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Our Immaculate

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PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

She could hear the thunder rolling in the distance. It was going to be a rainy day. Storms in the Magaliesburg were fierce, and left their mark at Our Immaculate. Trees always damaged something. Many classrooms had been flooded, two this year alone. When Electra was in Grade Seven, a lorry slid off the road during a hail storm and ploughed into the gates by the North Entrance. It came to a halt, on top of two security guards and a gardener. The school had terrible luck, or rather, the place itself was an ill omen. It would explain why the sisters were so mean, and why Doctor Hamilton ruled the school like the Nazi lovechild of Satan and Putin.

For as long as Electra had been at Our Immaculate Private Academy, one thing had always been clear: Doctor Eva Hamilton was evil.

A few years ago, when their principal found a bud of weed tucked under the pillow of some Grade Nine girl with bad skin, she had thrown a fit. The old bag marched the girls out of their rooms and into the icy August night, forcing them to stand outside for three hours.

Another time, before Electra moved to Our Immaculate, their ancient principal caught a few of the ground staff downing a bottle of whiskey behind the swimming pool clubhouse. She grabbed the bottle from their hands, smashed it on the gravel path, and commanded them to walk barefoot over the broken pieces. Of course, this was just a rumour, the school's unique urban legend, told by the Matric girls during Grade Eight initiation week. But Electra didn't doubt that Doctor Hamilton was capable of doing something like that, no one was safe from her line of fire. Had most of the students not come from wealthy families who donated shitloads of Rands to the school, Doctor Hamilton would have probably sprinkled the campus with shards of glass and forced the students to walk barefoot too.

Her lack of a soul (she was a Ginger), made the old lady a wicked nemesis to anyone who got on her wrong side. She could make your life hell with the blink of her dark rat eyes, Electra had seen it first-hand a couple of hours ago.

I don't know why I bothered allowing such a vote to be made in the first place. You are an

absolute waste of time, money and space! The old cooze had said when Electra arrived in her office that afternoon. *What made you think you deserved to be head girl? I never thought you deserved it. I was opposed from the beginning! But I suppose that's the thing with dumb little bimbos like yourself, you get everything you want! You aren't going to amount to anything, it's insulting simply breathing the same air as you! I have the right mind to kick you out for good for smoking a dagga stick and send you home to that boozy drug taking mother of yours where you can party away your life, until you both end up taking your last breaths in a puddle of your own piss and vomit. But Our Immaculate is a sinking ship as I'm sure you heard, and as pathetic as I think your mother is, she loves to write cheques, but that doesn't mean I'm going to let you off that easily. You are officially a below average student and nothing more. This position shall be awarded to someone who, unlike you, will actually make a difference in this world.*

By the way her principal acted in the cramped office, her voice neurotic and hysterical, one would've thought Electra had been involved in some sort of militant jihad against the school, but all Doctor Hamilton had done was catch her smoking a joint behind a shrub at Nkosi Library. It wasn't as if Electra particularly cared about losing head girl, not after what happened during December. At the end of last year, when she was awarded the title, she had been living a different life. Positions and awards and shit like that actually meant something to her. Now nothing did. They had only been back at school for a few months, the weather in the Magaliesburg was still hot, but Electra craved the outside world. Her trip that December taught her there was so much more to the world than she thought, and she wanted to explore each and every inch of it. This school was holding her back.

"Fuck Our Immaculate," she thought out loud. Fuck the rules, the sisters and the retards, and Delphi. Especially Delphi. Why did she accept head girl? Did their friendship - sisterhood - mean nothing to her?

She got off the windowsill and wrapped her arms around her naked chest. She hadn't worn clothes since Lana her roommate fell asleep in the daze of her high, she didn't need to. The room had been warm and stuffy, but she couldn't take it anymore- she needed to breathe.

She walked over to her bed, a single mattress covered by cream coloured linen that made her skin itch. At the foot of her bed was a discarded box of Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes. She pulled one out, grabbed her silver zippo and lit it. She dangled the cigarette from her lips as

she picked up her black school jersey from where it lay on top of her desk chair and put it on. The embroidered *OI* initials of the prestigious school cut into the flesh of her left breast. She slipped on the pair of boxers she had worn earlier, and slinked back to her spot on the windowsill.

Lana was still asleep, her scarlet hair curling out from beneath two large propped up pillows and a thick blanket. As far as roommates went, hers wasn't too bad, save the fact that she enjoyed making the room smell like Amsterdam, or some cheap illegal brothel in Cyrildene. Electra had known Lana for a few years now and considered her one of her closest friends. Her roommate taught her that the best place to score weed, coke, LSD and MDMA was in the centre of the Prayer Maze, north of their dorm. The maze overlooked the athletics track below from a hill that was said to be haunted by the ghost of a crazy cleaning lady who wore the decapitated heads of Grade Eight girls on her hairy mottled back. How the ten year old Lana knew anything about recreational drugs and how to score back then was still as much of a mystery to Electra as the hairy ghost lady.

From her window, Electra saw the Tears of Christ chapel standing proud and ancient in the near distance, right in front of the gravelled quad where the students had morning assembly every day. In the centre of the quad was a marble fountain, still gargling and churning at this early hour, and if she concentrated hard enough, she could hear a distant trickle that sounded like faint tinkling bells. She observed that not even the prefects or groundskeepers with their giant bright torches stalked the grounds. The school was a tomblike quiet.

She ashed her cigarette and brought it to her lips, inhaling more smoke as she tilted her head out the window to get a better look at the grounds. To her left, she could make out the edges of the Prayer Gardens with the creepy statues of saints, separating her dormitory, Saint Petra's, from the other, Saint Nakita's. Behind the other dorm, far into the darkness, so far she couldn't make it out in the deep river of night, was the swimming pool and the pool clubhouse, where the swimming team was known to stash alcohol smuggled from all corners of the globe. Having a party and in need of good booze? The swimming club was more than happy to accommodate, for a price.

Electra saw a tiny light in the east, glowing from what she thought was the infirmary, the observatory, or the auditorium. It was dwarfed by the valley of mountains in the Magaliesburg- jagged shadow beasts far darker than the gloom of the night, where she, like the rest of the students and staff, was trapped right now. One would think after being locked

up for eight years, Electra would know exactly what the tiny light in the east was, but she didn't. She took a deep drag of her cigarette, and puffed out a ghostly ball of smoke. She stared at it as it floated into the night. She suddenly felt homesick, which was ridiculous, because she hated Cly.

