

IRIS by Alison Carr

Act Two, Scene 1

JULIE: The room is hot with the smell. Blood. Raw meat. Sweat. It's thick and strong, seeping into the walls and the metal bed frame and the sheets.

The noise fills up the whole space. Even when it's just her breathing, low and long, or short sharp gasps, it's coming from somewhere else inside her. From all of her. Her body knows that this is what she is built for.

I'm backed into a corner. My ears are full, my nose, while my eyes sting and stream. I daren't blink in case I miss a moment of it. I've missed so much already, each flutter, kick, but no more.

Then ... I don't know what's happening, a flurry of voices, movement, gloved hands and red flesh ... and now suddenly it's over, it's done, and I'm a beat behind everyone else.

The midwife lies you on her chest. Skin on skin. You curl around to fit the shape of her. Instinct. I see her see you. There is no gap, no join. You're hers. From her. You are one.

Time passes. I'm a spectator. They bring her strong tea and buttered toast. It wafts over, I'm starving for it, but no toast for me. I haven't done anything.

Then, finally, I'm invited to join in. You're quiet now, wrapped up tight, passed over carefully. I can't find a curve for you to fit into. I hold you slightly away.

Your eyes are closed but I can feel hers on me. When I glance over she shuts them tight but I know she's watching, checking. Of course she is. She's lying there; torn open and emptied while I sit comfortably with the spoils.

I look and look but I can't see you. A mass in a blanket, fat face all blotchy, nose, eyes, lips. I can make out the parts, but not the whole. How long have I wanted to hold you? I wait for it to overwhelm me, for the rush ...

I close my eyes. They're so dry I feel the eyelids scrape down. Relief. You're heavier than I thought you'd be. I hear my own breath in my ears. Maybe it'll be ok.

You start crying. My eyes snap awake, wild, staring into your black, open mouth.

It wasn't meant to be like this.