

JODI MAY'S



HSA vs IT

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## FOREWORD & DISCLAIMER

First and foremost, I do not own the characters of 'IT' nor the original concept. All rights remain with the original author, Stephen King. It's important to note that this is a homage to the original story, which happens to be my favourite book. I was inspired by every single page and read it once a year, every summer, to be whisked away to Derry all over again. It occurred to me, after the two recent films (I prefer the 1990's television series) that a lot of people love the story and adore 'Pennywise the Dancing Clown' but they never get the chance to read the book. Put off by its length, they miss out on the magic of the tale as King wrote it. With this crossover homage fan fiction I wanted to bring a piece of that magic (and horror) to life and it's my hope, above all, that I'll be able to encourage just one person to pick up the original book.

Secondly, the '*Hillside Academy*' characters featured in this fan fiction are all my own. The only character I took from King's story was 'Pennywise'. The rest are mine and all belong to me by law. I will also add that much of the main characters' backstories have been changed to fit this specific 'alternative universe' and several of the minor characters of the story have also been altered. To conclude, there are no spoilers to the main '*Hillside Academy*' series. Rather, it is a way for me to highlight the main eight (Erika, Dominic, Sam, Anna, Emily, Will, Elivia and Tom) in this horror fan fiction that is dedicated to not only Stephen King for inspiring me to keep writing all these years, but also to the people of Lancaster, Lancashire.

Thus bringing me to the penultimate point of this disclaimer. Throughout the book, Lancaster is referred to not always kindly and sometimes in a negative light. This is fiction. I wanted to set this gruesome fan fiction homage in this city because for one, it's truly beautiful and has a rich, fantastic history, and secondly, because I love it. I moved here just over two years ago and fell quickly in love with the history and architecture. My babies were born here and in a way, so was I. By leaving the place I grew up and all its ghosts, I was liberated. This city has quickly become not the place I was raised but the place I was born. And the people? The people of Lancaster are wonderful. They're community-orientated, kind and generous, and during a rather arduous period, the community of Greaves specifically aided us greatly. My partner and I are eternally grateful for their generosity and kindness during this time and this is my strange way of saying thank you; of bringing Lancaster to the forefront again and displaying it in all its glory. So whatever you may read, remember it is fiction and that Lancaster, UK is my favourite place in the world. So to the people of Lancaster, thank you.

And last but not least, a disclaimer to say that the content of this chapter and all the following contain strong language, violence against children, sexual references, scenes of gore and peril and is quite frankly inappropriate for young readers or anyone easily offended. But if this is all to your taste, go ahead and read.

I hope you enjoy reading this 'alternative universe' fan fiction homage as much as I enjoyed writing it. All comments are welcome (though don't be mean), shares are encouraged and remember –

Once you begin this story...*you'll float too.*

# CHAPTER

## TWENTY-FOUR

### The Dagger and the Knife

Anna swore back in April that she would never return to Lancaster Castle. Ever since that near death experience with the Executioner, a memory she could still recall vividly to this day – the suffocating grip of the noose around her neck – which she now knew was It, she had recoiled at the idea of ever going near the castle again. And yet here she was. Standing in the very office she had first witnessed the power of It waiting for Sam to text to say he was outside.

Another thing Anna had been dreading.

It was nerve-racking enough to consider the plan of stealing a priceless historical artefact without having to worry about the dispute between Erika and Sam; something she was still yet to fully understand, though she gathered it had something to do with them having sex and Sam bragging about it. Which was no surprise.

*Typical fucking bloke.*

Grumbling to herself at Sam's idiocy and Erika's foolishness for sleeping with a boy like Sam Robinson, she held her Sony Erikson flip phone in her hand; flipping it open and closed anxiously as she waited.

She had failed to inform Sam that Erika didn't want him there. She had planned, instead, to invite Erika without telling her Sam was still coming. The fact remained Anna needed Erika to pick the lock on the glass cabinet which contained the dagger. Sam was simply there for backup; for extra meat against It. They'd all seen Its power on Saturday night in her own back garden. They needed as many people around them as possibly in case It decided to make another appearance, here at the Castle – with court in session.