A silhouette of a hadeda flew over Saint Petra's. It squawked once and plummeted into the water fountain on the quad.

A muffled shriek dragged her from the view of her window and made her jump, tossing the cigarette into the abyss, the glowing cherry shrinking smaller and smaller until it was swallowed whole. She swung the window shut, locked it, and closed the curtains. Her eyes leapt to her roommate, but Lana was still asleep. The muffled cries became louder, and she heard a door burst open.

"*...And if you ever touch me again I'll kill you!*" It was Delphi, Electra could tell.

A bang against Electra's room door startled her, and she heard Delphi yell, "*Get away from me you freak!*"

"*Don't push her like that*," She heard another voice murmur hesitantly. Nervously.

"*Back off! You have no idea what you've walked in on- no clue! You know what Liezl just did to me?*" Delphi's voice was getting higher, more manic.

Electra sighed and yawned, rubbing the fire ants away from under her eyeballs, suddenly feeling quite tired. Delphi hadn't been head girl for a full day yet, and already she was involved in some crazy cat fight. The girls outside had all four floors in Saint Petra's to tear each other to shreds, why did they have to cause a scene right outside Electra's room? She looked at the time on her BlackBerry that she had left on her bedside table next to the lamp. The screen read 03:15 and she ground her teeth. Electra had to wake up in four hours, they all did. It was going to be a long day.

She wished Cly had sent her to a day school, in Sandton somewhere. Why did she need to be locked away in a prison like this, an hour out of Johannesburg? *She's only looking out for you*, Electra thought, but she didn't believe it.

"I want you out of here! Out! You can stay in the courtyard for all I fucking care… I don't want to share the same air with a creep like you anymore!"

Electra walked to the varnished oak door, gripped the ornate handle, and turned it. She poked her head out into the large hallway, dimly lit by ancient lamps arching out of the dark red walls. A large group of girls stood huddled and frantic right in front of her, none paying attention to her as she took a barefooted step onto the dirty maroon carpet, closing the door behind her. The group grew larger as more girls left their rooms, nosing around, trying to find out what was going on. She heard excited whispers flutter through the air, "*What's got HG so pissed off*?", "*Is someone recording this shit*?", "*Beat her ass D! Come on HG!*"

Some of the girls were armed with smartphones pointed at two girls in the centre of the group. Delphi turned to the crowd, a vicious grin spread across her face, displaying rows of white marble teeth. She had sharp features and was beautiful, but in a dangerous way only pro-wrestlers and Amazons can be. Perhaps it was the anger in her dark eyes. Delphi turned the sneer onto the other girl who was trapped in the circle with her, a podgy girl speckled with blotchy beauty spots, Liezl van der Walt.

Delphi planted her palm against Liezl's rosy cheek. The slap unbalanced the girl and made her do an awkward drunk dance, before tripping over her own feet. She sank to the floor in an embarrassing heap. The crowd gasped, a few cheered, but many laughed as Liezl shakily got to her feet. Electra couldn't help herself, she felt sorry for the poor girl. She didn't stand a chance against Delphi Makholwe- captain of touch rugby and the running squad, and now the head of the student body. Instinctively, yet reluctantly, Electra pushed her way through the group of girls, their energy and excitement electrified and buzzing. She squeezed past two girls in the front, asking the slightly smaller one, a Matric girl she remembered was named Sonali, what was going on.

Sonali laughed and said, "I always knew Liezl would do something like this, that girl is psycho!" Her eyes darted to Liezl right in front of her. The girl massaged her pink cheek. A speck of blood shone out of the corner of her lips. Her eyes still focused on the carpet.

Delphi strutted around the centre of the circle, a look of pure satisfaction on her face. She's enjoying this, Electra thought angrily. The god damned bully- she's making sure the whole dorm sees her humiliating Liezl. Delphi laughed as a few girls in the crowd chant "HG! HG! HG!" before she raised a hand in the air, silencing everyone.

"Look at me," she hissed at Liezl, once everyone settled down. Her voice cut through the silence of the hallway like a panga. "Look me in the eyes you fucking pervert!" Delphi

pushed Liezl, right into Electra and Sonali. Sonali pushed Liezl back into the centre of the circle, and right into Delphi's fist. Liezl winced, and a thick spray of blood from her mouth splattered a few girls in the front of the circle. Some recoiled, red and screaming, others looked on with stony faces.

Liezl fell to the floor once more, rolling in pain. Delphi took a step towards her and kicked her in the stomach.

Electra sensed her own breathing getting heavier. Her hands were balled up into tight fists, her fingernails dug into her flesh. Keep calm, she thought to herself over and over. Don't do something you know you'll regret.

Delphi reached down and grabbed Liezl by her knotted blonde hair, yanking her up. Liezl howled and some of the girls laughed and mimicked her.

"You know what I do to perverts like you?" Delphi said, glaring at the girl, her eyes darker, more clouded. Sonali walked past the two girls, through the circle, deliberately knocking Liezl closer to Delphi. Sonali stood next to her friend Sudesha, and the two stared at something on Sudesha's iPhone.

Delphi raised a fist in the air right above Liezl's head and screamed, "I send them to hell!"

Electra saw Delphi's fist sail through the air, and before she could stop herself, she lunged forward and pushed her. Delphi toppled backwards into Sudesha's stomach. The iPhone fell to the carpet. Sonali caught Delphi and helped the new head girl to her feet.

"Get off of me!" Delphi said, swatting away her hands, "Get your stinking beef paws off me Sonali, you ugly walrus!"

Sonali's bottom lip shuddered and her eyes grew wide with hurt.

Delphi turned her attention to Electra, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Electra swallowed nervously, realizing all eyes were focused on her, studying her every move. She looked around the group, but everyone was silent and staring. No one dared to move.

Delphi cocked an eyebrow. "Well?" she said, "Are you deaf and dumb?"

"Excuse me?" Electra said.

"Well you're not *deaf*," Delphi said. Bitchy laughter barked around her, ricocheting off of the hallway walls, knocking Electra point blank from all sides. "So I guess that means you're just-"

"You were bullying Liezl damn it," Electra said, "You know she can't fight back."

Delphi smirked, crossing her slender arms over her breasts bulging out the top of her nightie, "Did you just interrupt me Electra?"

