

ENGLISH – LIKE A HOUSE ON FIRE CREATIVE PIECE

Surge

As you fold the hot roller onto the top of your head, your mind falls back to the cool sanctity of the pool, the plastic blue surface matching the vivid sky above, feeling the swirling, dancing rush of the whirlpool at its centre. It was only an hour ago that you and Anna had pulled poor, unsuspecting Chris into the whirlpool, savouring the instinctive swell of power that came over you as you watched him spin around helplessly, his puny limbs surrendering to the current below. Your eyes met your sister's across the water and a kind of unspoken acknowledgement passed between you both. As you stared at Anna, you knew that you weren't the only one enwrapped in a surge of sly, teeth-gritted pleasure at his protests. For once, you were both on the same page about something. This was your pool, and Chris had to learn.

It was unpleasantly warm inside the house, the fan doing nothing to relieve the humidity as it swivelled its head from side to side, stirring the thick air. A mushroom cloud of Love's Baby Soft enveloped the room, so that trying to breathe was like trying to inhale sweet, oozing honey. Still caught up in fantasy, you feel yourself unconsciously knock something off the top of the dresser. You glance down at the tube of bubblegum lip gloss lying on the floor and your daydream shatters into a thousand tiny pieces. You shake your head from side to side, reminding yourself to get a grip. 'Right', you thought. 'The Christmas photo.' Moving closer to the mirror, you carefully examine the fresh breakouts on your pointed chin, silently dreading what *she* would say when she saw them. You'd only been reminded so many times that as the eldest sister, it was your responsibility to make the family look presentable. You suddenly remember the skin tinted Clearasil she had given you for Christmas the year before, and fumble for it in the draw.

'Louise, *darling*, you really ought to do something about...those', she'd said in a sugary sweet voice, her cold, unblinking eyes making silent judgements as they moved up and down your face. The sudden flush of embarrassment filled your cheeks like hot, rising steam. She gave her signature smile, revealing a top row of immaculate teeth, glinting in the light like pointed, pearly daggers. 'That's why I bought you this' she said, handing over the bottle. You took it, feeling a sudden rush of shame for disappointing her.

At least you weren't fat like Anna. You were tall and thin; two attributes which guaranteed you regular praise from your mother. Your eyes move over to the sundresses that lay folded on the bed. You were both too old for them, but you were pretty confident that you'd be able to pull it off, hibiscus print and all. Anna was another matter. You could clearly imagine the look of disgust on her face when she realised she'd have to wear the pink and frilly sundress, the same one she'd had since she was nine. You smiled smugly to yourself. Where was Anna anyway? She'd embarrass everybody if she didn't show up soon. You shook the thought from your mind. Even if she was late, it wouldn't be completely without cause. It would be the perfect opportunity to show her up. Maybe your mother would let you sit next to her in the Christmas photo, her manicured hand resting protectively on your shoulder as if you were a prized jewel. It'd be better than the alternative, where those same talon-like nails would dig uncomfortably into your skin, sending the unmistakable message that there would be trouble later. Dread rushes over you like a dumping wave as you recognise the distinctive click-clack of her high heels on the kitchen tiles downstairs. You turn back to the mirror, carefully arranging tendrils of hair around your elongated face, remembering that the last time you'd worn it like this your mother had said it was *so pretty*. Reaching for the Clearasil, you give yourself an empty smile in the mirror before applying the peach coloured paste, trying to master the breath that suddenly falters in your throat.

It isn't long before Anna staggers into the bedroom, her face wrought with repressed anxiety. She's still wearing her bathers and water is dripping from her long, lank hair. The Clearasil is wiped from your mind as you wait in eager anticipation, knowing what's coming next. Even with your back to the door, you can feel Anna's terrified eyes hover over the bed where the sundresses are laid out.

'The sundresses?' she questioned. You revelled in the tone of dread in her voice.

'That's what she said.'

You glance at Anna's reflection in the mirror as she self-consciously adjusts the hideous shirring, trying to tuck in the disobedient skin that hangs over the edges. A smile creeps over your lips and the words spill out before you can think twice.

'It's just as well you have to wear a dress like a tent, anyway,' You kept your eyes glued to the mirror, your voice cool and casual, as if what you were about to say was something you'd announce over breakfast, 'because you're so *fat*.' Triumphant, you turn to face your sister, expecting a satisfying display of hysteria. Instead, she just stares at you, trying to mask her hurt beneath a calm exterior, but the tremble of the lip gives her away. That tiny, carefully controlled quiver rebounds and hits your chest like a bullet, filling you up with guilt. You try to force yourself to apologise, but your mouth is dry and the words refuse to come out. You blink your eyes in the opposite direction, trying to think of what to do, what you could possibly say. But nothing comes, nothing except the thought of that feeling of supremacy which you craved only a minute prior, that irresistible, venomous *surge*.