Her father's case today consisted of another man standing trial for rape. More proof to Anna that the entire male species – bar her father – were perverts and rapists. After hanging out with four boys in the last month, two of which preferred other boys, one of which only had eyes for a certain chubby girl with owl eyes and impossibly beautiful brunette hair that fell effortlessly each time she took it down from her hair tie, and the fourth being Sam – Anna's opinion on men hadn't changed much. Especially not about Sam. What Erika, a streetwise girl, was doing messing around with a Robinson was a mystery to Anna and not one she had time to debate today as her phone vibrated with a text.

You better have a good explanation Clearwater.

Gulping back her rising anxiety, Anna closed her phone, tucked it into her jean pocket and headed out of the office, carrying her father's ID on its lanyard.

She walked unsteadily along the ancient corridors which creaked under foot, reliving the experience in April over and over again. It was a blessing when she reached the fire exit door down a steep set of stairs which led out the side of the castle. It was a recent installation when society started worrying about health and safety but it was a stiff door to push on its rusted hinges; the salt air of Lancaster creeping into every orifice. Even into its people.

Pushing it open, she found Sam and Erika staring back at her. Both sodden from the misty unseasonal rainfall and both wearing expressions of annoyance.

"Hey," Anna said, holding open the fire door to let them in.

Erika gave a sweep around her before stepping inside. Sam followed, stomping over the threshold in his bright white trainers. Anna closed the door behind them; it slammed shut, sending them into a gloomy, stuffy silence in that cramped stairwell.

"You said you would sort it," Erika hissed.

"What was that, *Erika*? You got a problem?" Sam sneered.

"Stop it! The both of you!" Anna snapped, sounding an awful lot like her formidable headmistress. Not someone she ever wanted to sound like. "For one day can you just grow a pair and get this done?"

"I've got balls – it's *him* that needs to man up," Erika scowled.

"Do you know how derogatory that is to say?" Sam scoffed.

"Hey!" Anna said again, clapping her hands and feeling once again like the only sane person there. "Erika? Did you bring the kit?"

"You mean my hair pins? Yes, I brought them," Erika huffed.

"Right, so come on. My dad said court recess will happen at twelve. That gives us half an hour before you need to be gone and I need to be back in the office." Anna stomped away up the stone steps, fortunate enough to not see the childish sneer Sam and Erika exchanged before following.

She led them quietly along each hallway; poking her head around every corner to check the way first. It wasn't security she was worried about. If they'd been looking at their cameras, they would have already seen the three teenagers lurking about the corridors and would already be on their way.

No, it wasn't the chubby, red-faced, out of breath security guards she feared bumping into.

She had no desire to meet the Executioner again.

“Come on,” she hissed with a hasty beckon as she jogged down the last hallway, down the steps and into the tower room; the room where she’d made her final stand against It.

It hadn’t changed. It was still as gloomy and draughty as it had been in April. Looking up at the high windows, the view outside was the only change. Instead of a beautiful setting sky, it was a heavy blanket of grey clouds. A storm had rolled off the Irish Sea the night before, bringing with it an unsettling oppressive veil of humid mist that clung to your skin. It was typical Lancaster weather but only added to the teenagers’ apprehension that Monday morning as the three came to a halt in the tower room.

“Right, Sam, you keep guard,” Anna said, pointing to the large stone entryway.

Instead of arguing, for once, he did as he was told as Anna led Erika over to the glass cabinet. Through their own reflections, the two girls peered down at the dagger.

It was just as Erika remembered it; the Crone, It, had held it, promised to bury it in her stomach. She touched her stomach now; feeling ever bloated and weighed down by the burden she still carried. She longed to see blood staining the inside of her knickers each morning.

No such luck.

There came a long, drawn whistle behind them, frightening the two girls.

“Call that a knife!” Sam chuckled from in between them, the entryway unguarded.

“Sam!” Anna said, smacking his shoulder, her heart still thundering in her chest.

“*Call that a knife!*” he jeered again. “*Wipe the butter off it and put it away!*”

“Shut up!” Anna said again, giving him another smack; this time around the head for good measure. “Now’s not the time to be quoting *Snatch*, Sam.”

“I’m trying to lighten the mood,” he purred.

“Eat dick, Robinson,” Erika glowered.

“My dick? You already did.”

Erika slapped him across the cheek and then again across his shoulders and back as he tried to dodge and turn away. Anna interjected, stepping between the two and their juvenile fighting.

“Cut it out! The both of you!” she shouted through gritted teeth. They only had a matter of time and the couple were wasting it arguing.

“You’re infuriating!” Erika shrieked.

