Leaves crunched under feet. Eyes looked forward and looked at nothing. Skin reviled at skin, at itself.

Grace led Sam south, toward the campgrounds. Hums and buzzes and rustlings resumed.

They came out of the forest. He looked at her, and she looked down. He looked down too.

"Yeah, it's, um . . ." Grace began. "I think that's . . . those were some girls from cabin five. Molly Hurst has been hanging out with them a lot, and so, they . . . they certainly know the name of uh, of Gilly, that's for sure." She forced a laugh. "Apparently it's like a . . . a new camp tradition they're trying to start or something. At least here . . ."

Sam nodded. Grace nodded.

"Yeah, I, uh... I don't know why they'd want to do all that in the lake. Or, or, I guess... do that at all..." She looked up at him, then down. "Probably just a new game for them or something."

Grace looked over her shoulder, toward the girls' cabins. She turned back to Sam.

"I'm gonna, uh, go to bed now." She nodded. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Grace turned and left him. Sam stood still.

Then he turned in the direction of his own cabin, just a few paces down the turn of the road. He saw a dim light coming from its open door. He heard voices. He followed the dirt road, passed the canteen building, looked to his right at the orange lampposts. They looked alone in the dark. He looked down the long stretch of grass behind him, looked for a long time. There was no movement, or none that he could see. The camp was so empty, and when it was empty it was different. A different camp.

Sam looked straight again. He saw the dim light larger, and he saw people standing in front of the open door. He heard their voices.

He looked toward the distant pavilion. It was dark there too, almost especially. The hymn screen was no longer turned on. He couldn't even see the stage. Beside it, the central field of Camp Havenside spread out massively. The sky was an empty black.

Sam passed the first of the boys' cabins, looked toward his on the far end of the cluster. He saw the light close now, saw the people. Heard the voices, the raised voices. Heard the panic.

Sam picked up his pace, jogged to a near sprint at the door. He sidled his way through bodies, entering the cabin. At the same time, Thatcher, carrying Timothy's pale, catatonic body, forced his way past Sam, speeding into the direction Sam had come from.

Sam turned to the rest of the cabin. Nobody looked him in the eye, all looking down at the floor.

"Where's he going?"

"Nurse's office," Dennis said. "He had an asthma attack."

"When?"

"We don't know," Calvin said from behind Sam, part of the crowd. "He wasn't at worship at all, I don't think, so it could've been as much as two hours ago."

"Oh my gosh . . . "

"He was conscious, and breathing, thankfully," Dennis said. "I guess he had the attack, maybe passed out or something, or just . . . decided to sit here."

"Did he not tell us?"

Dennis shook his head. "He wouldn't say a word. Thatcher could tell by his breath that something had happened with his asthma . . . he thought it was best to take Timothy somewhere where nothing would trigger it, make it worse. Since it's stress-activated." Dennis sighed. "He is breathing, though, so he should be safe. He's just not talking."

Sam looked away from Dennis, from everyone. He followed everyone else's gaze, looked at the floor.

"Just don't know why the inhaler didn't work."

Sam looked back up, and back at Dennis. "What?"

"Yeah, Thatcher tried it a few times, but it didn't really do anything. But I guess he was already brea—"

"But, wait, Timothy had his inhaler?"

Dennis nodded. "Yeah. I think he was holding it when Thatcher found him." Sam looked at nothing. "Then why . . . why di—"

"Here, all of you guys go to bed," Calvin's voice boomed. "The counselors, we're gonna all go to the nurse's station in case we're needed, y'all just go to sleep, now. No stayin' up, no goofin' around, no nothing, okay?"

Everyone nodded, affirmed. Dennis and Calvin left, closing the door.

"What about Shane?"

"What about him?"

"He'll come back eventually, wherever the heck he is right now."

"He's not so stupid as to forget how to get back."

"You sure?"

Tepid laughter. "Maybe not."

"He'll be fine. Did the same damn thing last night."

"Language."

The lights were turned off. Sam walked forward to his bunk, shed his clothes. He climbed up into his bunk and covered himself with sheets. He stared at the ceiling.

