



Shadow's Sinner

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Category: Dark Erotica

Description: Lakelyn

I'm a nobody. I'm alone in the world, counting down the days until I'm eighteen. That is until I'm sent on a retreat with five other girls to celebrate my birthday. Nothing bad can happen in the middle of the woods, right?

Master Simon

None of them matter to me. They're useless wastes of space. I crave the feeling of their blood on my hands. Until she appears, my Little Shadow. And nothing will stop me from taking her.

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Drip, drip, drip.

Her crimson blood trickles from her mouth as her wide eyes glaze over with tears.

Pathetic mumbles cascade out of her, but nothing is coherent.

That could be because I hold the one thing in my hand that ensures her speech.

The one thing that took away all of her pleading.

Warm fleshy muscle slips and slides between my fingers as I hold up her tongue to show her.

A gargled cry falls from her bloody lips as her glassy eyes roll to the back of her head.

Fat tears run down her cheeks, landing on the forest floor beneath her.

This isn't exactly how this was supposed to go.

This was supposed to be the last step, but she just wouldn't shut up.

Screeching at the top of her lungs so loud for her God that the birds flew from the trees, and the deer scattered like wildfire was chasing them.

I reposition myself between her legs, prying her wet thighs apart.

My lip curls in disgust as I realize that she must have pissed herself from fear, or pain, maybe both.

The potent smell of ammonia reaches my nostrils, making me growl in annoyance.

Reaching my bloody fingers up towards her pussy, I slide in with ease.

Prodding around, I find what I'm searching for.

The thin piece of flesh that separates me from her innocence.

Ending what used to be her purity and sweetness.

My king will love his gift when he comes to collect her from the circle tonight.

I chuckle to myself as I make my way to standing, admiring my disciples, surrounding me with wonder and amazement in their eyes.

A low hum thrums through the circle around me as the disciples sing their praises to their master and their king.

"Disciples, tonight we give the gift of innocence to our king! Rejoice in the fact that he will praise and protect us from those who threaten our brethren!"

Hoots and hollers echo through the forest, the wind carrying it to the darkest corners.

Thrusting my hand up in the air, waving the bloody muscle around for all to see, I say, "Disciples I give you the tongue of another innocent tonight! Watch as I devour her lies, making it so that she will never tell our secrets again."

My disciples hum their words of praise through the circle as I hold the tongue over a

fiery torch, scorching the meat to a crisp, just the way I like it.

When the humming reaches a crescendo, I drop the toasted muscle onto my awaiting tongue.

Savoring the metallic, crispy taste of the tongue as it moves around my mouth, making saliva pool at the corners.

Swallowing it down, I reach into my cloak pocket, brandishing the ornate dagger, pointing it towards the sky.

Lightning flashes as the chanting in the circle intensifies.

Leaning down on one knee, I bring the dagger to the center of the girl's chest.

Big, round eyes roll up towards me with a pleading look, blood still bubbling up from her mouth with low gargled pleas.

Her God won't be able to save her now.

Another flash of lightning brightens the sky as thunder rumbles through the forest.

I bring the dagger down on her chest, listening to it squelch through her skin.

Applying more pressure, I hear the resounding crack of her sternum as the sharp point penetrates straight through to her heart.

A rattling gasp rumbles up the girl's throat, eyes rolling back to her head, her body convulsing on the ground.

With another loud clap of thunder, she takes her last breath.

Her body stills on the hard ground, making a small smile spread across my lips.

Our protection will be granted from our king once more.

I rise to my feet, hands thrown skyward.

“Rejoice my disciples, praise our king as we offer him another sacrifice this evening!
And so it is done!”

The chanting reaches a climax as an intense wind whips through the trees, carrying the praises along with it.

Our cloaks whip around us like the shadows of our king, reaching to drag us down with him.

The torches blow out, leaving us in darkness.

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Christian music filters through the door as I fiddle with the key. I can hear Mom singing, and I know I have about forty seconds until I'm late. Fear starts sinking into my heart, causing my hands to sweat.

"No, no, no," I mumble as my single key slips through my fingers. My eyes scan the broken concrete doorstep, searching for the small thing. It's not like I have multiple keys. It's just the one. One single key to the house, and now I'm struggling to find it.

Thirty seconds.

Twenty seconds.

My heart races, and the lump in my throat swells up until I can't breathe. I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and remind myself just to calm down. As if that ever worked.

I open my eyes, and the sun shines down, reflecting the key. Yes! I nearly jump in joy but don't have time for that. I bend down, pick the key up, and shove it into the doorknob. I ease myself inside, shutting the door behind me as my eyes scan the small living room. Dad's empty recliner tells me he's in his office. It's a toss-up if he's in a good mood or one of his bad ones. I can hear Mom in the kitchen singing along as pots and pans echo through the small space.

"Where were you?"

I jump at the voice, swinging around. My little sister stands there in the dark hallway, eyeing me.

“The library,” I whisper. My hands sweat as I smooth down my pale blue dress. Lilianna and I couldn’t be more different. While I have long wavy red hair, more freckles than clear skin, and green eyes, she’s more like our mom—jet-black hair and brown eyes. She’s ten months younger than me, and while I had hoped we would grow up together as best friends since she wasn’t much younger than me, it never happened. She hates me.

“Liar,” she smirks. Lilianna’s eyes drop down to my white sneakers before traveling up to my eyes. “If you were at the library, where’s your bookbag?”

My eyes widened; how could I forget? I tremble, searching for something to say, but I can’t think straight. I can’t believe I forgot. I’ve been careful, I’ve been good, and now it will all be washed down the drain because I forgot my bookbag. She can’t find out. Lilianna would definitely tell our parents and sit along the sidelines while Mom screamed at me and Dad beat me.

“Girls?” Mom calls out for us.

“You’re in for it now.” Lilianna chuckles. I watch my sister turn on her heel, walking away as if she knew my secret. She couldn’t know.

Lilianna is your typical sister. She’s evil, and I hate using that word. I’m a good girl and shouldn’t think badly about people. But I can’t help it, not when she does things on purpose to get me in trouble. Two weeks ago, she went into Dad’s office, snooping for who knows what. I tried to get her to stop, but no one could stop Lilianna from doing what she wanted to do. She blamed me, and I was the one who got lectured about right from wrong. I was the one who had to pray to God to forgive me, even though that wasn’t what I needed to be forgiven for. All while Dad hit me six times with his belt. Mom was at the store, not that she would help.

Taking a deep breath, my hands trembling as I smooth my dress down again, I make

my way into the kitchen, following Mom's call. The pale-yellow wallpaper peels from the ceiling, there are small cracks in the tile floor, and the aroma of Mom's cooking hits my nose. Liver. Bile rises in my throat as I gag silently. No matter how many times I tell them I dislike liver, beg them just to let me starve for the night, and I'm forced to eat the biggest piece.

I learned my lesson the first night just to shut up and eat what's on my plate.

"Lakely, set the table," Mom orders as I enter the kitchen. I glance over at Lilianna, who pulls down four glasses.

I open the cabinet, pulling down our plates, silverware, and napkins to set the table.

"So, Mom, I want to talk to you and Dad about something." Lilianna's high-pitched voice echoes through the kitchen.

"Oh, what's that, dear?" Mom asks. "Lakelyn, come on, dinner's done!" She claps her hands, causing me to flinch. Kicking myself in the butt, I hurry to set the table as they like.

"There's this new movie coming to theaters, and the girls are talking about going."

I roll my eyes, turning the plate forty-five degrees so the hummingbird faces the clock on the wall. There's a long list of things our parents don't allow in this household—no boys, no alcohol, no drugs, and no movies. While going to the movies on that list is odd, I don't question them. So if Lilianna thinks they'll let her go out with friends to the movies, that won't happen.

"I'm sure your father and I can discuss it."

I swing my head around; my jaw hits the floor. Aliens have taken over her body.

That's the only explanation. Mom would have shot her down before Lilianna could even finish that question. They're strict, and while it's worse for me, most of the same rules apply to her.

"Lakelyn, close your mouth before you let the Devil inside," Mom hisses.

I snap my mouth closed, my hands clamping to fists against my side. Breathe, one, two, three, breathe.

"Lilianna, go get your father," Mom says, smiling over at her favorite daughter. Lilianna leaves the glasses on the counter, smirking at me as she crosses the kitchen.

"Don't just stand there!" Mom's voice cracks in annoyance.

I grab the cups, not saying anything. It wouldn't matter if I did anyway. I place them on the table and grab the Brita for Lilianna and me while Dad enjoys his whiskey and Mom enjoys her red wine.

I hold my breath, take the liver dish from Mom, and place it in the middle of the table. I stand to the side, waiting for Dad and Lilianna to return. Thankfully, it doesn't take long before Dad enters the kitchen.

"Hmmm, smells good," he says a little too cheerfully. I bite my inner cheek, forcing the bile back down. "Let's eat."

We each sit down one by one. Dad gets the first helpings, Mom, Lilianna, and I last. They left the biggest piece of liver for me, as they do once a week when Mom makes it. My hand tightens around the serving spoon, despising the second I place it on my plate.

"Lakelyn, how about you say prayers tonight?" Dad announces.

I bow my head and fold my hands together. “Our beloved king, thank you for this food we are about to eat. We ask that you bestow this food with your protection and continue guiding our family along your path. In the name of your disciple, Master Simon, amen.” I repeat the same prayer I say most nights.

“Amen,” the rest of them mutter around the table.

“How was school today, girls?” Dad asks, cutting into his food. I keep my eyes down on my plate, the liver mocking me.

“It was wonderful. I got my essay back. Guess what? I can’t even hold it in, and I got an A plus!” Lilianna chuckles before I hear the scrape of her teeth against the fork. My eye twitches, my fingers tightening around my own.

“That’s amazing news. I knew you could do it,” Mom praises her. If only they knew what her daughter was really up to, they wouldn’t be that proud of her.

“And what about you, Lakelyn? Your mother told me you had a study group with some girls at the library.” I can feel his eyes fall on me, boring into my skull and mind. He’s picking the lie out of me. Sweat beads at my forehead, and my throat feels tight, closing around my windpipe.

“It was good,” I mutter. As much as I don’t want this liver, I force a forkful into my mouth so I don’t have to say anything else.

“What did you have to study?”

I hardly chew my food, swallowing the bitter liver. The taste is almost like a dirty penny as it explodes on my tongue and slides down my throat. I reach across the table for my water, trying to drown out the taste. My mouth is drier than the desert, and I can feel the food stuck in my throat.

“It was math, was it not?” Lilianna asks. My eyes dart to her, brows drawn together. What is she trying to do?

“Uh, yeah,” my voice is muffled and uncertain. I set down my glass, unable to see any of their eyes.

“Really? I thought your mother said it was English.”

My eyes snap up to Mom before I blink over at Lilianna. Her lip tips up in a smirk before she takes another bite of her food. Smacking her lips as she chews her food.

“You’re right, I forgot.” I pull my bottom lip between my teeth. Stop freaking out.

Dad grunts but doesn’t comment on me “forgetting.” He doesn’t believe someone can forget anything so simple. Thankfully, the rest of dinner goes over smoothly, even as I dry heave half a dozen times, getting my dinner down. Lilianna keeps the conversation focused on her as usual, and this might be the first time I’m completely okay with it.

By my last bite, I feel nauseous, and my fingers tingle with the need to reach down my throat. I force myself to save the last bit of water until my plate is empty before draining the rest.

“Thank you for dinner, Mom,” Lilianna says, leaning over and kissing Mom’s cheek.

“Thank you for dinner,” I say mindlessly.

“You both can be excused now,” Dad says.

