

Anna's Room

By Lo-Arna Collins

Drops of blood fell on the dead grass, her head thumped and she felt something heavy around her lips. The sunlight warmed her hands that lay still and by her side. It was a pretty afternoon but there was nothing nice about it. She could hear music in the distance but it didn't even give her a slither of hope. The mad man was going to win, her body was numb, limp, had already given up the fight.

Her mind was the only part of her that remained active and alive; she thought back to a happier time in her existence. She experienced a series of flashes, all very dream like in quality and involved laughter. The laughing turned into hysteria as the images spun around and around in her head until finally she had to squeeze her eyes shut to stop it hurting her brain.

The music had stopped and all she heard was a chirping bird flying overhead, some flies buzzing around the pools of blood, a few landing on her hand she didn't even have the energy to shake them off. There was a light breeze blowing through her hair and it felt slightly cool on her face, she had no idea where the mad man had gone, should she be trying to plan her escape?

She lay there for what felt like an hour or more trying to work up the courage to move her limbs she wasn't even sure anymore of the extent of damage she had suffered at the hands of the mad man. She felt a single silent tear tumble down her dirty, bloody cheek. She was suddenly aware of sharp bits of dead grass stabbing into her back.

She wriggled a little and the pain was out of this world, she had never ever imagined so much pain could even be possible. She could not even conceive trying to move at all anymore, let alone actually heaving herself up and making a run for it. She realized, as she lay there trying to return her breathing to normal, that when she had tried to cry out in pain her lips had not moved and the sound had been muffled, she very slowly brought her shaky hand up to her lips and she felt rough stitching through her lips, her lips had been sealed shut, she tried to scream but it was just blocked by her lips.

Where the hell was the mad man?

As she heard footsteps crunching against the dead grass, her survival instinct kicked in and she sat up ignoring the burning fire of pain shooting through every inch of her body, she looked around dazed, but couldn't see anybody. There were a few random gum trees and not much else, she realized the music from earlier must have been from a passing car as she was definitely in the middle of nowhere. She had no idea how far the road even was from her, sound can carry a fair distance on a day like this, the car could have been a long while away. She realized with a small triumph the only part of her body restricted was her lips,

she put her hands on the ground- the blood on them was dried and cracking- and used them to power herself up, she stumbled a couple times on her unsteady feet, unsure of how long she had been immobile, she felt dizzy and put her palm to her forehead, she felt like she wasn't breathing properly, her nostrils didn't feel like enough.

She powered on trying not to think about anything besides safety, trying not to even think of how she would get and find that safety just tried to imagine the enormous relief it would bring her. That worked for a few minutes, and then fear and uncertainty crept into her like a cancer. What if at any moment whoever had done this to her jumped out at her and ended her existence? No chance to say goodbye to anybody, no chance to laugh again no chance to make amends, no chance for anything. The thought made her weak at the knees and she almost lost her footing, she considered lying down and waiting for death to find her but realized she couldn't do that to her loved ones. She had to fight, she'd rather die trying than lay down and wait for evil to consume her and snuff the life out of her.

She surveyed her surroundings once more, and took in some more details, trying to figure out her best way to escape. The sun was suddenly replaced with a grey, unforgiving sky and she shuddered and brought her hands to her upper arms as her flesh became covered in goose bumps, she rubbed her upper arms up and down and breathed out a long deep breath she didn't realize she had been holding, in fear and in anticipation.

Her top teeth clanged against her bottom teeth and she mentally prepared herself for what was coming. She pushed on and walked for what seemed forever, not really getting too far, the scene didn't seem to change and she started to wonder if she was actually getting anywhere at all. Was she going in circles? Was this a bad dream? Was the mad man sitting somewhere laughing at her?

The day seemed to get even darker until she could barely see a foot in front of her. She stumbled over loose sticks that kicked up and scratched her ankles. She decided to rest under a gum tree until first light. She shivered her way through the night, too cold to sleep, too shaken to relax or rest.

As soon as first light started to creep and spread across the sky, she shook herself out of her frozen crouch, taking time to slowly untangle each joint and muscle. Turning them in slow circles and pointing her toes down. She stood up, and ignoring her creaking bones she walked on. After half the morning passed, or at least felt that way, she came to a road. She wiped her sweaty brow and blew out a breath like a blow fish through her cheeks. She heard a plane over head, and used her hand as a visor to try to see it, it was nowhere to be seen the only evidence besides the noise was a fluffy line through the sky. There were also some random birds flying leisurely through the sky, dipping down and going back up again. It was actually

sort of peaceful out here in the middle of nowhere, she reflected. Different circumstances, less creepy circumstances and she might have actually liked it and explored a little more.