"Look," Electra said, "I'd like to get back to sleep. I'd also appreciate it if you didn't beat the shit out of anyone *right* outside my room."

A look of disbelief crossed over Delphi's face, "In case you're forgetting, you aren't head girl anymore. You had your chance, now it's my turn, bitch."

It took Electra a moment to realize the girl was actually being serious. Not even a day as head girl, and already the power had gone to Delphi's head. "I know I'm not."

Delphi applauded sarcastically, and Electra caught sight of a red smear on the side of the girl's palm. There was a stinging glint in her eyes and all the other girls applauded too, except Liezl who was cowering in a corner like a beaten dog, sobbing and rubbing her stomach with one hand, as she cradled a ruby tooth in her other. No one looked at Liezl.

"Well done Electra!" Delphi said, "Gold star for you. So now that we've established who is head girl, and who is not, how about you fuck off to bed and mind your own business?"

"How can I mind my own business when you're humiliating Liezl at the top of your lungs outside my room?"

"How dare you!" Delphi said, her eyes burning, "I was asleep, minding my own business when I woke up and saw the little bitch standing over my bed fingering herself!"

Everyone went quiet again and Electra felt a small chill run down her spine.

"She was fiddling herself?" said a tired, confused voice behind Electra. She turned and saw Lana who stood behind her in a large worn out *Die Antwoord* t-shirt and panties. Her roommate looked at the blood splotched Liezl slowly getting to her feet.

"Do I have your permission to continue beating the crap out of that pig now, or do I have to paint you red too?" Delphi said to Electra, ignoring Lana.

Electra looked away. She really shouldn't have gotten involved. Liezl slouched away from the group of girls, towards the door at the end of the long hallway, broken and embarrassed, but still no one looked at her.

Except Delphi.

"Come back here!" She said, pushing past Electra, and knocked her way straight through the group of girls, "I'm not done with you yet!"

Lana caught up to their new head girl, and placed a firm hand around Delphi's elbow.

"I'm going to make your life a living hell this year!" Delphi said to Liezl as the bleeding girl disappeared down a flight of steps.

"Enough," Lana said, trying to get the angry girl's attention. She put a hand on Delphi's cheek, more confident this time, "Please, just let it go, alright? Let's not make a scene…"

"What scene?" Delphi said, pulling out Lana's grasp. She turned back to face the group of girls, her arms swinging around wildly, "You talking about this? All this?" She glared at Electra, then the remaining group of gawking girls, "Get back to bed, all of you! Show's over." She clicked her tongue as the last few disbanded and headed off to their rooms. Some girls slammed their doors in disappointment, others played footage of the fight on their phones. In an insect-like voice, Electra heard Delphi shout again and again, "*...Over my bed…fingering herself!...Over my bed… fingering herself!...Over-"* until she, Lana and Delphi were alone in the hallway.

"Are you cool now?" Lana asked, and Delphi nodded her head.

"Yes, thanks Lana, I'm fucking *fan-tas-ties*," Delphi said, and glowered at Electra. "But I should beat you to a pulp for what you did to me you just now. Nobody questions what I do."

Electra frowned and shook her head. Until tonight, the two had been inseparable since the day Electra came to Our Immaculate, but Delphi had shown her true colours at last.

It was late, or extremely early, and she didn't feel like wasting more precious sleeping time on this self-obsessed head girl, when she needed to rest for school the next day. The adrenalin was gone now, her pulse back to normal. She was exhausted. She walked past the two girls and back into her room. Lana punched Delphi's arm playfully and winked at Electra, "C'mon D, let's be nice okay?"

“Ha! I’ll be nice, sure when I-“

“Goodnight,” Electra said, slamming the door shut.

CHAPTER TWO

She hit the snooze button three times before she realized morning assembly was creeping up on her, only twenty minutes away. She got out of bed and threw her duvet to the carpet. Blades of early morning light cut through the slit in the curtains. She grimaced.

It hadn't been a good night, especially after her fight with Delphi. Bad dream after horrid nightmare clawed at her mind in the early hours of the morning. She couldn't remember a single dream, but she knew they were scary. Something about hadedas? She looked at Lana's bed, but it was empty. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and walked to her wardrobe.

She opened her wardrobe and identical school shirts greeted her regimentally, stacked on top of one another. Black and green checked skirts hung from wire hangers next to her navy blue blazer with Our Immaculate's emblem stitched onto its chest pocket. It was a silver crucifix in the centre of a gold crest, a single rose wrapped around it. Underneath was a banner which read: *sequimini eum in paradiso*.

Folded socks took up one drawer, underwear another. Two shiny pairs of leather shoes sat at the bottom of the closet, right underneath the blazer and skirts. She took out her blazer and picked up a pair of shoes, socks, a skirt and a shirt and placed them on her bed. The clothes depressed her and made her hate both Cly and the school even more. She gathered her uniform together and pinched her towel she kept hanging on a hook by her bed. She dug inside her bedside table drawer for her toiletry bag, and with a yawn, headed off to the bathrooms down the hall.

For a school claiming to educate the daughters of South Africa's wealthy elite, the bathrooms, at least on her floor, looked awful. The fluorescent light hung limply above her head as she walked in, flashing light spastically every few seconds. The tiled floor was covered in hairline cracks and the large mirror by the sinks looked blistered with rust and dirt. A tap dripped loudly, and a toilet behind one of the cubicle doors gargled. The air reeked of a mixture of sickly sweet deodorant and shit. She stepped into a shower cubicle, wishing she had worn sandals.

Steam suffocated the cubicle as pearls of water snail-trailed between her breasts. Electra stroked her arms with a bar of Dove soap. She watched her skin go from pale to a blemished red as she scrubbed her body with a sponge she had bought in Athens when Cly was there on

a shoot. She washed off the suds before opening a bottle of shampoo, pouring the thick liquid into her hands, and rubbed it into her scalp. She turned off the shower, and heard a group of girls entering the bathrooms, giggling and chatting. She draped the damp towel around her wet body, and pulled open the curtain.

She looked at the group of girls taking off their pyjamas, but they fell silent when they saw her. There were four of them- three Indian girls and a blonde. They murmured something as Electra reached for her toiletry bag. She pulled out her toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste. They watched her as she walked to the nearest sink.

