with her hands in her lap, silent and staring out of the window again.

"What happened?" I said. My voice seemed loud, obtrusive against her silence. She shook her head, but didn't look at me.

"I don't know if I can tell you," she said at last.

I crawled beside her and put my head on the pillows and looked up at her. She looked down at me, down the length of my body. She wiped her eyes again.

"I like to think that I dreamed it all," she said, lying down beside me and putting her arm across my chest. "I like to think I didn't go out that night and leave him there. I like to think that it was a dream so what came next could be a part of the dream too."

She held onto me tightly, and I reached up and kissed her on the cheek. She smiled and then became grave again.

"I started screaming," she said. "I'd never made a sound like that before, and I don't think I have since. I was beside myself. I regretted everything instantly, but I was also relieved. I thought I had got away with it, but I didn't want it to be like this. I thought over and over that there were a hundred things I could have done instead, but it was too late. Amyas was gone."

She moved in the bed and pressed her cheek against mine, then pressed her lips to the back of my neck. The movement of her lips as she spoke sent a shiver through my skin.

"I went home and got into bed. I lay there in my wet clothes and slippers, shivering, imagining that I could hear Amyas crying, but there was nothing there. There was just a scream of silence."

She kissed me again and I stirred and closed my eyes. Heat was rising in me. I could smell the blood on her throat and wrist.

"I saw the curtains billowing in a sudden breeze, and I saw a silhouette move in the light coming from outside. I didn't move. I lay there, expectant, waiting, as the figure moved and crawled under the sheets on my bed towards me, his shape moving up the bed deliberately slowly. I

remember how cold he was, like he had crawled out of the snow, and his nails were sharp as he ran his fingers up the insides of my thighs and across my stomach, up to my breasts and my throat. I moved with him as he touched me. I had never known anything like it."

She moaned quietly, and kissed me on the lips, her tongue finding mine. I returned the heat of her desire, and then gently pushed her back. Her hand crawled down my body to my groin, and clasped it, stroking me gently. I turned my face towards her.

"Not yet," I whispered. "Tell me first. Tell me what happened, and then I'll do whatever you want."

Her face hovered above mine. Slowly, she lowered her wrist to my lips again, holding it in place as I sucked again at her wound.

"He lifted me off the bed and held me close to him. I clung to his hair, traced the shape of his eyes and lips in my fingers. His skin and hair were so white in the dark. He had me in his power. I could do nothing against him as he drove into me, lifting me as he did it and pushing his face into my neck. There was a flash of pain as he moved in me and bit lightly into my throat, but it was wonderful. I moved with the shock of it, listening to him lick and swallow at my blood as we moved together."

"'You didn't want him did you?' he whispered to me. I felt a chill run the full length of my body as he laid me down and continued kissing me, holding my wrists as he pressed his face into my neck again."

"'No, no, I didn't.' I whispered as he bit me again, this time more vicious than the first. I could feel him biting and tearing at the skin, pressing me down into the bed with his weight, holding me down."

"He licked at the blood again, but this time I was afraid. The spell had been broken. I struggled beneath him and he started to laugh quietly. It was a horrible sound. I felt like I had heard it before. It surrounded me and stopped me breathing. He lifted his head and glared down into my

face. His eyes gleamed like an animal's in the dark and I knew I was trembling. He placed a hand over my mouth and squeezed my face."

"He belongs to me," he said. "He's my son now."

"What have you done to him?" I asked. I knew then that this being, this cold man, was the shadow I had seen in the trees. I knew that I had heard him laughing. I knew that he had been watching me."

"He sat up and wiped his lips and sat kneeling on the bed in front of me, looking into my face. I wanted to hide. I wanted to scream, but I was frozen as if he was holding me down. I could feel the heat of the blood as it poured down my neck onto my chest."

"Nothing," he said at last. "Nothing, pretend it was all a dream."

"He leaned over me again, his breath hot in my face. 'One day, he will be as I am.'"

"And then he was gone. I got out of bed, and ran to Amyas's room, and found him there in his cot, sleeping soundly. I touched him timidly, watching him move in his sleep. I couldn't believe that he was there. I lifted the blanket and looked at where I had rubbed him raw and saw that the skin was healed, but very warm when I touched it, as if it pulsed with new life. I fell against the bars of his cot, my legs giving out from under me as I stared at him, watching his little chest rise and fall. He never cried that night, or any night ever again. From that moment until he could talk, he never made a sound."

She moved her wrist away from my mouth. She was tired, and struggling. The machine beside her was flashing brighter. She tried to take hold of my face, but it was as if her body was fighting against her. She collapsed onto the bed, and I moved her onto her back and spread her arms in her lap. Her eyelids drooped, and her head nodded, but she was trying to speak. My mouth was streaked with her blood.