“And you’re a cunt!”

“Sam!” Anna bellowed, her voice echoing throughout the tower. Her wide eyes stayed upon Sam who seemed to realise too late that he’d crossed a line. “You’re acting no better than –.”

“Than what?”

“Damien Ashcroft.”

“Excuse me?” Sam choked.

“Than your dad!”

Finally, silence fell upon the three. As Sam positively shook with his anger, Anna stood poised and ready. Meanwhile, Erika turned her back on the two and set to work; if only so they couldn't see the tears welling in her eyes.

“You don't know shit, Anna,” Sam said firmly.

“I know your dad is a notorious asshole and a crook. I know he's a criminal and that one day, he'll end up here just like all the other thugs. Don't follow in his footsteps!”

“You don't get to say that shit to me, princess!”

“Stop!” She gave him a shove. “Calling!” And another. “Me!” Another. “Princess!”

“Guys?” Erika spoke.

The two ignored her.

“Can dish it out but can't take it!?” Sam jeered, deflecting her slaps.

“Asshole, Robinson!” Anna stuttered and panted as she whacked her forearms onto his back as he covered his head with own arms. “You thug! You dick! You're just like the rest!”

“Anna?” Erika called again.

“Yeah?! Yeah?! Like Damien!” Sam said, pushing Anna away from him and backing away toward the entryway. “Like that Ashcroft, dickhead?”

“Don't!” Anna yelled.

“Guys?!?” Erika shouted.

“Everyone at our schools says he fucked and dumped you, is that what happened?!?” Sam grinned with sick delight.

“Fuck you!” Anna roared.

“Guys!”

“Is that what happened, Anna?!?”

“Fuck. You!”

“Guys!” Erika's bellow finally broke through.

“*What!*?” Anna and Sam swung around to face her.

“Can we just get on with this?” Erika murmured, uncharacteristically quiet for such a girl.

“What?” Anna panted, seemingly confused as to what they were even doing here.

“The dagger?” Erika gestured. She held up her two sturdy hair pins. “Like, we can take bites out of each other another day but I, for one, have an empty cold garage to get back to and I’d rather not do this here.”

Sam gave a scoff in reply and after giving Anna one last scowl he marched back to the entryway to stand guard, leaving Anna breathless and incensed.

“Please?” Erika beseeched, staring back into Anna’s watery eyes, Sam’s words still stinging deep inside of her.

With one last exhale, Anna followed Erika back to the cabinet. She gave a glance around the room and was surprised to see it empty of security cameras. For a moment, Anna allowed herself to feel relieved. It was quickly followed by suspicion.

Everything they had faced and fought so far had taught her to be wary as she viewed the tower once more. All the rest of the castle was dotted with cameras; peering black eyes and that flashing red light. But here? In this room which held some of the most prized possessions of Lancaster’s past, there was nothing.

Something wanted them to get this dagger. But why would It want that?

Unless it wasn’t It. Unless it was something else entirely...

“E?” Anna spoke in no more than a whisper. She listened distantly as Erika grumbled and muttered to herself, kneeling on the flagstone floor and fiddling with the small lock on the cabinet. “Erika?”

“What?”

“Hurry up.”

“I’m going as fast as I can, *Anna*,” Erika groaned. With a tinkle, she cursed and bent down further to retrieve the dropped hair pin. It had fallen narrowly close to the drain just inches from the legs of the cabinet stand. “Phew, that was lucky.”

“Erika!” Anna turned on her heel to look at her. “You need to hurry up.”

“Keep your panties on!”

“Yeah, *Princess*,” Sam said from the entryway where he was leant against one side, arms folded across his chest. “Were you like this with Damien?”

There was a small titter from Erika, igniting Anna’s rage all over again. With a push, she sent Erika into the cabinet, rocking the heavy structure backwards and sending her hairpins flying.

Flying.

Straight into the drain.

Anna stood frozen to the spot. She hadn’t meant to push Erika hard. She hadn’t meant to push her at all. Holding open her hands, she could hardly believe what she’d done. And neither, evidently, could Sam or Erika.



“You bitch!” Erika said, leaping to her feet to give Anna a shove in reply.

This time, it was Sam intervening, much to the girls’ surprise.

“Cat fight later! We need to get this cabinet open,” Sam commanded.

“I can’t!” Erika yelled. “The hair pins fell down the drain!”