“That’s her,” Electra heard one of the girls whisper in a heavy Durbanite accent. The others giggled and told the girl to keep quiet. They gawked at Electra and the blonde laughed. “Don’t make it so obvious guys!” she squealed, cupping her mosquito-bite breasts in the mirror before darting off into a cubicle. Electra rolled her eyes and brushed her teeth quickly. In the mirror, she saw her cheeks turn to rouge. She hated people staring at her.

“Virashni babe, what time is it?” shouted the blonde as she turned on her showerhead. The curtain wasn’t drawn and from where Electra was brushing her teeth, she saw the blonde rub soap over her chest in thick foamy circles. One of the girls, Electra saw in the mirror, removed a slim iPhone from inside her bra and padded the screen with her thumb. Virashni groaned, “It’s twenty to eight- I don’t know why you’re even showering now!”

Electra spat out a wad of white toothpaste into the sink and reached for her comb. She had about five minutes until morning assembly started on the quad, which meant she’d have to miss breakfast in Saint Petra’s dining room. Again. She ran the comb quickly through her black hair.

The bathroom door creaked open and another girl walked in. “…You have to delete that clip from last night, it just won’t do if it spreads to Saint Vincent’s or, God forbid, Divine Collegiate…” the girl said. It was Phumla, the senior prefect. “Delphi was ready to pounce!... Stop saying Liezl is trouble!... Why did Electra get involved though? Does she have a death wish?... She doesn’t stand a chance with Del-“

Phumla came round the corner of the sinks and stopped straight away when she saw Electra. The senior prefect was a girl who took pride in her school. She wore her blazer buttoned up, her tie was neat and straight, and her socks were stretched to her kneecaps.

“Hi Phumla…” Virashni said.

Phumla turned to the group, as if she’d only realized then that Electra wasn’t alone. She looked at the blonde in the shower, “What the hell are you doing Abby?”

The blonde switched off the shower and walked out of the cubicle, “’Sup, Phumla!”

Phumla glared at her. “Did you just greet me like I was your friend?” she said.

Abby smiled awkwardly, slowly bending down for her towel. Phumla lifted her foot and placed her shoe on the towel as Abby grabbed it.

“Forget it,” Phumla said sternly, and Abby’s smile disappeared, “You want to walk around naked, go right ahead.”

Abby frowned anxiously and she looked at her friends who were all suddenly on their cellphones or looking in every other direction but hers. Phumla shook her head, “Have some decency Abby… You are a woman, remember this! If we all decided to be like men and walk around naked with no shame, we’d all be stupid, wouldn’t we?”

Abby nodded her head quickly, shivering as she covered her blue nipples.

“But we’re not stupid Abby. Because we are *women*.” Phumla lifted her foot and Abby scrambled for the towel. She wrapped it around her body, grabbed her clothes and ran out the bathroom with a shivering sob.

“Get out of here. All of you!” Phumla shouted at the girls, and they started moving towards the door, “You should all be at assembly by now!”

Electra threw the comb into her toiletry bag and tied her hair into a ponytail. Phumla stared at her as she buttoned her shirt and picked up her clothes.

“No,” she said, “I want you to stay.”

Electra sighed and dropped her clothes onto the bench. She got into her skirt as Phumla walked over to the bench and sat down, legs crossed. She looked up at her while she tucked her shirt in and wrapped her tie around her collar. Phumla’s fingers were knitted together on her lap and she sat with her back painfully straight.

“I’m sorry about what I said on the phone. I thought no one was in here.”

Electra gave her a wan smile as she fiddled with her collar. “It’s all good. But I could kick Delphi’s ass if I wanted,” she said, “Just so you know, I do stand a chance.”

“Well, let’s hope it never comes to that. You two are supposed to be friends, not enemies, or frenemies for that matter. Again, I’m sorry,” Phumla lowered her gaze and looked at her hands. Compared to any of the other students at Our Immaculate, Phumla was the most proper, she had the most class. “How are you doing, now that you aren’t head girl anymore?”

“Better,” Electra said, “It’s like a weight has been lifted off me.”

Phumla gave her a hurt look, “But…I’m sorry, I thought you wanted it so badly last year?”

“I did, until I went on holiday and realized there’s so much more to life than this petty shit.”

“What happened to you when you went overseas?” Phumla said, “I heard from Carli van Skyl that you were involved in some illegal dog fighting in the Ukraine.”

Electra laughed. “Why would I go to the Ukraine?” she said, and adjusted her tie. She picked up her blazer. “Nothing happened to me. Nothing bad, at least. I’m just sick and tired of the politics of this damned school and the dictator that watches over us like Big Mother.”

Phumla frowned and stood up, crossing her arms. “Speaking of which, Doctor Hamilton would like to see you after assembly.”

Electra shook her head, slipped into her blazer and made her way out the bathroom with Phumla. “I guess I’ll be seeing you in detention then.”

Phumla walked away, chuckling. “I hope your legs are ready for squats,” she said.

*

“Good morning.”

“Good morning,” they all murmured in unison. Doctor Hamilton put down the microphone, removed her spectacles and narrowed her eyes at them. She’s pissed off, Electra thought. Whenever their principal took off her glasses and glared at them, it was a bad sign. Just last week Electra saw Doctor Hamilton do it twice. She did it when she caught a girl texting while she subbed for Sister Mahlasang’s biology class last Monday. Last week Thursday, during PT, the old crone walked past the athletics track as Coach Vikus shouted out, “Run you bitches! It’s not *that* cold!” Her glasses came off and she glared at him. Until then, Electra

had never seen such a giant jockstrap of a man so apologetic, and to be honest, it made her laugh. He left Our Immaculate that weekend.

Doctor Hamilton picked up the microphone, and brought it to her lips, "I said *good morning* students."

"Good morning!" they said, more enthusiastically this time.

Doctor Hamilton cleared her throat and the noise growled through the speakers placed on either side of her. She flipped through the pages of the black notebook she placed in the centre of the wooden podium, which was carried out of the chapel by two red faced Grade Eights. It was placed at the top of the stairs leading to the Tears of Christ chapel five minutes ago, as students formed class lines below. The sharp sounds of pages flicking cut through the speakers echoed out onto the quad. Electra noticed a few girls in the Grade Eleven line next to hers frowning uncomfortably. She recognized them from her first day of school when Lana had pointed the group out to her and called them "The Celibates".