"Tell Amyas," she said, "tell him that I didn't mean for it go so far. Tell him I'm sorry that I let it happen."

I leaned over and took her hand, shocked by the tenderness of my own gesture. I held it to my lips and kissed it. She smiled up at me, and then shuddered.

"I don't know who that man was," she said, her voice hardly more than a breath. "Just when you appeared in Amyas, I recognised him. I wanted him again. I couldn't help myself. I've done so many terrible things."

I clasped her hand more tightly. I think it was hurting her, but there was a riot of feeling in me. Rage, hate, disgust, all coupled with affection and desire. It turned in me like a tide, and I was helpless as the tears ran down my cheeks. I could see all of her miserable life, and the misery passing into Amyas and the mystery keeping him an enigma that she simply could not get enough of. The story was of abuse begetting abuse and over and over until we all died. It was maddening. When I cried, I felt ugly. I felt like Amyas had won.

"Why didn't you do anything about your illness?" I hissed through my tears.

"What illness?"

I turned my face back to the window. Every night after I had been with her, I had looked at the stars afterwards. They were as consistent as she was consistent and they couldn't change without being destroyed. I shook my head. She didn't understand. Of course she didn't. Even then, she didn't understand the extent of her abuse. She didn't understand her quiet madness and the impact of it all on her son, and on me. I didn't want to fight anymore.

"It doesn't matter," I said quietly.

I wanted to argue about the absurdity of it, how fucking blind she was. I wanted her to go to death fully aware of the damage she had done and how I was the culmination of all of her son's suffering. But I couldn't do it. She loved me and she hated him because I was everything she had wanted him to be. I was vicious. I matched her pain. I made her feel despised because she despised herself.

I got up from the bed, aware suddenly of the smell of the room and of her. There was the burning rot inside her and then the bleach and the hot water and the damp on the walls. I couldn't

stand it any longer. I wanted to do as Amyas had done and get her blood out of me. I wanted nothing more to do with her. She reached for me, but I pulled away, watching her as her hands hung in the air and she blinked at me with bleary eyes.

"I suffered, little boy. I never saw that man again. I know now that he left a mark on you and Amyas."

There was a flash in my head of the blonde man, leering at me. It was powerful. I was hungry for the image.

I shook my head. I could feel Amyas stirring.

"Shut up." I said. She looked forlorn and broken.

"You all leave me in the end," she said.

I slammed my fist into the side of my head and pulled at my hair. I knew that Amyas was waking up. I was at a loss. It hadn't gone to plan; not at all. I didn't know how it was going to end. Amyas was crawling all over me and I gritted my teeth and pushed against him, trapping him as if under glass.

"You don't know what you've done," I said. "You don't know what this all means."

She didn't respond. I wasn't sure if she could hear me. Amyas was scratching at my brain.

Where am I?

I pressed my hand across my forehead and staggered against the door, my hand fumbling to turn and open it. I thought I could see her, rising off the bed, the machine clattering beside her, the table falling over.

"You need to keep him safe," she was saying, her voice cracking with the effort. "Don't let him have him. Don't let him make him a monster."

I stopped dead at the door, feeling Amyas smoulder, as if in recognition of his mother's voice. He loathed her. It was him that forced me beside her bed as she strained to see me. She was covering her ears and murmuring. The machine beside her was frantic, as if it was calling for help. My boots crunched on her glasses as I edged closer to the bed.

I listened for the dull rasp of her breath. I pressed my hand against her forehead, and felt her stiffen, her little hands curling around mine and biting into the flesh with the weight of her convulsions. Over and over, she trembled on the bed. Her back arched, her mouth open with a growling, animal sound. I watched the spit drip down her chin and saw her dry eyes roll in her head. Her entire body curled up like a dead spider, her limbs contracting against her body as if pulled by strings. Her arms shifted gradually and fell beside her face and chest. Again came the stench of piss, and then a fouler, more pervasive smell.

I looked down at the spectacle, feeling Amyas looking at me as I had looked at him so many times over the distance of our consciousness. He didn't know what he was seeing. It was as if he was peering through a thick fog. He had never before tasted my terror, and it was bitter to him. It hurt him more than his own had ever, and it was making him weak. She wasn't breathing anymore.

And what a stain she had left upon the world.

Amyas had often thought, Andrew, that our mother didn't have a heart; that it was just some mechanism inside her. But I knew that she had a heart, and now, it wasn't beating. I reached down and touched her on the chest. Her flesh felt oily beneath my hand. My fingers traced the shapes I had once adored; her little collar bones and nipples, the slight indentation between her belly button and her hip bones. I imagined them as they were, and felt the grief swell, but I didn't want to look at it. I didn't want to feel anything for her body. I didn't want to think about the bag of bones I had entered again and again and again. She may as well have been dead all of those times we had fucked for all that it mattered now.

