

THURSDAY

Good morning, campers.

Now, most of y'all are probably saying, 'What's Malcolm doing up there? He gonna teach?' or, 'I went to camp just so I could get away from his ugly mug for a week, now he shows up here?' No, no, very sorry, but I won't be teaching a lesson or anything this morning. I'm just here to make a quick announcement.

Now before you hear it, I'll be upfront: this announcement may frighten you, it may make you feel uneasy, but the one thing to remember above all is that everything is *okay*. Everything is going to be fine, and really, this announcement will probably be of little consequence in your two remaining days here. It may also be difficult to believe for some of you, but from what I know from Scripture, my career as a preacher, and what god has told me through prayer, I believe this to be the case.

After careful consideration and consultation with the other churches, we believe that a demonic presence has taken residence here at Camp Havenside. Now, it is true that things like séances and exorcisms have been more or less left in the past, and because we are a by-the-book church, as you know, we don't like to lose ourselves in arbitrary rituals or superstitions. But, based on our interpretation of Scripture, it is not impossible for the Devil or some other spirit to take earthly form so he can disrupt a godly experience that that old fool doesn't like us having.

Now, you're probably wondering what this means, how it can affect you, and whether or not you're safe here. I cannot stress this enough—you are *safe* here. god Almighty will always, *always* triumph over the enemy, and Scripture tells us

that if you stay close to Jesus and you believe in his power, then the enemy cannot harm you. So don't let this announcement trouble you or scare you; this is simply to keep you informed of something that, in all likelihood, won't even pose an issue to begin with.

If you believe that demonic forces are affecting you, you can come to us and talk about it, and we'll help you, pray with you, give you anything you need from us. But remember, just as our Lord delights in positivity, serenity, and peace, the enemy delights in the opposite. In fear, sadness, and destruction—so as a Christian family, let's ensure we don't let these things disrupt our time here. Good will always triumph over evil. That's just the truth. So you have nothing to be afraid of—like Psalm twenty-three says, *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.* Let us pray.

Heav'nly father. We ask you on this day to let your presence be felt among us, to make these last days of camp a worthy experience. Protect us from the enemy, and guard our path from he who seeks to mislead us. Cast out the wicked one from whatever rock he's hiding underneath like the coward he is. Send him from our presence as you cast the demons of Legion into the pigs, and thus ensure the safety of these children from evil. We seek only you, Lord, in our presence here, and we pray you free us from the evil outside of us just as you have freed us from the evil inside of us. It is on you we wholly rely, Lord, for our salvation, and at no other name . . .

. . . *for I am thy servant—thou art my master!*

. . . do we kneel. We pray all of this in Jesus's name . . .

Amen.



Sam woke.

Life was in blurs. Sunlight was scarce. The floor was pain.

Sluggish blinks. He couldn't move. He couldn't feel, yet he hurt. His bones wore him. He didn't know which parts he was.

He forced his eyes open and looked. A gray room filled with empty light. He tried to reach for his glasses but couldn't. He lay still.

Sam was filthy all over. He was covered in sweat. He felt bug bites on every part of him. The heat was unbearable.

He breathed.

He breathed and did little else.

He reached out. Felt, retrieved. His glasses were cracked in one lens. The crack was wide. He put them on. He was alone.

The sky was overcast. Sam looked around, naked. He made it into the covered section of the path. He approached the circle with leaves all over it, that lead then to the concrete stairs. He went past them, found the closest thing to a gap in the trees that there was. He lurched one leg into the thick brush. He felt nettles sting him and branches jab him. The stairs led to canteen; he would need to go through the forest to get straight to the boys' cabins without coming out in the open. Without being where people would see him. He couldn't be seen. He couldn't bear being seen.

Sam stepped carefully, painfully. It was the same area of the forest he and Molly had roamed Tuesday night. He stepped through the weeds where he had seen her running, had looked at her body.

He felt gnats landing on him. He kept looking around him for anyone. He tried to make himself small. He tried to make himself nothing.