They were Doctor Hamilton's little Sapphic princesses. They met three times a week in Hamilton's cramped little office and preached about the importance of virginity and God. Saving oneself for marriage is God's business too, apparently. They were such prudes, and they got on Electra's nerves like they did with everyone else. The worst part was that they didn't seem to care or notice no one liked them. They idolized Doctor Hamilton. They were the ones who normally did all the heavy work for assembly- bringing out the podium, setting up and plugging in the speakers and microphones, preparing a glass of water for the principal- why were they down here with the rest of the students? More importantly, Electra thought as Doctor Hamilton cleared her throat a second time with a loud, phlegmy grunt, why is she getting Grade Elevens to do a Grade Eight's job? Because those stupid girls would do anything for their beloved principal, that's why.

"*Psst*," Electra said, and one of the Celibates turned round. She pulled the middle finger at her, and the Celibate looked away.

"Before we start with morning prayers, there is an important matter I wish to discuss with you," Doctor Hamilton paused and her beady eyes darted to Delphi. The head girl stood on the second step below the podium, opposite Mischa Slovaski, the slutty deputy head, "It has been brought to my attention that in the early hours of the morning a fight broke out regarding a highly… disturbing event that took place in Saint Petra's. Now, while I don't

condone fighting in the least, as I believe we should all strive to be ladies of grace like our Mother Mary, in this specific scenario I shall overlook the fight as it was sparked by an act of defence…"

Act of defence? Electra thought, and looked at Delphi who stood with her head bowed, an angelic look on her face. More like an act of carnage. As the morning sun gleamed white on Delphi's shaven head, Doctor Hamilton's eyes looked the head girl up and down slowly, her silence adding to the morning chill. Delphi looked up at Doctor Hamilton, and the principal returned to her black book, "What I do object to is *sinful* behaviour at an establishment such as this. We are not a mere government school parading ourselves as harlots, or promoting acts of the sexual kind because we are isolated in the middle of the veld! We are a private Catholic academy- we are Our Immaculate! And, because we are blessed and privileged in the eyes of both the world and God Almighty, we have a reputation and a mission to uphold." Doctor Hamilton turned a page of the black book with a crackle and Electra saw one of the Celibates gasp. What was wrong with them?

"I have already sent Miss Mthembe, our senior prefect, around to the students I would like to question after assembly," Doctor Hamilton breathed into the microphone. Her eyes scanned the lines of girls. No one looked at Liezl. "To those students, meet me by the podium after morning prayers."

Doctor Hamilton turned another page. The Celibates cringed once again and Electra heard someone murmur, "Liezl is a fucking poes lesbo…"

"Shut up Tarantello!" she heard Phumla say to the school's resident 'secret' drug dealer Cha Cha. Electra had always wondered how Cha Cha had never been caught before. She was one of the most popular girls in school, and everyone, even the geeks, knew she sold the good stuff. The centre of the Prayer Maze was her turf. Perhaps being captain of the ADD Math League and one of the top ten students at Our Immaculate had something to do with it.

Phumla marched up and down the line while Doctor Hamilton spoke, on duty like the other drone prefects.

"Don't tell me to shut up Mthembe, I'm five months older than you, bitch," Cha Cha said.

Electra's eyes widened, but she didn't turn around. No one talked back to Phumla. She heard Cha Cha sigh as Phumla threatened her with detention, "Does that mean I'll be stuck in a tiny classroom with you for an entire afternoon?" she said.

"Yes," Phumla said.

"Then I'll keep quiet. Swear to God."

"Finally," Doctor Hamilton said with a smile tight as a cat's anus, "There shall be a more rigorous weekly inspection from now on. Any contraband or illegal substances found in either the dormitories, lockers or on your person, shall, and this is quite obvious, end in expulsion. This is a grand school, it has been so for the past hundred years, I shall keep it clean at whatever cost necessary. Do I make myself clear?"

No one said anything, the students were quiet, angry. Everyone looked at Liezl, even Electra. Doctor Hamilton's voice crackled through the speakers, "I said…"

"Yes Doctor Hamilton," they all said together forcefully. No one broke their gaze, staring at Liezl at the front of the Matric line, bruised and broken, her hair a spider's nest on top of her head, the glare of four hundred and fifty eyes sizzling into her back.

"Good," Doctor Hamilton said, "Well then, without further delay, Miss Makholwe, please proceed with the morning prayers."

CHAPTER THREE

Doctor Hamilton grew older the closer Electra got. From a distance she looked middle aged, but with each step, Electra could make out the deep wrinkles creasing her skin, her dull coal eyes, and cropped red hair wriggling in the breeze. She was archaic.

It wasn't that Electra was nervous, she had no reason to be. She was pissed off. This was the second time in two days Doctor Hamilton wanted to speak with her, but this time there was no reason for her to scold Electra, she had done nothing wrong. She knew she shouldn't have gotten involved in the fight last night.

She walked up the steps as the rest of the students headed off to class or congregated around the fountain where the hadeda corpse, now bloated, floated lamely. Electra passed Liezl along the way up to the podium. They glanced at one another for a second, before Liezl tripped and fell over. This time, Electra didn't help her.

Doctor Hamilton had her glasses on again, her eyes magnified and dead. She sneered, showing off a row of yellowed dentures as Electra climbed the final step. "Well, well, well. Miss Almacy… Twice in the period of twenty four hours, yes? How lovely to see you again."

Electra looked at Delphi laughing as she put her tiny bible into her blazer pocket. Vindictive little bitch. She turned back to Doctor Hamilton and bowed her head slightly, "Lovely to see you too."

Her sneer disappeared and her dead eyes stared at Electra. "You're not being cocky with me, are you Miss Almacy? If you were, we would have serious issues now, wouldn't we?" she said.

"We would," Electra said, "But I'm not."

Her eyes studied Electra as Liezl hobbled up the last few steps, a thin vein of blood trickling down her leg from her knee. She dusted herself off.

Doctor Hamilton pursed her lips, "Miss van der Walt, you *certainly* took your time coming up here. Go to my office immediately and wait for me there. Mrs Mazibuko will let you in. I am beyond furious with you. Beyond."

Liezl nodded, sniffed once and limped away. Doctor Hamilton watched as Liezl made her slow way around Tears of Christ and out of sight. Once she was gone, the principal turned to

Electra. “I am getting rather annoyed with you. First I catch you smoking a funny cigarette, and now you are involved in a scandalous fight. Care to explain yourself? I’m all ears Miss Almacy.”