I pulled up the sheet and covered her with it. The sheet was stained and I could smell it even as I turned away from the bed and looked out of the window. I watched the trees wave against the clear sky.

Another scent entered the room, overwhelming the putrid smells of mortality. It was the same scent as before and it soothed me, as if I had opened the window onto a garden. It beckoned to me, but I was losing my grip. Amyas was rising, pulling at me to come back to him and return to my

rightful place. Although I didn't want to feel it, I know now that I was grieving for her, and it disgusts me.

I have never hated him more than I did then.

I didn't look at her again.

I held my breath, closed my eyes and opened the door. I fell into the corridor and slammed the door behind me. People stared at me, but I got up quickly and marched away. I could hear them talking to each other, and then the hurry of their footsteps as they walked into my mother's room. I didn't look back. I pulled up my hood, and ran into the undergrowth as fast as I could.

Amyas was unchained inside me, rattling around, trying to take hold. I could not subdue him. In my mind, he could see fragments of our mother's story, but not the whole picture. He was confused, and it made him furious. I felt a trickle of blood burst from my nose and down my face, but I ignored it as I fled further into the trees and collapsed on the soil, turning over on my back so I could see the stars. I was breathless and in pain. It was cold, and I ached everywhere. I leaned back studying the stars and felt Amyas pace inside of me, his hands up against the divide between our souls.

I'll break it down. I'll take everything from you.

"There's nothing to take," I said. "It's all yours anyway. I get it now. I really understand it."

What did you do to her?

"Nothing."

I felt it. I felt it as if was there. What did she tell you?

"Enough," I said. "Give it up, little boy. This is my time now."

Where's Andrew? Where is he?

I folded my arms. I was exhausted. I wanted it to be over.

"That, I do not know."

Amyas hammered against me, I closed my eyes, feeling myself slip away as he crawled in me, his weakness filling my fingers, my legs, everything. I felt like I was dreaming.

"You told me that you did."

Well, I lied. And I will keep on lying to protect you.

"Just tell me what you did with our mother."

There's nothing to tell, Amyas. I swear.

"I'll go back in. I'll make her tell me."

That's a stupid idea.

"Why?"

Because she's dead, Amyas.

Human Tissue: An exploration into how the Gothic and the vampire figure can be used as coping mechanisms for trauma.

Human Tissue is an epistolary novel which addresses living with mental illness and factors that can exacerbate the symptoms of mental illness. I wanted to explore the cycles of revictimisation, particularly in the context of female violence towards children and how stigmatisation of mental illness can lead to a lack of appropriate treatment. I also wanted to demonstrate how the Gothic and the vampire can be used as coping mechanisms for trauma and situate horror in reality as opposed to fantasy. I also intended to explore the idea of how people can be drawn to the Gothic and the Goth scene because they are suffering from mental health problems and are looking for a validation of their experience.

Human Tissue is about a young academic in the Gothic called Amyas, who through suffering abuse from his mother, has developed a mental illness known as dissociative identity disorder. Through Amyas's identification with the Gothic and the vampire figure, he develops coping mechanisms for his mental illness through simulations of vampiric behaviour which include biting and drinking blood. The novel consists of a number of letters written by Amyas to his estranged lover Andrew, in which he describes events from when he was growing up and the experience of living with his alter-ego, little brother. There are also some chapters in the novel written from the perspective of little brother.

Dissociative identity disorder is a complex coping mechanism for trauma which: 'occurs when the brain simply cannot handle the stimuli it is receiving and reality splits from consciousness in order to deal with the overload.' (Everett and Gallop, 2001: p. 63). The removal of Amyas's consciousness from reality leads to him developing a split-personality and the creation of his alter-ego that he names little brother: 'In extreme circumstances, dissociation interrupts identity formation, shattering the survivor into a number of personalities' (p. 65).

Despite little brother being an alter-ego, he exists constantly in Amyas's consciousness and makes him feel like he is watching or touching him: 'I shook my head and touched the bed where I thought the figure was, but the bed was empty.' (p. 5). The constant presence of little brother in Amyas's life is intended to emphasise the persistency of mental illness and how it impacts upon an individual's perception of themselves and the world around them.

The letters act as a confession that describe Amyas's experience of their time together and the difficulties of functioning with his mental illness while he was in a relationship. The letters also allow for little brother to emerge in the narrative and the contrast in his and Amyas's personalities to be portrayed through how they speak and perceive events in the story:

'Goodbye, my blessed one,

Amyas.

Amyas isn't the only one that resides in these writings.' (p. 31)

In this example, the epistolary form allows for little brother to comment upon events as Amyas does without disrupting the narrative and the action. A problem I had with earlier drafts of my story was finding a way to put little brother into the narrative. Previously, I had alternated between the narrative voices of Amyas and little brother so they both gave their sides of the story. Although this was helpful in showing the distinctions between their characters, the progression of the story was interrupted. The epistolary form, however, shows Amyas and little brother interacting with each other on the page and the power dynamic of their relationship that gradually shifts.