... ssnn ...
A yawn.
... rrrllllhhh ...
A deep sigh.
Sssssnnrrrkkkkhh ...
Rrrrrlllllhhhh ... rlllhhuuhhh ...

What, Sam wondered.

It could have been a random attack, before he could reach the cabin.

But I do know that Timothy's asthma is, like, it's mostly stress-activated, right? And the inhaler could have been empty.

And I like, just got this one, like last week.

The inhaler was not empty. And there were no random attacks. So what.

What had caused it?

Sam shivered. Breaths entered and exited the cabin. The mantra repeated into the night.

[&]quot;The trees are walking . . ."

Camp Havenside

"The trees are walking . . ."

"The trees are walking . . ."

"The trees are walking . . . "

gggnnnhh . . .

eeuaaggkh . . .

god does desire an interpersonal relationship he does

Camp	Hav	enside
Cump	1 1uv	ensine

is sammy-boy afraid of the dark the dark scary forest

nnknnngghh . . .

i couldn't find him anywhere around the pavilion

camp is just not the place for that kind of camp is just not the place

eungh

what other god do you feel you're praising

does that sound very practical to you

It did not create you

eungh

I didn't want there to be anything that needed resolution or anything

It's natural for a man to desire sex with a woman before marriage right that's a perfectly natural thing but that doesn't make it the right thing to want it's not what God wants

eungh

you're just scared of it you're a chicken

eungh

It awoke when you came to walk among Its Garden

molly's been telling little Gilly stories almost as much as Shane

eungh

think of scripture that'll set your mind back on the right track pretty good

amen

eungh

it came to me in a dream

you want to live with god but not in his house you want to be a part of the kingdom of god without being inside the gates and you want salvation but only if you baptize yourself

it has been dormant for many years

it'll getcha sooner or later

It is the fig leaves you wear, It is the bush burned in childlike anger, mistaken for providence

It is the tree in the Garden, the cross covered in blood, water, and filth

eungh

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

those were some girls from cabin five molly hurst has been hanging out with them a lot and so they they certainly know the name

you created It

eungh

on the third day, It rose from the tomb of your shame and your agony

eungh

of uh of Gilly that's for sure

it will repossess

eungh

It will rise up and take back what you have given to a false idol

he'll come back eventually wherever the heck he is right now

eungh

i saw him walking back to the cabin earlier before service even began i just figured he'd be back by now

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

maybe arrogance right because to some degree by drawing a line between the church and you you're saying well i don't need them i don't need other people to help me with my own faith because i'm perfect right we like to think we can take oneverything

ourselves

if you won't come to It, It will come for you

an eternal bridegroom

your shame bonded with your cowardly attempt at virtue

even in this moment, it walks

even on this night it walks among creation

i don't know it just seems kind of stupid Gilly's not real why would we talk about things that don't exist it's stupid Sam was standing in the forest. Around him there was no sound, no movement.

He turned, looked in multiple directions. He looked at the trees, the leaves, the soil. There was no color, no color in anything at all, but it was not quite monochrome either. It was as if color had ceased to be possible in the world. And yet, in a sense, it was dark.

Nothing was moving, not even the slightest motion. Sam looked down, saw a flower near his foot. He bent down, lifted it from the earth. It crumbled into pieces before he raised it fully, thin petals chipping into a fine dust. The fragments fell into his hand.

Sam looked up. Through the treetops, he could see a portion of the sky. It was empty, starless, but it did not exactly seem to be nighttime. The sky was not bright or anything close to light, and yet he could not quite call it black either. It was simply empty. There was nothing above him, nothing for him to look up and see, or not see.

But he could, he began to feel, hear something.

Sam looked around. Hymns were being sung somewhere. He could not actually hear them, but as they kept on, he could tell that they were not the type of hymn you sing with your voice. He looked around, determined their direction.

Sam walked toward them. He made his way around the dry, desiccated trees. Looking around, he saw that he was very deep into the forest, far from anything he recognized. He wondered how he had gotten so far from the cabins, from the camp. From everything.