She walked on for a while longer, trying to ignore her dry mouth, so dry her tongue was stuck to the roof of her mouth and felt furry. It was becoming difficult to even swallow. After what seemed another hour or two, it was definitely mid-afternoon she came across an old abandoned cottage. It had a pretty looking rose garden out the front, which was still oddly maintained, the same couldn't be said for the cottage.

She could see it was once a beautiful home, probably very well maintained and loved at one stage. But this place had been empty for years by the looks of it, the porch was sunken in and the paint work had bubbled and flaked. It quite literally looked like at any moment, the entire house would just drop into the ground and break apart. Despite this, she found herself shuffling through the rusty old gate and towards the cottage. She paused, her foot in mid-air before deciding to push on and up onto the porch. Maybe there was an old bed she could lay on while it was dark; she should probably settle herself in for the night soon. She set her foot on the porch and sort of jumped up on it and cringed, waiting for it to all fall down around her. It didn't.

She gingerly stepped over the porch and made her way to the front door, the screen door was falling off and full of holes. She idly wondered how much time and money it would take to fix a place this far gone. Almost as soon as the thought came into her head it was gone. She looked around at the inside of the cottage, there were old pictures hanging loosely on either side of the hallway walls, some looked ready to drop on the floor. The furniture was old, probably back from the 50s or 60s. It looked like, people had been living here one minute and then up and left the next. There was even a TV guide opened next to an armchair. And what looked like a potato chip packet. The cottage smelt musty, she thought, as she made her way further inside. She stopped at the kitchen, there were some photos taped to the fridge, curiosity got the better of her and she moved closer to see who the people were in the pictures. There were several of a little girl with blonde curls and amazing green eyes she was wearing a pink coat and pretty denim skirt in one and laughing with her whole face. In another she was riding a bike with a proud smile, there was also one with a man, possibly her father. The same man was in another photo with a woman who had the same blonde curly hair and green eyes as the little girl, so obviously her mother. They looked so happy and close. There were no dates on any of the photos, she checked the back just to be sure, so she had no idea if these were taken recently or months or years before.

A noise made her jump and look in every direction ready for a fight. Nothing else happened. She

wondered back down the hall, and found the bathroom. There were dirty towels on the floor and the mirror dirty, for some reason she picked up one of the towels and wiped the mirror. She stared at her reflection. She noticed absently she looked like the woman on the fridge. Except dirtier, and sadder and more broken, empty. Maybe she is my sister, she wondered before shrugging and walking out again. She found the master bedroom and saw a big wedding portrait of the man and woman from the fridge. The bed covers were rumpled and the faintest blood drops speckled the sheet. She ran her hand along some of the blood spots and walked out of that room. She found the little girls room next; it was decorated with lovely bright wall art, with a sunny and warm yellow background. Her parents must have spent hours on this, she thought. She walked to the little girl's bed and saw a stuffed teddy tucked into the covers and resting against the pillow, he was brown and fluffy. She picked the teddy up and crushed him to her chest. He seemed oddly familiar, the entire place did. So maybe that was her sister on the fridge, maybe they were twins perhaps. Maybe that's why she wondered here of all places from where she started.

More banging, but where was it coming from. Still clutching the bear, she walked out of the little girls room but not before she caught some lettering on the door; Anna's room. Anna, pretty name. Didn't ring any bells. She walked on further, and came to a home office. The computer was whirring and there were bills scattered all over the desk. Bill Thompson, a couple also had the name Ellie Thompson. So that must be Bill and Ellie on the fridge and they must be Anna's parents. So where were they? And why was there house so neglected and they obviously had been living here not long before?

Then she saw it, a newspaper clipping. She skim read and learnt Bill and Ellie Thompson had tragically lost their 5 year old daughter, Anna in a horrific car crash. A car which Ellie Thompson had been driving. Feeling sick, she put the paper down and wondered outside. She vomited under an orange tree and then sat and pondered for a little. Another plane rumbling high up in the sky above her, jolted her out of her daze and she wondered back inside the house. More banging. She looked above her and realized it was coming from above, was there perhaps an attic of some sort in this cottage? Seemed unlikely but she searched for an entrance, if someone was up there she was determined to get answers. Where was she? Who lived here? Why did she look like Ellie Thompson? Were they related? Finally, she saw it, a ladder poking out from a man hole. How had she not noticed that before? She shakily climbed up and poked her head through the man hole at the top. A man was in there moving old furniture around, even older than what was downstairs.