In my writing and research, I intended to address the idea that mental illness is not just something that happens to people, but is a product of environment, background, upbringing and experiences and that everybody's experience of a mental illness is different. The illness may be triggered by one event in particular, but how a particular individual responds to trauma and their symptoms is always unique. For example for Amyas, the creation of the little brother alter-ego is the product of his mother's exacerbation of his mental illness. Given the extent of the trauma Amyas

suffers, he has no choice but to retreat and let his little brother take over in order to survive: 'Every time my mother hurt me, he put me in the meadow and dealt with everything.'(p. 12)

I wanted, as I did with Amyas, to represent Amyas's mother's mental health problems honestly and as a product of circumstance and coping mechanisms. To do this, I researched the phenomenon of revictimisation and the psychology of female violence. In my story, Amyas's mother projects her own experiences of abuse onto Amyas:

'they [the mothers] are acting out, through their children's bodies, experiences which are too difficult to think about. What cannot be borne mentally becomes enacted through this sexualised violence.' (Motz, 2001: p. 56).

Through abuse and the pursuit of sexual gratification from Amyas's body, she encourages little brother to take over Amyas in order to deal with the trauma. However, by abusing Amyas, she gives little brother strength and effectively falls under his power, so that she begins to injure Amyas just so little brother can emerge: "'Make him come out," she said as my blood dripped onto the carpet and flowed between her grasping fingers. "Make him talk to me."'(p. 23)

This behaviour is a form of revictimisation. By abusing Amyas, she is encouraging the part of Amyas that most resembles her past abusers to emerge and abuse her: 'survivors appear actually to seek out certain situations where they are victimised in strikingly similar ways.' (Everett and Gallop, 2001: p. 67).

By showing the circumstances in which Amyas's mother became mentally ill, I intended to ask the question of whether an individual has a responsibility to seek help because of the impact a mental illness has on the people around them: 'She may well have been ill, but she also knew that she was ill, and even with that knowledge, she chose to do nothing about it.' (p. 15). This commentary foreshadows Amyas's fate in my story, as he does not seek appropriate help either because of the stigma surrounding his mental illness, which leads to revictimisation with his partner Andrew: 'In the absence of her own abusers, she became my abuser, and down the line, I suppose I became yours.'(p. 13)

However, as Amyas's feelings are coupled with his sense of remorse, the primary difference between Amyas and his mother's responses to their mental illnesses is emphasised: 'We should have been aborted. No one should have let my mother have children.' (p. 43). By showing Amyas's remorse, he embodies the lasting impact of untreated mental illness and its impact through cycles of revictimisation.

Little brother is essentially a personification of Amyas's mother's abuse and as such, effectively adopts all of the traits that Amyas is afraid of such as: lust, assertiveness and aggression. As the letters progress and become less eloquent and more vicious, they indicate that little brother is growing in strength until at last, he has enough strength to take over Amyas's body: 'I tried to fight him, but he was rising in my body and I was helpless.' (p. 47).

In order to deal with this new trauma, Amyas develops more harmful coping mechanisms to restore his agency over his body. These coping mechanisms include Amyas drinking blood from the wounds made by his mother and his little brother. These actions indicate Amyas's need to reassert his own agency:

'when a person feels they have lost control in all other situations, the act of self-injury may be one thing over which he or she can exert absolute control; it enables the individual to "do something"'. (Tantam and Huband, 2009: p.64).

However, Amyas's need to reassert agency becomes an addiction that can be likened to substance abuse because it soothes little brother and he has to do it over and over again: 'I sighed at the silky texture of the blood and the heat of it against my lips. It was bliss.' (p.42). I was particularly inspired to show how blood soothed Amyas and his little brother by researching the euphoria experienced by people with a mental illness when they turned to substances such as drugs or alcohol for reprieve: 'drug or alcohol abuse is a form of destructive self-nurturing, relieving in the short-term, overwhelming anxiety and stress.' (Kearney, 1998: p. 69).

As self-injury can be a continuation of past experiences, Amyas's behaviour is connected to the phenomenon of revictimisation and echoes his observations about how he became Andrew's abuser after his mother abused him:

'The various ways in which clients harm themselves become simply the extension of an abusive life, where survivors take on the role of the perpetrator no longer present.' (Everett and Gallop, 2001: p. 67).

Amyas's decision to self-injure represents the symptoms of dissociative identity disorder and the accompanying emotional numbness and confusion: 'some people who injure themselves experience the preceding dysphoria as diffuse and ill-defined, and so find it helpful to have a single wound on which to focus.' (45). It is therefore significant in my story that Amyas chooses to injure himself on the wrist, as that is usually where he is injured by his mother and little brother: 'scars may provide 'evidence' to the person themselves that they can endure and survive experiences (and resulting feelings) which seem unendurable.' (Arnold and Babiker, 2001: p. 30-31).

