

Between The Trees

In the bedroom pink curtains are closed, a chink of light on either side. A lamp glows on bare knees, white socks. Who begins, it doesn't matter. Perhaps it's Mandy who lies on the floor and goes quiet. Sensing a shift, the others gather round.

Soon someone says, where does it hurt? Quietly, Mandy says, here, and she touches her finger to her chest and closes her eyes.

Someone makes a stethoscope from a long thin plastic stick - an inter-connecting piece of the Barbie house - and begins to trace round and round in little circles the place where Mandy's finger touched. After a while someone says, is it getting better, and Mandy says not really, and she brings her finger down again. The plastic stick travels lower.

There's a quivering in the air. The girls look at each other, mouths slightly apart, eyes a little wider.

The stick moves again, across her hip, delicately over the jutting bone, back round onto the stomach and over to the other side. Someone says, is that the place it hurts, but Mandy doesn't speak any more and the stick begins to travel down to where she's pulled her pants a little lower. It laces back and forth across her abdomen, a trellis of invisible maps. Now Mandy raises her hips as

someone helps her ease her pants down around the top of her legs. The stick begins again, tickling between her legs. She moves her face to one side and closes her eyes. The door opens.