Lilianna and I stand from the table. She makes her way to her room as I rush towards the bathroom down the hall. Flinging the door open, quietly shutting it behind me,

hoping not to alert anyone, I throw myself down on my knees in front of the toilet. The powder-blue tiles of the bathroom dig into my knees and shins, causing indents to appear. Throwing the toilet lid up, I hunch my torso over the bowl and plunge my finger down my throat. It hits the back of my throat, bouncing off the uvula, making me heave with nothing coming up. I do it again, reaching farther down, barely making it back up before vomit spews into the toilet bowl. The taste of liver and acid coating my tongue made me more nauseous than I was before. I vomit again, coating the bowl with a nasty brown color, bits of partially chewed liver floating to the top.

Once I've emptied my entire stomach and the only thing making it back up is stomach acid, I reach up and flush the contents down the toilet. It takes me a few times before the toilet is sparkling clean again. Shakingly, I make my way to my feet, heading to the sink to grab my toothbrush and toothpaste. I squeeze the minty paste onto my brush and thrust it into my mouth, aggressively brushing to get the taste of liver and vomit out. I take the extra steps to use mouthwash and a water flosser, ensuring no trace of the vileness is left.

Taking a deep breath to pull myself together, I open the bathroom door to make my way back to the kitchen. I pick up the dishes from the table and take them to the sink. I grab the sponge and dish soap and begin my chores for the evening.

It's late in the evening when I finish my chores. I'm exhausted and ready to climb into my twin-size bed. I shut the light off in the kitchen and turned just to almost run into Lilianna.

"I heard you," she says, leaning against the wall.

"I'm not sure what you mean." I go to move around her, only for Lilianna to step in my way.

"You know exactly what I mean," she hisses, crossing her arms over her chest.

“I’ll say it again. I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I lie. I tried to be as quiet as possible, but there’s no way to be completely silent while throwing your guts up.

“You think you’re such a good girl, but you’re not fooling anyone,” Lilianna sneers, smirking at me.

I bite my inner cheek, refusing to let her enter my head. Lilianna enjoys playing games. She’s wicked and downright mean.

“Please move. I want to go to bed,” I mutter through clenched teeth.

“They’re going to find out sooner or later,” Lilianna continues to egg me on. “Just remember that.”

Lilianna’s eyes scan over my body, causing me to shift on my feet. I don’t like her eyes on me, and I don’t like her thinking she knows better than me.

She slowly moves out of the way, allowing me to leave the kitchen. My hands stay fisted at my side, and I have the urge to make myself throw up again as my brain tricks me into believing that the liver is stuck in my throat.

“Oh, by the way, Dad and Mom want to see you in his office.” She laughs, turning around to the kitchen.

I close my eyes, my nails digging into my palms. It’s okay, just breathe. But that doesn’t do anything to calm the nerves sinking into my skin. I blink my eyes open, glancing over at the door. Run. It’s not the first time I thought about running away. Where would I go? I have no friends, I have no other family, there’s no one. I’m alone in this world. Sure there’s Travis, but he’s too new.

I suck in a breath, my feet carrying me towards Dad’s office. His door is closed, and I

can hear hushed voices inside. My hands shake as I lift and rap my knuckles on the wood. Their voices immediately stop before I hear Dad say, "Come in."

I twist the doorknob and push it open. Dad sits at his desk while Mom stands off to the side.

"Sit down, Child," Dad says, motioning to the chair across from the desk.

I bite my bottom lips, pulling the door closed behind me before I sit stiffly in the chair.

"Your mother and I have been discussing it, and we would like to do something special for your birthday," Dad announces.

My eyes widened, confused and startled that this was what he wanted to talk about. I for sure thought he would comment about me forgetting what class I was supposed to be studying for.

"You're turning eighteen. It's a big milestone," he says, leaning back in his chair.

I nod my head, unsure of what to say.

"The church is picking six girls to go on a camping trip this weekend, and we think you should go for your birthday." Dad doesn't bat an eye as he talks. I glance between Mom and Dad, not believing a single word he's saying. What he's saying can't be true, can it? Our whole lives have been spent between school and the church. There's no way this isn't a joke.

"Honey, say something," Mom says with irritation radiating through her voice.

"I-I, that sounds wonderful." My voice shakes.

“It is wonderful. You’ll leave tomorrow after school.” Dad smiles at me.

“Why me?” I blurt out. I know they hate being questioned, but it doesn’t make sense why they’re suddenly letting the noose break away.

“You will not question your father!” Mom hisses, her eyes narrowing down at me.

“Yes, ma’am,” I mutter, swallowing the lump in my throat.

“It’s okay, dear.” Dad doesn’t bother looking up at his wife. “The church has agreed you’re the perfect fit for this... adventure.”

My spine stiffens as my body breaks out in goosebumps. The way he says adventure makes it sound like anything but fun, but I don’t question him again. Mom glares at me, daring me to do anything but agree.

“I look forward to it.” The words leave my mouth even though I’m not sure I should be looking forward to it.

“Then it’s settled. Tomorrow after school, you and the other five girls will head out on this camping trip,” Dad says, getting up from his chair. “It’s time for bed now.”

“Yes, sir,” I say mindlessly.

I stand from the chair and leave his office, closing the door behind me.

Lilianna stands in her bedroom doorway, watching me, her brow raised.

It appears she has no idea what they wanted to talk to me about, either.

I can't help but find that odd as well.

Lilianna and Mom are like two peas in a pod.

I longed for that feeling, to know what it was like to have a caring parent.

But I was always the outcast.

Mom looked for reasons to yell at me and punish me.

Dad didn't pay attention to me until I did something he didn't approve of, and I would be beaten for it.

I reach my room and close the door before I let out my first full breath since getting home earlier.

My tiny room might not be much, just a twin bed in the corner with bright yellow bedding.

A desk across from my bed has a small container of pens.

The dresser sits behind the door with my alarm clock on top.

But it's my safe space, the only place I can breathe freely.

I don't bother with the light.

Stripping out of my dress, I pull out my pajamas and get dressed.

Slipping under the covers, I lay on my side, the window allowing just enough moonlight in.

It doesn't take long before my eyelids grow heavy, pulling me into a restless sleep.

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“Praise the king! Blessed be!”

The melodic chants swirl through the thick, hazy air, wrapping around me like a comforting blanket.

The cloaked figures surround us in the forest's darkness, pressing further towards us into the circle.

My small hand reaches up to tug on my father's sleeve as my eyes sweep the circle.

Everyone's faces are hidden inside of their black hoods.

My father peers down at me with a small smile as he tugs me closer to the bed of hay in the middle of the circle.

“Son, what we are doing today is of utmost importance.

We have a sinner in our midst.

Someone we should have been able to trust, but they've deceived us.

Can you be strong for me tonight and help lead the disciples to the path of righteousness?”

my father asks.

I've never heard my father's voice like this, angry but sad.

He turns me around to face the opposite side of the circle as he stands behind me with his hands on my shoulder.

Holding me tightly in place.

The chants continue until they are so loud my ears start to hurt.

I throw my hands up over my ears to ease the pain, but my father grabs them and forces them back down to my side, making me wince.

The circle parts, and two cloaked figures drag in a sobbing woman.

She has mud caked to her feet, crawling up her legs like vines.

Her clothes are ripped in spots and plastered to her body with sweat and blood.

Blood runs down her face in small rivulets.

Her hair is matted to her head like it hasn't been washed in weeks.

The woman struggles to escape the cloaked figures, backpedaling as much as her small, frail body will allow her.

“Please, no.

I swear I didn't mean it! You can't do this to me!”

the woman screams, her voice clogged with tears.

She looks up at me, and her eyes flash with recognition, causing her to sob even harder.

“N-n-no, please, not in front of him! Colin, please, you can’t do this to me, to him!”

She’s thrown down at our feet on the bed of hay, struggling to her knees and grabbing my hands with her filthy ones.

“Atti, honey, please tell your father how good I’ve been.”

My mother pleads for me to help her out of the hole she made for herself.

She looks up at me with hurt swimming in her eyes as I drop her hands and take a step behind my father.

Leaving her there to deal with the consequences.

Her wails of sorrow reach my ears, and my stomach rolls with nausea.

“Martha, you knew what you were doing before you did it.

You knew you were breaking our sacred vows.

Thou shall not keep their children from their parents.

Thou shall not sully their marriage bed with sexual sins.”

The anger in my father’s voice makes me scared for my mother.

I know that, in her way, she was trying to do what was best for me, but that’s not how the king likes things done.

When she snuck into my room late at night, I knew she was up to no good.

I couldn't let her betray my father by taking me away like that.

I screamed and screamed my lungs out until the guards came to save me from my mother's sins.

"Colin, I was just doing what was best for our son! He should not have to grow up in this life, and you know it! You used to think the same way until you were forced to become the master.

Atti deserves a better life, Colin."

Her pleading makes my heart sad and my eyes well with tears.

I clutch onto my father's cloak and peer around him, watching my mother as she pleads for her life.

She catches my gaze and frowns as tears cascade down her dirty cheeks.

"Atti, honey, don't look, okay? Be a good boy for Mommy.

Cover your ears and look away.

Just this last time, please listen to me."

My heart feels like it will beat out of my chest, and my cheeks are wet with tears.

I give her a nod, covering my ears and closing my eyes.

Even with the pressure of my hands over my ears, I can still hear the shrill screams of my mother as my father sacrifices her to our king, wiping away her sins.

Paving a path to righteousness for us.

When it's silent again, I crack my eyes open, and my father is crouched in front of me, removing my small hands from my ears.

“You did so well, Atticus.

One day, you will continue to lead the disciples along the path of righteousness just as I have done.”

I jolt awake from my recurring nightmare.

Sweat coats my body, and my breath sees in and out of my lungs.

Scrubbing my hands down my face, I stare up into my own eyes in the mirror on the ceiling above my bed.

Bloodshot and haggard from the consistent nightmares and sacrifices being made.

The bags under my eyes are dark purple and so sunken that I almost look like a corpse now.

I never wanted any of this.

I heave a sigh, sitting up and swinging my legs over the edge of the bed.

Placing my hands on my knees, I dip my head down between them, closing my eyes and focusing on my breathing.

My racing heart makes my head throb and tries to pull me back into the memories I try so hard to avoid.

My phone chirps on the bedside table beside me, nearly vibrating off the stand.

I grab it and press accept on the call.

“What now?”

I grunt through the speaker, standing and grabbing my black silk robe from the chair across my bed.

“Well? It better be fucking good if you’re disturbing me at six in the morning.”

Stalking to the wall of windows on the other side of the room, I peer out at the dense forest before me.

“M-master, I’m so sorry to disturb you this early in the morning.

We just got word that the sacrifice has been confirmed.

They will be in the king’s chapel in two days' time.”

The disciple’s stuttering voice irks me, but the news he carries irritates me even more.

You’d think I’d be happy, but the act of killing just doesn’t seem to do it for me anymore.

I do it because I have to, not because I want to.

Hearing their screams is more difficult these days.

I’d rather hear the sweet screams of pleasure than pain.

I've never heard of them in real life, though, except in the old movies I found in my father's closet.

I don't even acknowledge the disciple before I hang up the phone.

There's no need to.

He knows what's happening next.

It's the same ritual every single time.

Maybe that's why it doesn't do it for me anymore.

I rush to dial back the disciple who is handling the sacrifice.

He picks up on the first ring.

Typical.

I don't let him have a chance to speak before spewing out, "Make sure that they are oblivious to what is happening.

I want them dropped off two miles from the site along with others so they won't realize what's happening.

I want to hunt them."