Electra swallowed down her anger and took a deep breath. “I wanted to stop the fight,” she said, “That’s why I stepped in. I meant no disrespect to Delphi… Miss Makholwe… but she had an unfair advantage and dealt with the situation wrongly.”

“Who do you think you are?” Doctor Hamilton said. She had taken off her glasses at this point. “You thought Miss Makholwe dealt with the situation… Wrongly? I’ll have you know, Miss Makholwe is a fine example of what a true leader, and lady, should be. She excels in everything she does, and comes from a family of class and sophistication, unlike a certain girl standing before me. She is head girl now, and if she deems it fit to deal with uncomfortable situations in any way she pleases, she must be free to do so, without being interrupted.”

Electra thought back to the footage a few girls had taken early that morning while the fight was taking place. She wondered if Doctor Hamilton had seen any of the video clips, but she doubted she had.

“You are on your last strike,” Doctor Hamilton said, her eyes boring through Electra’s. “If I find you are meddling with your superiors or causing a ruckus I shall have no choice, big pay checks and all, but to send you packing back to Johannesburg. Would you like that?”

Yes. “No, Doctor Hamilton.”

“Because if I do expel you, and believe me, every inch of my being wants to, you will have no luck finding a reputable school that will accept you into their Matric class at this time of the year.”

“You’re right, Doctor Hamilton.”

“You get a week’s worth of detention with Miss Mthembe, starting this evening. And I expect you to apologize to Miss Makholwe for invading a situation she had full control of. You are not head girl anymore, thank the gracious God above. Keep out of any affairs that don’t concern insignificant fools like you.”

Electra bit her bottom lip as she felt a wave of anger rush over her.

“Is there anything you would like to contribute to this discussion?” Doctor Hamilton asked. She put her glasses back on, and they rested on the bridge of her nose.

Yes, thought Electra, there are so many things I’d like to contribute. I’d like to tell you to go fuck yourself, you dirty ginger cunt. I’d like to take those stupid glasses of yours, break them, and shove them into your ratty eyes. I would like to watch you scream and cry and piss yourself as I beat you to a pulp. Lastly, I want to take a hacksaw and cut off your head, cut right through that tortoise neck of yours, and leave it on the podium for the rest of the school to look at and laugh. I want you, the nuns and your little Celibate bitches to die painful, miserable deaths, you despicable, old hag.

“No Doctor Hamilton, there’s nothing I’d like to contribute.”

“Then what are you waiting for?” Doctor Hamilton said, motioning for Delphi, “Apologize to Miss Makholwe immediately.”

Delphi walked towards them, and stood next to their principal. One of her eyebrows was raised and she gave Electra a stern look. “Well?” she said.

Electra sighed. “I’m sorry,” she said, “It won’t happen again.”

“Good, now get to class, both of you. Miss Makholwe, I’ll see you for evening prayers with the Celibacy Girls,” Doctor Hamilton said. She nodded once at Delphi, glared at Electra, and turned around, walking away.

“You had no idea what was going on,” Delphi whispered, as Doctor Hamilton walked through Tears of Christ. “How could you stand up for Liezl like that?”

“Like I said, I’m sorry.”

“You’re my friend!” Delphi said, “My friend! You’re supposed to be on my side.”

“How many times do you want me to say it?” Electra said, walking down the steps to where her bag lay on the gravel. “I’m sorry, okay? Next time I’ll stay out of it.”

Delphi followed her and picked up her leather satchel. She’d been using it for two years now, a Christmas present from one of her European admirers. “I’m sorry you got detention,” she said softly.

Electra turned to face Delphi and smiled. “That’s okay,” she said, “You have to pray with Hamiltoe and the Celibates tonight, I think you’re worse off than I am.”

*

Seeing Doctor Hamilton after assembly made her late for Afrikaans, so she took the only short cut she knew from Tears of Christ to the teaching block.

She walked around the back of church, along a tiny dirt road lined with skeletal trees and small dried up leaves. It was only February, summer was still burning in full force in the Magaliesburg, so it was strange that the trees along the road were already dead. Normally, at that time of the year, the trees were green and sagging with fruit.

There was no rush getting to class, Electra assumed Sister Geldenhuys knew Doctor Hamilton wanted to speak to her after assembly. She put her hands in her pockets and pulled out her box of cigarettes and the zippo lighter. She lit a cigarette, blowing out a wisp of smoke. The dirt road, which she had unimaginatively nicknamed The Back Route years ago, was hidden behind the church and trees, and was barely used by anyone except for the ground staff. It was the perfect place to light up and enjoy a cigarette or a joint, and if she reeked of smoke by the time she got to the teaching block, she had a can of deodorant somewhere in her bag. Looking around the Back Route, Electra should’ve smoked the joint Doctor Hamilton had caught her smoking yesterday, right there on the dirt road. What had made her want to smoke behind a shrub at Nkosi Library? Perhaps Doctor Hamilton was right, maybe she was starting to get cocky.

Behind Tears of Christ, Electra saw through one of the open windows the sinister crucifix swallowed by the dark insides of the chapel. It was made up of hundreds of nails embedded in the wall, and it made her think of pain. It wasn’t something one would expect to see in a place of forgiveness and love, not that religion had ever been about forgiveness and love in the first place. Electra was always cautious when it came to what she believed in, and at the age of eighteen had already decided she was better off not believing in anything at all.

She tripped over a knotted tree root and stumbled to regain her balance. She could feel her cheeks burn even though there was no one else around. At least she hadn’t dropped her cigarette. She took another puff and held the smoke in her lungs for nine seconds before blowing it out into the air. “Try to pay attention,” she thought out loud, and smiled.

She entered a small orchard a few meters behind the chapel. It looked like a graveyard, with more dead trees and weeds sprouting out the soil. As she arrived at a gate she saw a crumbling shed where kwaito fizzled softly from a dirty radio perched on a tree trunk. From the gate, Electra could make out the teaching block, taking up the view behind a few evergreens. It was such an ugly building. She took one last drag of her cigarette, exhaled slowly, and threw the cancer stick on the ground. She rubbed it into the earth with her shoe and opened the gate.

She started to jog as she passed the row of evergreens and headed out onto the open field, knowing all too well that at any moment Sister Geldenhuys could look out from one of the many windows in the teaching block and see her. She had to look as if she was at least trying to get to class on time, even though all she wanted to do was curl up in her bed and sleep away the day.

