

W E D N E S D A Y

Camp Havenside

*There was a grand ol' king,
he had ten thousand men,
he marched them up the hill*

Sam rose from the pew.

and then he marched them down again.

He sat back down.

Now when you're up, you're up,

He rose, with some struggle.

and when you're down, you're down,

He sat down, hastily.

and when you're only halfway up,

He stood up halfway, crouching on his knees.

you're either up or down.

One final stand that looked more like a leap, and he fell back into his seat. He panted, watched Dennis descend the chapel stage and hand the microphone to Calvin. Calvin carried it with him to the stage. He looked out to address the campers. Sam looked away from him, turned toward Molly, and Shane.

Shane was looking at the floor, eyes hidden in hair. Molly's eyes were blank, unblinking. They were staring straight toward the stage. Sam followed her gaze. She didn't seem to be looking at Calvin. She seemed to be looking at the twig-built cross at the back of the stage, behind him.

Sam watched his cabin-mates tidy up their bunks, allotted fifteen minutes by the camp schedule to do so. Sam sat motionless in his bunk.

He turned to look at the neighboring bunk. Shane was carefully organizing his laundry and bedsheets. It wasn't long before most of the cabin had emptied. Shane was faced away from Sam. Sam opened his mouth.

"So . . ."

". . ."

"So, Shane . . ."

"Yeah?"

"How was . . . last night?"

The folding paused. A dark green blanket was in Shane's hands. He resumed folding.

"Why do you ask?"

"Just . . . curious, I saw something going on in your . . . your bunk."

Shane kept folding. Sam looked around. The rest of the cabin had emptied.

"Yeah . . ." Shane laughed quietly.

"Yeah." Sam laughed at the same volume. "So . . ."

"Soooo what, Sam-wich?" Shane's voice was familiar, but his face was still turned away.

"Do you remember, like . . . me waking up?"

Shane set the blanket down at the foot of his bunk. He let his arms fall slowly to his sides. His right hand was in a closed fist.

"What's that?"

"I sort of . . . woke up in the middle of it, sorry. I kind of thought you knew, cause . . . when I looked up, you were . . . staring at me, like, right at me."

"Huh . . . I was staring at you . . ."

"Yeah . . ."

"Well . . ."

Shane's head bowed slightly. His right hand kept in a fist, twitching.

"Well, I . . . I mean, let's just say I was a little busy at the moment, I . . ." He laughed again, beneath his breath. "I had my mind on other things, so . . . I don't really recall looking at you, or anything."

"Y-yeah, and I mean, like, I was sleepy, I was probably still really . . . groggy, I, I might have just thought I—"

"Alrighty, whatever you say, man."

Shane hopped onto his bunk and beneath the sheets. He settled his head onto the pillow.

"You, uh . . . gonna make it to morning sports?"

"I'll get there."

"Alright . . . see you there."

". . ."

Sam closed the cabin door behind him. He set out toward the flagpole area where Frisbee would be commencing in a few minutes. He passed the other boys' cabins, stepped over the concrete pathways.

"And is she, like . . . i-is she okay?"

He crossed the dirt and gravel road.

"I'm not sure, they found her in the bathroom this morning all pale and . . . unconscious."

He passed the octagonal wooden bench around the tree, passed the distant girls' cabins on his left.

"Oh my god . . . oh my god-d-d . . ."

Sam stopped walking. He turned toward a nearby bench. Two weeping girls sat under the shade of a tree, hidden but audible. One held her face in her hands, shaking. He walked closer.

"I know . . . gosh, I . . . I don't know what to think about it . . ."

"So Malcolm's coming, then?"

"Yeah, I think he should be here any minute now."

Sam approached them, spoke.

"Judith's dad is here?"

The girls nodded.

"Why?"



Thatcher did not know what had happened.

Thatcher did know that Timothy was safe, stable. He did know that was what mattered. After carrying him back in his own arms, after listening to Timothy's lungs and heart, after speaking to him and interpreting the wordless nods and headshakes—Thatcher did know he was okay. He did look up, at Timothy, across the nurse's office from him. He did see Timothy sleeping, breathing, breathing normally. He did know he was okay.

Thatcher did see that as enough to make an ambulance unnecessary, and he did try to contact Timothy's parents; did find that they were on a cruise somewhere, uncontactable. He did agree with Calvin that Timothy was best kept there in the nurse's office, away from any possible stressors. And Thatcher did stay there with him for all of it.