The hymns were getting louder. In the distant dark, between the trees, he saw gray shapes that were dim and indistinct. His vision began to cloud, became fuzzy, hazy. He kept walking, getting closer to the gray shapes. His vision gave way completely. He could smell something rotting.

```
Sam woke.

"The trees are walking . . ."

mnph . . . mnph, mnpphh . . . mmmyih . . .

crrnkh . . . crrnkh . . .

"The trees . . ."

He could smell sweat.

mnnf, mmp, ymmp, mpphyeh

crrnkh . . . crrnkh . . .

"Trees . . ."
```

It was coming from the bunk at his feet. He craned his head downward. *oouunnh...ooh—!*

Sam retrieved his glasses from beneath his pillow. He put them on and looked.

```
mph . . . mph . . . mmph—!
```

In the moonlight, Sam could see Shane's naked body, blocked from the waist down by Molly's. Standing on his knees, he thrust loudly, repeatedly into her body, bent over on her knees. The flesh of her buttocks quaked and rippled with the force, and Shane's fingers clutched them as if they would never be able to hold anything again. Each thrust brought out a moan, a squeak, from a face hidden by damp and mossy masses of hair. Sam looked up. Shane's face was downturned, hair hiding everything.

Sam lay his head back down. He reached to remove his glasses, felt something clutch his foot.

Sam flailed his legs, kicked his way back up to the wall aback his bunk. He latched his body to the brick. He looked down and saw Molly's hands, gripping at the frame of his bed, shaking it with her. He could not see her face.

```
\dots c-c-c-rrck-k-k...
```

Shane's head was rising, slowly, with apparent difficulty. His neck cracked audibly, unevenly lifting his head. He was looking right at Sam, before the head was even fully raised, eyes not needing to search. They saw Sam already.

The eyes were green, bright green, unnaturally. Shane had brown eyes. But now his eyes were green, luminous, glowing out of his head into the dark cabin. Under them, Shane's lips were pressed shut, containing a wild and flailing tongue

Camp Havenside

that pressed from inside his cheeks as if in protest. They did not look like they belonged on the same face as those eyes, looking directly at Sam as if trying to tell him something. To warn him of something.

```
"The trees ... are walking now ..."

"Tonight ... tonight the ... the trees are walking ..."

"Walking ... walking ... it'll find her."
```

Judith hung a clean shirt on the end of her bunk for the next day. She covered herself. The heat found her and covered her in sweat.

Her papa had said nothing but sun in the forecast that week and she better bring sunscreen. If she didn't, he said, she was going to burn. She had packed multiple bottles just in case. She should always come prepared. If she came prepared, she wouldn't be caught off guard by anything, that was the truth. That was why she brought bug spray as well. Wasps were all over the place, like her papa said they would be, and she had to be careful around those. Scorpions as well.

Judith's cabin was empty, save for herself. She had come right back there after the devotional to get a head start on sleep. She had a headache anyway and didn't much feel like sticking around afterward, unlike everyone else, unlike Sam, Shane. Unlike Molly. When teenagers went running around with other teenagers, it was a sure sign of trouble, that was the truth. Molly and Shane had been practically joined at the hip that week. Judith had seen her and Sam running after him past the boys' cabins and into the forest. He was holding Sam's water-pouch. It was stupid to be stealing that and running off to begin with, but it was stupider to be lowering to his level and running after him, giving him what he wanted. Just because some people are fueled by attention doesn't mean you gotta attend their performance. That was what her papa said.

Judith took her glasses off. She had seen the other two slip into the forest after Molly sweet-talked Sam like she did to Shane and anyone else with a Y chromosome. Judith saw her pressing her breasts together with her arms, looking at him with her eyes turned, a routine Judith recognized. And then they went after Shane. There were wasps and scorpions and snakes out there, too. More crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made, that was what her Father said. They could have gotten bit. They may have gotten bit. They would've deserved it. Running into a danger-infested place and then getting bitten, stung, or worse was a self-correcting problem. That was the truth. Judith got beneath the covers.