I wanted to challenge the stigma of scarring and self-injury both by showing the psychology behind it and Amyas's sense that he is taking back power over his body by self-injuring. I also wanted to show how the system treats the patient when dealing with self-injury can contribute to an exacerbation of mental illness and how stigmatisation affects people getting appropriate treatment both for their injuries and their mental illness.

I chose to do this by including a scene in my story where Amyas is treated by emergency staff when he goes to hospital after his mother has attacked him at his home. I found during my research that: 'Many staff working in this area feel that A&E is an inappropriate setting for "psychiatric emergencies" including self- injury' (Arnold and Babiker, 2001: p. 106) and that: 'The difficult life experiences and feelings which have given rise to the self-injury (and which might otherwise have evoked some understanding and sympathy from staff) may not be known or apparent.' (p. 107).

I show this difficulty in dealing with mental illness in A&E through Amyas attempting to be truthful about his injuries to a nurse, only to be met with frustration and disbelief because he is seen as a 'frequent offender' who is wasting hospital resources:

"What's the story this time?" The nurse said as she knelt in front of me and examined my arm.' (p. 33).

The attitude of the nurse and Amyas's subsequent discomfort reflects my research findings that many hospital staff feel that A&E is an unsuitable environment for treating mental illness and self-injury as the patient is presented without context: 'the same patient may present themselves for treatment repeatedly in which case staff can become frustrated and angry.' (Arnold and Babiker, 2001: p. 106).

However, Amyas's response to the treatment he receives from the nurse is to take responsibility for the injuries caused by his mother: 'if they want to think I made them, fine. It's easier than telling them it was her. They never believed that either.' (p. 45). This is indicative of how negative assertions surrounding mental illness and unsympathetic responses to symptoms can lead to an exacerbation of symptoms and a lack of appropriate treatment as the patient becomes unwilling to ask for help in the future.

In order to show the psychology behind self-injury and describe in detail the circumstances that led Amyas to self-injury, I read first-aid manuals and nurse's handbooks to research wound types and healing processes. I also read psychological case studies about survivors of child sexual abuse to understand the types of coping mechanisms they had constructed to deal with their abuse and the words they used to describe their experiences so that my portrayal of Amyas would be accurate and sympathetic.

My research into healing processes and the psychology behind self-injury was helpful when describing what Amyas sees and feels when he is injured by his mother, and also when he injures himself. I wanted to illustrate how numb Amyas is to injury by having him describe his injuries

objectively: 'The cut on my wrist was an old and familiar pain. The steady spurt of blood and the stinging of the flesh reminded me of a lullaby.'(p. 22)

This indifference reflects the symptoms of dissociative disorder described by patients, including feeling numb when experiencing traumatic stimuli and distancing themselves from the reality of the event. Amyas does nothing to resist his mother because he expects little brother to do something about it, therefore the comfort he finds in little brother and his coping mechanisms become weaknesses. This is shown in particular at the start of my story, when Amyas describes what he used to help himself when he was a little boy after his mother attacked him:

'There was a St. John's Ambulance manual of First Aid in the bookcase of our house, and it became my bible while I was growing up. Dettol and bandages made from old t-shirts became my saints, and my little brother became my God.' (p. 14)

I felt it appropriate to use Christian imagery here to emphasise the importance Amyas places upon the everyday objects he used to treat his injuries and also the lack of any immediate family who might have been able to help him. I also wanted to depict the ambivalent nature of little brother by having Amyas refer to him as a God. This is emphasised by the way little brother first appears in Amyas's life as a reprieve from his trauma:

'Don't worry, he said as I felt him settle inside my head. I can do this. I can make you feel like I am there with you. I won't ever leave you alone, Amyas.' (p. 11)

I wanted little brother to embody how mental illness has both positive and negative aspects. As he is a coping mechanism for trauma, his function is to protect Amyas from trauma and he does this again in the novel when Amyas's mother breaks into Amyas's house: 'When she came in, my brother heard her and woke me up quickly enough to catch a glimpse of her'(p. 22). Here, Amyas's dependency on little brother is shown, as well as the caring aspect of their relationship. However, the positive actions of little brother are contrasted throughout the story, representing the unpredictable nature of mental illness but also how sometimes it can harm an individual as much as help them. For example, little brother makes Amyas injure himself so he can build up his strength

through Amyas's trauma: 'He watched me with disdain and then pressed against me, forcing my hand to claw at the soft flesh of my belly.' (p. 45).