So he did hear about Judith before anyone else. He did see her brought in that morning, carried by Heather and the camp nurse into the second room of the nurse's office. He did hear the details. Did hear of the bath house doors cracked and nearly caved in. The stall door practically broken off its hinges. The deadbolt bent in half and thrown halfway across the room. He did hear how she was found, half-naked and collapsed onto the floor of the stall. He did see her, pale and dirt-caked, fingers and forehead bleeding. She was breathing. She was breathing and not doing anything else.

Thatcher did try. He did try to get a response. Judith did not follow the finger before her eyes, did not respond to anything he or the nurse said, did not do anything but breathe, normally. Thatcher did call her father, as well. He did remember his response.

No . . . no, no ambulance. We don't need that. The Lord will deliver.

Thatcher did as he was told.

Malcolm was to arrive sometime that morning. Thatcher did not see any sign of him yet. Until he arrived, it was Thatcher, and the nurse, and the two campers.

That was what Thatcher did know.

Thatcher did not know what had happened that night.

The nurse said it would have been an extremely stressful situation for Timothy's inhaler to fail. She said it may have been an asthma attack brought on by a panic attack. Heather said Judith had likely spent all night in the bathroom stall. Said the bath house door and stall door had been nearly destroyed, that it

had possibly been an animal attack. She considered a criminal having done so, but the nurse said that other than her nails and her forehead, there was no sign of major injury, or of sexual violation. There was just Judith, and Timothy. Neither speaking, both alive.

Thatcher did not know what had happened that night and he did not know why it was the same night. The same night as each other. He did not know what he was to make of that.

Thatcher did look at Timothy again. He did watch his chest rise and fall. He did try to picture what situation it had been. What extremely stressful situation.

KNK—! KNK—! KNK—!

Thatcher did look back up, walk over to the door. He did swallow, did open it.

“Hey, Malcolm . . .”

“Hello, Thatcher.”

Malcolm was tall. He wore a red lumberjack shirt and blue jeans. Thatcher did not remember seeing him ever wear anything but a Sunday suit. His hair was still combed and slicked, and he was standing just as straight as he did behind a pulpit every week. He looked hard at Thatcher. Thatcher did not look back.

“Where is she?”

“Over here.”

Thatcher did turn around, did hear Malcolm close the door solidly behind him. He did walk Malcolm to the second room of the nurse’s office, to Judith’s bedside. He did look at Judith. At her pale flesh. Her unmoving eyes.

Malcolm sat by her bed. He stared at her for many moments. He hung his head. Thatcher did see his hands clasp together in prayer.

Thatcher did close the door behind him, did walk over to Timothy. Did look at his wearied, pale face, reposed in sleep. Thatcher did remember their last conversation. Did remember their last several conversations, each more weary than the previous. Did recall distinctly Timothy’s stress, his social anxieties, his fears of what camp would be like. Did know, know in his heart of hearts that he would rip his heart out for the kid, and he did remember telling him that, and he did remember—

“Jason Thorn.”

“ . . . ”

Thatcher did stop. He did listen.

Timothy did not say anything more. He did not open his eyes.

“... Timothy?”

He did not say anything more.

“...”

Thatcher did know the name. He did not know how Timothy knew it. He did remember things. He did remember many things. Things he did not know how to forget. No matter how hard he tried.

The empty dorm room. Empty except for him, and him. The moment of connection. The words in his mind, the echoing voices of scholars debating Leviticus and 1 Corinthians and Romans because nothing else could help him place Jason in the holy or unholy category.

Then the touch, and those voices ceasing all at once. The moment that followed that.

The years that followed that. The downturned faces of his family. The wet eyes of his mother. The firm frown of his father. The pamphlet handed to him as a suggestion. Then the pamphlet handed to him as an order. The white fingertips of his father, holding it out to him. The paper shaking in midair.

The one-on-one sessions, the group sessions. The tone of the voices. The insistence that he must have been conditioned by something that no one ever seemed to know what was. The vague allusions to fire and the thoughts of a razor. The accidental encounters with other members outside group. The eye contact that never happened. The written and filed reports of those encounters, on threat of penalty.

The words and the warnings and all the labors to fix him, for him. His endless, endless, endless prayers.

The silence of God.

The listening for God.

The silence of God.

Thatcher did what they said. He did not do what God wanted him not to do. He did as God wanted and didn't do as He didn't because it was all he could do. Thatcher did not speak. Thatcher did not speak because what would he say. What would he say and who would he say it to. Thatcher did see Dennis's face every day, and Malcolm too, and Calvin, and Heather, and when he did see his youth group he did know he could say nothing. He could say nothing because he could not lose them. He looked at Timothy. He could not lose them. He did not know how the campers would look at him if they knew, and he did not have the heart to even ask himself that question. He did not think he would survive it. So he did not speak and he did not stop needing to speak and he did not speak. He did not speak a word of it.

