**Bloomsbury - Beside Myself by Ann Morgan**

**Pages 28-31 from Ch 4:**

Thorpe Park is more than just a park. It is a big place with rides and rollercoasters and people dressed up as cuddly elephants. When we get there, there are so many cars lined up that I say it is more like it should be called Thorpe Car Park. Everybody gives a laugh at that and I watch them carefully to see if anyone realises it’s actually clever me.When we get inside, Akela says, ‘Now what do you want to do?’ and Ellie, who always gets excited by silly things, shouts that she wants to go on the whirling teacup ride. So we go and sit in one of the cups and soon we are whirling in and out and round and round. It’s fun and we all go ‘Whee!’ but it

also makes you feel a little bit sick. It’s not just me because when I look at Ellie I see that she has gone quiet and the sides of her nose are white and when we get off she walks slowly with her hand to her head in a slightly staggery way. Mother and Akela are striding ahead because they want to find somewhere we can have lunch, but I stay behind with Ellie because I think now might be my chance to talk to her properly about putting

a stop to the game. In a minute we are passing the toilet block and there is a big

high hedge where you go in, so I reach out and grab Ellie’s wrist in a pinch and pull her behind it.

‘Listen Ellie,’ I say into her swaying white face. ‘Enough’s enough. We’ve had our fun but now it’s time to tell the truth. You have to swap back to being you and I have to swap back to being me.’

She looks at me with dull, wandering eyes and her lips do that trembly thing that makes me want to get the hard lessons going again really quickly. ‘Besides Ellie,’ I say, ‘they already know what you’re up to. I heard them talking about it last night after you were asleep. They’re just waiting until you’ve done enough naughtiness so

that they can punish down on you really hard. That’s all they’re waiting for. So you might as well own up now and save yourself some of the punishing.’

Ellie slumps forward with her eyes closed and gives a slow, saggy nod. I put my arm up round the back of her neck. ‘That’s a good Ellie,’ I say. ‘I knew you’d see sense in the end. Some people just aren’t meant to be the leader.’ Ellie opens her mouth to say how sorry she is and that she’ll never disobey again, but instead what comes out is a long stream of chocolate-coloured sick that spatters all down my front and on to my feet in Ellie’s white, holey socks and sandals. I stand blinking in the sour smell as a shadow falls over us. ‘There you are! You mustn’t wander off like that!’ says Mother. Then she looks at me. ‘Oh God, what have you done now?’

‘Ellie’s been sick all down herself,’ says Ellie quickly, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and pointing at me. ‘It really smells.’ ‘Oh, Ellie!’ shouts Mother, reaching down and snatching up my hand. ‘You couldn’t manage to keep things nice for even one day, could you?’ She drags me out from behind the hedge to

where Akela is waiting, holding two cuddly tigers. ‘I’m so sorry, Horace,’ she says, loudly and brightly so that all the families walking past can hear. ‘We’ve had a little accident. She’s been sick everywhere. You couldn’t be a dear, could you, and go and find something we can dress her in? One of those big T-shirts from that stall by the fountain will do fine. I’ll take her in here and try and get her cleaned up.’

Akela trots off and Mother turns and starts to pull me back towards the toilets. But my feet don’t want to move. Suddenly all the things of the last two days – the game and the monster-man carrying the boxes and ‘fucked’ and the smell of the eaten Feast lolly – build up and build up and start fizzing in my head until there is nowhere left for them to go and they have to come spilling out, like mind sick, all over everywhere.

‘No!’ I scream and I pull back on Mother’s arm. ‘No! It wasn’t me! It was her! She was the one! She was sick, not me! No one’s being fair!’

Mother rounds on me and there is a look in her eyes I have never seen before. It is like all the mumblings and spikiness and clouds of glum have hardened into a sharp, black point.

‘Ellie,’ she hisses. ‘You are not going to have a tantrum here. This is going to be a nice day out and you are not going to spoil it. You are not going to take this away.’ But the tantrum is coming thick and fast now, and with it sobs flood up my throat like backwards gulps.

‘I’m not Ellie!’ I yell. ‘I’m not Ellie! It’s her! She’s the one! I’m Helen! I’m the one who does everything right! I’m Helen!’

But the sobs are making it difficult to speak and the words come out all broken up as a rollercoaster swoops over our heads and all the people put their hands up in the air and shout with

glee. Mother glances at Ellie. A frown comes over her face. Something glimmers in her eyes.

‘What’s this all about?’ she says.

I do my most Helen of all faces. Surely she must see. Surely the me-ness in me will shine through.

‘What’s going on?’ says Mother, wrinkling her nose like someone has done a windypop and no one is owning up. Ellie takes a deep breath. She looks at me, then back at Mother.

For a minute the world tips and sways like the magic carpet ride wavering in the distance.

‘Oh, it’s just Ellie,’ she says in a pinched little voice. ‘You know how she’s always making things up and saying she isn’t her? Well, now she’s made up a story that she’s really me and I’m really her. She won’t stop going on about it. I’ve had it up to here.’ I stand looking at her with an open mouth, because none of that is true. The real Ellie was far too boring to make up stories. This is a new Ellie – an Ellie that she is making to fit me.

Mother rolls her eyes. ‘I might have known!’ she sighs and starts to pull my arm again.

‘No!’ I shout, tugging and stamping. ‘She’s lying! She’s lying! It wasn’t me!’

The smack sounds like a gunshot. I clutch my bottom. A big boy in a baseball cap gives a laugh as he walks past. He points at me and his friends turn to look. Tears flood into my eyes.

‘Ellie,’ says Mother, her mouth narrow and tight, ‘I will not stand for this. You are going to behave. This is too important to be ruined by silly games. Do you understand?’

I sniff, nodding up at the blurry Mother in front of me. ‘Yes,’ I say.

‘Right,’ says Mother. ‘Come along then, like a good girl.’ I follow her into the toilet, the sick squelching round my feet. At the door, I turn and look back. Ellie is standing by the hedge. Her face is still pale from feeling ill, but on her mouth there is a small twist of a smile.