“Don’t you have another?” Sam asked.

“*Oh wait, yeah, one sec!* Let me just pull one out of my arse where I keep them – No! I don’t have another!” Erika thundered.

“Well stop whining about it and think of something!”

“You think of something!” Erika retorted.

Anna watched the exchange unfurl. This had been a mistake. Three fiery personalities all on one crucial mission. It shouldn’t have been them. Will, Emily and Tom perhaps. Dominic and Elivia even. But not Anna, Erika and Sam. They were useless in a trio and they had failed. They had let their team down and It would win.

Just as It knew It would.

Toby Johnson. His little arm ripped from its socket. His dead eyes staring up at the sky, filling slowly with rainwater from the October storm. His small body buried in an equally small coffin just like all the other children.

*Shaun McDonald.*

*Kelly Edwards.*

*Penny Smith.*

*Danny Collins.*

*Maggie Alex.*

*Katherine Dennings.*

*Charlie Hope.*

*Angela Higglestone.*

*And I’m coming for your sister next. Little Fifi...Little Fiona Clearwater. What tragedy! How awful! Her grief...it’ll make her delicious...irresistible...every last bite.*

No. Failure wasn’t an option.

“I have a hair pin,” Anna stuttered.

Sam and Erika’s bickering fell silent as the two stared at her. They seemed to, somehow, in those few seconds, understand exactly what Anna had been thinking about.

All those children. All those dead children. All those lives snuffed out; eaten whole. Devoured. All that pain. It would continue. It would carry on if they didn't put a stop to it. And there would be more coffins. More little headstones to fill the Lancaster cemetery. More siblings and offspring taken. More lives gone.

*Fiona Clearwater...*

*Victoria Waterstone...*

*All of Rupert Matthews' children...*

*I will devour them all.*

*Then I'm coming for you.*

*Anna Clearwater.*

*Elivia Spencer.*

*Tom Right.*

*Emily Fox.*

*Will Bennet.*

*Dominic Johnson.*

*Sam Robinson.*

*Erika Waterstone.*

*I will make a throne of your skulls. Those who dare try to stop me will know pain.*

*I will make you suffer to the end.*

No.

"No," Anna mumbled. Reaching into her hair, she unpinned a thin clip from the intricate stylish quiff of her fringe. She passed it to Erika.

"I have a pen knife," Sam said, reaching into his back pocket. He palmed it to Erika who took both instruments over to the cabinet.

This time, Sam removed his hoodie and laid it over the drain. Erika mumbled a thank you while Anna stood sentry at the entryway. She would keep guard. She would make sure their plan didn't fail. She would make sure It didn't win.

Erika brushed her fringe from her eyes. Sweat dribbled down her back as she worked, concentrating on running the bent hairpin along the teeth inside the lock while she used the slim screwdriver instrument on Sam's pen knife to hold the lock open.

"You okay?" Sam asked, kneeling beside her.

“I’m fine.”

“You sure?”

“I’ve got this!” Erika yelled. “Let me do this! I can do this!”

“Okay!” he said, holding up his hands. “I know you can,” he whispered.

Erika halted momentarily to meet his hesitant gaze. With a tight swallow down her dry throat, she went back to work, listening closely.

It was there as she worked, ticking the teeth up inside the lock, listening intently, that she heard something else.

Footsteps.

Heavy footfalls that, as they grew closer, shook the ground beneath them.

“Anna?” Sam called out, having evidently heard the footsteps too.

“I can’t see anything – I can’t –.”

Erika glanced back over her shoulder and saw for the first time ever, Anna Clearwater scared.

Positively petrified.

“Anna!” Sam yelled.

But all their friend could say was – “It’s coming.”

“Fuck!” Erika cursed, leaning closer, working quicker.

All the while, the footsteps moved closer.

“E, come on,” Sam encouraged. “Please, baby.”

“Don’t call me baby!” Erika snapped.

“Guys!” Anna yelled. “Come on!”

“I didn’t – no! Just fucking do it!”

“I’m trying!”

“Erika!” Anna called out one last time.

Then, everything was silent.

It was everything Anna had described and more. It took up the entire vast entryway. Its tall frame loomed over Anna, several feet higher than her already lean stature. She staggered backwards, almost falling if it wasn’t for Sam grasping and tugging her away. Sam glanced to Erika who didn’t

look up from her work. She didn't even shake as the Executioner entered the tower, hood, noose and all.