And he did not know how Timothy knew the name. He did not want to think about it, but he did not know why he didn't. He did not know what had caused Timothy to end up in the nurse's office, but he did wonder what it was, and he did find between the wonderings and obscurities some feeling that he could not name. He did not know what had caused Judith to be wounded, left pale and catatonic on the bath house floor, but he could not stop himself from asking why it happened on the same night as Timothy's attack, and when he did ask the question he did hear a silence, a silence that he could feel, that seemed almost to answer the question for him. Thatcher did not know what that meant, and he did not know how Timothy knew, and he did not know what had happened the previous night and he did not know if he wanted to know because what he did know of the events told him things that couldn't be true and a voice he could not place seemed to echo them every time and all he did know was that he would rip his heart out—

"Thatcher?"

He did turn. The door was open, Malcolm looking out. Thatcher did look down, away from his eyes.

"Y-yes?"

"Could I trouble you to get some water for Judith for me?"

"Y-yeah, of course . . . no p-p-problem . . ."

"Much obliged."

"Thatcher, you go get you some sleep, honey," the nurse said. "You don't look yourself."



“Molly, can I talk to you outside for a sec.”

“Okay, do you want me to finish cleaning the cabin f—”

“No. Thank you. Just come with me.”

“... okay, one sec.”

Molly put down her pillow. She turned to follow Heather. She heard the door shut behind her. She followed Heather out closer to the trees.

“Hey, what’s u—”

“So, I’ve heard from Calvin and from some of the other counselors that you and Shane have been, um, a little buddy-buddy lately.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, and I heard you guys have been running off to this, this old cabin or building or something by the lake, more than once. Calling it a ‘love shack,’ something like that. Is that, is that true? Am I correct?”

“Uhm . . . y-yeah, I mean it’s just a j—”

“Right, so what kind of stuff do you do in this cabin, in this, uh, this love shack?”

“Um . . . I-I don’t, we’re not . . . i-i-it’s n—”

“It’s okay. It’s okay. You don’t have to tell me, I think I, I have a decent idea already. Listen. Molly. Shane is a very nice boy, a very kind boy. And I’m sure you think he sees something in you, but. Is this really what you want? Sure, he may think he wants it, and I’m sure you want it, but it’s not what God wants. Okay? God wants you to treasure your body, treasure your love. Not give it away to somebody just because your sinful impulses get the better of you. That’s not what God wants; He doesn’t want you to be that kind of woman. The kind of woman you’re being right now, and frankly, that it sounds like you’ve been for a while.”

“Wha—”

“Okay? He doesn’t want that for you, and neither should you. I mean, do you want to be the woman God wants you to be, or the kind that Shane wants you to be?”

“... God . . .”

“Right. God wants you to value your body as much as He does—the body He made, that He, He knit in the womb. And He didn’t give you that body so you could give it away, to give away the body He bled and *died* for. Do you think

He's happy to see you give that away to someone who won't appreciate it like He does?"

"... no—"

"But the kind of woman you're acting like right now—the kind of woman who, you know, runs off, gives her body away to some random guy for cheap, indulges in lust—I mean, that's what Shane is going to want you to be, and he can't help that. Okay? That's just his body developing, it's just how boys . . . are. It's how he is, at this age. And when you do this, all you're doing is being a stumbling block for him in his faith while weakening your own at the same time."

"... I know . . ."

"And not just him, but what would your future husband think? If you told him that you ruined yourself for him before marriage just because, because some boy you liked looked at you. Right? You don't want to have to tell your future husband that, do you?"

"... no . . ."

"I mean, would he even still marry you after that? Think about what you're risking here, I mean, don't you want to have a happy marriage?"

"I-I do—"

"Well, if you do, then why are you off with Shane in the love shack. I mean, that's my first thought when I see this, I just, uh, I don't get it."

"... I . . . I . . ."

"Molly, God loves you. He loves you *far, far* more than any boy will. And He thinks you're more valuable than that. Do you?"

"... yes . . ."

"Okay. Well maybe start acting like it, then. That's all."

"... okay . . ."

"Here—here are some verses that I think might help. I wrote them down for you."

"... right . . . um, thanks."

"Of course, anytime. You can always talk to me about this. Okay. See you around, Molly."

"..."

Molly stood beneath the trees. She looked down at her feet, her legs. She looked down at the grass.



klopp—!

Sam caught the Frisbee. He held it without looking at it, then threw it to Thatcher. Thatcher passed it to Caleb. Caleb passed it to Valerie.