The bath house was empty, as was the cabin. The shower was only so relieving. The water didn't feel like it cleaned him enough. He buried his face in his hands.

Sam tried to remember. When he tried, he could only remember certain things. Darkness consuming his vision. Light that was not light. Bloody, flayed lips slipping into his. One skin pressing through another skin. Something that felt like a tongue and tasted like something he could not name.

And before that were memories that didn't feel like his, although they contained him. Things he did. The bodies, his and hers. The blood running through him. He remembered it all, but it didn't feel like him. Not as he was now.

But he must have done something. He must have done something to bring it upon himself. He must have done something.

His back ached under the water. It hurt to stand up straight. It hurt him unless he was bowing.

Sam had just put on a shirt when Calvin entered and did a quick sweep of the room. He saw Sam, his eyes widening.

"Sam, oh my gosh, thank goodness, where have you been?" Calvin approached him and held his shoulders. "I was just about to tell Malcolm we needed to call the cops, *where were you?*"

"I . . . I, um . . ."

Sam's face shook barely. He looked down from Calvin's eyes.

"I . . . left early this morning, before flagpole. I just went into the forest, to . . . spend some time with god."

"Is that it?" Calvin looked at him hard. "Are you sure that is what it was that you were doing?"

Sam paused. Thought. It was the closest thing to true.

"Yeah. I promise, it was."

"Okay, well . . . gah, Sam, I understand, but you gotta run that by a counselor first, buddy, you know that. You can't scare us like that, not with Shane and everything."

Sam looked back up at Calvin. "Shane?"

"Yeah . . . I guess you didn't hear about that. We can't find Shane, he disappeared sometime yesterday, probably around nighttime or something."

"Oh . . . Shane . . ."

"Yeah. As far as we know, this cabin was the last place he was."

Sam looked away, then back. "Did we call the police?"

Calvin looked down, scratched his neck. "Uh, no, Malcolm has said that . . . said that since Shane has somewhat of a reputation for these kinds of runaway prank things, we should hold off. And when you were gone this morning, too, we thought maybe you two had run off together or something. You have any idea where he might be?"

Sam thought. He asked the question of himself. He could not say the answer, did not have the words for it.

"No, I don't."

"Dang it . . . alright, man, well I'm gonna tell the counselors that you're safe and we found you, you can just . . . go to sports if you want to, I think they're just about to start wrapping up, but just . . . don't go anywhere. Okay?"

"Right . . . I understand."

"And if you need something, or you, you need to go somewhere for some private time, bring a counselor with you, okay? But honestly, just . . . don't go running off again. Understand?"

Sam nodded. "I do."

Calvin nodded, left. Sam heard voices outside, some recognizable, some not. He rested his face in his hand. He would have to go out, and speak to them, like what had happened hadn't. He would have to speak to Joshua Green like he hadn't seen him, seen what she did to him. He would have to speak to Molly like

he hadn't felt her body, touched it, or seen it, looked at it in the way he had. He would have to speak to Grace like he didn't look at her body in the same wa—

Sam stood fully upright.

"No . . . no, god . . ."

He knew what was going to happen.



Why were Thatcher's eyes green.

"Yes . . . yes, she's got everything . . ."

Thatcher did look into the mirror. He did see himself looking back. He did hear Malcolm, on the phone with his wife, in the other room of the nurse's office as he packed up Judith's things:

"I'll be putting her in the car here in a little bit . . . A couple of hours, at least. Traffic wasn't bad headed here, shouldn't be bad headed back."

He did see his face. He did see his eyes.

Why were his eyes green.

Thatcher did not know. Thatcher did know that Timothy hadn't spoken a word since Sam had come by on Wednesday. He did know that Shane had vanished the previous night and was nowhere to be found at all. He did know that Malcolm had forbidden him and Calvin and Dennis and anybody from calling the police for any of it because a demon was at work and the lord would deliver but what he really meant was that a demon was at work here and if Shane wanted to run off and submit to it because he was from a godless family and lived a godless life then Malcolm couldn't save him you can bring a horse to water but you cannot make it drink but Thatcher did not know.