"Oh..hell..hello I was hoping you could help me." She said in a hoarse and croaky voice.

He looked up at her with pain in his eyes and she realized they were wet eyes.

“Nobody can help you.” He said simply and turned his back.

This reaction stunned her and for several moments she remained silent.

“Do you know me?” She asked.

He didn’t answer just sighed.

She tried again.” I just need to know where I am, I woke up in a paddock and I’ve been trying to find a town or something. A man... or someone had left me out there and stitched my lips together, can you believe it?”

“No. And no one else would either. Go spin your little story elsewhere.” He waved her off.

Who did this guy think he was?

“Please, can I at least just use your phone?” She begged.

He looked up at her in wonder, and after a long silent stare nodded.

She went back down the ladder and went to search for the phone; she found it on a hallway cabinet a few steps from her. She picked it up and realized she couldn’t remember anyone’s number. Who could she call? Did she have a boyfriend? Best friend? Would anyone come rescue her from the middle of nowhere? Where was she?

She turned around to call out to the man upstairs to find out where exactly she was when she realized he was standing right behind her. He swallowed hard and then spoke, his hands in his pockets, the veins in his neck standing out.

“You usually call your sister in London.”

“I have a sister in London?” She asked, eyes wide.

“No, but you think you do.” He almost smiled.

“I’m sorry. I’m confused have we met?” she asked.

“Only about a million times.” He said dryly.

“Excuse me?”

“Oh we do this at least once a week.” He said casually.

“This?”

“You busting in here demanding to know where you are, telling me some mad man took you, you then ask for the phone after lecturing me for not caring and call your fake sister in London.”

She was speechless. This guy must be off the wall.

“What happened to Anna wasn’t your fault. You have to stop this nonsense.” His voice softened around Anna’s name and she could see the raw pain inside this man.

“Anna...the girl on the fridge.” She nodded, still not seeing what any of this had to do with her.

“Yes Eleanor. The girl on the fridge. You daughter.” He said impatiently.

“I don’t have a daughter.” She refused to believe him.

He stared at her for a few moments.

“Ok well I don’t actually know that for sure, I seem to have a mild case of amnesia right now but I’m fairly certain I don’t have a daughter. You wouldn’t forget something like that.”

“Most times no, but in extreme cases of grief and mental health problems as a result of that it’s entirely possible Ellie.”

She was silent.

“You were a good mum to her El, real good.” The man had softened towards her slightly.

She brought a hand up to her lips and felt the stitching.

“You did that the other night and then ran out of here. I was worried sick but knew you wouldn’t be far, and that in time you would come back and spin your kidnapper story again.”

She couldn’t say much she just dropped to the floor and rocked back and forth. She experienced a series of flashes, Anna, her and Anna, her and Anna and Bill, her husband.

She started sobbing uncontrollably.

“Bill.” She cried out.

He dropped beside her and wrapped his warm, strong arms around her.

“Ellie.” He cried and started sobbing.

“My little girl she’s gone.” She screamed, clutching his shirt and crying hysterically. He stroked her hair and cheeks and kissed her tears. He carried her to bed and tucked her in, kissing her forehead tenderly. And left the room to let her sleep.

Hours later, she woke to him standing over her with a pillow.

“Bill..” she said sleepily.

“It as to end El, I’m sorry.”

“What does? What are you on about?” She snapped, running her hands through her hair.

“In a few hours, I’ll lose you again you’ll run out there and believe you’ve been kidnapped again and it’s a cycle I don’t want to repeat anymore. I’m letting you go to be with Anna.”

Ellie scoffed.

“Say hi to her for me.” He said, advancing on her.

“Bill, don’t do this. I’m better now, honest I remember everything.”

“For now, once you stayed Ellie for three days I thought I had you back for good but you always retreat inside your head, and I can’t do it anymore.”

“Bill, don’t!” Ellie protested.

“Say good night.” He said soothingly, as the pillow swallowed up the moonlight streaming in through the window and replaced it with black, nothing but blackness.

Nothing but black, she chanted to herself as the pillow clutched forcefully by her husband snuffed the life out of her. I hope I see Anna soon, was her last thought.

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