Timothy had had no color in his face. His body had been limp and pale. He had said no words. But he had had his inhaler. Sam had seen it on the cabin floor, as Timothy was being carried away. Dennis had said he was holding it when Thatcher first found him. It had been in his hands. And it was a new inhaler, that Timothy had gotten the previous week. And it had been in his—

klopp—!

Sam caught the Frisbee again. He looked down at it, as if forgetting what it was. The cries of his team were urgent. He threw it to Caleb.

And it had been the same night. The same night he saw Shane and Molly and they had maybe seen him. Shane's face had been looking downward. Molly's face was covered by her hair and she had grabbed his foot. Shane had looked at him. When Shane looked at him his eyes were green. Shane's eyes were brown. But that night Shane's eyes were green and his tongue was moving around inside his mouth. Sam saw it when Shane looked at—

klopp—!

Sam caught the Frisbee, or his hands did. It was almost automatic. He searched, tried to remember who was on his team. There were voices raising all around him. He threw it to Valerie.

And it had been the same night, as well. The same night something else had happened, to Judith. Heather said it might have been an animal encounter. Some of the girls said it had been a random anxiety attack. Calvin said it was probably dehydration and he didn't say it a second time. Whatever it was, Malcolm had come to camp. Malcolm had come to camp and the girls on the bench had told Sam they had maybe heard screaming the during the night and another sound they didn't know how to describe. One of them called it crunching, or something wetter than that. The other one just cried and cried and—

klopp—!

Sam caught the Frisbee, or the Frisbee struck him in the hand. It had connected with his palm directly, absorbing all its momentum into the skin. It didn't hurt but probably should have; instead it just made his hand go numb. He threw it to somebody else.

Timothy had had his inhaler—but it did not save him. Judith had been severely hurt—but no one seemed to know how or why. It was all on the same night Molly had been in the cabin with Shane—and Shane wouldn't talk about it. He wouldn't tell Sam the truth. And Molly did not seem to care. And Judith did not have the capacity for speech. Timothy had said no words—

klopp—!

—but did that mean he had nothing to say?

“Sam!”

“Sam, over here, over here!”

“Throw it already, man! Come on!”

The disc was cross and slanted in his idle hands. They were barely even holding it. Sam looked at it and was tired of catching it, so he threw it to the first teammate he saw, and he decided what he was going to do.

“No!”

“Ahaha!”

“Oh my gosh, Sam! Are you serious??”

“And there goes the game. Great.”

“Gosh, Sam . . . come on, dude!”

Sam looked up. The Disc had landed in the end zone behind him, scoring for the opposing team. The teammate had been an opponent.

The game ended. Sam turned to his left, walked toward the end of the canteen building. Affixed to the side of the building was the nurse's office, two doors with white crosses on red squares. He reached the first door, knocked.

A pause. Then the nurse opened the door.

“Hello.”

“I . . . I know he's probably not feeling great, but . . . I was hoping I could talk to Timothy for a sec? I'm just . . . really concerned about him right now, and I just wanted to make sure he's okay.”

The nurse nodded. “Let me ask him.”

The door closed. Sam heard voices. The door opened.

“Yeah, come on in.”

She opened the door fully. Sam entered. His eyes adjusted to the beige and green hues of the room. A humidifier hummed next to Timothy as he lay on the cushioned table.

Sam pulled up a chair next to him. The nurse left the room.

“ . . . ”

“Hey, Timothy . . . how are you feeling?”

“ . . . ”

“Do your lungs feel okay?”

“Getting there.”

“When do you think you’ll be back outside?”

“Don’t know.”

Sam nodded. “Did you hear about Judith?”

“Yeah.”

“Pretty crazy, huh?”

Timothy looked at Sam immediately. He looked at Sam with a face unlike a face. It was more like an object.

“What do they think happened to her?” he asked.

“Well, they really aren’t sure. No one is. They think maybe an animal attacked, I guess like a bear or something, though I didn’t even think bears were—”

“What do you think?”

Sam tried to meet Timothy’s eyes. He did but could not answer. So he asked instead.

“What do you?”

. . .

“ . . . ”

. . .

“ . . . ”

. . .

“ . . . ”

. . .

“ . . . ”

. . .

“ . . . ”

. . .

“You know, I know you . . . you told me that your asthma was mostly stress-activated . . . ”

. . .

“ . . . ”

. . .

“And I’ve been thinking, been . . . wondering what may have . . . triggered your attack.”

...

“...”

...

“...”

...

“Sam, would you believe me if I said that . . . if I said that . . . that I hadn’t been alone in the cabin?”

...

“... what ...”

...

“...”

...

“What . . . what do you mean?”

