

Smalltalk Ruby McGrath-Lester

'I have no friends'. She told me today when she visited the clinic. She laughed as she said it, but we both knew it wasn't a joke.

She tells me she used to have 'the best friends'. They had made her 'cry with nose-snorting laughter'; they had made things 'a little lighter'. But she had moved interstate for him, they had heard from her less and less, so they had tried less and less. While she and him used more and more.

The first time he did it they had both been 'out of it'. She said she had found a text and 'overreacted'. The next time they hadn't slept in days, she had understood why he'd 'snapped' and she was 'hard to be around at the best of times'. She says she had thought about leaving, but she 'could not survive by herself'. She tells me she really does love him and wants to make it work, 'it is just so good when we are not on it...'

'...But we are always on it'.

They have both tried to 'get healthy...so so many times now'. She describes how hard the last time had been, 'we were both sick as dogs'. But then how good it was to feel again, 'to feel like humans'.

They had promised they 'would never go back to how it was'.

But the weeks had passed, the emptiness had returned, and it needed to be filled somehow.

She says she truly hopes this time is different.

'I really do think I can do it...I really do want to turn it all around.'

As I check her blood pressure, I ask if she has weekend plans.

She replies 'nothing much' and returns the question.

I don't tell her that I am meeting up with my own 'the best friends' tonight. To drink, maybe dabble, to dance on sticky dance floors. That we will wake up in one of a lounge rooms tomorrow, sprawled over couches and blow up mattresses, order the greasiest lunches and support each other through our dustiness.

I just say 'nothing much either', as I unhook her arm from the inflatable arm cuff.

She will be back next week. She knows that it might be months of waiting to get into program, 'I've done it all before...'

As she leaves she takes a flyer for a local support group.

'...And I don't mind coming in...it's nice to have someone to talk to'