**Title -** True Short Story: *Without the cancer drug Herceptin, this is how short the story of a life might be*

**Year -** 2005

**Author -** Ali Smith

Ali Smith is a contemporary Scottish novelist and short story writer who studied at Cambridge University. She was born in 1962 to working class parents.

**Subject -** Our life and our stories, how we tell them, and what we make of them

**Characters**

* Narrator - the author herself serves as the narrator, and tells an account that is implied to be autobiographical
* Kasia - a friend of the authors, 39 years old, she is an expert on short stories and a fellow graduate of Cambridge University. She suffers from breast cancer and her life may well rest on her getting the drug Herceptin, which is not being readily handed out due to an ambiguity over who is supposed to fund the drug
* Two patrons in a coffee shop that are discussing the essence short stories; one is an old man, the other is a younger individual
* Echo - the author talks of this mythical Greek character. Echo is a nymph that repeats whatever she hears last.

**Setting -** the story takes place in a coffee shop, the narrator converses with her friend Kasia in a hospital room over the phone

**Summary -** The narrator eavesdrops on a conversation in a cafe. Two individuals, an old man and a younger individual, are discussing the difference between novels and short stories. The younger individual compares short stories to a "nymph".

The narrator is intrigued; she calls up her friend Kasia who is bed-ridden in a hospital owing to breast cancer. They then discuss the various ways short stories are similar to nymphs. They continue to discuss this topic over the phone.

The author then talks of the story of Echo, a nymph that loses her ability to talk and can only echo the last statements heard by her. The author, however, changes the way Echo echoes statements in her recollection of the story. She makes Echo slightly mischievous and rebellious, by altering what she says, ie, she changes "back to the hunt" to "the cunt".

The story then relays the opinions of a multitude of authors and their opinions on short stories.

The author ends the poem with "So when is the short story like a nymph? When the echo of it answers back."

**Analysis -** I feel that the message of the short story is that life is a collection of brief short stories and that one story inevitably echoes into another. These brief moments define our existence.