...

“...”

...

“... please ...”

...

“...”

...

“Please, Timothy. The whole camp’s scared to death about this. We just want to know the truth.”

...

“The truth ...”

...

Timothy shook his head. He looked at nothing, but looked like he was looking at something. His lip quivered when he opened his mouth.

“Something horrible is in the woods, Sam.”

The door to the other room opened. Malcolm Gray stepped out.

“Excuse me, boys ...”

He walked past them, exiting through the other door. He left the first door open. A pale hand dangled visibly.

Sam rose. He stepped toward the door, put his hand on it. He pushed.

There was black dirt caked under colorless nails. There was dried blood under upturned nails. There was skin clammy and saggy and the color of porcelain. There was hair mulched and ruined with a thick layer of sweat mingled with the

scent of the earth. There was the bright red line on her forehead like an incision. There were twiglets in her hair. There were eyes without glasses locked firmly in an open stare fixed on something invisible as they stared into space yet focused so, so intensely. As though. As though.

As though she could still see It.

Sam closed the door, then the other door, and he heaved breath while staring at the grass.

He wanted to go back in. He wanted to know the truth. But would he survive the truth.

"Look alive!"

klopp—!

A Frisbee struck his shoulder hard. Its momentum glided back to the ground, leaving his upper arm tingling, almost numb. He could still feel the pain.



"I'm telling you, I saw the whole thing through the window."

"She did it by the window?"

"Why did she do that by the window?"

"Attention, probably. Make sure everyone in the cabin sees it."

"Oh my gosh . . ."

Molly spooned some mashed potatoes into her mouth. She looked around her, listened.

"Well, that's something, isn't it."

"How did people react? Like, everyone inside, I mean."

"I guess, like, part shock, part laughter. Because I was like, 'is anyone else seeing this right now?' and they were like, 'what?' and I was like, 'oh, y'know, Valerie, outside, right there.' Then they turned around and saw everything, and I mean *everything*."

"Did any counselors see it?"

"No, thank God."

She listened to the girls around her.

"I feel like that takes, like . . . y'know, like, coordination, or something."

"To do what Valerie did?"

"Yeah. Like, can you—like I can't . . . bend that way."

"Oh my gosh."

She listened to their voices.

“What cabin was it in?”

“She’s in six, cabin, cabin six, I think. Whichever one is sort of back in the forest a bit, like, further away. Next to ours.”

“The one by the lake trail? Talk about risky . . . one of the boys could easily have seen it from there.”

Molly said nothing. She looked down and kept eating.

“Well probably nothing they haven’t seen before, from what I hear.”

Molly stopped. Her spoon hung midair, then lowered. She looked up, looked around her. There was a faint shimmer on her eyes.

“Really? She’s . . . like that?”

“Yeah. She’s . . . y’know . . .”

She looked at the face of the one talking. The words were distant, at a disconnect. It was like her lips were too slow to be saying the words Molly was hearing. Molly tried to keep her face in focus. She tried to understand the words.

“Not much of that body is a secret, if you know what I mean.”

Molly’s vision faded. She felt her tongue and teeth making words. But she heard nothing, saw nothing.

Then it came back, vision manifesting again. She saw her mashed potatoes, her spoon. She saw the dining tables and the windows of the dining hall. She saw the girls around her, looking at her with wide, wide eyes. She looked from side to side as if for a reminder of what she had said, or what her mouth had said. She saw nothing but the same wary expressions.

“What?” she asked. “What is it?”

Nobody replied. They just stared at her. Then they looked back down at their trays, ate in silence.



“Shane, time for guys’ class.”

“I’m not going.”

“What? Why not?”

“I’m not going.”

“Seriously? You’ve been sitting in bed, like, all day, just laying there, what’s the deal?”

“ . . . ”

“ . . . Alright, suit yourself. Don't be surprised if Calvin comes in here and makes you get up.”

The door closed.

Shane lay in his bunk. He stared at the ceiling.

Oh, it'll getcha sooner or later.

That's bound to happen.

The days are coming when all titles and creeds will be rendered useless, will fall to the side like the petals from a blossom. Coming is the time when the virtuous will say unto themselves, 'I followed the way of life and the way of the righteous, and yet still my flesh burns with plague!' No one will raise their voice to cry, 'Help me!' or 'God, save me!' No one will escape the eye that beholds them, nor the hand that follows them; their kind will be scattered like rats in a cave.

Shane squeezed the sheets of his bunk. He felt them closely, felt and remembered. He closed his eyes, saw things, pictured things. And his hands held the sheets tightly, wanted to hold something else, as he heard it again.