He did not know why his eyes were green.

"Linda, do not trifle with me. You will do what I tell you. Not a word of contradiction, you understand me? . . . Right, then. Goodbye . . . Thatcher, are you alright in there?"

"Yeah, I'm . . . I'm f-fine."

Thatcher did not know how long he had been staring at them but he did know it had been a long time. He did not know why nobody else seemed to see them. He did not even know eyes could be that green. But they were. They were green. They were so green. They were so green and luminous they were practically not a color anymore and so he shut them.

He did hear things.

*Camp Havenside*

who are you

who are you inside my eyes



who are you  
who am I you are  
are who are I  
who are you

what is this how  
how is this in my in me  
in me  
what is this who  
are you

who are You

*Camp Havenside*

I am here  
where is here  
You are here

i don't know you  
know Me  
verily you have known Me all week  
look into your own eyes  
and you will see Me

is this the demon  
no  
no demon  
I stand before you as on the isle of Patmos  
I stand among the seven lampstands  
and I speak to thee

god no  
no

*Camp Havenside*

why  
why are You here  
why are You speaking to me  
why is any of this happening

. . .

what are You doing to me

you belong to me  
I have seen the color of your entrails  
I have felt the fabric of your loins  
I alone know every human heart  
I have made my home in yours  
I have ruined it beyond recognition

I will split you open  
and make thee in my image

I will strip you naked  
and make you as bare as on the day you were born

I will cast abominable filth upon you  
make you vile  
and make you a spectacle

in the eyes of your family  
the eyes of your youth  
and show them what you truly are what am i

what am i  
what am i anymore  
am i anything  
to anyone  
what  
what am i

look at your body  
look at your heart

Thatcher didn't feel right.  
His chest. His chest felt wrong.  
His chest didn't feel like his chest.  
And he could smell something. Something coming from him.  
He looked at his reflection and his shirt did not look normal.  
He did not look normal.  
He did not look like himself.  
He did not feel like himself.  
Thatcher lifted his collar, looked beneath his shirt.  
...  
Thatcher did scream.



"I need to talk to you."  
Grace turned. Looked at him.  
"What is it?"  
"I just need to talk to you, now."  
"... um, okay ..."

Sam walked stiffly down the sidewalk away from the dining hall. Grace walked behind him, quiet, slow. He did not slow down.

"... where are we going?"  
"Somewhere private, just ... somewhere we can talk."  
"Okay ..."

The sky above them was thick with clouds, dark. They passed the church buses. They passed the girls' cabins. They passed the gazeboes, the canteen building, the adjoined nurse's office, the flagpole. They walked to the field, wide and expansive between all parts of the camp, far from the dining hall. Far from everyone.

Sam stopped, sat straddling the broken-log border between field and road. She sat across from him. Looked at him apprehensively.

"So ... what is it?"  
Sam's tongue shriveled.  
"I ..."  
"..."  
"I, um ... I ..."

“What?”

“... something is going to happen tonight.”

Grace furrowed her brow. “Happen? I, what do you mean?”

Sam breathed. He breathed and it was so hard.

“I... it, it’s hard for me to... e-explain, but there... there is...”

He closed his eyes.

“There is something here. At this camp.”

“... do you mean... do you mean, like, what Malcolm was talking about this morning?”

“N-no... not... n-not exactly, I... I can’t... put it into words, I just...”

Sam felt something quivering in his throat, in his lungs. When he did manage to look at her everything was shaking, and he saw then that it was him shaking, rigid but unsteady, vibrating in place on his seat. His nails dug into the wet wood beneath him.

“Sam, what are y—”

“I became... something. Or, or It b-became me or, or something, and I... I did th-things... It made me do things, and I think... I th-think...”

Sam closed his eyes, grit his teeth.

“I think it’s going to hurt you, Grace. I think it’s going to make... *me* hurt you. To make me do something to you.”

“Um... okay, do... what to me?”

