

Black Sheep

I'm still trying to make sense of it. The dream. Black sheep forcing the white one through the gap in the fence. Ganging up on it. The white fleece tearing against the barbed wire. A drop of blood. The thing is, this is turning into a recurring nightmare. First time I had it, I thought it was to do with my insomnia. I know it's stupid but I've been doing that counting sheep thing to try and make it better. I didn't think it was working but I suppose it must have done because I woke up a few hours later, sweating and still thinking about that terrified amber eye. So I stopped counting sheep, but I've had the dream twice since then and it's getting more intense. There are more of them now and that fleece is getting more bloody.

The truth is I've been having a tough time recently. Mum tells me unhelpfully that the sixth form was the happiest time of her life. Well it isn't working out too well for me. All my friends are doing different subjects and the work is horrendous. Looking back on it, GCSEs were easy compared to the work now. Brian Cox has a lot to answer for if you ask me. Who'd have thought physics could be so incomprehensible? And the biology practicals make me sick. I try and hang back while the others stick the knife in.

And because I'm not seeing much of Beth and Jess in class, it feels like they are all having this great social life outside school as well. I catch up with them at lunchtime – if I can find anywhere to sit in our cramped canteen – and it's all about gigs they've been to or trips to Manchester. To be fair, Jess did invite me one time but I couldn't spare the time. Sounds really lame to say you've got too much work to do, but it's true, and the mocks are next week! We haven't even covered half of what we should have by now.

Plus they've all got boyfriends. How did that happen? And Mum says I should be thinking about uni. I don't even know if I want to go to university. Sometimes I think I shouldn't have given up art. No art school would have me now. The point is I'm never going to make my living at art so I guess I did the right thing. That's what I think rationally but then I find myself sitting in maths really struggling – me, the A* student. I don't know if I'm just not concentrating but the equations seem to swim in front of my eyes. I'm not getting this topic at all.

Mr Evans took me aside the other day and said he was thinking of setting up an after school maths club to go through some of it but that's just less time with my friends. More social suicide. So I sort of stalled and hoped it would go away.

Of course I don't see them anyway. I come home and collapse in front of Friends on TV then I try and get down to a bit of work but I'm kind of brain-dead by then and I can't concentrate. Then I go to bed and read and read until my eyes feel dry and itchy and then it's sheep-counting time again.

I had the dream again last night. I was definitely the sheep and I was looking at the others as they came charging up and I was trying to get through, thrashing around, but the wire was digging in and then one of the black sheep had a knife and wanted to dissect my leg or something. It sounds funny but trust me, it really, really wasn't and I

felt so weird and disorientated when I woke up that I almost woke Mum up. It was like one of those really visceral childhood nightmares.

Jess came round last night. I've been off school with some kind of bug. I'm all hot and cold at the same time with no energy. Yet all the time I'm thinking about what I'm missing and how I'm going to catch up. Still, it was nice of her to come and we watched Mean Girls and she told me she'd broken up with Jack. I had a dreamless sleep last night which was odd because during the day I'd had all sorts of fitful naps and bursts of dreams – not the sheep though. And this morning I felt a sort of calm. Mum says I'm not so hot now but I still feel wrecked so I lay there listening to Radio 4. This woman started talking about how they want to encourage female engineers – people with maths and physics and an interest in art. Made me think that could be me if I could just get a handle on this stuff.

I'm better now, more or less, and I made it into school. It wasn't too bad actually. This boy I sit next to in maths lent me his notes and he says he's definitely going to try the after school club. I might give it a go. It's only one night a week.

Mum made me have an early night and even gave me a hot milk – haven't had that since I was about six. And then I was back with the sheep. Not sure that dream will come again though. Something's changed. So I was the sheep again and I was thrashing around but then I sort of was me and I was looking down at the sheep and I saw that actually there was plenty of room if I just stopped panicking and eased myself through the gap. And over the other side, in the next field, there were black sheep and white sheep like me and they looked OK. No blood. Just a field of sheep doing their thing.