



PLURIPOTENT

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She lost her virginity last Friday and it was shit. It wasn't shit because it hurt, or because she was too high to remember why she she'd thought it a good idea to lie down except the stars looked prettier than she ever had seen.

It wasn't shit because she didn't wait to do it with someone she loved, or someone who she felt comfortable with, or even knew for that fact. Louise doesn't give a fuck about any of that bullshit. She has observed the so-called adult world for years and has no delusions regarding happy ever afters, movements of the Earth or any of that other crap. It was shit because he filmed it and he never said he would, and after she stood up she felt like a bit of his thing had fallen off and was still in there. No-one told her that happened. Perhaps it would come out later.

Too embarrassed to ask her sisters who would say if she's old enough to lie down and spread her legs then she should know these things, she spends the first three days in pain but like most things it subsides leaving a residual embarrassment and a lingering confusion. Also, a tiny little part of her, a much ignored, resented part keeps

repeating at random; you didn't even wait till you were thirteen. You threw it away on a cherry hooked closet junkie prick and even if you said no, he knew you meant yes because you wear whore all fucking over you like every other blood relation you know.

It was shit.

It's all shit.

Today she is thirteen and this morning her mum gave her a silver necklace with a heart on the end. She kissed her at the breakfast table and looked kind of teary. Tonight she will go home and act surprised at the bought cake and her older sisters will stand around bitching in the kitchen but they'll be nicer than usual which means they'll just be averagely disinterested. She keeps touching the necklace to make sure it is still there. She finds the feel of the cold metal underneath her shirt reassuring. All the way to school she scuffs her feet and it makes a gentle swooshing sound on the wet pavement.

The lead feeling in her spine gets more intense the nearer to school she gets until she feels her back must be stooping and people in the street are probably staring more than ever because she is obviously a total freak.

The three girls in 2C that said they're going to kick her head in and film it 'a la happy slap' for complete humiliation factor are standing by the school gate smoking. She swerves sharp left and wriggles her way into the middle of a bush. She doesn't feel the twigs scratching her legs and hands as she pushes in. Just now she is numb with cold and the heavy emptiness that sits inside her, growing ever larger by the day. She struggles to pull out a Regal that she'd stubbed earlier, she can smell the rich burnt metallic scent from her pocket and on her fingers as she lights it. It takes three matches to light the

half fag as her fingers are numb and look like raw chipolatas from the cold. On the third shaky strike she catches the blue flame and inhales savouring a fleeting victory.

If anyone stood far enough up the hill behind the school they would see smoke coming out the top of the bush. Nobody climbs up there except for at night to get fucked or every once a while after school for a fight. Her legs are covered in goose pimples. It's only October but it's freezing and she's still wearing summer clothes because the only winter coat she owns is a skanky duffle. Her physics teacher who everyone thinks is a total paedo has one like it. He took a class yesterday morning on how long it would take both a feather and a car, dropped at the same time, to hit the ground. She wanted to say that he should try weighing varying sizes of emptiness. She has an empty chasm in the middle of her chest, she imagines probably where her heart should be, and it grows heavier by the day. Nothing shifts it. Not throwing up. Not E's not speed, not smoking till she whiteys and feels she's left her body behind. She did that on the Friday after — after you know, she'd left him standing in the street wearing a non-committal smirk.

She'd never felt scared by her own anger before but for a second she wanted to take out the pen from his shirt pocket and stab him through the eye, stick it in real deep and twist and then walk away throwing over her shoulder a cool non committal smirk. She didn't. These are the fantasies that always come later. She replays them at leisure adding a flourish here, an extra cool cutting biting remark there — always she comes out on top, clear, concise and hard as fuck. Not like reality. Fuck.

She watches the girls going into class and sighs as that means she

better skip. She can see them already in the Home Ec department.

They arrange themselves on the tables with their shorter than short skirts, re-applying lipstick and glowering at poor Miss Henry who has a heavy moustache and the shadow of a beard. They posture and pose sticking their flat tits out and riding their skirts high as they can. They roll their eyes and look practise perfect bored, blasé, permanently unimpressed.

She pictures them walking in naked and licking each other out cos they all think they're so fucking amazing. Fucking cows. She will not live in fear. Avoidance is just a survival strategy, for now anyway. She shuffles backwards out of the bush and one long branch slaps her near her eye as she emerges back onto the path. She touches her face and there is a smidgeon of blood, a tiny shock of colour on an otherwise bleached out morning. The sky is white and the pavement is grey, the trees hold fragile bare twigs aloft, defiantly out of reach of the many hundreds of assorted youths pouring toward school.

She keeps her head down and nimbly picks her way through the crowd, pushing against the tide. Yeah on the Friday she had went and stood in the bus stop to come home and it had been raining and she'd smoked joint after joint till she couldn't feel the E anymore she just felt all her limbs turn into a big Angel Delight sogginess that crumpled her up until she lay on the floor of the bus stop staring along the road.