You have heard that it was said, 'the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.' But truly I tell you, on that day, all will turn their faces to the sky and say, 'What is this burning within me, this fire springing up within my loins?' and 'My flesh burns though I said it did not; my skin sweats and simmers though I thought I was safe!' Their bodies will be cast in with the rest of them, and those who thought themselves safe will be overtaken in their ignorance, for this is what the prophet has written:

It's the only way to get Timothy to see me.

*You musteth take advantage of his bodily weakness
and give it over to me!*

Shane sat up. He reached down into his bag, found his bible. He opened it to a page Dennis had recommended to him. He opened it with trembling hands.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Truly I tell you, to hide is a worse sin than to never have followed at all. Those who hide will bolt their doors shut and will say, 'I have locked my door; I am not

endangered by that which lies without,' or 'Who can come and conquer my domain; who is able to tear down walls that are built as high as my own?' It is these who will find their doors broken in and their windows shattered, rendering them helpless; it is those who will look behind themselves and say, 'I have lied to myself and to my King; it is I who will suffer that which I gave up.' Already many have fallen to this danger; many have looked around themselves and found It waiting behind them, and what was said through the prophet Shane was fulfilled:

*It's very good at hiding. One day, you walk into the cabin,
it's all empty, until bam!
It shows up right behind you and gets ya.*

Shane inhaled. He flipped pages, searched them.

When a man has sexual relations with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both of them must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

Truly I tell you, the days are numbered and the end approaches near. Cast down your hymns and your idolatry, for a time will come when what you have not given to It will be taken from you nonetheless. Those who knew their King and followed Its pathway, committing their bodies to Its service, truly they know already the reward that awaits them. They know the light burden and easy yoke; the abundant hills and warm fountains between sprawled open before them. But I tell you that those who have done nothing for It will know none of these things, and the lot that is to others a great feast will taste as bitter acid on their tongue; it will be as blood filling their lungs and intestines in due penalty for their faithlessness, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Shane:

*See, I'm on its good side.
I'm making sure that once it comes, I ain't gotta worry about
nothing. Bringing it gifts and stuff.*

Shane gasped for air. He turned the pages again.

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

But every verse just made the voice louder.

I tell you all of these things that you prepare for its presence, for It approaches at this very moment, coming for initiated and uninitiated alike, for tainted sinless

and pure sinner. It is always present within; but because many denied It and refused to follow Its way, It became present also without. This is the One about whom it is written:

You're just scared of it.

You're a chicken.

Scared of it. Scared of it. Scared of it.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Shane closed the book. He covered his face with his hands. His tears were warm against his palms. He breathed in, then out. Then he lay back, flat in his bunk, and retrieved a used sock from Sunday. He felt himself growing hard. He closed his eyes, felt tears drip down the sides of his face. He felt it coming.

The eyes of one hundred and forty-four thousand campers blazed before him.

"I'm so sorry . . . so sorry . . . I'm so, so sorry . . . please, God, no . . . so sorry . . ."

He felt It coming.

. . .

Shane opened his eyes. He looked down at his body.



“Okay, next question . . .”

Molly sat halfway between the front and back of the chapel. There was no one sitting next to her. She watched as Heather and Leah took turns drawing paper slips from a bowl between them, conducting a Q&A instead of a sermon for gender-divided class.

“Okay, so . . . this is a good question. It says, ‘Why aren’t women allowed to preach in the Church of Christ?’ Yeah, that’s, um, a good question. Well. As you all know, Church of Christ is big on following Scripture to an absolute tee, you know, it’s kind of what makes our belief system. We follow the Bible before we follow anything else. That’s why we’re so big on interpreting the original Greek, so big on, on tracing verses back to their original context and meaning. And in the Bible, there’s no basis for, um, women preaching—in fact, sometimes, it actually says that . . . like, there are verses that say, by honoring a man over yourself and submitting to him, it could even bring him closer to God. 1 Peter, chapter three, it says that, by being submissive to your husband, if he, if he doesn’t believe in God’s word, he may be won over to doing so by your behavior. By the way you treat him. So really, it’s another form of Christ-like love because it’s self-sacrifice. It’s lifting up someone else by, you know, by . . . by putting yourself below them, like, placing his needs above yours. And that’s what God always wants us to do, He wants everyone to love like that, like He does. So it’s not really a bad thing that women aren’t allowed to preach—it’s actually kind of beautiful, you know? So, that’s pretty much why.”

Heather folded the paper slip, discarded it. Leah reached in, drew another one.

“Okay . . . this one says, ‘Is it true that if you save yourself for marriage, your marriage will be better?’”

