

A Dainty Princess

What do you see in your reflection? Do you like yourself? I gaze into the depths of a mirror seeing breathtakingly beautiful bones hidden beneath a parasitic layer of fat that distorts and twists the frame of my body and leaves my poor, abused skeleton begging me to stop opening the fridge door. I hate myself. Only thing tears me away from that image, drags me through each empty day; the deliciously seductive voice inside my head - my mantra - "Everything I want to be, I am. Only buried under a layer of fat".

It seems like another life since I haven't felt an aching regret deep inside myself after surrendering to the intense temptation held within a biscuit. So long ago that I cannot completely remember it now and several months of my life are just a hazy blot on the pages of my memory. You lose all sense of time. And on days you are aware of life hurtling past your generously padded hips you're not alone, conversations take place within your mind where you sheepishly try and bargain for a slice of cake, unconditionally offering endless lifetimes of aerobics. But no matter what you offer, you will never win. She's a dominatrix, a dictator, a puppet-master, more powerful than any religious leader could ever hope to be. You will find yourself thrown against the floor, knees tucked tightly under your chin, screaming inside, cursing her to the deepest, darkest pit of damnation. You know that if your glutinous fingers wrap themselves around a stack of empty calories and force them past your tongue, they will not be making it to your thighs. As the gleaming porcelain of the bowl cools your forehead and you fight to breathe through the searing pain burning in the back of your throat she comes to you and curls words in your ear that promise a conditional reward of two less pounds on the scale, "For your troubles". I admit, I still feel compelled to pause and marvel at the pale lines in my skin against my natural olive tone; despite what she may say, the scars do show. Ana is untouchable. She can frivolously do you wrong and abuse you in any way she pleases for as soon as you witness the sharp curve of a hip bone jutting out through the soft fabric of

your skirt you will fill with such unconditional love for her that you will find yourself remorsefully apologising for every binge and refused exercise that would have got you here sooner. You thank her for deeming you pure enough to reward; even in your self-confessed utterly unworthy state. For all of this, I fondly christen her: Ana.

You may call it ignorance or vanity but I have tearfully justified to myself one million times that I am in the clutches of a genuine mental illness, and I firmly believe that this is true. An indescribable energy takes possession of your brain and controls you; ordering you to compare yourself to sickeningly emaciated stereotypes, to look in the mirror and see only the imperfections. You fear any confrontation where someone could look at you and think, “She’s not *that* skinny.”

Despite all this, the deadliest influence in my life is not the subconscious voice. There is another force that fuels the voice and has the power to push you to the furthest extremes of unhealthy: Pro-anorexia websites. These beastly sites become like oxygen to your energy-starved body. They tear you from your bleak, isolated world and embrace you in the most welcoming of hugs; a community infatuated with disorders and desperate to be free at the same time. Split views and confusion are just another symptom; simultaneously wanting to starve for five days and scrape every morsel of food from your kitchen cupboards provides quite the moral dilemma.

They say it consumes your whole life. Takes your friends, your education, your future but that is not the Ana. That is the work of the people who consider themselves to be affected by it. I continued to attend school for a month once I fell fully into her grip but the weight loss when you first begin fasting is so staggeringly inspirational that one month melts 15kg from your body. The school politely asked me to vacate their building, “For my own good” with a distinct undertone of “You are too great an insurance liability”. I experienced an initial bout of soul-crushing rejection and utter confusion as to how anyone could bear to send me away when I was so perfect, such a dainty little princess, so beautifully desirable as I floated through the air surrounding the other less-desirable people of the world. Upon reflection of this time, all I see are blurred, dog-eared images of days spent clutching my knees to my chest to cease the deep pain rumbling inside of me, as though

if I left this foetal position I would be torn in two by the aching emptiness. I remember duvets and dressing gowns whilst my sister wobbled past me in shorts and I remember the tempting serenity of a faint every time I stood. I was perfect. However, my demons always found a way into my perfect world. They chase you with their blood tests, force protein enriched milk down your throat and crush you with BMI readings as often as they possibly can. They speak bluntly at you using complicated medical terms but in this you will find solace, for the feeling of inclusion when they name a disorder is overwhelming. This is another of my predicaments. My first, and absolutely non-consensual, visit to the dietician's office left me with the label or EDNOS or *eating disorder not otherwise specified*. The crushing sensation of churning about in a life not otherwise specified can only drive one further into weight loss. For all the doctors try to tiptoe around triggers and well-known issues they cannot help you; they can drag your weight up above critically low but they cannot rid your brain of the disease. You believe there cannot possibly be a psychologist in this land who can understand what is happening to you, no matter what they say they have "seen before". Understanding comes only from living the daily life of a sufferer, feeling the pain and the dilemma between starve and binge.

I genuinely do wish that I could here insert a generic happy ending. But recovery is not something I have yet found, nor can I ever see myself finding. I have no strength to ask for any kind of help that I could actually benefit from. I have is a dietician that Ana can manipulate out of a meal plan in 3 seconds, a school guidance councillor who asks for weight-loss tips and a concerned mother, shouted down by Ana all too easily. Not forgetting the GP who examined at the outpourings of all my anguish and remarked "Oh, just scratches then." I cannot see how a single human could overcome, physically or mentally, a force so strong that it can have you purging your body of all nutrients only seconds after teasing you with the notion that you would be permitted to consume them. However, as masochistic as it sounds, I have a deep-rooted adoration for it. This may not be a fairytale "happily ever after" but to me the sense of control and the uniqueness anorexia provides my life with are what true happiness is composed of. I find myself with an insightfully warped view

of the world and I have Ana to thank for it, this can be done easily with only 100 calories a day, she tells me. Then I shall be a dainty, Ana princess.