This contrast in little brother's behaviour shows how much Amyas depends upon his coping mechanisms to deal with reality, but also how much they damage him, leading him to engage in more extreme coping mechanisms such as self-injury and blood drinking in order to soothe his mental illness. This behaviour shows how Amyas's initial coping mechanism of dissociative identity disorder has become ineffective, and that he needs a new coping mechanism to deal with the trauma little brother is inflicting upon him. The epistolary form allows for these feelings to be established and traced back so the reader can see how Amyas changes in his behaviours because of his little brother as the novel progresses.

Overall, I wanted to use the conflict between Amyas and little brother to show the difficulties faced by people who self-injure and have mental health problems because of how they are treated by the system. I also wanted to show how this can have a detrimental effect upon self-perception and treatment and contribute to the cycle of revictimisation. This cycle is connected to a phenomenon I witnessed while being a member of the Goth scene where symptoms of mental illness are blamed upon an interest in the Gothic as opposed to a lack of appropriate treatment and support.

As Amyas is an academic in the Gothic and finds solace in the vampire figure, he embodies my research findings that people are attracted to the Gothic because it allows them to indulge in dark aspects of culture without being judged. For these people, the Gothic is a place where difficulties can be worked through and validated.

Oxford University researchers Rebecca Pearson and Lucy Bowes recently conducted a study into the Goth scene and found that 'Teenagers who identify as Goths have a three times higher risk of depression than non-goth peers' and also that 'Teenagers who are susceptible to depression or with a tendency to self-harm may be attracted to the Goth subculture which is known to embrace marginalised individuals,' (Bowes & Pearson, 2015).

These observations support my research that certain people are attracted to the Gothic because they find validation for their experience and provide evidence for a phenomenon I have experienced from being a member of the Goth scene. This was the perception from mainstream society that the Gothic and the Goth scene were contributory factors to mental illness.

Due to the stereotypical perception of the Gothic and the Goth scene encouraging melancholy and self-injury, the real cause for an individual's mental illness is scapegoated by the scene the individual is a part of. This leads to a lack of support for the mental illness, and can lead to an exacerbation of symptoms; reflective of the findings of Bowes and Pearson that Goth teenagers were more likely to self-harm. I have called this phenomenon the circle of fear, and feel that it reflects the failings of the system to effectively treat and diagnose mental illness.

I use the Gothic in my narrative to show what happens when the circle of fear is actualised and people become entangled in a cycle of mental suffering. This is connected to revictimisation, and the stigmatisation of mental illness.

In my story, the Gothic and the vampire are initially established as fantastical horrors, but are revealed to be as real and terrifying as Amyas's reality and something that he is eventually consumed by in the form of the character Adrian. In my novel extract Adrian is a character who overshadows Amyas's narrative and is revealed later in the story to be a vampire that Amyas has encountered before. Adrian is responsible for Amyas's imprisonment and torture, and embodies the vampire figure as an ideal image of aspiration, but also terror.

Amyas by simulating vampiric behaviour is demonstrating his reverence for the Gothic and how much he wants to escape to fantasy in order to deal with his reality. Later in the narrative, Amyas does become a vampire, but it is a painful experience which reflects the disintegration of his coping mechanisms and the Gothic becoming real and a source of trauma: 'The coming true of a dream, the discovery in the object world of what was at one time purely subjective, is actually more terrifying than the subjective experience itself.'(Homans, 1983: p.267).

By becoming the one thing he revered the most, my story shows how Amyas has been overwhelmed by the coping mechanisms he constructed himself due to a lack of appropriate external support, and is effectively punished for having a mental illness. This reflects the culture of stigmatisation that has grown up around mental illness and the consequences of there being a lack of intervention in cycles of abuse and revictimisation.

The themes about being consumed by coping mechanisms, being punished for your choices, and the use of the Gothic and the vampire to describe things that cannot be comprehended rationally are significant aspects of my story which connects it to other books I have read of similar genre and subject matter. In these novels, society, cultural stigmatisation and traumatic events are shown as being more horrifying than horror itself and show how elements of the Gothic can provide the tools for discussing these horrors openly.

Two novels which have particularly influenced the writing of *Human Tissue* are *Blackwood Farm* (Rice, 2003) and *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (Shriver, 2003).

In *Blackwood Farm*, a vampire called Quinn accounts the story of his human life and the existence of his spirit double who he has named Goblin. Goblin has the power to control parts of Quinn's body and interact with him physically and sexually, but when Quinn becomes a vampire, their relationship is disrupted and Goblin begins taking blood from Quinn in simulation of his vampiric behaviour.

I was inspired by the strength of Goblin's character in this novel, despite him being a spirit and not a physical being, and the fact that he could interact and stimulate feeling in Quinn. For example, Goblin, although identical in appearance to Quinn, is his polar opposite in terms of personality; like Amyas and little brother: 'As to Goblin's personality? His wishes? His temper? All this was wholly different in that he could be a perfect devil when it humiliated me and embarrassed me' (Rice, 2003: p. 137).