Its glowing yellow eyes scanned all three teenagers and while Anna and Sam grasped one another and met Its glower, Erika ignored It.

She was almost done. Just one last prong to loosen. Shaking her instruments, banging on the cabinet, she dared't look back. She didn't need to. She felt the Executioner in her bones.

In her soul.

"Erika," Sam stuttered, tears in his eyes and his bladder aching to be released.

*No! I won't piss myself! I will man up! I am the man!*

*I am the man my father will never be!*

"Erika!"

With a small, unassuming click, the cabinet lock opened.

Standing up, Erika opened the glass lid of the cabinet and reached inside. The smell of time itself billowed across her face as she carefully lifted the silver hilted blade from its purple silk cushion. Still with her back to the Executioner who watched her closely, seemingly ignoring both Sam and Anna now, who dared't move, Erika lifted the dagger up. Holding it in both hands, she admired the weapon.

The Witches' Weapon.

Tightening her grip around the handle, she turned on her heel to face the Executioner.

She held the blade outwards, its point illuminated in the dim spotlights of the tower room. The sword seemed to vibrate in her palm. She held it with precision, fearless in the face of It as she slowly backed away to stand in front of Sam and Anna.

The Executioner moved Its yellow eyes from the blade to Erika's face. Then, It raised the noose in Its hand, wiggling it almost tauntingly.

"This is it," Erika said, her voice oddly calm. "This is what you fear."

The Executioner cocked Its head to one side and shook it.

"No?" Erika sneered. "Come on then. Come get us."

"Erika," Anna gasped.

Erika held up her free hand to silence her, keeping that blade pointed toward the Executioner.

"Come on then! *Come on!* What are you waiting for?!" Erika mocked, bouncing on her heels, that blade staying eerily still and ready. "Come get me, you shit!"

“Alright, Erika,” Sam said, one hand on her shoulder, “I think It gets it. Now let’s get the fuck out of here.

“How?” Anna squeaked, turning her gaze to the high walls surrounding them; to those manacle nails she had used all those months ago in an attempt to climb away from It. She had failed and she doubted the three today would have any more luck.

“It can’t take on all three of us,” Erika said, her eyes on the Executioner moving one step closer. “I’ll distract It, you guys run.”

“And leave you with the knife?” Anna scoffed.

Erika shot her a snarl.

“I think what Anna means to say is, *and leave you here?*” Sam corrected.

“It doesn’t matter about me,” Erika said, palming the blade to Anna who held it with both hands; they trembled and shook, almost losing her grip on the knife. “Just go.”

“I’m not leaving you,” Sam said, surprising both girls.

Erika turned to him then, glancing back once at the Executioner who turned Its head to one side again, seemingly growing impatient as they continued this drawn, unnecessary conversation.

“We do this together,” Anna agreed. Reaching into her jean pocket, she removed a golden decadent bottle of perfume.

“What you gonna do? O de perfume It to death?” Sam scoffed.

“It’s *eau de parfum*, you cretin,” Anna tutted. She raised the perfume bottle and came to stand beside Erika. “And it’s my mother’s.”

Sam nor Erika said any more. They understood. This was Anna’s token. As Emily’s cross was to her, Tom’s camera, Will’s cat, Bruce and Dominic’s rocket, this was Anna’s token, filling her with faith as she faced off with Executioner once again.

Retrieving his penknife from the floor, Sam stood on Erika’s other side as she once again held the Witches’ blade. The three stared back at the Executioner who raised that noose once more with a promise.

“Nothing can save you now,” It grumbled, a deep guttural noise from deep inside of It. “You cannot defeat me. I am infinite.”

“Yeah?” Sam chuckled humourlessly. “And we’re teenagers. *We believe* we’re infinite too.”

“I can smell your fear,” It hissed hungrily.

“That’s Chanel, bitch,” Anna said and without another word, launched forward, spraying the expensive perfume straight into Its hooded face.

With a thunderous roar, It stumbled backwards, the noose flinging outwards in Its desperate attempt to grasp them as Sam yelled;

“*Fucking leg it!*”

And the three barged their way past to the entryway.

Its almighty infuriated roar followed them up the passageway as the three pelted along the uneven stone floors, following Anna as she led them away from the ancient stone hallways and up into the light; into the warmth and security of the modern part of the castle. Nonetheless, It followed them every step of the way. Its fury engulfed them, catching at their heels, tugging at the tails of their t-shirts, on the very hair on the backs of their exposed necks. They tasted Its determination...Its utter resolve to have them.