I hear the gasp on the other side of the line as I mention the hunt.

"Do not question your master, Disciple.

Do as I ask!”

I end the call, tossing my phone onto my bed as a smile of giddy anticipation spreads across my face.

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I hold my breath as I reach the street corner, swinging my head to the left and right before I jog across to the park. Travis stands there, his hands folded over his chest. My brows pull together as I come to a stop in front of him.

“Hi,” I rasp, breathing heavily just from that little exercise.

“Hi,” Travis says as he glances behind me. Peeking around, my heart drops for a moment thinking someone I know is there, but I don’t see anything.

“I got your message,” he finally says, holding out my bookbag from yesterday. Grabbing it from him, I loop my arm around the handle. I turn around, my eyes snapping to his as I nod.

“Yes,” I breathe out. “Uh, my parents, they’re sending me to some retreat, camp thing, it’s uh...this weekend.”

“What?” he snaps, frowning down at me as if I had any choice in the matter. News flash, I didn’t. I have to do every little thing my parents tell me, or I’ll suffer the consequences. And that’s not something I ever enjoy doing.

“Yeah, they’re sending me and some girls from...well, I’m not sure where the girls are from, they didn’t...Dad never told me—”

“Stop fucking rambling and just get to the point,” he hisses.

I press my lips together, swallowing the lump in my throat. Travis has a temper, one that I try my very best not to invoke. He hates it when I ramble, when the thoughts in

my head get stuck and I can't figure out the right thing to say.

"I'm sorry," I mumble.

"I don't care that you're sorry, just tell me where you are going?" he asks, grabbing my hand.

I mindlessly follow beside him.

"I'm not sure. They just said I was going on this trip. He said I was reaching a milestone."

Travis doesn't bother to say anything as he continues to pull me further into the park where the wooded area lies. I glance behind us, unsure why he felt the need to drag me here, but I don't question him. I don't want to anger him.

Once we step between the trees, Travis turns me around until my back hits a tree, the bark digging into my shoulder blade.

"What milestone?" he asks.

For some reason, I can't look at him as I whisper, "My birthday...my eighteenth birthday."

I never lied about my age to him. While I know it's wrong to mess around with a boy, I also know it's wrong that he is four years older than me. But that doesn't matter, not to me. I want to feel normal, and seeing Travis is as normal as possible.

"Oh," he mumbles, looking off into the distance again. "I almost forgot about your big day."

I want to tell him there's nothing special about my birthday. I just have to get through this last little bit of high school before I can leave home. I want this town to be behind me and to never think about it again.

“I’m sad I’m not going to spend it with you,” he pouts. I tilt my head to the side, confused about why he would be upset about this. He never once asked about my birthday or told me he wanted to spend it together.

“We can celebrate it next weekend? I’m sure I can tell them I have some work I need to catch up on since I’ll be gone.” I shrug. I doubt they would believe me, but at least I can try.

“I’m not sure that’ll work either,” Travis says, leaning forward.

I frown up at him, my mouth opening to ask what he means when Travis rushes forward, slamming his lips against mine. I suck in a breath, confused about what he’s doing. My eyes widen, afraid to move.

“Kiss me back,” he growls against my lips.

I should want to kiss him, but something inside me refuses to let my lips move. I’m frozen against him, begging my body to move, to do anything. But I can’t.

“Jesus fuck, what is wrong with you?” Travis yells. He pulls back, grabbing my shoulder to shove me harder against the tree.

My body trembles as fear sinks into my spine, realizing I never should have followed him out here.

“I asked you a fucking question, Lakelyn.”

I shake my head, unable to speak. Even if my life depended on it, which this feels like it might be.

“What, you think you’re too good to kiss me? Is that it?”

Again, I shake my head. I don’t think that I’m too good. I can’t explain why I can’t move. I like Travis, I really do, but something deep down in my heart tells me he’s wrong, that this is wrong.

I’m too wrapped up in my head to realize what’s happening until I hear the blow echo around the woods and feel the sting radiating through my cheek. Dad is the only man to ever hit me, and while I know it’s wrong, I’m shocked Travis has hit me.

My eyes widen as tears threaten to fall when I look up at Travis. I’m not sure why I expected him to be surprised by his actions, or at least sorry. But he just stands there, fuming and breathing heavily. His blond hair shifts in the wind, his brows pull together, and his muscular build suddenly no longer seems attractive to me.

“You’re worthless,” he spits. I bite my tongue to stop myself from crying. I won’t let him see me break, just like I won’t let my family. But his words sink deep, reminding me that I am nothing. I live in my younger sister’s shadow, and my parents hate me, not that I don’t blame them. But now hearing those words from someone that I thought liked me hurt more than I care to admit.

“You’re not worth it,” he repeats, scoffing as he walks around the tree towards the park.

I blow out the breath I’ve been holding and swallow the fear down. I step away from the tree and watch him cross the park on shaky legs before climbing into his car. I wait until he drives off before finally allowing the first tear to fall.

I am worthless.

By the time I make it home, I can feel the bruise forming on my cheek. I know there's no way around facing my parents, especially since I'm about to be stuck in a car with them.

Climbing the broken concrete staircase to the front door, I pull the single key out before sliding it into the lock. I push the door open, half expecting Lilianna to be standing there, ready to pounce, but the living room is empty. As quietly as I can, I shut the door and lock it. I don't hear music playing in the kitchen like I usually do, and peeking down the small hallway, I see Dad's office door open.

"Hello?" I called out, but no one answered, which is odd. One, if not both, of them, are always home. Mom and Dad believe we should never be left alone, so where would they have gone?

Biting my cheek, I tiptoe towards my room. The doors must remain open unless we're sleeping, so I walk right into my room and glance around. Everything seems in place. Not that it wouldn't be the first time the three of them have gone through my room. I never knew what they were searching for, and I never asked. It's better not to ask.

I drop my bookbag by my desk before I start pulling out a few dresses. I'm unsure how Dad expects me to camp since I've never gone. And they don't believe women should wear pants, so I don't own any.

I shake my head and take a deep breath as I pull my undergarments out and rearrange my bag. I go across the hall and grab my toothbrush, hairbrush, and some toothpaste. By the time I've finished packing, the sound of the front door opening reaches my ears as I zip my bag up.

“Lakelyn!” Dad bellows.

I press my lips together, grab the bag, and walk out to the hallway. I reach the end of the hall to find Dad standing in the front doorway, already watching me.

“The girls are waiting, come on.” He motions for me to move.

I step forward, keeping my head down . Don’t look. Don’t notice, do—

“What’s this?” he hisses, grabbing my chin. Dad forces me to look at him and I know he’s not asking in a caring manner. He’s not asking because he’s my father and he wants to protect me.

“I tripped,” I lie. I’m a sinner.

“Lakelyn,” Dad says, raising one of his graying eyebrows.

“I did. I... I was so excited for this trip that I wasn’t paying attention to the steps. Right out and...and I just tripped. I tried to reach out, but my arms were caught with my bookbag. I—I’m sorry, I know it’s b—”

“You’re not lying to me are you?” he asks, dropping his hand from my face.

“No, sir,” I lie again.

“Fine.” I’m not sure if he believes me or not, but he drops the subject. “The girls and your mother are waiting. Let’s go,” he says, holding a hand out for me to walk before him.

I drop my head in shame. I’m a liar. I’ve sinned and now I’m going to be punished. But I deserve it. I’m worthless like Travis said. I’ve lied to my father about what

happened.

I'm a sinner.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:17 am

My back hits the wall as I watch dark figures move into our home.

I hold my breath, praying Dad or Mom don't see me hiding in the shadows.

I know I'm supposed to be asleep in my room, but I got thirsty and before I made it to the kitchen, I heard noises.

I couldn't help myself, I had to see who was arriving so late at our house.

"Welcome, welcome,"

Dad boasts.

I've never heard him so happy, not even when Mom makes his favorite meal.

I heard some of them muttering under their breath, but I couldn't make out what they were saying.

I've never seen these people here before; my parents don't have many friends.

None that they speak of anyway.

It's always just them, Lilianna, and me.

"The children are asleep, and Debbie is making a fresh pot of coffee and some tea for the others,"

Dad says, holding a hand out for them to follow to his office in the back of the house.

We're not allowed to go into Dad's office, not unless he summons us, and that only happens when we're in trouble.

I tried to sneak in Dad's office once and Mom barely stopped Dad from beating me to death with a belt.

I'm not sure why she stopped him when she's always mad at me.

My gaze trails after the last dark figure who disappears into his office before the door closes.

I take a deep breath dropping the back of my head against the wall, remembering that I'm still thirsty when my body nearly goes into a coughing fit.

My eyes fly open as I hear footsteps coming closer, I lift my head up and swing my head around.

“Ah!”

I squeak as I come face to face—well face to stomach with one of the dark figures.

I lift my head up, waiting for him to say something to me but the man just stands there, most of his face hidden within the depths of his hood.

I can barely make out his hazel eyes in the darkness.

I press my lips together, terrified but also interested in who this man is and why he's here in our hallway.

“Atticus, have you found the bathroom?”

Dad yells from his office.

I’m frozen as I stand there, unable to move and speak.

He’s going to tell my father I’m out here snooping, I can feel it.

My eyes widen as he bends down until we’re eye level.

Holding my breath I wait for the punishment to come.

“Little girls shouldn’t be out after dark,”

he whispers.

Tears well in my eyes, and swinging around I run to my room, slamming the door before I jump into my bed and under the covers...

I jerk awake as a car door slams.

I snap my eyes open as the girls begin to shuffle out of the van leaving me to scramble forward.

I nearly trip over the seat before I climb out and my feet land on the ground.

“This is it,”

Dad announces.

I watch him walk around to the back of the van and lift open the cargo area.

One by one all six of us girls grab our small duffle bag from him.

My heart races as I try to clear my head away from the memory of the hooded man so I can listen as Dad talks.

“The campsite is about two miles north.”

I peer around, wondering if any of the other girls are as confused as I am.

But when none of them even blink an eye, I cool my confusion.

“Here is a bag of non-perishable foods.

We’ll be back Sunday to collect you girls.”

Dad peers over us before he climbs back into the van, leaving us standing there.

It was so quick that I can barely process the fact my father just dropped me off in the middle of nowhere.

“Do any of you know each other?”

one of the blondes with green eyes asks, her eyes scanning around the area.

I shake my head following the rest of the girls.

“Okay, I’m Samantha,”

one of the other blondes whose ponytail is tied back too tight says rolling her eyes.

“Alicia,”

the short blonde who had asked if we knew each other says.

“Lacey.”

“Emma,”

the brunette girl says while raising her hand.

“Ashley.”

I bite my bottom lip self-consciously as their eyes all turn to me.

“Uh... Lakelyn,”

I mumble awkwardly, diverting my glance away in hopes they focus anywhere other than on me.

“Okay, now that we have that out of the way, let’s get moving.

I don’t want to be out here when it gets dark,”

Samantha says.

The girls all nod, agreeing with her.

My gaze shifts anxiously in the direction Dad and Mom drove off to.

Run.

The urgent unbidden thought flashes through my mind.

I press my lips together, realizing this is the first time besides prep school that I've been left alone.

Dad and Mom would have no idea where I went.

I could run away and make a whole new life for myself.

I haven't finished high school, but I can work in a diner.

I'm eighteen as of midnight, tonight.

They would have no idea where to look for me. I could be free.

"Lake, you coming?"

Emma, I think her name was, calls out.

I swing my head around finding that most of the girls have already disappeared into the woods, while I've stood here dreaming of running away.

I bite my tongue to tell her not to call me that, giving the road one more glance before hiking my duffle bag up high on my shoulder.