And all the while Shane yelling about Gilly again. She closed her eyes. It was a trick Shane pulled to scare the girls, that was the truth. Cabin five had been talking about it all over the place. Said it roamed the campgrounds at night. Said it was a monster made out of grass and leaves. Said that's how it blended in and

how nobody ever saw it coming, but if you listened, you could hear it. Said there was something inside of it still fighting to survive, fighting for breath. She had seen all those girls sneaking away during devo the night before to go do whatever they were always whispering and giggling about at the lake. By that abandoned cabin. No one would've batted an eye if they had just left and said they weren't feeling well, or that they forgot something at the cabin, but they had still whispered and scampered and snuck away all the same. Judith inhaled and exhaled. The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion. That was what her Father said, and what her papa said, and it was the truth.

Judith clasped her hands together beneath the covers. *Please, Lord, give me the strength to not be led astray.*Judith closed her eyes.

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Her friends were nice, her papa said, her friends were nice, but they were rowdy, he said. He meant Shane and Molly. They were rowdy, that was the truth. Her papa said she had to be careful who she associated herself with. She said Jesus associated himself with prostitutes and tax collectors, that was the truth. But Jesus was sinless, and she wasn't, that was what her papa said, and that was the truth. She was not sinless. That made her sinful. She was sinful. That was the truth.

She liked her friends, that was the truth, but she didn't want to be sinful. To commit inappropriate acts with the opposite gender was sinful, that was what her Father said. She had never and would never until she had that ring on her left hand and not the one she had now but the one her husband would give to her, that was what her papa said, but her papa said birds of a feather flock together. Her papa said she should spend more time with Timothy and Sam, he liked them. They were humble and well-behaved, her papa said, and it was the truth. She liked Timothy and Sam. She liked Shane and Molly, too, that was the truth, but she didn't want to be like Shane and Molly, that was the truth, it was the truth. She wanted to lead them to the right path if she could, that was what her Father

said to do, but her papa said some people are just different from us they're not like us and if she wasn't careful she would end up just like them, that was what her papa said. She would end up just like them. She didn't want to end up just like them. She didn't want to be a sinner, that was the truth but she already was sinful that's what her papa said. It's what he said, and we are all sinners, that's what her Father said and it's what her papa said every Sunday morning. She didn't want to be a sinner. She didn't want to be a sinner she didn't want to be a sinner she didn't want to be alone she didn't want to be alone she didn't want to be a sinner she didn't want to be alone she didn't want to be alone, that's the truth papa

is it

yes

is it

I promise you it is

I've told you how many times have I told you that birds of feather flock together and if you aren't careful who you hang out with

I know papa

no you don't know

please just believe me

I know what you're thinking trust me you're thinking what if I can save them what if they repent well what if they don't repent you ever thought about that Judith

yes but shouldn't

oh really you have

yes papa but shouldn't I try anyway

Judith how many times do I need to tell you you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink and people like that godforsaken Hurst family are just like that when's the last time you saw them at church

I see Molly there

on Sundays

no on Wednesdays

and have you ever ever seen her parents with her

no I haven't

Camp Havenside

and you really think that whorish little Molly girl is there to learn more about Jesus like she really wants to improve her life

it's a start isn't it at least she's there

not in the same way you are not in the same way you should be and not in the same way I raised you to be but I'm starting to think you're more like them everyday

no papa I'm not

oh yeah you're not

I'm not that's the truth papa I promise I just don't want to be alone is that why that Shane's still around think you see something special in him no papa

I've seen the way you look at him you think maybe one day he'll look at you the same maybe one day he'll think about you the way you think about him no papa I don't think about him like that I swear

because let me tell you he will never see you as anything other than a piece of meat that's just who he is you can't change that

papa

you can only hope he finds redemption himself but Judith the more you think you can help people the more you risk yourself

I know papa it's just

what

it's just I

what is it

I just want to have friends

and there's nothing wrong with that Judith there isn't but you gotta pick who you want to surround yourself with wisely

I know

because there's one friend that matters more than anyone else in this world and that's the Lord and He will remember you making acquaintance with a bunch of false Christians

I know

a bunch of heathens

I know

those are not the kind of people we just hang around with I raised you better than that

I know papa

Judith I don't know how many times I've told you and I don't know how many times I'll have to tell you again but apparently I need to say it to you again papa please

don't you interrupt me

I'm sorry papa

you know what happens if you interrupt me

I'm sorry papa I promise I'm sorry

interrupt me one more time I'll give you something real to cry about you understand me Judith

