

AVA and ELLEN

Ellen: I only served a year. I got a plea deal, because I squealed on Johnny.

(Ava's mouth is agape.)

See, I told you it was boring-

Ava: Boring? This is not boring. My aunt Grace talking about her glaucoma surgery is boring. You were in prison?!

Ellen: I was. Central North Correctional Centre. That's where I got my tattoo. Big Marie carved it into my thigh one night behind the commissary. Hurt like hell. She used a Bic pen and an Exacto knife.

Ava: My God.

Ellen: It says "NO MAN". It was supposed to say "NO MEN", but Big Marie didn't finish third grade. I wanted an indelible reminder that men are no good. But the thing is, I didn't realize how seldom you see the back of your own thigh. And I kept forgetting "No man". And so there kept being men. After I got out of prison, there was Jimmy in Kapuskasing, Jesse in Elliot Lake, Jake in Huntsville and pretty much a new charming smile in every town I've ever lived. I'll level with you Ava: I make bad choices. I've never met a loser I didn't love. Yep, I have a real talent for picking them. And they have a real talent for dumping me. My mother said I never learned to say no. "Ellen," she'd say. "You've got to do a whole lot less saying yes". But I'm like one of those dolls with the string you pull. You pull my string and I say "why not?" So, I've had men that steal, men that gamble, men that run poorly funded Ponzi schemes. Years and years of bad choices. That's why I'm here with no husband, children, money in the bank, or friends.