"Yeah,"

I whisper.

I might dream about running away but there's no way I would make it out there on my own.

I'm scared of my own shadow, and with the memory of those dark hooded figures

fourteen years ago fresh in my mind, I don't want to be alone.

I seriously need to be more active.

By the time we reach the campground I am sweating in areas I didn't know were possible.

I'm running out of air and wheezing so loud the other girls are giving me disgusted looks, not that I blame them.

While I'm dressed like I was going to church, they all look comfortable in jeans and t-shirts.

Where did Dad even find these girls? He had said the church was bringing them in, but why aren't they dressed like me.

We couldn't be further than different from each other.

"I swear if she doesn't shut up I'm going to make her,"

Lacey mutters to Samantha.

I hold my breath, trying my best to stop myself from breathing so heavily but it's useless.

I'm dying.

Samatha looks up, rolling her eyes as she sees I'm already watching her.

It didn't take long for the five of them to realize I was the weak link.

I was the last one to start heading to camp and the last to arrive.

“Looks like we’re going to have to triple in the tents, they only gave us two.”

Ashley tsks, tossing one of the tents to Lacey.

“Samantha you can share with me,”

Alicia announces.

And just like a match to straw, they all call each other’s names out.

“Emma,”

Samantha is quick to follow.

Leaving Lacey and Ashley looking at me like I’ve just peed in their cereal.

I blow out a pained breath, not thrilled with the choice either.

One by one, we each slowly started to put our tents up.

I mindlessly follow Lacey, unable to focus on joining in with them as they get better acquainted.

All I can think about is those hazel eyes and that dark hooded man from my dream.

He haunted me for weeks after the hallway incident, and I assumed he hadn’t told my father about it since Dad never punished me.

“Why are you wearing a dress?”

someone asks, snapping me out of my thoughts.

I stand up and glance behind me to see who it is.

Samantha stands there with her hands on her hips.

Alicia looks up from her tent, watching, while Emma and Ashley stand off to the side, peeking over as if they're not eavesdropping.

"That's all I have,"

I finally answer.

I run my sweaty palms down my dress, trying to smooth it out.

If I had to choose, I would love to try wearing pants, just once.

But we were taught good religious girls wear dresses while whores and such wear pants.

"You're telling me all you own—all you have in that bag—are dresses?"

Lacey points to the bag near my feet.

I glance down, my foot kicking the thing behind me.

"Yes..."

I timidly say.

"What the fuck?"

Ashley laughs.

I flinch at her words.

“That’s weird.”

Alicia chuckles under her breath.

"Why...Shouldn't you all be wearing dresses as well?" I ask.

I list my fingers together, trying to distract myself from their scowls.

"I mean, from the church, all girls—all women are meant to wear dresses or skirts."

"I'm not from whatever church you're talking about," Emma chuckles.

My eyes scan over them, one by one, as they all look at me with a cruel smile like I had grown two heads.

If they're not from the church, then where are they from? I was stupid to think this trip might have been good.

I was growing excited to get out of that house to finally talk to someone other than the girls at my prep school.

I wanted to get away from Lilianna, but I was wrong.

They’re all like her.

I’m always going to be the odd one out.

I take a deep breath, my nails dig into my palms, and my heart speeds up.

“Fucking freak,”

one of them mutters.

Bile rises in my throat, fear seeping into my chest.

Refusing to let them see me break, I bend down, yank my bag up, and hike it onto my shoulder.

Mumbling that I have to pee, I take off into the woods.

The bile rises higher in my throat, and I’m barely able to swallow it down before my knees buckle.

Dry heaving, back hunched, I plunge a finger down my burning throat, hitting the uvula and causing my eyes to water.

But nothing comes up.

My hands drop to the ground, tears leaking down my cheeks.

I shake my head, and using my finger, I shove it back into my throat, further down than I’ve done before, until vomit spews out of my mouth and all over my fingers, purging everything in my stomach, acid coating my tongue.

I gag, feeling something stuck in the back of my throat.

I slam my fist down on the ground, feeling my body grow weaker as more vomit spills from my lips, but I can’t stop.

“You’re a freak!”

“Ugly bitch!”

“You’re fucking stupid.”

All the words that the girls tell me every day at school.

The times I came home hating myself just to have Lilianna tell me how much Mom and Dad wished I was never born.

A branch snaps somewhere nearby.

My head snaps up, vomit stuck to my bottom lip.

I scan the area but see nothing other than trees and bugs flying around.

“Lake!”

Lacey yells behind me.

I glance over my shoulder and squint my eyes.

I see her further in the distance, cupping her mouth as she yells my name again.

My hands shake as I realize I just made myself throw up and I can’t exactly explain that.

I unzip my duffle bag, pulling out a pair of underwear to wipe my hands and lips.

Digging further down I pull out my toothbrush and toothpaste.

As quickly as I can, I brush my teeth in record time, tossing my dirty underwear into the bushes.

“Lakelyn!”

Lacey screams again.

I shove my toothpaste and brush inside my bag before I get to my feet, my knees weak.

I turn around and start walking towards her.

“Fuck,”

she hisses once I come into view.

“Can you not be stupid?”

I hold my breath, my body frozen as she glares at me.

“Let’s go, we’re going to eat something and make a fire.”

She rolls her eyes and turns.

Following behind her, neither of us says anything as we reach camp.

The girls are piled around a small hole in the ground with some firewood.

“I have to pee,”

Samantha announces, getting to her feet.

“Oh, look, the freak is back.”

She walks around Lacey and I, her shoulder bumping into mine as she passes.

I bite my tongue, refusing to feed into her pettiness.

Maybe a bear will eat her.

As soon as the thought enters my head, I want to take it back.

She might be mean, but that doesn't mean I need to be as well.

I can be the bigger person.

“Which one is ours?”

I ask, forgetting since they all look the same.

Lacey points to the furthest one.

“Thank you.”

I sigh.

I leave them behind and unzip the tent before climbing inside.

Turning, I close it back up and turn around to find Lacey's and Ashley's bedding made up basically side by side.

They barely left me room to stretch out.

It's a tiny cubby that I'll have to try and fit in.

I take a deep breath and slide over to the duffle bag seated by the sleeping bag.

I swallow the lump in my throat and begin rolling the bed out.

I glance over at their bed repeatedly, mimicking what they had done.

I still don't understand why Dad thought me camping on my birthday was a good idea.

But it also beats being at home, walking on eggshells, holding my breath because if I sighed too heavy it would give them a reason to hit me.

So much for having a good eighteenth birthday.

"Samantha!"

comes a jarring scream.

It sounds like Emma, followed by similar urgent calls from the others breaking the eerie night silence of the forest.

Dropping my small pillow, I rush over to the tent door and begin struggling with the zipper for a second before finally pulling it open and scrambling out.

"What's wrong?"

I breathe out.

Lacey is the only one who turns around, something like terror passing over her before

she says the words no one ever wants to hear, especially in the middle of the woods.

“Samantha’s gone.”

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:17 am

Warm crimson blood splashes against my face as I drag the blade across the wriggling girl's neck.

The metallic scent of her blood, accompanied by the smell of her piss running down her leg, reaches my nostrils.

Swirling around and mixing with the earthy smell of the dirt, it makes the most exotic aroma.

She pleaded so prettily for me to stop, but I refused.

I watched the sacrifices enter the woods, but I wasn't expecting her to be one of them.

Her emerald eyes sparkle like jewels in the sunshine.

Freckles splattering her skin like constellations that I wouldn't be able to miss anywhere.

My little shadow, the one I protected all those years ago.

"Atticus, what took you so long?"

Mr.

Wren asks when I make my way back into his office with the others.

The scowl on his face makes my heart beat harder in my chest.

“Did one of the girls disturb you? Were they out of their rooms? If that’s the case, the punishment will be severe because they know the rules!”

He takes a step toward the door, pushing me out of the way to grasp the doorknob in his meaty palm.

Before he can yank the door open, my father speaks up, making the breath I didn’t realize I was holding hiss out of me.

“I’m sure that Atticus has a perfectly good explanation for taking so long, right, Son?”

My father flicks his eyes to me, nodding his head, directing me to explain why I took a whole minute longer than I was supposed to.

“My shoe came untied, and I had to stop for a moment to tie it again.

My apologies for delaying our meeting, Mr.

Wren.

Your girls are fast asleep in the shadows of their rooms as they should be.”

Smiling at him I take my position beside my father at the front of the room.

Mr.

Wren nods accepting my pathetic lie before we get started.

Watching my shadow as she trudged through the woods was rather amusing.

Seeing her traipse through the brush, and over logs with her long dress made me chuckle.

The rest of the girls on the other hand, made me completely irate.

Their attitudes toward my shadow—unacceptable.

I had to watch from afar as they tormented her with their nasty words.

What I would give to drive my dagger through their hearts.

Watch them bleed out and the life leave their eyes.

One of them currently lays lifeless at my feet having met her demise.

Letting out a sigh, I lean down and drag the girl across the forest floor, leaving a trail of blood in our wake.

She's a mess—leaves and twigs sticking out of her hair, dirt marring her once-perfect skin.

I catch a whiff of something out of place with the stench of blood, dirt, and piss; an acrid odor that increasingly tickles my nostrils the further I progress through the gnarly brush.

Setting the dead girl down, I look around, trying to find the source of the musty smell.

I spy a heap of freshly spewed vomit on the forest floor amongst the leaves.

Obviously, human and not a sick, rabid animal.

This has to be what my shadow was doing out here alone.

I thought she was peeing when she broke away from the group and was hunched over here.

I stayed far enough away that I couldn't quite make out what she was doing.

Turning around to head back to where I came from, my boot catches on something soft.

Reaching down, I snag the white cotton fabric from the forest floor.

Bringing it up to my nose I catch the smell of vomit and even fainter, something sweet.

The latter makes me smash my face into the soft panties, inhaling deeply so my brain stores the memory away for a later date.

I've never smelt something like this before.

I've heard mention of it on the porn videos I have stashed from my late father, but never experienced it in person.

A euphoric feeling that tingles at the base of my spine and travels to my balls as the smell takes over all of my senses.

Gasping out a moan, I stuff the ruined fabric into my cloak pocket.

I know these feelings are wrong, my father made sure that I understood that.

Stroking over the brand on my palm that I was forced to take when I turned twenty to

show how serious I was about this.

To prove that I could continue to lead the disciples after my father was long gone.

My jaw ticks with the memory of that night, anger rising to the surface threatening to explode out of me.

I drive my teeth together and breathe through the onslaught.

“Do you, Atticus, swear to the king to guide and protect the disciples when I am no longer here?”

My father stares down at me from his place in the middle of the circle.

The hard ground digs into my knees as I kneel before him and the rest of the congregation.

I gulp hard before I answer yes, knowing what is to come for me.

“Do you, Atticus, swear to the king to remain pure of all evil in this world? To continue along the path of righteousness serving up sinners to the king?”

As he speaks he walks to the fire pit a few feet off to the side and picks up the metal poker laying on the ground.

The tip of it glows orange with a blue tint.

As he walks closer to me, two other cloaked figures walk behind me, grabbing my arms, and holding me tight.

The one on my left holds my hand out to my father, gripping my wrist so tight I fear

it might break.

My father looks at me, waiting patiently for me to answer.

Taking a deep breath to calm myself, I look up into my father's eyes and pledge, "I, Atticus, swear to the king to remain pure from evil and protect and guide the disciples along the path of righteousness after you have gone."

As soon as the last word leaves my mouth, my father brings the brand with the symbol of Saturn down on my palm.

The sizzling sound hisses through the air as the scent of burning flesh chases it.