I do

and apparently I need to say it again Judith there is the right path and there is the wrong path it's as simple as that there's the wide path and the narrow one now you tell me where does that wide path lead to

it leads to hell

where does it lead

it leads to damnation to fire and damnation

and where does that narrow path lead

Jesus

that's right say it again

it leads to Jesus

you say it one more time so you remember it

it leads to Jesus to God's mercy in the kingdom of Heaven

good now that you've said it with your own mouth I shouldn't have to repeat it now should I

no you won't papa

do I make myself clear

yes papa

good you think about that when you're at

Camp Havenside was thick and shrouded off the main path.

Judith was walking through the forest. She looked down and saw she was barefoot, feet dirty in the soil. The feet kept walking as she looked at them. She looked up. There was no sound. There was no movement anywhere. There was no color.

The hand of God was clammy and bloodless.

She looked at her hand, at the way Christ held it as they walked. His grip was tight. He led the way with a fervent, determined pace. She looked around her;

there was no one visible anywhere. Perhaps she and Christ were going to where everybody else had gone.

Christ yanked her arm. She focused on His head, His brown hair tossing with momentum, falling in threads upon his shoulders. But out of the corner of her vision she saw glints, gray shapes, appearing infrequently just outside her view. When she turned to look, Christ pulled her harder. She had given her life to Him and His fingers seemed to remind her. She obeyed, because that's what her Father had said. He was increasingly impatient, impelling her to follow His path and His path only because that was what her Father said, and what her papa had said, and it was the truth, and her faith said something wonderful was waiting for her at the end of it. It was just the truth.

But with each glimpse she caught of the pallid shapes in the distance she began to piece together an image. They were many shapes, many humanoid shapes, moving very, very slowly if they were moving at all. They seemed to be in a variety of positions all adjoined to one another, legs merging together with backs, arms with shoulders, hands with chests, faces with faces. She tried to get a closer look. She began to smell something very bad.

Christ came to a sudden stop. Judith collided abruptly with him, pulled away and stepped backward. They had reached a small clearing that Judith didn't recognize. He turned around and his eyes found hers without having to search. They were a stark and seething shade of green, luminescent, the only color in the whole world. She tried to return His gaze. His eyes were wide, wild with something like anticipation. He stared down at her so hard that she could not look back, turning away from it, downward.

Judith gasped and covered her mouth. He was completely naked, and so was she. She quickly tried to cover her body, but He grabbed her hand before she could. She looked up at Him.

"I . . . I am not worthy . . . "

She blinked. She began to feel something heavy, in her arm and atop her shoulder, and it felt that she had been carrying it for a long time. Something long and wooden, splintering against the skin of her shoulder. She craned her neck, and saw a large wooden cross behind her, on top of her, as if she had lugged it all the way herself.

The will of God closed her eyes.

. .

```
... suchhuckkhhh...

Judith felt weight rushing into her head, her skull heavy with blood.
...
.... kkrkkrr-r-r-t!
```

The will of God opened her eyes.

She was bound to the cross at the wrists but she could not see it. The will of God kept her looking straight forward, fixed her gaze directly before her. When she looked up at the world it was upside down. Christ was upside down. But that didn't seem right.

She was upside down, the top of the cross resting in the dirt, the base propped up against a tree at an almost fully inverted slope. Jesus straddled the base of it, above her, bending over her. Her feet reached His abdomen from their inverted position.

She watched her legs open to Him, though she didn't know why they were. She did not really feel it, did not feel much of anything, at least not anything that she could name. Christ shifted downward on the cross, closer to her, and her vision began to blur.

The will of God closed her eyes again, then opened them, then closed, then kept them half-open and fluttering between the two. In brief glimpses between blackness she saw Christ's face, haggard and urgent, sweat sticking His hair to His brow. She felt the body of Christ moving, hastening. She saw the tree behind him, thick in shaggy growth, and she wondered if it was specifically created for this purpose, called forth by the Lord as for Jonah, or of its own will entirely. Tears dripped down Christ's face, and they fell into her eyes, making clear her vision. Then she saw the Tree behind him, and she saw the Thing that was there, and she saw the two thick, moss-covered arms rising behind christ, straight outward as if to imitate and eclipse him, with two thick and wooden claws—

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Are you . . . worthy . . . now?
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EEEYYYYYIIIIIAAAIIEEEEEE-!-!-!

