

## **The scar**

Twenty-two she was when she slept deliberately with a man. They were both medical students and had met in the library. Raymond, a third year student, saw her first. He had watched Helen a while from opposite the table. Then went to her and touched her shoulder, 'can I help you to straighten that deep frown in your forehead?' He'd said. She'd awoken from her concentrated reading and smiled at him. They'd chatted a while and he'd given some advice on her thesis. Later they'd gone out together and became friends. She thought she had fallen in love with him and of course the day came they would go to bed together.

Having sex with a man was not new to Helen. She knew everything of skins glued together, the taste of male salt sweat on her lips, wiry brush cheeks rubbed against hers till they were sore and almost bleeding, the pressure of a hairy, stiff and big organ between her thighs and in her abdomen. But this time it had been different. She'd felt attracted towards him and was sure he desired her, just as much as she desired him. His smell of sweat and soap had been exciting; his skin was soft and not hairy at all. He was not heavy, but sweet and caring. He'd understood she needed more time. The first night they slept together in his bed they held each other without having sex. Although Helen was very mature, responsible and serious in the way she approached her study, her appearance was girlish. She had stopped growing when she was 15, her breasts were not developed, her menstruation only just started and she had no hips. But she had beautiful long brown hair and big hazel brown eyes. Ray had said to her, 'your eyes, I fell for your eyes.' Helen was happy; she had found a friend she could trust, who was patient and sweet.

The next morning they shared toast and tea between the sheets of his bed before she hurried to her lecture. The pathology course started at nine thirty and she arrived just in time. The dead body of an elderly man who had donated his organs to medical science had been brought in. Helen and five other students could finally start their practice on a real body. The professor said, 'we are going to operate on this man, make clean cuts, take out organs, examine the heart and aorta and rehearse the names of muscles and nerves. Helen, who had hardly slept the night before, felt excited and looked at the bulging figure under the green

sheet. The professor and his assistant, Margaret gave instructions. They started with the man's legs. The girl next to Helen, Amy, had to carry out a knee surgery, the others followed her movements. Helen's eyes wandered over the hairy legs of the man, but when she caught sight of his yellow toenails she lost concentration. Paul, another student had to perform a prostate operation while the others watched. The professor guided Paul through the process. Helen found herself staring at the dead man's genitals, thinking of the boy's penis she had taken in both her hands the previous night. How she had gently stroked and squeezed his testicles, soft as ripe figs. The memory of that night slowly changed back into the shrunk and sagged, hairy animal she saw between the legs of the dead body. That sight she realised she knew so well too, she had taken that penis into her hands, even her mouth, so many times silently on a secret dark night. Her screams of fear and pain were never heard and so, finally she'd got used to this hairy monster that visited her twice, three times a week.

The voices around Helen rose, she woke up from her muzzy state. The others were laughing and chatting, without a thought for the dead man. Who laid there, waiting to be stripped and cut to pieces, as a dead pig in a butcher shop. What about his family, his children? She wondered. Were they in mourning? Planning a day for the funeral, thinking of texts for the announcements, ads in the newspaper? Or was he an old bachelor not leaving a soul behind. Was he good man, a bad man? Helen got lost in her thoughts and had no clue what Paul was doing with the prostate.

When Paul was finished, Margaret, the assistant re-covered the legs and genitals and uncovered the middle part of the corpse. The professor looked at Helen with his grey eyes peering over his reading glasses. 'Helen, would you do the next task and remove the appendix?' She gathered herself together, nodded 'yes' and moved closer to the body. She touched the abdomen, her fingers moving over the dead skin in the direction of the appendix. Then she hit upon a scar, a ridge of skin, once roughly joined together with an unclean thread; it felt kind of familiar.

She used to press on this scar when she wanted him to move aside; when his body became too heavy on her; when she couldn't bear it anymore and was saturated with

disgust. She had always found the scar easily in the dark. The spot ached, it poked and itched in his side. Because of that wound his body had grown slightly crooked. The scar was a leftover of a war wound; he'd taken out the bullet himself in the trench. The bullet had ruined his appendix. After the war, surgery had cleaned up the whole area, but the scar and the pain had remained.

'Helen, that's the right place, so what do you do next to take out the appendix?'

'There is no appendix, sir,' she answered without lifting her eyes. The professor glanced at the dead man's notes and said, 'very good, how did you know?' Helen's fingers stroke the scar over and over again, without looking up, she whispered, 'I've touched this scar before.'

Then she fainted. The professor looked at his notes again, he asked, 'What's her last name?'

'Hook,' Margaret said.

'Mm, awkward.' he mumbled, 'Margaret, take her home, will you.'

They lifted Helen on a stretcher. But she soon started to come round again and Margaret helped her into her car and asked, 'where to?'

'I think you have to take me to my parent's place.' Helen said, numbly staring at the dashboard.

Helen had left home as soon as she was eighteen to live alone. She could no longer face the unseeing eyes of her mother or the sick obsession of her father. Three years ago she had seen mum and dad for the last time. They had spoken on the phone once in a while, but Helen had preferred to sever their relationship totally.

Her mother opened the door; she had become puffy and looked unhealthy. 'There you are, I rang you constantly last night,' her mother greeted her. Helen leaned heavily on Margaret's arm, feeling faint again. 'God, you look pale, so you know what's happened?' she went on.

'No', Helen shook her head.

'Your father died yesterday afternoon, car crash. He crossed the street, a young fellow drove through red.' She didn't show any emotion, just went on. 'I had no clue he'd donated his body to science, did you?'

'No.' Helen whispered. Margaret tightened her grip around her elbow and said, 'But Helen this is terrible.'

'Yes it's terrible,' her mother said, suddenly producing a tear.

'No, I mean it's terrible what happened this morning on the operation table,' Margaret said, confused.

'Helen, what happened this morning?' her mother asked without any warmth. Helen went inside. She felt stronger now; or rather she felt nothing. It was as if her arms and legs were torn off and her head belonged to another body. She fell into a chair and stared ahead. A heavy mist descended in front of her eyes. Her nose was blocked by the smell of rotten sperm. Her fingers still tingled from the memory of touching the scarred skin. Poisoned spiders infested her mouth. Her hearing and speech disappeared in the wounds of her so-called life.

Margaret said to her mother, 'It was your husband who was on the surgery table this morning.' Her mother gaped at her open-mouthed and turned to Helen. 'But Helen this is truly terrible,' she said, more out of sensation than loyalty.

'No it isn't,' Helen heard herself say with a flat voice that didn't seem to be hers. 'He's dead now and I can finally untangle the ropes he has tied around me. At last I can abandon my filthy body of long lost virginity. I'll call Raymond and ask if he can collect me. We were happy last night, in fact I was happy for the first time; I'll ask him if he will deflower me once more. He will help me to bury my unclean youth and to find dignity again.'