A pained scream rushes out of my throat and echoes through the trees.

The brand throbs on my hand as the memories seep away, leaving me to catch my breath.

I'm so tired of following these fucking rules.

I didn't want this.

My father made me what I am today, and I'm not sure I like it.

I hear the screams of the sacrifices ricocheting off the trees, looking for Samantha while she lays dead on the ground next to me.

Retrieving a dagger from my cloak pocket, I grasp it tightly and stalk toward the frantic-sounding girls.

It is time to select my next victim.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:17 am

My frown deepens as Lacey's words sink in.

Samantha's gone.

"How do you know?"

I ask, stepping closer to the group, my fingers intertwined with each other.

"She was just using the bathroom, she wouldn't have just ran off,"

Ashley snaps, not bothering to look at me.

"It shouldn't be taking her this long,"

Emma mutters under her breath.

"I'm pretty sure I heard her scream,"

Alicia says.

I stand back as they share a look, and while I know it's right to feel worried that Samantha might be missing, I have no desire in me to care.

As the thought appears in my head, I immediately cringe.

I shouldn't be having those types of thoughts.

It's wrong.

It's one step closer to being a sinner.

"We should go out there and look for her,"

Lacey offers.

"It's dark, I'm not sure we should go out there,"

I find myself saying.

Alicia swings around, narrowing her eyes at me.

It's the same look Dad gives me right before I announce a stupid opinion I have.

He tells me that no man in our church is going to want me if I speak my mind.

He tells me I'm a waste of space and that Mom should have killed me before I was born.

It's only when I'm sobbing and begging for him to stop that he lets me go.

Only to have Mom come in to tell me she wished it was Lilianna that she had first, just so she didn't have me.

She goes on telling me that I never deserved to breathe.

She tells me how she wanted to drown me as a child, that she wishes she let me die.

"Who do you even think you are?"

Lacey bites back.

I shake my head, shrinking back from her.

I shouldn't have opened my mouth.

"We can't just leave her out there,"

Emma says, pulling Samantha's attention back.

I let out the breath I'd been holding when Lacey turned around and stepped towards them.

"You're right, we should go and try to find her."

Alicia sighs.

"Come on,"

Emma says, stepping over the small bush.

I shake my head as I watch one after the other go deeper into the woods, not caring that they don't have a plan and oblivious to the fact that we have no idea where we're at.

So while my fear of the dark is rearing its ugly head, I follow them anyway.

Samantha might have been mean, but she doesn't deserve to be lost and scared.

"Samantha,"

one of the girls calls out.

The moon shines down, barely giving us any light as the temperature starts to drop.

The woods grow murky the further in we head in.

I know we should head back but I can't bring myself to tell them.

The girls all hate me, and I don't understand why.

It's not surprising given I'm different from the normal crowd, but I can't be that much off.

It's like people forget those who are different still have feelings.

But no one cares.

Not the students at the prep school.

Not my family.

And not that hazel-eyed figure that scared me in the hallway.

"Samantha!"

They cry out again.

My fingernails dig into my palm as the trees begin to block out the little light we have, making it impossible to see two feet in front of me.

"Did anyone bring a flashlight?"

I finally dare to ask.

Lacey, who stands in front of me, stops and glances at each of us, confirming that no one except me has thought about it until now.

“We should head back,”

Emma’s voice squeals as a branch to our left breaks.

My head snaps to the side, heart pounding in my chest.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand as I sense someone watching us.

I can’t explain it.

I can feel their eyes burning into my skull.

I’ve had this nerve-wracking pressure on me before.

I can’t explain or process fully what it means before a figure steps into my line of sight.

One by one the girls swing their head around, staring at what I already see.

“Oh, fuck no!”

I’m not sure which girl curses before two of them take off.

I glance to my left just as the other two run off, following.

I swallow the lump in my throat, meeting the stranger’s eyes.

Or where I assume their eyes to be because I can't see into their hood but can feel the intensity of their stare.

They tilt their head at me, fiddling with something in their pocket.

I glance down and squint my eyes before I see the glint of something shining in the moonlight.

My eyes widen as it slowly sinks in what this shadow man has in his hand.

This can't be real; this can't be happening.

But it is and I don't comprehend what's fully going to happen until they take a step closer, black jeweled knife firmly placed in their hand.

I shake my head as if they understand and will magically not come after me.

It takes me longer to move than I'd ever admit.

My knees buckle as I back up, fear licking up my spine.

Air gets trapped in my lungs as it dawns on me that I'm about to die.

“Ah!”

I squeak, falling backwards into a bush.

My back hits something squishy yet hard and before I can stop myself, I'm glancing down.

Bile rises in my throat as my hands feel the warm metallic scent seeping into my skin.

My vision blurs as I take in Samantha's body lying underneath me, her throat slashed, eyes blown wide as if she didn't realize she was going to die when she had.

I struggle to my feet unsteadily, the deep chuckle from the shadow man echoing through the trees, settling in my ears.

A shiver runs down my spine, and my knee twitches before it dawns on me that I need to run.

I twist around, picking up the hem of my dress, and take off.

The trees blend together making it difficult for me to see clearly in front of me.

Panic curls in my gut and my heart pounds against my chest.

My breath comes in ragged and the blood rushes to my head.

A branch snags on the arm of my blue dress, I hiss under my breath.

Tears pool in my eyes.

Between the fear ripping my heart apart and the pain in my arm, I want to stop.

But the little voice in the back of my head tells me to keep going.

Tree branches and shrubs snag along the bottom of my dress, threatening to rip it to shreds.

Leaves crunch beneath my feet, and anxiety clutches to me as I hear the hooded figure behind me.

I'm unsure how long I can keep running until I finally spot a clearing in the wooded area.

My lip tips up in a smile, only to fall the moment my foot catches on a tree root.

My heart drops to my stomach as I tumble over a branch.

I do my best to wrap my arms around myself, bracing as gravity gets the best of me.

Twigs and sharp rocks rip into me as I roll downhill.

My eyes slam closed just as my body plummets into the murky water at the bottom.

I don't get the chance to close my mouth before water begins pouring in.

My blood turns to ice as darkness wraps around me like a cold blanket.

My head snaps up out of the water, coughing and spitting in an effort to get it out.

My entire body burning with pain, I blink furiously to force both eyes open and try to gather my surroundings, searching for the hooded figure that was chasing me.

Only it's cut off as something—rather someone—grabs the back of my hair plunging my head back under the water.

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Cold droplets of water plaster my face and drench my cloak as I push the thrashing girl's body harder into the stream, pressing her deep into the mud and rocks beneath her.

She almost manages to buck me off of her, but I hold fast, gripping her hair harder, and using all of my weight to hold her under the water.

Her body starts to still beneath me before I yank her up towards me.

She splutters gasping for air, spit mixing with the water on my face, fingers clawing at my hands still around her throat.

Her eyelids flutter open, and the emerald-green orbs glow back at me under the moonlight.

The look in her eyes makes me groan with delight.

Fear mixing with something else that I can't quite decipher.

We stare at each other in the darkness, the only sound our mixed heavy breathing.

I let her catch her breath before I dunk her back under the water, stealing everything from her lungs again.

Instead of clawing at my hands this time, she clutches them to her, holding on for dear life.

I feel her trembling like a leaf from the cold water, but she's not thrashing like she was earlier.

Her lack of fight, acceptance of her fate, makes my cock hard in my pants, pressing against my zipper and almost too uncomfortable to bear.

When her hands start to slip from their hold on mine, I rip her out of the water.

Her head lolls back towards the sky, arms limp at her sides.

I give her a harsh shake, but she still sits there limply in my hold.

Slapping her cheek, her head swings to the side, a red mark blooming on her skin.

A deep cough rushes out of her mouth, water and spit splashing my face again.

Those gemstone eyes look up at me with a glazed expression, glittering with tears as they trail down her face.

She reaches up gripping my hand with hers while she struggles to catch her breath.

I hold her there for a moment, contemplating what to do next.

I've never been this intimately close to a girl before.

Touching like this, hands clasped tightly.

Her skin is warm under my fingertips, even after being in the cold water for so long.

Her hair is plastered to her head, and although she resembles a drowned rat right now, there's still something about her that makes my cock twitch.

Her breath fans my face, pulse going haywire under my hand still wrapped around her neck.

She's shaking from the cold, lips starting to tinge a light blue, the color of them making a smile pull at my lips.

Pushing to my feet, I straddle her thin legs, looking down at her quivering in the cold water.

She stares up at me, tilting her head to the side like she's waiting patiently for what I might do next.

There's no screaming, no anything, just quiet as we look at each other.

Crouching down I reach over and hold her face between my hands, almost dwarfing her head inside of them.

I pull her face towards me and lean over to her ear.

Breathing in her scent, musky but sweet at the same time, nuzzling my nose in the hair by the side of her head.

My lips caress her ear as I whisper into the silence of the forest surrounding us, "Run, Little Shadow, because if I catch you, I will ruin you."

We sit there with each other for a few seconds, and I worry that she is hard of hearing.

Before I can repeat myself she pushes me away, thrashing through the water like a hurricane, darting across the stream away from me.

A smile spreads across my face as I watch as she weaves her way through the trees and bushes.

Giving her a decent head start before I run after her.

Pushing tree limbs aside as they catch on my cloak, scratching the skin beneath, the pain eggs me on.

Running faster to catch up with her, watching as her red hair whips around her in the wind.

Her soaked dress weighs her down as she tries to jump over a log and trips, sending her face-first into the forest floor.

She rolls a few feet along the leaves and fallen twigs on the ground.

I pull myself to a stop on the other side of the log.

I'm not ready for this chase to be over yet.

My cock is throbbing in my pants, reminding me that it's still here.

It makes me growl with irritation which gets her attention.

She looks up at me looming on the other side of the log and leaps to her feet before continuing on her way.

She's much slower now than she was before, exhausted from the chase and almost being drowned in the stream.

I walk behind her waiting for her to give up already.

She won't make it out of these woods either way.

My little shadow comes to a halt at a wall of rocks.

I knew the whole time where she was going, leading her to her demise at the edge of the woods.

The rocks are tall and imposing in the dark.

You can get lost trying to make your way through them, unless you know where you're going.

Running along the rock wall she searches for an exit to keep going, making me chuckle when she finds one and darts in—following after her as she corners herself at the dead end that I knew was there.

She pushes up against the rocks, trying to climb her way to the top, but she slides back down to the bottom from her wet skin and clothes.

Finally giving up she turns around to face me, pressing her back up against the rocks.

She's shivering in the cold, eyes darting from side to side trying to find a way out of this.

I stalk towards her, eyes traveling up her body.

Her dress is plastered to her, nipples poking out hard enough to cut glass.

Her body has curves now, much different from the child I once saw.

Walking right up to her I press my body against hers, pushing her hard into the rock

behind her.

“Little Shadow, you didn’t run fast enough now did you? What a shame,”

I whisper into her ear, stroking her wet hair back from her face as she eyes me with apprehension.

“You weren’t supposed to be here today, Little Shadow, but I’m so glad you are.

Do you have any idea how chasing you down has made me feel?”

She shakes her head no, her body trembling against mine, seeking the warmth that I offer.

My cock throbs in my pants against her hip as we stand there.

She glances down and the look of horror on her face is comical as she realizes what it is.

“Are you scared, Little Shadow?”

I chuckle in her ear as I lick the side of her face, lapping up the salty tears that are falling from her eyes.

Taking a step back from her, I push her harshly to her knees.

She lets out a whimper of pain as her knees hit the hard forest floor beneath her.