A key difference between my story and *Blackwood Farm* is the form that little brother and Goblin take. In *Blackwood Farm* it is revealed that Goblin is the ghost of Quinn's twin brother, who

died after he was born. In my story little brother is an alter-ego of Amyas, so they share the same body but are not two different people. There are similarities however in how Goblin and little brother have an impact on the bodies of Amyas and Quinn. Little brother and Goblin can both move parts of Amyas and Quinn's bodies for their own gratification: 'At one point he grabbed my left hand – I'm left-handed and he's right-handed – and he made me smear my cake all over my plate.' (Rice, 2003: p. 138). Amyas is also moved to violence by his little brother: 'I turned with you and forced you down onto the desk, enjoying the sound you made as I pressed down on your throat and leaned down into your face.' (p. 18)

The actions from Goblin and little brother emphasise their agency over Amyas and Quinn and how they are constantly aware of them. This is evident during Quinn's conversations with Goblin:

'You're afraid of me now,' he said, his lips moving sluggishly.

'Is that what you want?' I asked.' (Rice, 2003: p. 391)

And also when Amyas and little brother speak to each other:

"We don't do that to anyone, brother. You know it."

But I'm sick of her and I was hungry.' (p. 26)

Engaging in conversation with Goblin and little brother makes them into physical characters with agency as opposed to being figments of Amyas and Quinn's imaginations. Another aspect of showing how entwined little brother and Goblin are in Amyas's and Quinn's lives is their capacity to stimulate sexual feelings in the protagonists. In *Blackwood Farm*, Goblin physically touches Quinn to arouse him:

'Again, he came in for the kiss, and I felt his lips on mine... His hand went down between my legs. He ran his hand under my nightshirt.' (Rice, 2003: p. 391).

In my story, little brother moves parts of Amyas's body in order to seduce him: 'My arm moved of its own accord, and my hand pressed against my jeans and stroked.' (p. 5)

There are also parallels in how my story and *Blackwood Farm* employ the Gothic to explore the horrors of real experiences. The vampire is a constant theme in *Blackwood Farm* as Quinn is transformed into a vampire later in the text, and although Quinn sees his transformation as a curse, it is established as an ideal image: 'Human enough. Yes, I was pleased with it. I was magnificently pleased with it.' (Rice, 2003: p. 684). This description of the vampire as an ideal image is contrasted when Quinn is described as a vampire by his mother when he was with his twin in the womb: 'and they said he had given you all his blood in my womb, all his blood. You were like a vampire baby drinking his blood!' (Rice, 2003: p. 738).

The vampire is evoked similarly in my story when little brother attacks his mother while in control of Amyas's body:

'I knelt down beside her and reached for her. She stared at me petrified.

"Are those teeth marks?" I whispered, staring at the bruises on her throat.' (p. 25).

The vampire is also depicted ambivalently in terms of the character Adrian, who Amyas has fallen in love with and finds attractive, but who subjects Amyas to starvation and imprisonment. The contrast of the vampire as both a negative and positive image of identification emphasises how the Gothic is used to describe and deal with instances in reality. By using the vampire to describe the actions of baby Quinn in the womb and the actions of little brother when he attacks Amyas's mother, the extreme nature of reality is described. With the vampire as a metaphor to describe these instances, reality is depicted as being more horrific than horror itself.

We Need To Talk About Kevin in contrast to *Blackwood Farm*, and my own story is not a Gothic text. However, its epistolary format is similar to my own work and it also adopts the Gothic to address the horrors of the everyday in order to try and deal with traumatic experience.

We Need To Talk About Kevin consists of a series of letters from Eva to her estranged husband about her life and reflections after their son has murdered some students at his school in a Columbine-style massacre. It inspired me to write an epistolary novel, as the foreshadowing and the use of hindsight was effective in involving the reader and giving the story an undertone of misery

and regret: 'As the papers would be so fond of observing sixteen years later, Kevin had everything.'
(Shriver, 2005: p. 106).

I used this technique, as well as the direct address to the character intended to read the letters, as it conveyed intimacy and gave the impression there was a conversation going on: 'He did many things when he took me over, Andrew, and passed them off as my crimes, but I want to explain to you where he came from.'(p. 7). However, as there is never a response from the other character, the narrative can be perceived as unreliable and the reader is entirely dependent upon the narrative voice's version of events.

Another technique I have used from *We Need To Talk About Kevin* is the observation about events and people that have been formulated through hindsight. The narration of events and the mapping out of developments help characterise the protagonist. The descriptions also give a confessional element to the letters as they are intended to be read by characters who the protagonist has been intimate with, so there is a level of honesty that would not be clear if they were talking to a stranger:

'You were just desperate to throw yourself into this parenting business, weren't you? To plunge from a cliff, to pitch yourself on the pyre. Was our life together that unbearable to you, that bleak?' (Shriver, 2005: p. 85).