Molly blinked. She looked around. People seemed to be murmuring, giggling, turning around at each other, but she wasn’t sure. She couldn’t quite hear them, or if she could, it didn’t feel like she did. She scanned across the room. Everything was just slightly, slightly shimmering.

“Right . . . uhm, so . . .”

Things seemed to flicker, dark and light. Her vision felt frail, thin. She blinked a few times. Each time she opened her eyes everything just looked more wrong.

“What I’d say to this is . . .”

She watched Leah speaking, exerted herself to follow each individual word, to string them into meaning. She watched the mouth open and close.

“The short answer is—”

But then lines and sense fell away, and she felt her hand raising itself in the air, and then she could see nothing anymore.

Things came back into focus. The last few people were leaving the chapel, and no one was onstage anymore. Molly was still sitting in the pew.

A few girls stood in front of her, looking down at her with a strange expression. It was unlike the way they had looked at her during lunch. Molly stared at them for a while before she determined that the expression was fear.

“What is it?” she asked.

Nobody said anything.

“What, why are you guys looking at me like that?”

“Why did you ask those questions . . .”

Molly turned to the one who had spoken. “I’m . . . I’m sorry, I, I don’t . . . remember what I asked. I . . . wasn’t feeling well.”

Everyone looked down. They said nothing.

“What . . . um, what questions was I asking?”

No one replied, or met her eyes. She repeated herself. There was a long silence before the same girl spoke again.

“Just . . . bad questions. You were asking bad questions.”

“What were the questions, though?”

No one spoke. They all looked down at the chapel floor.

Then they turned away and left her sitting in the pew.



The game continued. The volleyball went from one side of the net to the other.

Sam stood closer to the back of the field. He watched his teammates playing, lunging and jumping. He wasn’t moving.

The truth . . .

Sam was trying to remember the verses. He was trying to remember the verses he had read.

“Watch out!”

Molly stepped backward, toward him. He moved out of the way. She watched the ball headed toward her, leapt and struck it. Sam watched her body go into the air, watched it come back down. He watched her body shuffle from side to side.

Sam tried to remember the verses. He tried to picture what the words had been.

The game continued. Molly stepped quickly forward. She moved rapidly, anticipating the ball's trajectory, as her hair fell in black flurries on her shoulders. She jumped in anticipation, but didn't reach the ball. Sam watched her body move.

Black dirt caked under colorless nails. Dried blood under upturned nails.

He saw it before him. He saw the body, unmoving.

Sam tried to remember the verses. He tried again to picture the words, the phrases on the page, tried to envision what shapes they were. He tried to remember what they had sounded like in his head.

The game continued. Molly turned around briefly as the ball was retrieved. She pulled her T-shirt down tighter over her body. Sam watched her do it. He watched the fabric become taut, disrupted only in a few places. Sam looked at the places.

Skin clammy and saggy and the color of porcelain. Hair mulched and ruined with a thick layer of sweat mingled with the scent of the earth.

He closed his eyes, tried not to see it. Tried instead to recall the verses that he had read just an hour or two before, had read carefully and repeatedly, but he could not. He could not recall them.

"Oh, sorry, Sam—"

Sam felt something touch him, and he opened his eyes to see Molly brushing past. He looked up, blinked. But he felt he did not know what to look at, what to put his attention on. He stared at nothing and it did not feel like any of it was real. He turned and looked at Molly. She was panting, readying herself. He watched her chest rise and fall.

Sam, would you believe me if I said that . . . if I said that . . . that I hadn't been alone in the cabin?

The cabin. It felt real.

There was the bright red line on her forehead like an incision. There were twigs in her hair.

He closed his eyes, closed them tighter. He clamped his eyes shut to keep out the volleyball game and to keep out the things he saw under his eyelids, and he

tried desperately and painfully to see those verses. The verses he had read but could not picture, could not remember. He shut his eyes so tightly it hurt.

Twiglets in her hair.

The game continued. Sam heard the ball pounding back and forth. He opened his eyes slowly.

The ball glanced off the net, landed and rolled in Sam's direction, stopped. Molly came forward.

"I got it."

She bent to pick it up. She straightened her back and bent. Sam watched bend over. He watched her for as long as it took her.

Something horrible is in the woods, Sam.

Sam walked quickly from the volleyball field once the game was over. He lifted his Camelbak off the ground, tried to fasten it back on himself as he walked quickly past the basketball court, and he saw Molly in the distance, and he looked at her body and then turned away, looked at the basketball court over his shoulder, saw Grace's body lunging and—

Thssbb—thrsbb—sb . . .

