

Tophead and Weighthead

'If you love someone who makes you feel trapped, controlled, or manipulated, this wonderful book can set you free'.

Weighthead scanned the accreditations and turned the book a few times, before allowing a folded corner to open the page for her. This was her routine, almost every day, usually around midday, she would read for an hour or so before having a nap to reset. This tactic, she felt, enabled her to get on with things in the morning, while guarding her from the lure of ruminations before bedtime, which tempted insomnia.

I pay rent on this place, so I can be upset here if I want, she affirmed. And she took up where she left off the last day: reading about the discovery of neurotransmitters, of how they pass messages along an internal chain. Dopamine – linked to feelings of being rewarded, serotonin – associated with impulsivity and mood. Norepinephrine – memory and the fight or flight response. The parasympathetic, freezing reaction – driven by the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. She took her highlighter to this one.

She squeezed out a towel that was marinating in a dish of lavender-infused water and draped it across her face as she lay back. Feel how light you are, every part of the body floating and drifting. So light, so airy. Drifting, floating. Light.

Try to experience heat; summer, sun and heat on the beach. Some kind of experience of very strong heat. Heat in the right leg. Heat in the left leg. Heat in the right arm, heat in the left arm, heat in the right sole, heat in the left sole. Heat in the right palm, heat in the left palm. Heat in the right eye, heat in the left eye. The whole body is hot. The whole body is hot.

When Weighthead was a teenager, her parents fought all the time, they went to court too. Sometimes the guards were around. One of her aunts took to despising her for whatever reason, might have been because she was promiscuous or because they thought she took her father's side. One Christmas this aunt got the others expensive Nike tracksuits and gave Weighthead a bar of soap and a face towel.

She peeled the lavender towel off her face and flung it into the corner, which was the designated dirty laundry area, then she winced and twisted away from the pile. That morning the washing machine had reduced Weighthead's favourite jumper to a fifth of its original size. It had been a warm, soft, cashmere jumper with a cowl neck and long cuffs, bright, rusty orange. Like wearing a hug. Tap the body, hug the elbow, hug yourself, she'd say and she'd bring her arms and knees inside the jumper too sometimes. In her absent-mindedness she had set the washing machine to its regular forty degrees instead of a cold wash and the garment had been spoiled. She tried stretching it out by putting it on damp but only tore a hole in the armpit. She pulled at it from different angles and only succeeded in making more of a rag out of it. The softness was gone, it was felted, and wet.

Now waken the sensation of cold. Bitter cold. Remember the bitter cold in the winter. You walk in bare foot in the snow. On a very cold floor. On Ice. Awaken the sensation of cold in the feet, cold in the spine, cold in the hands, cold in the arms, cold in the knees, cold in the thighs, cold in the buttocks, cold in the head. Cold in the whole body. Cold in the whole body.

Weighthead was in a huge hall, which was completely dilapidated. The floorboards had warped and the walls were peeling. Around the side there were a few people that she knew vaguely as friends of friends. Everything was sand. There was a family of deer and the baby one nuzzled her hand. She saw a tower and Ray was trapped inside. She was supposed to help him but when she reached him, it wasn't a tower in a pasture, but a huge barge on a city canal. It was so big it tore the banks away as it moved along.

When she opened her eyes, Tophead was sitting near her slowly eating a bag of sultanas. She was rolling the shrivelled fruit in her hand, holding each one up to the light. Tophead took her phone from her coat pocket and typed, *is a grape a berry?* Grapes are considered a true berry because the entire pericarp is fleshy, she told Weighthead who was still half asleep.

Tophead was waiting for Weighthead to waken so that she could tell her about an incident. She sat there staring at the dancing flames on the screensaver of Weighthead's laptop.

Somewhere between the gate and the, main road, at a row of yellow-brick terraced houses, Tophead had heard the terrified, agonised scream of a woman. Four guttural cries of the kind that can't be ignored for fear of a murder taking place. And she had run into the housing estate and found the voices at the end of the terrace and with no time to loose she had banged as hard as she could on the door and the bruises formed on and around her knuckles and the muscle that controlled her little finger. She ran back and waited for the door to open and soon a young man swung out the door. He stood there panting and wide-eyed. Then the little fella ran out from behind him, rushing blindly out and into her arms, puffy-faced and heaving jolted sobs.

She had spent the rest of that day at the station giving a laboriously detailed statement to a woman with a bandaged hand in a grim and stuffy room with the words, *comfort suite* painted across the door. The comfort suite was strewn with stuffed animals, broken toys, fake plastic fruit and veg, a doll with matted hair, a cardboard picture book and some board games that looked old and incomplete. The women took her statement at a snail's pace, tapping out the words mostly with her left, uninjured hand. The air was close and the venetian blinds blocked the efforts of spring. She had stared up at the spongy white tiles and fluorescent lights, waiting for the woman to catch up with her, it was at that point that the child appeared, he was disorientated with fear, he had a puffy face and his eyes were wide, he ran erratically – first into my arms then....

She had put one hand on his shoulder and the other on his chest and felt the panicked thumping of his heart, which seemed to beat with the fervour of a full-sized heart, and she wondered how a heart could beat so fiercely inside such a small torso. And then he ran, the little boy ran. The next-door neighbour had come outside in her dressing gown, hunched a bit and with her arms across her chest pulling the lapels up against the brisk air. It was difficult to say how long they had all stood there after the child had run off. The man, holding the handle of the door, looking forlorn, the woman behind him with her head down, the neighbour and herself looking around, and at each other. They're always fighting like that, the neighbour said after the two had gone back inside. This isn't the first time something like this has happened, she added.

Tophead finished relaying the story and then moved across the room to join Weighthead who had risen to sit propped with pillows all around her, listening carefully. They sat in silence and ate coffee slices and drank rooibos tea and when Tophead left, Weighthead lay back down on the sofa.

Now visualise the following:, a bell tower, a moving barge, a galloping horse, a landscape in the sun at midday, a street lantern, a grapevine, black clouds, a brown dog, sunrise, sunset, a red rose, a violet orchid, the bank of a river, a human skeleton, an ash tree in a garden, a hurling stick, a canister of cooking oil, a mountain gully, a piece of bread. Your own outstretched, physical body, lying in front of you, connected by a silver chord with your transparent mental body. Look at your outstretched body. You are now inside the transparent body, and you look at your outstretched physical body. From the navel of the transparent body, a golden chord rises into the sky, and there floats your third body, cloudy, smoky. And embedded in this body, in this third body, lies the fourth golden body radiant like the sun. Think of your brain. Stay, stay in the brain. In the centre there lies a golden egg – stay inside. Penetrate into the golden egg.

Violet orchids all around, clamouring out of their pots, as though the air between stones and clumps of bark is all they needed to give them life.