The road was slick and wet with rain and the streetlights were reflected in it like large orange shimmering alien orbs. Every time a car went by it sent a little tidal wave through the reflection distorting the orange light outwards yet it always contracted back to the original round shimmery shape. She felt already that she perhaps could distort her mind and body with chemicals as much as she chose but somehow

she would always have to come back to her original shape, self, reality. Fuck it. Was worth trying.

Like the rectangle guy, she doesn't know why they call him that but everyone knows he took too much and he never made it back. He got taken away after smashing up the bookies and trying to batter the garage windows in, they put him in the nuthouse. Now when he stops at the garage to say alright, everyone looks sorry for him but also kind of edgy cos they don't want to catch it. So they nod and then try and ignore him as they smoke themselves blind and shovel whatever they can afford down their throat or up their nose or into whatever receptacle it can be best absorbed. She doesn't like needles and her eldest sister lost her baby on the smack and she thinks smackheads are fucking boring anyway they just nod and sleep and doze cos they're all fucking zombies. Crackheads are the opposite with a demonic power and energy followed by a righteous all consuming paranoia.

It's all shit.

She has decided to go and skive at the river all day. First she is walking quickly to the garage so she can get ten fags, two packets of pickled onion Monster Munch for lunch and a bottle of cream soda. Those are three of her favourite things but lately a cardboardy taste has crept into even them.

The leaves on the forest floor are wet and soggy so she walks until she finds a flat tree trunk to sit on. It's wet also but she sits anyway and the damp seeps through her skirt quickly. She smokes three cigarettes in quick succession, double drawing each for a cheap and easy morning buzz. She wonders if she should stop now. During her homework tutorial on Tuesday she had gone online pretending to find

out stuff for class but really it was so she could look up the cellular development of the foetus.

As it turns out the drive for perfection is so ingrained within the human desire to form itself out of cells, into a functioning mammal that it begins in fact from the first embryonic instant. The heart that she feels beating now against her chest may in fact not be the first heart she, as a group of cells, manufactured. It may be the second or third or perhaps even fourth heart, the others, deemed not good enough or strong enough would have been discarded as the cells tried again and again to regroup into the strongest healthiest version of themselves possible. She is the result of the most perfect amalgamation those cells could muster.

Somehow she feels cheated. This is only because she cannot see her eyes are pretty and she may be somewhat plain compared to other people but she has an honest face and an athlete's shape. She feels ugly. Not good enough. Strives always for a more perfect version of herself. She understands this drive well. She continuously betters herself in subtle unobvious ways such as stopping biting her nails and giving up eating chocolate to clear her skin and to whittle down an already narrow waist even further. The drive for perfection must be contained, however. She doesn't want to end up like her middle sister, full of plastic and silicone and cows arse fat. Bleached blonde locks mixed with extensions from some poor fucker who had to sell their hair and all that still just leaving her looking like a badly-manufactured sick doll.

She feels her waist. Sticks her thumbs into the grooves of her jutting hip-bones and stares into the water which gurgles and races over a large stone, cleansing it again and again and again. She thinks

of the cells and how somehow, she had known straight away that they were there.

She thinks this must make her a cliché. Or a going-to-be cliché. A British statistic. Not the youngest though, not by quite a way. This is comforting.

It's not that she thinks it won't be hard as she knows it will and she will certainly have to hide it till after they can make her get rid. Probably she'll wait as long as she can, just to be safe. It's her body though. She was old enough to lie down and spread her legs and she knew it could happen. She doesn't feel like killing someone for her mistake because that would make her a murderess. She knows a fact like that would take the void in her heart and expand it to a vortex that would swallow her whole.

She will nourish the cells. She has kept the money she would have spent on hash and is going to buy folic acid. She researched this online. She will buy calcium next week and vitamin supplements the week after. She will stop eating coleslaw and mayonnaise. She doesn't want to lose hair like her mother said she did, or bone density, or teeth, or develop big ugly veins. She expects to get some of those silvery looking marks that still snake across her mother's hips and stomach, but she knows it won't be so bad because her skin is tight and will snap back like elastic.

It is day six now and the cells have the ability at this point to form virtually any type of cell found in the human body. These kind of stem cells that have the potential to develop into any of the cell type found in an adult organism are called Pluripotent. Her embryonic secret is Pluripotent. She rolls the word around in a whisper and it disappears through the whistle of the trees. The sun is dappling the

path now and she stretches her bare legs toward it. She wills the cells to strive for perfection. She says in her mind over and over, 'You can do it! Don't settle for less. I'll settle for less if you promise never ever to do so, not even from day one.' She thinks this is a fair deal.

She flicks a cigarette butt on the forest floor and resolves to quit after this pack. She sucks on each Monster Munch allowing the pickly goodness to penetrate each cheek producing a flood of saliva to wash away the acidic reflex. There is still an hour and ten minutes to go before the lunchtime bell will ring and she can go and hide in the school library and read up some more.

Somewhere in her throat the threat of tears presents itself as an angry persistent lump that keeps returning. She forces it back down.

It wasn't meant to be like this.

It's all shit.

Except the cells. The cells will not be shit. They will be perfect. Each and every atom. Each and every tiny striving fibre. Complete perfection. It gives her hope. It makes her smile.

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