Sam stopped. He looked forward, at the thicket of trees he was facing. They were distant, a number of yards away. But he had seen them move.

. . . thhssbb—sb—shr—sb . . .

He had seen something moving in them.

Sam's feet turned around, began walking away. But his head could not move, could not turn his eyes elsewhere. He staggered his way backwards then swung around, stumbling more than walking, in a direction his body seemed to choose at random. He looked up, saw a circle of campers playing Frisbee in the central field. He hastened past the corner of the basketball court, quickened his pace. He reached the circle quickly in a near sprint.

"Whaddup, Sam."

"H-h-heyy-y-y . . ."

"You alright?"

"Y-yeah, I'm, mm . . . mm fine."

"Serve!"

The Disc passed from one to another. It transferred perpetually, from hand to hand to hand like a communion tray.

"Barely caught that one!"

"Gotta look alive."

Sam turned away from them. He looked at the trees in the distance.

When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it.

“Got that one!”

“There we go.”

“The name of the game, man.”

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

“Don’t throw it into the trees again!”

“It’s fine, I brought like five of them with me.”

“You brought five Frisbees?”

“Of course. How we gonna do camp without Frisbee?”

But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

“I’ll probably bring it out after devo as well.”

“Even then?”

“Of course. Did the same thing last year on the mission trip.”

“Tradition is tradition, man.”

“As always.”

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Gouge it out. Gouge it out. Gouge it out.

Sam stood up, made his way around the circle, walked in the direction of the—

klopp—!

The Frisbee struck him in the shoulder.

“Aye, sorry, Sam,” Caleb said, approaching. “Here, come join us, man.”

Sam shook his head without turning.

“Ah, come on. Why don’t you ever want to play?”

He turned around.

“Why do you *always* want to?”

Caleb went back a bit, blinking. “It . . . it’s fun, I don’t know.”

“Fun?”

“I . . . I don’t know, it’s a good time, it’s just, like . . . what you do at camp.”

“Why?”

“It’s just what we do . . . it’s what we always do. Do we need a reason?”

Camp Havenside

Sam headed straight for the chapel.

Sam walked between pews. Sam walked down the aisle. Sam walked to the edge of the stage, just in front of the podium, and fell onto his face. The words bled from him as tears.

Father . . . what is it . . . what is this place . . . what am I, to you . . .

Sam prayed.

I lick the dust of Thine earth—I hunger only for You—I await You with burning flesh and flame-licked soul, with a heart flayed by the uncompromising lash of Your silence . . . it is my punishment in due penalty, Your refusal as the holy crack of Your whip on my unholy, unworthy, unbaptized flesh—but please . . . p-p-p-please . . . I cannot bear Your silence any longer . . . I cannot bear it . . . any longer . . .

I have walked the earth weeping, I have felt the bite of Your denial, I have felt my soul searing with the burn of your apathy—but I falter before you, my Lord . . . I falter under the weight of your punishment . . . and sin is among me, it hunts me, it finds me in the darkness where Your light shines not and leaves me helpless to my own wicked ways—but for You, for You I would shed this skin and all its despicable cravings, and lay it at Your wounded feet, I've nothing in my arms but Your absence and I long to relinquish it forever . . .

I came here for Pentecost—I came here for Your call, for Your desire, a desire I hoped would be for me—but Your desire is never for me, and I'm left with my own, for You, for her and her, for You again—all unfulfilled, broken cisterns, a vapor beginning and ending with nothing, for we never were to begin with—we could not be—we would not let ourselves be—and thus we stumbled forth with a blind man's vague conception of what path we follow—going where? Glorifying what? Worshipping who?

You are my only, highest, sovereign Love—I will repeat it however many times You need, I will raise my voice, a cracking voice in the choir of an endless song, over and over, a holy drone, continued endlessly until it resembles something like praise, held up to Your silent throne—I will walk over the ashes of that untended Garden You burned but that screams forever, unrelenting, while its reanimated corpse walks the night—if You so desire it, I will become a frame in that tapestry of stagnation, I will let color fall from my eyes and become another gray shape in that legion without personage, but—

“Do You?”

Do You desire it . . . is this Your light burden, Your easy yoke . . . is this for what You wrenched me from dust and threw me in the direction of this camp . . . is this what You died for . . . did You truly die for me . . . did You ever truly love me . . .

What am I to do? What spring lies here for me? What path do You ask that I follow? Please, show me Your will, and without question I will follow it . . .

Sam raised his trembling head.

Please . . . what is Your will for me?

Through the blur of tears, Sam looked upon the cross of twigs hanging at the back of the stage. Its dead wooden limbs were unspeaking. Silence lay heavy.

There was no reply.