Her face went up and down, side to side. The world was quaking before him. He felt something like a drill in his skull.

“Sam, are you... are you feeling alright?”

She looked at him with shock. With concern. Almost terror.

“I don’t want to go to Hell... I just don’t want to go to Hell, I... I really d-don’t want to go to Hell-I...”

Sam gripped the log. He tightened his grip until he felt splinters. She looked at him with deep concern but he did not know how he looked at her. He never seemed to know that anymore. So he shut his eyes and felt the tears warm against his cold, cold skin.

...

He felt her come closer. He felt her hands, on his arms, holding him. And before he could open his eyes, he felt her lips.

...

It was quiet. Outside of him, inside of him. Quieter than he thought possible.

Her lips stayed. They didn't leave him. They kept him on the earth.

Sam's heart stilled, pulled back his blood. He felt himself kiss her back. Her lips pressed more firmly, matching and raising him, began to push all the sound from his head.

He felt her hands wrap around his. He felt her pulse rise. He felt her lips intensify upon his, bounding against him with fervor, pressing the noise, the clamor, the voices out of him until it was just him, and her.

And Sam wondered. He wondered at what his life would be, if it were this way forever. If the verses, the nightmares, the sermons, the temptations, the chapel, the bible, the trees, the wheezing—if all of it vanished forever. And it was just him, and her.

But it wasn't just him, and her.

...

Dark lips became firm. The motion hastened. He tasted more of her, offered more of him. He felt his mouth wet, salivating. He felt hers soft and dense, a fountain deep and wide. He felt himself within it. He felt himself soaking in it. He felt himself squeezing its every surface.

...

Sam opened his eyes.

There was no Grace in front of him. There were only trees.

Sam backed away, flailed around, spun in a ragged spiral. The log border had disappeared, and the field with it. He was in the heart of the woods, alone, still feeling a vague burn inside him, caustic in his throat and tingling on his lips—

*schk* ..... *chkhk* .....

Footsteps.

..... *schhkh* ..... *schhkr* .....

Footsteps approaching.

Sam's breath came in thrashes. Like fingers forcing into his lungs. His eyes sought frantically, thatch by thatch, but it was all the same, all identical; in the forest, everything was equally fatal. He was in a place far beyond the log on which he had sat mere glimpses before. His eyes fought, scrambled to trace what his ears found. What his nose found.

..... *sCHHKKr* ..... *sSCHKKRr* .....

A retch held his neck. The odor was foul, coagulating in Sam's airways, but untraceable, diffuse, spreading all about him as from a thurible in swing. He



covered his mouth, buckled, spun perpetually. Where was it. Where was it. Where was it.

“Sa-am . . .”

Sam turned. Slowly, painfully. Behind him.

“Sa-*aaam* . . .”

Speech and motion should not have been possible in the limping, twitching atavism that Shane had become, half rotted with decay and infested by root-strung growth, twisting in sprouts around the bars of his ribcage, spinning through putrefied flesh like maggots claiming territory. What was left of his flesh resembled a gutted fish, pink, red, and black woven together by parasitically thriving vines, a dismembered doll held barely together by strings, flies attending him in multitudes. One arm had been consumed entirely by the overgrowth, and the other bore a hand sharpened into a dark, wooden claw. Half of his face had been rot out by time, sagging and drooping, leaves hanging off the decomposing cheek—while the other half was the only recognizable part of him, bearing the right section of his hair and face with one alteration: green, green eyes.

The misshapen claw reached out.

“Sa-am . . . come with m-me . . .”

“Hhhh-uhhh . . . *bbbbbb*—uhhuhhuhuu—huhhh . . .”

“We’ll be th-there, Sam . . . we’ll all be there . . . in the end . . .”

Sam looked at Shane. He looked at Shane and he looked like a prophecy.

“Sam-m-m . . . it is . . . so beautiful there . . . no more sadness . . . no more pain . . . just pleasure . . . *forever*.”

Blood spilled from what remained of Shane’s lips.