Judith awoke, lurching up in bed and immediately lapsing back down. Her body was wet, hot. Every nerve was a live wire.

The sheets clung to her skin, soaked with sweat and something else. She tried again to sit up but couldn't, her legs shaky and unable to rise. She inhaled, exhaled. She tried to think how she could have had a dream like that, how she could have it in her to dream such things, and if she did not have it in her like her papa said she did than did it come from outside of her—

```
cchhsschk-k-k-k...crrkrkrkrk...
```

The slow, sharp, shrill sound of a scratch. It was coming from the window beside her.

Her face was covered in a frozen dew. Hot and cold became close synonyms atop gooseflesh. Like a mannequin turning its head, Judith turned toward the window.

. . .

She could not look away. Tears of awe ran cold. Terror trapped her mind and body, and her throat closed with the force.

"Heather?"

She called for the cabin counselor. There was no reply.

"He-ea-ther!" she repeated, her voice broken by a sob, and, with a force of will, twisted her head around to Heather's bunk. It was empty.

```
kkkkkschk-k-k...crrrkkkkkkkkk-
```

"Somebody wake up . . . somebody . . . please!"

She searched each of the bunks, all occupied. The campers were all asleep, deep asleep. Nobody was awake but her, and—

Rrrnnggogghagghaggh . . .

The scratch turned to the cracking of glass.

Judith thrashed and struggled to her feet, top-heavy and half-animate, and stumbled her way through the cabin. Finding the door, she crashed through it and left, concrete punching up into her feet. She threw her imbalance into a sprint toward six wooden steps, wide and makeshift in the earth, but faltered and toppled face-first into the dirt. Her hand had just barely reached the first step; she dug her fingernails into it, wrenched herself forward, a tortured cry bleeding out of her as her nails tore uprooted, until her right leg was able to perch itself unsteadily beneath her chest, pushing and propelling her body.

Equilibrium bounced from side to side. She shot forward onto each wooden step while she could, bounding from board to board in gradual ascent to the bath house, its door at the center of a wide strip of concrete. She collapsed through the door while the trees swished and danced. Although there was no wind blowing.

The beige tile was cold against her flesh, already slick. Crawling on her belly and grabbing the counter, Judith hefted herself up to a stand, looked in the mirror. Her face was covered in dirt, alongside a scratch running red and fluid up her temple. The fingertips of her right hand were bleeding. With them, she removed the silver purity ring from her left hand and placed it by the edge of the sink. She cranked on the faucet and covered her face with water. Her lip trembled. She clamped her palm over her crotch, felt her hand come away hot and wet. She looked in the mirror, looked at her eyes. She looked at her face and tried to understand. She tried to say her name. She heard it in her head, but it was not her who had said it.

CCKKKKRKRKKKK-KCK-KCK-KKH-!

The door was shaking. Sound came out of her that was gasp and moan. She quickly turned the lock on the bathroom door with shaking fingers. Staring at the door, she reached behind her and grabbed her bloodstained purity ring off the sink, clenched it in a fist pressed to her chest.

"It isn't real, it isn't real, it isn't real . . ."

The doorknob began to rattle.

Her head was shaking but she did not feel it. She went into the closest stall and pulled the bolt inside, collapsed onto the seat. Breath shredded her trachea, helpless to give life to the walking corpse she had become. She clutched the purity ring between her fingers.

KRAKCKK—!

She heard the door fly open. She covered her mouth with a clammy hand. Heavy footsteps pounded around her. Another sound accompanied, something she could not discern, like something was suffocating just outside the stall . . .

Eeuuugggghhhhaagghh...aaahhhhngguunnnggghh...onnngggghhh...
. ouuuhhhoouuhhhouuugggggghhhh...

Her mouth twitched. "... It isn't real ..."

The stall door broke open, and the horror was upon her.