Halfway across the field, she remembered her class had a toets she hadn't studied for, on a book she hadn't read yet. It was going to be a long day.

She eventually arrived at the end of the field, and skipped up the concrete steps that led to the teaching block. The double doors to the building were open wide. She walked inside, and made a sharp left. She headed towards a staircase, and greeted Lindiwe, the head of the cleaning staff, who walked out of the bathroom with a bucket and a yellow sign which read *Careful! Slippery!*

"Why are you so late for class? Sleep in again?" Lindiwe called to her as she ascended the steps.

"Doctor Hamilton wanted to see me," Electra said, climbing two steps at a time. "Angiyathan zonda!"

Lindiwe howled with laughter.

She reached the third floor and looked at the time on her phone. She was only ten minutes late, the toets probably hadn't started yet. Sister Geldenhuys allowed a fifteen minute study time before each test to allow her students to go over the work she would cover.

Electra walked into the classroom, just as Sister Geldenhuys handed out the last of the question papers.

She was out of breath, could feel her shirt sticking to her body, and her tie was strangling her. Electra pulled up her socks, which were down to her ankles, and looked up just as Sister Geldenhuys brushed past her. “Sorry… Sorry I’m late Sister, Doctor Hamilton wanted to… see me…” she said out of breath.

“Mejuffrou Almacy,” the large lady said, squeezing into the chair behind her desk. “In hierdie klaskamer, praat ons net Afrikaans.”

“Ek is jammer Mevrou,” Electra said, ignoring the stares from the other students as she made her way to her desk.

Lana looked at her as she took off her bag and sidled into her seat. “How’d it go with the Hamiltoe?” she asked. She played with a lock of her scarlet hair.

Electra shrugged and opened up her bag. She pulled out her pencil case and an exam pad. “Alright I guess, got detention. A whole week.”

“That old bitch really has something against you,” Lana said with a smile, and looked down at the question paper on her desk.

“Julle het dertig minute om die toets te voltooi,” Sister Geldenhuys announced from her desk at the front of the class. “Sterkte en julle mag nou begin.”

*

Afrikaans was hard, it was definitely one of her worst subjects. At least the pass rate in South Africa was so low, she would still be able to scrape through and maybe get into university one day. Not that university was a priority for Electra. While her friends and other Matrics at school fretted over applications and acceptance letters, she didn’t feel the need to further her learning once she left the ornate iron gates of Our Immaculate for good. She wanted to live life, experience it first hand, not study about it like a nerd for the next three years or so. Life was so short, it was bad enough she had wasted away in some stupid academic institution for the most part of her young life.

Naturally, Cly was over the moon when Electra told her she didn’t want to further her education after school. In her mother’s mind, she saw Electra partying with her in Mykonos or New York, snorting cocaine off the backs of spray tanned club sluts, but that wasn’t

something Electra wanted either. She just wanted to get away, and the second graduation was over, she'd have her driver take her to OR Tambo and she'd choose where to go from there.

The school bell rang just as Electra attempted to answer the final question, and a few of the students groaned.

"Goed meisies," Sister Geldenhuys said, slowly getting to her feet. "Sit julle penne neer en gee julle papiere voorentoe aan. Maak seker dat julle name op die toets is. As julle klaar is mag julle loop."

The students passed their test papers to the front of the class, and Sonali, the class rep, collected them at the front and gave them to Sister Geldenhuys.

Electra lifted her arms over her head and stretched her back. She yawned and dropped her arms to her sides. It wasn't even ten o' clock yet, and the day already felt over. She gathered her pens together and put them back in her case, which she put in her bag.

"What are you doing after this?" Lana asked as Electra slung her bag over her back.

"I have a free period now before Geography, why?"

Lana grinned and put her hand in her pocket. She looked around the classroom, her eyes on Sister Geldenhuys as she pulled out a long rollie.

"Is that a jay?" Electra said, grinning as Sister Geldenhuys suddenly turned in their direction and Lana stuffed it back into her pocket.

"Of course," Lana said, casting a glance at the big lady to make sure she hadn't seen anything. "You want to go smoke it in Cha Cha's room?"

"That sounds amazing," Electra said, picking up her Afrikaans woordeboek and held it over her chest. The two walked out of the classroom, and said goodbye to Sister Geldenhuys.

"Totsiens," the fat lady murmured, not looking up from her test papers.

Lana and Electra walked out into the hallway, which was now packed with girls rushing to get to their next class. Some leaned against the wall, chatting to one another while others crowded around a pin board where results of the Geography prac were posted.

“I shouldn’t get high though,” Electra said, remembering the events of the previous day at the library. “Doctor Hamilton tore me to shreds.”

“As if you care,” Lana said as the two walked down the staircase together. “What’s happened, happened. There’s nothing you can do, so you might as well have a little fun and smoke some Jabulani.”

Electra laughed. Jabulani was a code word for marijuana that the girls used at Our Immaculate whenever the possibility of being eavesdropped on rose. The sisters and Doctor Hamilton were oblivious to this secret word, or at least, they acted like they were. Cha Cha came up with the word when she first started selling to students, about three years ago when they were in Grade Ten.

“I guess you’re right,” Electra said. She had been feeling a little strange since the fight that morning, and her mind was foggy from lack of sleep. Some Jabulani could go a long way. Besides, what else would she have done during her free period? Study?

They managed to work their way out of the teaching block and into the sharp sunlight. Electra was happy to be out of the teaching block, it was starting to feel claustrophobic. She took in a deep breath and breathed out through her nose. She shut her eyes against the bright sunlight and wondered where all the rain had gone. Although it felt like ages had passed, Electra remembered thunder rolling in the distance as she had smoked a cigarette early that morning.

“I’m surprised Hamiltoe didn’t expel you to be honest,” Lana said, holding a hand over her eyes as they walked over the field towards Saint Nakita’s where Cha Cha stayed.

“Me too,” Electra said, “That would’ve made my day.”

“Maybe she has a creepy lesbian crush on you.”

“Maybe you should shut the hell up.”

Lana laughed as they passed under one of the evergreens, but stopped suddenly when she looked at something ahead. She frowned. Electra also stopped walking and followed Lana’s gaze, until she saw Liezl, a few meters away, under the shade of an evergreen. The girl looked pale and bruised, more so than she did at assembly. She grinned at the two girls when she looked up from a book she was reading, and got to her feet.