Take them. Eat them.

Devour them whole.

Anna slammed shut the fire escape door. The three stumbled backwards as the steel door rocked on its hinges; shuddering, slamming, inching open. But it would not move. And the three were safe.

For now.

The fine rain settled like a cloak over their flushed, sweaty skin. Their pants for breath filled the silent, heavy air around them as they stood on that small patch of lawn within the shadows of the great castle behind. None of them spoke. None of them could.

Collapsing back on her behind, Erika held the blade in her two hands which now trembled as the adrenaline flooded her body and left her in a mess of emotions. Sam came to sit beside her, placing one tentative hand on her back. Anna stayed standing, catching her breath; hands at her hour glass waist, face turned to the sky as the slight breeze cooled her skin.

When Erika was finally able to peel her focus away from the blade her grasp, she found Sam's wrist. There, wrapped around it, was a familiar item.

A black scrunchie. *Her* black scrunchie.

She frowned. "Why do you have that?"

With a stutter, Sam slipped it off of his wrist. He went to put it away when Erika took it. Holding it up, she viewed the scrunchie.

"I left this...at my flat."

"I took it – and I'm sorry," Sam said quickly.

"Why?" Erika blinked.

Anna was completely lost to them now as the two stared at one another.

"I –," Sam stammered, coming to a pathetic bashful halt. "I wanted it."

"Why?" She searched his reddening cheeks, his fluttering eyelashes, his fringe falling into his eyes. Very carefully, with fingers that no longer felt like her own, she brushed those dirty-blond locks, sodden with sweat, out of his face.

Sam raised his head to look at her with a muted expression of surprise. “Because it’s yours.”

“Mine?”

“Yours. I – it’s my token.”

“Your *token*?” Erika breathed.

*We all need to carry something we believe in.*

*Something that will make us strong.*

Anna had her mother’s perfume. And Sam?

*My scrunchie.*

A scrunchie she didn’t even need now her hair was short. He had taken it – taken it because it was hers. Carried it because it belonged to her. Her – Erika.

“I’m sorry,” Sam whispered, tugging at the laces of his trainers to save meeting her eye.

“Don’t be. I – I didn’t think I mattered to you.”

Sam’s head snapped up to look at her. “Of course you do!” he stammered. “You matter to me, Erika Waterstone. You’re all that matters.”

With a quiver of her lip, Erika subdued her tears. The onrush of emotion was almost too much to bear. One glance down at her bloated stomach, concealed today beneath a baggy t-shirt she’d borrowed from Tom, and any hope that burned inside of her was quickly extinguished.

She got to her feet leaving Sam breathless and confused.

“Are you gonna be okay, Anna?” Erika asked, ignoring Sam as he slowly stood up, defeated and downtrodden. Hopeless as he gazed at the back of her head.

A gaze only Anna saw in those moments. A gaze she desperately tried to ignore as she nodded.

“It’s almost twelve. I’ll text my dad and ask him to let me in. I’ll probably just get my stuff and go home. Don’t think I could spend another minute in this place,” Anna said, arms folded as she rubbed the tops of them, suddenly chilled to the bone.

“Want us to wait?” Erika offered.

“No, you go. Garage? At three?”

“See you there.”

Erika didn’t look at Sam as she took off around the side of the castle, dagger carefully stored in Tom’s borrowed backpack and Sam’s penknife, which he’d dropped upon them falling onto the lawn, stashed in her back pocket.

She would never be able to admit to him that he mattered to her too. That the sight of her hair scrunchie around his wrist had meant something to her. That it had changed everything.

Because after all, there were still two things stopping her. One being the life growing inside of her; the secret she carried every day. And two?

She was Erika Waterstone.

A happy life, one of peace, love and safety, it wasn't in the cards for her.

So she carried Sam's penknife instead. It would be her token. It was the belief that there was a life – a better one – she could possibly have. That if things were different, she could be happy. But nothing ever changed in this world where a shape shifting monster could steal children off the street and eat them. Nothing ever changed in this world where little girls were used to pay for drugs. Nothing changed and Erika wouldn't waste time wishing for it.

She would carry on, just as she'd always done; carrying that small piece of hope with her.