Wrapping my fingers in her red hair I tug her head back, so she looks up at me, green eyes shining with unshed tears as her bottom lip trembles.

Using my other hand I rip open my cloak, remove my belt, and yank my zipper down.

Freeing my hard cock, it bobs in front of her face.

Her eyes go wide with fear as she stares at it, her mouth gaping slightly with shock.

I smirked down at her and said, “Now, why don’t you be a good little shadow and listen to what Master Simon says? Suck my cock like your life depends on it, because it just might.”

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Darkness looms over the rocks as the eerie shadow hovers over me.

Dead leaves drift around his legs catching on my knees.

I'm frozen and scared out of my wits as his words slowly sink in.

Suck my cock like your life depends on it, because it just might.

All while the question of who this hooded man is screams in my head.

There's no way men just go around telling women to do that.

I'm terrified.

"Don't test me, Little Shadow,"

he growls.

A hiss escapes my lips when he yanks my head back, viciously pulling my hair.

It's a reminder of what he said, that my life might depend on how well I can do something I've never done before.

I've never seen, let alone felt one, and now I'm supposed to just put my mouth on it?

My eyes are glued to his penis, unable to look away.

Eight metal studs hang off his length.

“What’s wrong with it?”

The question flies out of my mouth before I can stop myself.

I brave a glance up at him, and something flashes in the depths of his eyes hidden in his hood.

“Simon says open your fucking mouth,”

he grits out.

He brings his hand to my mouth, forcing it open before he plunges himself in.

I gag around him, my hands immediately pushing against his thighs, trying to get him off me.

He pulls back, and I think he’s going to stop but he doesn’t.

The shadow man shoves himself back into my mouth, the metal pieces along the bottom of his length dragging across my tongue.

“Fuck,”

he grunts above me.

I slam my eyes closed not wanting to witness his pleasure.

Spit pools in my mouth, slipping out at the corners.

Dad taught us never to hate, but I hate this man.

I hate what he's doing to me.

“Nah uh, open those emerald eyes for me,”

he demands.

Humiliation hits me as I listen to what I'm told.

Tears form in my eyes as I open them, hating the evil smile plastered to his face.

He thrusts harder into my mouth, my skull slamming against the rocks.

Pain radiates down my neck and to my knees that dig into the cold ground.

“I never thought it would feel this good,”

he mutters to himself.

He forces himself harder into my mouth, and bile rises in my throat.

I'm going to throw up if he doesn't stop soon, and I can't tell if he cares or not.

Shadow man moves back, narrowing his eyes at me.

“I don't care if you throw up, you're going to suck my cock until I finish in your pretty mouth,”

he growls, as if he heard the voice inside my head.

“Please,”

I try to beg.

But he doesn't care.

He uses the opportunity and shoves himself back into my mouth.

I'm a mess; my teeth drag over the top of his length and the bottom catches on each piercing.

The shadow man takes and takes from me.

Not an ounce of him cares that I don't want this, that I'm terrified, or that my life depends on how well I can do this.

Why did the girls just leave me? I know none of us saw eye to eye.

They think I'm weird, that their words didn't hurt.

But they did.

It reminded me of my childhood.

I was once again being bullied, but it wasn't my sister this time.

It was a group of them.

“Fuck, your mouth....”

he groans above me.

The gagging sounds coming out of my mouth are embarrassing, but he moans loudly, and I can't make sense of his jerky movements.

His hands cradle the sides of my face, my skull crushing into the rocks.

His eyes meet mine, and something flashes in them, but just as it appears it's gone.

"Such a good little shadow,"

he murmurs.

"I'm glad it was you..."

He pulls out of my mouth.

I don't get a chance to think about what he meant when I'm coughing so hard, I'm sure I'll throw up a lung.

So much spit slips out of my mouth it's disgusting.

"Please stop!"

I beg, tears falling down my cheeks dropping to the ground.

My skin breaks out in goosebumps as the wind picks up.

My wet dress is plastered to my body like a second skin.

"I don't think I can."

His voice carries so low I can barely hear him.

I shake my head, petrified beyond belief at his words.

Shadow man doesn't give me a chance to ask or move before he's placing the tip of his penis at my lips again.

"Open that whore mouth wider, Little Shadow."

I mindlessly open my mouth allowing him to slowly move his length back in.

This time he's slower, careful not to crush my head against the rocks.

I should be grateful, but how can I be? He's forcing himself into me.

I can't breathe as he continues working himself into my mouth.

"That's it, take my cock like a good girl,"

he groans.

His movements jerk, his balls hit my chin as my nose hits his pubic bone.

I struggle to breathe as his eyes drop down to mine, and all I see is darkness.

My nails dig into his clothed thighs, hoping I'm causing him some type of pain.

"F-fuck,"

he stutters out before warm liquid shoots down my throat.

I gag, pushing against his legs, but he doesn't budge.

His eyes slam closed as he throws his head back.

Saltiness mixed with a hint of sweetness coats my tongue.

He pulls out of my mouth, breathing heavily as he steps back.

My hands drop to the ground, barely holding myself up as I cough and spit out whatever he shot into my mouth.

Tears stream down my face at the overwhelming need to throw up.

My hands tingle as I slowly reach up to shove my finger down my throat.

“Don’t you dare make yourself throw up, Little Shadow, because that’s the only piece of me you’ll willingly get.”

I blink up at the shadow man just as his hand wraps around my neck.

My eyes widen as the air slips from my lungs.

My hands wrap around his wrist, begging him to stop.

But he doesn’t.

My brain becomes fuzzy, my eyes cross as my vision blurs, and darkness pulls me under.

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My shadow's motionless body lies on the cold ground before me.

Her chest rises and falls with each breath she takes.

I thought she was pretty before, but she's breathtaking when she's unconscious.

Her wet hair is plastered to her head, and her cheeks are stained with tears and dirt scattered over her clothes and flesh.

Lips swollen and cracked from the abuse that they just endured.

Goosebumps rise on her skin as I watch over her, almost like she subconsciously knows about my sinister intent.

Leaning down I swipe the corner of her mouth where some of my release had collected.

Admiring its sticky texture as I push it back inside her mouth, so she'll have the taste of me even after she wakes.

I rub my semen on her soft tongue, massaging it into every taste bud.

If I could brand the taste on her tongue, I would.

Once I'm satisfied she will taste me for the next few hours, I pick up her limp body and cradle it in my arms as I walk back towards the dense forest trees.

My cock still throbs slightly in my pants at the memory of her velvety warm mouth on me.

I've seen it done before but watching it and experiencing it are two different things.

I would have never guessed that I'd have a girl on her knees before me in the middle of a damn forest.

Does this count as breaking my vows to my king? How far do the lines of staying celibate go?

Stepping over fallen branches as I trudge through the dark forest before me, trying to find my destination, I look up at the stars and follow the brightest one, knowing that it will take me where I need to be.

After what feels like forever, I finally spot the flickering of fires in the distance.

Picking up my pace, I enter the circle the disciples have made to help me find this place.

Trekking over the cold ground to the wood cage in the corner, I wrench it open, crawling through the small door and depositing my little shadow at the back.

She stirs slightly, mumbling something in her sleep, but continues to lay there limp.

I remove my cloak and drape it over her, so she doesn't freeze to death.

That would completely defeat the whole purpose of bringing her here.

Crawling out of the small cage, I close the door before leaning my side against the hardwood, staring down at her.

Shivering like a leaf under my cloak, she subconsciously reaches out to pull it tighter around her.

She looks so innocent like this, almost as innocent as she was the last time I saw her.

My mind flits back to memories of her dressed in her white nightgown, terrified, and shaking in the hallway of her home.

The beginning of what feels like forever ago.

“Alright, Disciples, does everyone understand their part in tomorrow's ritual?”

I say, sweeping my gaze around the circle, watching as they all nod their heads eagerly.

They will do anything to please me or their king, even if it means killing innocent people.

I never did agree with that part, but my father always said that “this is just the way it is.”

“Okay, then I think it's time that we call it a night.

Thank you, Mr.

Wren, for hosting our meeting this evening.

You have pleased me and for doing so, you will get to be an integral part of tomorrow's ritual.”

I smile over at the older man standing next to the door, and he beams at me with

delight.

Twisting the golden knob on the door, he pushes it open, gesturing for everyone to head out.

He verbally thanks me, but I barely hear him with the sight in front me.

Standing in the hall clad in a frilly white night dress is one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen.

Her red hair flows down her back, emerald eyes glowing with fear as she looks at me.

“What the fuck are you doing out of your room!”

Breaking eye contact with her, I swing my eyes to Mr.

Wren, watching as he stalks toward the terrified girl.

She’s trembling like a leaf, and I’m not sure why.

Mr.

Wren has always seemed so nice.

He always talks about his girls, about their achievements, and even passes around school photos of them.

“Lakelyn, you know you aren’t supposed to be out here after bed!”

He grabs her arm, shoving her into the wall, spit flying from his mouth as he yells at her.

“Daddy, I’m sorry, I just had to go to the bathroom!”

She pleads with him as he’s shaking her by the shoulders.

Tears gather in her eyes, face red from embarrassment as she looks at her audience from the corner of her eyes.

The look of fear she has makes me angry.

It makes me want to tear Mr.

Wren limb from limb.

She’s too pure to know fear like this.

“I don’t fucking care.

You hold it until morning you ungrateful brat!”

His hand whips out, slapping her across the face and sending her head flying to the side.

A pained sob rips out of her throat, and I can’t hold myself back anymore.

One second I’m standing in the office still, and the next I’m in the hall holding Mr.

Wren by the wrist.

“I think that there is a perfectly good explanation as to why Lakelyn is out of her room this late, isn’t there? I don’t think there’s any need for more violence,”

I say, looking over at Lakelyn, her green eyes swimming with tears as they cascade down her face.

“Well, go on then.

Why did you need to use the bathroom so badly that you disobeyed the rules of your parents this evening? Are you feeling alright?”

She shakes with fear as I try my hardest to make my voice soft and reassuring for her.

“Y-yes I-I uh,”

Lakelyn starts as she blushes and stares at the floor before continuing on.

“I started my monthly cycle and needed supplies,”

she says, her breath hiccupping as she finishes explaining.

My hand tightens on Mr.

Wren's wrist before I drop it, like it burnt me.

“Very well, child.

Why don't you carry on with what you were doing, then.

Disciples, I think we are done here.

You can all follow me, especially you,”

I say pointedly to Mr.

Wren as I walk towards the front door.

I can't even remember another time that I wanted to kill one of my own outside of that night.

The restraint I used not to tear Mr.

Wren's head off was immense.

Just thinking about that night makes me angry all over again.

She wasn't supposed to be in these woods tonight.

We made a deal years ago that Lakelyn would never sit in a cage like this.

I'm not sure what happened between now and then, but there better be a good explanation for it.

She never deserved this.

The way she makes me feel, like I have no control, is intoxicating, and I'm not sure if I can give that up.

I peer over at my little shadow's sleeping form, wondering how I will get us out of this mess.

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I smile into the warm cloth covering my body.

Though the ground is cold, I don't care, not with the warmth on top of me and the smell of sandalwood and citrus.

I cling to the cloth, burying my nose in the oddly familiar scent.

I let out a sigh, feeling safe and content.

I can't remember the last time I felt comfortable enough to just lie here without sleeping and feel at home.

"I was beginning to worry that I may have caused more damage than I meant to." The shadow man's voice pulls me out of the brief comfort.

My heart plummets to my stomach, and my eyes snap open, immediately falling on the man sitting in front of me outside of the cage.

His face is hidden in the depths of his hood.

I swallow hard, fear licking up my spine as I stare at him through the wooden bars.