“Come drink of the pleasure . . . c-c-c-come taste of the *bodies* . . .”

Sam’s feet tripped over themselves, flinging his quickly numbing body away from the eviscerated fragment of man, the walking effigy of creation reversed, then redone in a crude imitation.

“So . . . *so* many bodies . . . pleas-se, Sam . . . come . . . come to the *garden* . . . spend your years there . . . not *here* . . .”

His feet flew quicker, quicker through an environment not designed for him, perhaps designed specifically against him, body numbing in preparation as the ungodly stench slid its hand down this throat and into his stomach and pulled at the very fabric of him—

—until he collided with the trees, and clambered headfirst into a bed of gravel.

He looked around. He lay face-first in the playground, next to the chapel. Next to that was the counselors' office. On his left was more of the forest. From where he lay, he could see the boys' cabins, the worship pavilion, and between them, the field. The log border between the field and the road. Where he had been just a few moments before.

Grace was nowhere to be found.



Molly's eyes were in the mirror.

She looked at herself, standing. Standing in the bath house in front of the sink. Holding her cell phone in mid-air.

Molly had done wrong. Molly had been too touchy with boys, too buddy-buddy. Molly had done things with Shane, in the boys' cabin and in the one by the lake. Molly had said inappropriate things to her friends. Molly had asked bad questions in girls' class. Molly had not put on a shirt or towel over her swimsuit, had not done so when asked repeatedly, had not even turned her head as Heather called her name. Molly had walked across the whole camp with her body visible. Molly had vanished into the forest, had seen two boys there and done things with them. So Molly had been ordered to leave, to go home, to call her parents and have them pick her up.

But Molly remembered so little of it.

She held the phone. Her finger hovered over her parents' home number. Her finger wasn't moving. Nor were her eyes.

They weren't even looking at the phone. They were looking at her. She looked at her face. She looked at her eyes. She looked at her body and heard voices.

*What would your future husband think? If you told him that you ruined your body for him before marriage just because, because some boy you liked looked at you. Right?*

She stared at herself, and listened.

try to breathe  
try to vomit the filth from thy mouth  
lick the dust  
lick the dust

They will bring  
her to ruin and  
leave her naked

The light of a lamp will never  
shine in you again

try to deny the earth from entering thy body  
you cannot

They will keep you from the adulterous woman,  
from the wayward woman with her seductive words.

It comes into you, It takes you back for itself,

The voice of bridegroom  
and bride will never be  
heard in you again

It makes of your body a nest for its soil  
a home for Itself  
for It has plans  
for It has plans

they will eat her flesh  
and burn her with fire

they touch you with their eyes, they crucify you with words  
but It sees you in truth, and verily you see it

She is unruly and defiant, her feet never stay at  
home; now in the street, now in the squares, at  
every corner she lurks.

you give it praise with your body, scorned and wounded

you spread Its name throughout the nations, and offer all you have to It

you cannot deny Its touch, nor can you deny Its name

Jesus said to her: "You are right when you say you  
have no husband. The fact is, you have had five  
husbands, and the man you now have is not your  
husband. What you have just said is quite true."

you have chosen what is greater, and you will not be taken away from It  
never  
never

the days are coming when all will speak Its name  
when all will give It praise as you have

She has become a  
dwelling for demons

when you will no longer claim Its name alone

a haunt for every unclean bird

verily the reward will come in plenty

pleasure forever

a haunt for every impure spirit

pleasure forever

a haunt for every unclean  
and detestable animal.

Then they shall bring out the young woman to  
the door of her father's house, and the men of  
her city shall stone her to death with stones,  
because she has done an outrageous thing in  
Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you  
shall purge the evil from your midst.  
no song will be sung  
from the caves will grow the fruits of being  
those fruits from which you surely ate  
and now will see that I Tree from which they grow  
and from which  
grows you.

*Camp Havenside*

Molly looked at her phone. Noticed that the signal, all at once, had died.

It was the last thing she saw before her vision disintegrated, and oblivion claimed her.