The letters are essentially one side of an argument and this encourages the reader to gauge the other character's reaction and see things about the protagonist that they may not reveal willingly. I do this in my story when Amyas's mental health begins to deteriorate and the tone of his letters becomes more aggressive:

'I don't have the energy for being pleasant. I guess if I'm going to be honest with all this, as I set out to do, you need to see the deepness and expanse of my temper and of my despair.'
(p. 32)

Because there is no response from the other character within the body of the letter, the reader constructs an impression of the other character shaped by this one-sided interaction.

Furthermore, I was inspired in *We Need To Talk About Kevin* by its dissection and exploration of what makes people who they are and its reflections upon why they do the things they do. This was important to me in terms of discussing mental illness and coping mechanisms for trauma as I wanted to show what can trigger mental illness. Discussion of past events in *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and in my story grounds the negative stereotypes surrounding mental illness and see them as a reaction as opposed to something that just happens. For example, when Eva assesses her own and her son's behaviour in a cold, objective voice, she admits thoughts and feelings that she may not admit in conversation: 'There's no other way to say this. I threw him halfway across the nursery. He landed with a dull clang against the edge of the stainless steel changing table.' (Shriver, 2005: p. 229).

I use this technique when Amyas talks about his mother abusing him: 'She clasped me with her hand. Then her hand moved slowly up the inside of my leg and stroked the flesh.' (p. 10). The objective detail of the description in *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and my own work makes the image being described more powerful and harrowing because the abuse and violence is described honestly and without emotional engagement. This suggests a resigned attitude and dependency on coping mechanisms, and to an extent, a lack of understanding and emotional repression about the significance of what has happened.

We Need To Talk About Kevin utilises the Gothic by subtly describing horror and tabooed emotion through Eva's exhausted pleas for understanding. With suggestion and foreshadowing, and the construction of Kevin as an enigmatic anti-hero, a Gothic undercurrent is established and implied: 'Kevin is uncomfortable; the tiny clothing replicates the same constriction that he feels in his own skin.' (Shriver, 2005: p. 201).

I chose to construct little brother in a similar way to show the difference between his and Amyas's personalities, and also to demonstrate his capacity for violence in comparison to Amyas's gentleness and naivety:

"You won't hurt her, will you?"

He shook his head. *No, brother, I will never hurt her. Not unless she really deserves it.* (p. 12)

In conclusion, my story is an exploration into how the Gothic and the vampire figure can be used as coping mechanisms for trauma. By researching dissociative identity disorder, and tracing the circumstances that triggered Amyas's mental illness, I have shown how mental illness is a culmination of circumstances as opposed to a singular event. By giving Amyas's alter-ego a voice and allowing him to interact with Amyas as if he is a physical character, I have illustrated how it feels to have the illness, and how it can impact upon everyday life. Also, by researching female violence and revictimisation, I have shown through Amyas's mother the circumstances in which revictimisation can occur and the impact of child abuse upon mental health.

In addition, I have demonstrated through Amyas's interest in the Gothic and the simulation of vampiric behaviour how the Gothic and the vampire can be used as coping mechanisms for trauma, but also how stigmatisation of mental illness and a lack of appropriate help and diagnosis can exacerbate symptoms and lead to extreme coping behaviours such as self-injury and substance abuse.

Furthermore, I have addressed how I was inspired by the novel *Blackwood Farm* to construct little brother as the mirror image of Amyas who can physically affect Amyas through touch, conversation, and the stimulation of sexual feelings. I have also shown how *Blackwood Farm* uses the vampire image both as a positive image of identification and as a device to describe traumatic events in reality, which indicates the power of the Gothic as a coping mechanism for trauma.

Additionally, I have described how I was inspired to write an epistolary novel by reading *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and employing the writing techniques of the direct address, foreshadowing and commenting on events. I have also described how Shriver's construction of Kevin as an enigmatic anti-hero inspired me in the characterisation of little brother, and shown how objective and clinical description of traumatic events makes them more powerful.

Ultimately, my epistolary novel is a form of cathartic writing which fictionalises some events from my own life and has allowed me to explore certain traumatic experiences through a fictional protagonist. Through my research, in particular the psychology behind female violence, I have been

able to work through some personal trauma on the page and work to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and the construction of coping mechanisms both for myself and for others. My research has been extremely helpful in establishing in my own mind what can trigger mental illness and the difficulties surrounding treatment, and how in some families, cycles of revictimisation occurs with little intervention. It has allowed me to understand more completely the circumstances which have led to the development of mental illness in my own family and has made it easier to address these topics with an appropriate descriptive language at counselling.

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