My eyes drift around the area, a few torches lighting the wooded scenery.

I swallow the lump in my throat, blinking away the tears forming in my eyes.

Why am I such a crybaby?

My muscles ache as I sit up, easing myself back against the cage.

I pull the cloth over my body trying to hide myself away from the shadow man's gaze.

I can feel his eyes drilling a hole into my skull, and I can't understand why.

"Where am I?"

I blurt out.

"In a cage."

His voice carries through the wind.

I roll my eyes and bite my tongue, even though I know better than to roll my eyes.

Dad always said it wasn't ladylike, and the next time he saw me do it I was going to be in big trouble.

It was enough of a warning that I never did it again until now.

"Why am I in a cage?"

I ask, wrapping my arms around my knees.

"I put you in there."

I close my eyes to stop myself from rolling them or shooting daggers at him.

I hate that he's being cryptic and not telling me the truth.

I know I have no right to demand he tell me, but my head feels as if it's going to explode any minute now.

I'm scared, and the anxiety sinking in my gut makes bile rise in my throat.

"Why won't you look at me?"

the shadow man asks.

I frown, my eyes flickering over to him.

He sits in front of the cage, his hands resting on his knees, looking at ease.

For some reason that irritates me, I don't want him to look fine with me sitting here, cold and feeling things.

"I'm not sure,"

I answer.

Sinner.

My cheeks heat, and I can only imagine how red my face is.

My eyes flicker down, but with the way he's sitting, I can't see anything.

All I can think about is what he did to me.

"Why did you knock me out?"

I ask, unable to look away.

“I won’t answer your questions if you can’t look at me.”

Against my better judgment, my eyes trail up his body until I meet his eyes.

Something flashes across his face, but just like last time, as soon as it appears, it’s gone.

His hazel eyes stare into mine as if he’s looking for my soul.

I want to tell him I might not have one, but I keep my mouth shut.

Most of his face is still hidden in the depths of his robe and the darkness but something about him feels all too familiar.

That is until a smile spreads across his face, and he says, “There it is.

The respect your master deserves.”

My lips press together, annoyed at his words.

After everything he did, he has no right to talk about respect.

“Excuse me?”

The words fly out of my mouth.

A tingle of fear wiggles along my spine, but I hold it back.

I might be a naive girl, but I’m not going to let him just walk all over me.

The shadow man blinks at me, his head tilting as he studies me.

I hold his gaze, trying to portray that I'm not moments from emptying everything in my stomach and curling into a ball while I cry.

"Who hit you?" he asks.

My hand automatically reaches up to my face, pressing my finger against the bruise Travis gave me.

"No one,"

I mutter, my eyes breaking away from him.

I shouldn't be embarrassed, but I am.

While I liked to think Travis was my boyfriend, that even if we barely saw each other because of my parents, he understood me.

That is until he smacked me.

"Don't lie to me.

It's a sin,"

he growls.

I swallow and nod my head.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

"It's not important."

I shrug, pulling my knees further into my chest.

“That’s a lie, again.”

“It’s not a lie.”

I frown over at him.

“It’s not important.

It doesn’t matter.”

Growing up I never mattered to my parents.

It was all about Lilianna.

They both made it clear that I was an unwanted child, and while I know I have my faults, they beat me for any reason they could come up with.

“Tell me who hit you,”

he demands.

I shake my head.

Even if I did tell him it was Travis, nothing good would come of it.

“Don’t think about lying to me,” he warns.

I press my lips together, debating on still lying to him.

But one glance at him and I know he holds no argument.

“It was a guy.”

Shadow man’s eyes darken, his hands flex into fists, and his knuckles crack from the force.

If I didn’t know better, I would think he was upset that someone hit me.

“Why did he hit you?”

he finally questions.

“I’m not sure. I...we...”

I shrug, trailing off.

I don’t know why Travis hit me; it feels like another life at this point.

“What were you doing before he hit you, Lakelyn?” he asks.

My eyes snap to his at the mention of my name.

How does he know it? And why does it feel like this isn’t the first time he’s said it?
But I don’t get a chance to say anything before he starts to stand.

I can’t look away from him, the fear of being left alone grabbing me by the throat.

“Can you tell me your name?”

I blurt out, trying to think of anything to say to get him to stay.

The shadow man glances back at me.

I can see the words on the tip of his tongue, but he sighs and shakes his head.

I plead with him to not leave me, but he doesn't care and continues to walk away leaving me here alone.

Clinging the cloth to my nose, I breathe in its scent.

My eyes slam close, the smell of citrus and sandalwood bringing me some calmness.

But I know somewhere in the back of my head, I'm about to die.

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The moment she sat up and turned her head to look at me full-on, I could feel my anger rise to the surface, threatening to break out and tear everything down around us.

It's irrational, I know that.

The purple bruise that blooms on her cheek makes me want to kill someone, bleed them dry, and watch the life leave their eyes for putting a mark on her.

The only one allowed to leave marks on her is me.

I stop in my tracks at that thought, pondering the feelings that are churning in my stomach and head.

She's mine.

I think she's always been mine, but the universe must have had other plans.

Or did it? She ended up in my clutches like a lamb to slaughter, but does it really need to end that way?

I glance back behind me, seeing the wooden cage sitting in the forest's darkness, catching a glimpse of her pale skin shining under the moonlight.

She's clutching the wooden slats, rattling them for dear life, hoping they will give way and set her free.

I imagine it's my arms around her, holding her tight, threatening to devour her whole

instead of that cage.

My mind flicks to the task ahead, and I'm unsure I can complete it.

Watching the life bleed out of a sacrifice is therapeutic to me, but knowing it will be her under my blade makes me somber.

The last time I felt this sadness was when my mother was the one in the ring.

When my mother pleaded for me to save her, it broke my heart.

What will it do to me when I hear the cries for help coming from Lakelyn?

She shouldn't fucking be here.

I turn back and trudge through the forest looking for my disciples.

When I find them, they're huddled around a large fire near the sacrifice pit.

Creeping up quietly behind them, I hear their chatter about the girls that they brought here, one bragging about how they managed to convince them to come to this phony camping trip.

A voice pipes up in front of me, and it makes me pause.

The disciples around him still, staring at me wordlessly as the man in front of me continues to speak.

"I told Lakelyn that this was an eighteenth birthday gift for her, said that it would do her good to go camping with a group of girls.

I even told her it would be relaxing for them all.”

Mr.

Wren starts cackling like a hyena.

“I still can’t believe she actually bought it.

She should know better.

I would never let her go camping in the middle of nowhere without a chaperone.

She must think I’m stupid, and for that alone she deserves to be here.”

I fist my hands at my sides, resisting the urge to reach out and strangle the ungrateful man before me.

Taking a deep breath to calm myself, I clear my throat, and Mr.

Wren whips around like his robe is on fire.

The look on his face is priceless and makes me wonder if he pissed himself in fear.

“M-master Simon.

Sir, I didn’t know you had made it back just yet from your hunt. Welcome.”

He bows before me, spreading his arms wide behind him in some grand gesture.

“Hello, Disciple.

I couldn't help but overhear your conversation.

Please, why don't you elaborate some more on why Lakelyn is here with the other sacrifices? I thought we had discussed this previously.

She should not be here, Mr. Wren."

The threat in my voice makes him tremble before me.

He stutters, his words panicking, and I have no idea what the hell he's trying to say, making him guilty in my eyes.

"Speak clearly, Disciple, or you will be on the other end of my blade."

"Master, there are things that you just don't understand."

He wrings his hands in front of him as he looks at me like a kid who was called to the principal's office.

"Lakelyn is—"

Mr.

Wren is cut off by screaming coming from across the field at another cage.

A disciple is tugging one of the girls by her hair across the cold ground.

They kick the door of the cage open and fling her inside.

She lands on the ground with a thud like a rag doll, screaming and crying for her God that will never save her.

I turn back to Mr.

Wren and he's nowhere in sight.

Turning in circles looking for him.

I see him fleeing to the opposite side of the field, his robe flapping behind him.

Letting out a huff, I tilt my head back looking at the moon shining bright, taunting me.

It's almost time, and it makes my hands sweat with nerves.

The crackling of the fire ahead brings me peace as I try to make sense of the emotional turmoil inside of me.

Looking down at the brand on my hand, I rub my fingers over it, thinking back to happier times.

A time when I had a mother who would help me make sense of the chaos in my mind.

When I had a father who was in charge, shouldering the burdens instead.

A time when I wasn't tasked to destroy families for the sake of my own.

"Master Simon."

A disciple, whose name I don't care to remember, calls for me across the fire.

He nods up to the moon, pointing as though it were a beacon.

“It’s time, sir.”

Shoving my hands into my pockets, I turn on my heel heading back towards the wooden cage that houses my little shadow.

When I get there she’s curled up in the corner, shivering under my cloak, breathing deeply as though asleep.

She must sense that I’m here, because her eyes pop straight open, staring directly into mine.

The green of her irises sparkling under the moonlight makes my insides twist.

She sits up wrapping her hands around her knees waiting for me to say something, anything.

I can feel her nerves coming off of her in waves as I unlock the door to her cage swinging it open.

Holding out my hand to her, I beckon.

“It’s time, Little Shadow.”

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My muscles grow weak from pounding on the bars trying to escape.

I have no idea why I'm in here, and that should be what I'm trying to figure out.

Instead, I puzzle over how I know him.

There was something about that look in his eyes when he was staring at me.

He makes me feel uncomfortable but safe at the same time.

He screams danger, I know this.

But I can't help the little piece inside me that is curious as to his identity.

My hands drop from the bars.

Sitting back, I pull his robe over my shoulders and hold it against my chest.

Even with its coverage, the wind sends shivers down my spine.

My teeth begin to chatter, and I swear they'll crack under the pressure.

The moonlight barely gives any light, which terrifies me all the more because I'm afraid of the dark.

Sitting in this cage, it's no different.

Every noise sends chills of panic through my veins, my heart races, and my eyes dart around trying to figure out where the noises are coming from.

I know it's useless, but I must do something to keep myself awake.

Slowly, my body begins to fall until my head rests against the ground, my eyelids drooping as sleep takes over.

I don't know how long I've slept before I sense someone watching me.

My eyes snap open and are immediately drawn to the hazel-eyed man.

I sit up slowly.

Pulling my legs to my chest, I wrap my arms around my knees.

I wait for him to say something, but he just watches me.

I bite my lip, unsure if I should speak first, when his eyes drop down to my mouth.

It's just for a moment, but it's long enough that I want to question him.

I'm not sure how long we stare at each other before he reaches into his pocket, producing a key.

My eyes follow his hand as he unlocks the cage, swinging the door open.

He gestures with his hand extended, motioning me towards him.

"It's time, Little Shadow."

I shake my head before I know what I'm doing.

I don't know what it's time for, but the glint in his eyes and the fact I was locked in a cage tells me I should do anything but take his hand.

"Don't make this any harder than it needs to be."

My head continues to shake as if that's enough to convince him.

I know it's not.

"I need you to trust me."

He almost sounds sincere.

That little voice in my head screams at me not to take his hand.

But the look in his eyes tells me another story.

I'm just not sure what to believe.

Swallowing back the fear trickling in the back of my throat, my hand trembles as I reach forward.

I slip it into his, easing myself out of the cage.

His skin is cold to the touch, rough with just the right amount of softness.

Helping me to my feet, I look up at the shadow man, his face hidden in the depths of his hood.

“Will you ever tell me your name?”

I whisper.

He tilts his head to the side, considering my words.

His jaw ticks while his eyes flicker behind me.

I don't dare to look away, afraid that if I don't hold my ground I'll never find out his name.

“Tell me one fact that no one knows about you and maybe,”

he finally says.

My brows pull together into a frown.

Being put on the spot wrecks my nerves and I can't think of anything.

“I hate liver,”

I blurt out.

“Most do, so that doesn't surprise me.

Tell me something else, a secret, your darkest one.”

I swallow, my eyes darting away from him.

I can't tell him.

I can't tell anyone.

If anyone knew the thoughts in my head, I would be committed.

"I don't have one,"

I tell him instead.

Maybe knowing his name isn't all that important.

He roughly grabs my chin, forcing me to look at him.

"Ah ah ah, I see it on the tip of your tongue.

Spit it out."

I try to shake my head, but the grip he has on my face stops me.

"Be a good girl and tell me."

My stomach tightens, pressure forcing its way between my legs as I feel something warm and wet build in my center.

"Sometimes I think about killing my parents,"

I whisper.

His eyes widen for a moment before he cools his expression. "Why?"

"That's another secret, and you only asked for one.

What's your name?"

His lips pull up in a smirk, nodding his head.

"You got me there,"

he says.

His hand drops from my face.

A small piece of me misses his touch already.

"Atticus."

His hushed words barely reach my ears.

It takes me a second to realize what he's said, but when I do, I can't help but smile.

"I like it."

"You'd be the first."

I open my mouth to say something when I hear a low humming behind me.

Just as I turn my head, Atticus grabs a hold of my wrist.

"Whoa—what?"

I jump backwards.

My eyes snap down, confused about what he's doing.

It's then I see thick rope wrapping around my wrist.

I attempt to jerk my hands back, but his firm grip stops me.

My brain doesn't work fast enough before he's tying a knot, my wrists bound and held together.

The humming grows louder, fear seeping into my veins.

"Atticus?" I mumble.

"I told you it was time,"

is the only thing he says just as multiple fires ignite behind us.

My head snaps around.

Six small fires stand in a circle while a large wooden cross sits in the middle.

My eyes widen as it suddenly dawns on me that something is seriously wrong.

"Please, please don't,"

I find myself saying.

Atticus doesn't say anything, not that I expected him to.

I don't get a chance to move before his arm wraps around my middle, lifting me off the ground.

A scream escapes from my lips, my throat burning from the force I put behind it.

He walks me towards the cross, my legs kicking out, fighting against his hold.

I might not stand a chance, but I have to at least try.

Or that's what I tell myself.

I can't just not do anything.

But it's all useless.

He's stronger than me, much stronger.

The humming wraps around us.

I try to look about to see who's there, but I'm too focused on the cross Atticus stops in front of.

Setting me down, he twists me, so I'm turned, hooking my arms above my head.

"Stop!"

I scream, imploring.

Kicking my feet out, I attempt to hit him, but I'm stopped.

Someone, or two someones, grab my ankles pulling my legs back together.

I glance down, frozen in fear as one holds my legs against the wood and the other ties them together.

"Stop! Please stop,"

I desperately cry out as I fight against their hold, my terrified heart nearly ripping free from my chest, tears falling down my cheeks.

Atticus stands, slowly backing away.

I can't fathom him leaving, even if he was the one to put me here.

I feel like I can't catch my breath.

He turns around, facing the dark shadows that stand in a semicircle watching him.

"Welcome, my disciples, it's a joyful time to see you all again."

They all mumble their responses.

I can't hear what they say between the pressure building in my head.

My teeth hurt from how hard I clench my jaw.

Why had I trusted him? I should have put up a bigger fight.

There are a million things I should have done.

Why did I think Dad meant well when sending me on this trip? I'm so stupid.

"Tonight we were brought a special gift,"

Atticus' voice echoes around the wooded area.

Fresh tears form in my eyes, and my vision blurs, making the dark figures mix together as they hoot and holler excitedly.

“The innocent brought to us must be checked for purity for our king,”

he announces.

The crowd quietens, and an eerie feeling sinks deep into my bones.

Atticus turns around, facing me.

I swallow the lump in my throat, feeling my airways closing.

Unable to look away as Atticus steps forward and positions himself in front of me, he reaches down to the bottom of my dress.

I hold my breath as he pulls it up, my knees becoming exposed first and then my thighs.

I shake my head, pleading with him not to do this.

He stops just before my sex, pushing my panties to the side, baring me for everyone to see.

His fingers brush over my lips causing my breath to hitch.

My eyes lock onto his as he pries my folds open, one of his thick fingers sinking into me.

I can't breathe, confused why my body is reacting to him in ways it's never done before. Instead of fear, I'm excited. Somethings wrong with me.

I hold my breath as he prods around, his thick finger making me feel full in a way I've never felt before.

Our eyes lock together, his jaw ticking as he blinks slowly.

I'm not sure what he's doing, but in a blink of an eye his finger stops moving as if he found what he was looking for.

“Mine.”

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The moment my finger brushes up against her thin barrier, it's game over for me.

Every doubt I have in my mind vanishes in a millisecond.

My eyes collide with hers as I whisper, " Mine,"

making a shiver run through her body.

Her pussy clenches around my finger that's still inside of her.

Wetness starts to pool around it, dripping down her legs.

Lakelyn's face is a mix of pleasure, confusion, and fear as she stares up at me.

The flames from the fire reflect in her eyes, the breeze rustles her hair around her face softly with the scent of apples, and the earthy smell of creek water wafts through my nostrils.

Gently withdrawing my finger from her slick pussy, I reach up and pop my finger in my mouth.

The musky taste of her explodes on my taste buds, making me groan with pleasure.

She trembles against the cross as she watches me suck her essence off my finger.

I lean down to her ear so that only she can hear me as I whisper, "Do you remember when I asked you to trust me, Little Shadow?"

She nods her head against my cheek, her soft hair tickling my nose.

“I need you to be such a good girl for me, and I promise to take care of you.

Nod if you understand.”

Lakelyn is still for a moment.

I fear that she might have passed out, but then she nods her head slowly while letting out a deep breath.

Taking a step back from Lakelyn, I turn towards my disciples and throw my hands up in the air ready to put on the best show of my life.

“Disciples! Another pure soul has been sent to us to gift to our king! Oh how happy he will be to receive this blessing from his obedient children!”

Brandishing the dagger I hold it up in front of me, the light of the fire glinting off of it sinisterly.

The humming in the circle increases in volume as I glide over to stand in front of Lakelyn’s terrified body.

Tears glisten in her eyes, making my cock hard at the most inconvenient time.

“Before we give the innocent to our king, we must absolve them of the ability to speak our secrets in the afterlife!”

As the humming reaches its peak, I strike out quickly, parting Lakelyn’s lips with my fingers and grabbing her tongue roughly.

Her panicked mumbles reach my ears as drool slides down her chin.

Bringing the dagger to her withering muscle, I make a small slice in it, watching the blood flow down my fingers as her scream pierces the forest.

Before her scream ends I've taken the dagger and cut her free from her bindings swiftly.

Snagging her around the waist, holding her close to my body, I chuck the dagger at the closest disciple's head.

It lodges into their eye socket, the blood spraying like a geyser from their black hood.

Their pained screams are enough of a distraction for me to kick over the wooden cross, flinging flaming sticks and ashes all over, effectively cutting off any access for them to get to us.

I grab my sobbing little shadow around the waist, hoisting her over my shoulder, and run for the hills.

Jumping over logs, getting snagged by brambles cutting me through my robe.

In my haste, I trip over a log and we both tumble down a hill, landing in the stream below.

Lakelyn's sobs are the only way for me to find her in the darkness of the night.

She's hyperventilating, and we don't have time for me to stop and make her feel better.

Grabbing her hand, I haul her up out of the water and drag her through the stream to the other side.

Unfortunately for us, the other side is a wall of rocks, and there's no way for me to

get us both up there.

I spin Lakelyn around and push her up against the rocks, slapping her cheek, stunning her enough to quiet her.

“I need you to shut the fuck up, pretty girl, and listen to me.

If we are going to make it out of this forest alive, I need you to be strong and listen.

I know you’re in pain, but we don’t have time to deal with that right now.

Nod if you understand.”

She nods frantically while she tries her hardest to visibly get her shit together.

“Good girl.

I’m going to hoist you up, then you’re going to grab that rock ledge and pull yourself up there, got it?”

She nods then turns around quickly.

Leaning down, I grab her foot, placing it in my hands and hoist her up as high as I can.

She grabs ahold of the ledge and pulls herself the rest of the way up, grunting in pain the whole way.

When she’s up, I half expect her to leave me, but she turns around and reaches her small hand down to help me.

Backing up a few steps, I sprint towards the rock, placing my foot on it and jumping

as hard as I can, grabbing the ledge as she tries to pull me up with her.

Once I've made it we both collapse onto the ground in a heap trying to catch our breath.

Her small hand reaches for me and wraps around my own, the small movement warming my cold heart.

Looking over at her, she gives me a tiny bloody smile before getting to her feet and pulling me along with her.

We trek through the forest for hours, both shivering from the cold and weak from the journey.

As the sun starts coming up over the horizon, I spot a run-down shack tucked away in the trees.

The shack is made of logs with vines running all around it, windows boarded over with plywood.

Trees and brush surround it so well that you could almost miss that it even exists.

I tuck an exhausted Lakelyn behind some trees while I go and investigate the shack myself.

Wooden floorboards on the porch creak under my boots as I approach the front door.

The door is barely hanging on its hinges as I push it open.

Musty stale air assaults me as I walk inside.

Sweeping my eyes around the small space, it seems like it's been uninhabited for

years.

The living room is covered in dust with an old sixties floral couch against the wall and a box television across from it.

The kitchen to the left simply houses only a fridge, sink, and stove.

I continue on down the hall and find a bathroom that has definitely seen better days.

Rummaging through the cabinets, I find a first aid kit and tuck it under my arm.

The only other room in the house is a bedroom.

A full-size bed sits in the room with a floral quilt on top and a rocking chair in the corner.

A large wooden dresser sits off to the side.

Opening the squeaky drawers, I find old men's and women's clothing.

Not the most stylish options, but they will do.

Once I'm satisfied that it's safe, I leave the first aid kit on the couch and walk back out to Lakelyn.

She's asleep against the trees when I get there, and I almost hate having to wake her up.

I lean down, pick her up and carry her bridal style back to the shack.

Sitting her on the couch, I rummage through the kitchen looking for a glass and almost praise the king myself when the water in the sink actually works and

eventually runs clear.

Making my way back to Lakelyn, I tilt the water to her lips, and she hisses at the cool temperature before guzzling it down.

“I know you're a tired little shadow, but we need to fix that tongue of yours.”

Pulling out the first aid kit and sitting it between us, I sort through all the bits and bobs inside, grateful to find a stitching kit.

Lakelyn looks at me with terrified eyes when she realizes what I'm about to do and tries to get up off the couch to run.

Grabbing her hands in mine I hold her there before I finally speak.

“After everything you just went through and will go through, this is the least of your worries, Lakelyn.

You can do this.

You have to.”

She doesn't answer me, and she doesn't need to.

I grab the needle and thread and set to work.

She sticks her tongue out; it's barely holding on by a thin piece of muscle on the left side.

As soon as I push the needle through the squishy muscle, she lets out a squeak and her nails dig into my thigh making me gasp.

“Fuck, that’s it, baby girl, make me hurt too, Lakelyn.”

I continue on with my work, and all the while her nails are making me bleed.

My blood seeps through my pants as hers drips down my arm.

Once I’m done I tie off the end and place the needle down.

Looking into her tear-filled eyes she whispers, “What do we do now?”

as a tear trails down her bloody cheek.