“Speaking of creepy lesbian crushes,” Lana said as Liezl made her way towards them slowly. Electra cringed. What the hell did Liezl want? More than anything, after the fight, she never wanted to be in the same space as the mentally deranged girl ever again.

“What the hell is she still doing on campus?” Electra said, “Surely playing with your lady parts in front of a sleeping student gets you an instant expulsion?”

“Maybe Doctor Hamilton has a creepy lesbian crush on her too,” Lana said.

Liezl smiled at Electra, white foamy spittle sticking to the corners of her mouth like cream. “Hi Electra, how are you?”

“Better than you, I’m sure,” Lana said, a wide grin on her face. She turned to Electra. “I’ll leave you two love birds alone,” she said, “See you at Cha Cha’s?”

Fuck you, Electra mouthed as Lana walked away, leaving her alone with Liezl. The two stood in silence as Lana made her way towards the Back Route and opened the rusty gate.

Liezl laughed, her eyes shiny and her cheeks red. “I wanted to speak to you,” she said, “I was actually on my way to visit your room. I saw in the office that you have a free period now.”

Electra bit her bottom lip, unsure how to respond.

“Doctor Hamilton didn’t expel me, but I wish she did… Really bad,” Liezl said.

“You and me both,” Electra said, wanting the girl to get to the point.

“She wants me to stay so that every girl here can torture me for the rest of the year because of what I did!” Liezl said, “I don’t want that…”

“Well,” Electra said, “Maybe you shouldn’t have broken into Delphi’s room and masturbated.”

“I don’t know why I did it,” Liezl said, looking down at her shoes. She took off her bag and adjusted the straps. “I haven’t done anything *like that* in a long time. I was having the weirdest dream, I don’t remember much about it now, but there were hadedas and a statue in it…And I woke up in Delphi’s room. I’m taking meds, I even remember taking two pills before bed last night. I think it’s getting worse.”

“Look,” Electra said, trying to come up with a way to get out of talking to her, “I have to go study, I have an essay for Biology that I still need to write and it’s due-“

“No!” Liezl said, grabbing her by the arm and stepped closer. The stale smell of old books tickled Electra’s nose and made her want to sneeze. “I just want to talk to you is all, I’m not going to touch you.” Electra looked down at her hand. Liezl let go of her arm, “Sorry… Should we take a walk?”

Reluctantly, Electra nodded. *Why am I agreeing to this?* “Alright,” she said, “You have five minutes.”

“Great,” Liezl said, “Follow me.”

They walked to the Prayer Gardens gate and Liezl fumbled the lock as a warm breeze picked up, rushing past them into the overgrown garden beyond.

“Why are we here?” Electra asked as Leizl opened the gate. The girl didn’t say a word, she merely gestured for Electra to follow her inside. The Prayer Gardens used to be a place where girls could go to reflect and pray, but over the years it had been neglected and nature had taken over. They walked along a path choked with weeds and grass, passing a strange statue. The facial features were worn away and it was covered in roots.

“This is where I stayed last night,” Liezl said, “I couldn’t get past the security guard outside Saint Nakita’s, so I slept between two bushes down by the statue of Saint Tobias.”

“Are you insane?” Electra said as another breeze ruffled her skirt. “Why didn’t you just go to the infirmary or something?”

Liezl shrugged and pointed at a patch of overgrown bushes a few feet away. A green statue of a man with a book dwarfed them. “That’s where I was…” she said, “Right on top of that *thing*.”

“Liezl, I think five minutes is up, so-“

“I knew something was strange when it vibrated… did it three times, as if someone was trying to punch their way out of it. I even heard a low moan…”

“I really have to go,” Electra said.

Liezl narrowed her eyes. “Go down there with me, please,” she said, “I have to see what’s inside it!”

“Where?”

“The tunnels,” Liezl said, “They were built during Apartheid in case a civil war broke out. There are many different entrances, and it’s *massive*.”

Electra glared at her. “You slept on a hatch or something? Why didn’t you just say that?” she said, “And besides, if there is such thing as these tunnels, why aren’t the entrances guarded?”

“Because,” Liezl said, “The tunnels aren’t meant to exist.”

“So how do you explain that?” Electra said, nodding her head towards the bushes.

“No one comes here anymore.”

“But you did,” Electra said. She kicked a fat mushroom sprouting in the middle of the path, “And here we are.”

“Would you like to see it?” Liezl said.

“Why?”

“You helped me out last night, it’s the least I could do.”

Electra nibbled her bottom lip. “Look Liezl...” she said.

“I saw something come out. Early this morning, an hour or so before class,” Liezl said. Her eyes were round and intense, almost comical. “I got scared of the hatch and the banging after a while, so I slept in the bushes somewhere else. I saw something climb out of it. It looked like a little boy.”

Electra smiled and started to walk away. It was clear Liezl was losing her mind, and quite frankly, she was becoming annoying. As she walked through the gate, she heard gravel crunch behind her and Liezl’s hand gripped her shoulder.

“Electra… Wait…” Liezl said, huffing. “Would you like to meet me here tonight? I want to find out what’s going on. It’s the last thing I’ll ask of you.”

Electra had no intention of going underground, especially with Liezl. Was she asking her out? “I don’t know,” she said, “I’m really not sure about that. I don’t think it’s a-“

“Please?” Liezl asked. The pleading look in her eyes was desperate. She blinked and smiled crookedly at Electra. “*Please?*” she said again, “I know what I said sounds odd, but if we both go down we can protect each other. I swear, we never have to talk to each other again if you go down with me.”

“Why don’t you ask the little boy you saw last night to go with you?” Electra said.

Liezl’s face hardened almost instantly. “You think I’m lying don’t you?” she said, “It’s the truth, I know what I saw. A little boy was down there. He was probably beating against the hatch while I slept on it. I thought I could trust you. Looks like I was wrong.”

Electra rolled her eyes. “You were wrong,” she said, “Don’t ever talk to me again.”

She turned around and walked away. As she passed the gate and turned right towards Saint Nakita’s, she heard the girl whimper and sob.

“Fine!” Liezl screamed, “I won’t! I’m going to see what’s down there and I’m going to save us. I’m going to save all of us and you’ll be sorry you were mean to me!”

Electra didn’t turn back.

CHAPTER FOUR

The door to Saint Nakita's gave a loud shriek as she opened it. She flinched, but the coast was clear. The area around the front of the dormitory was as quiet as when she arrived. She snuck inside.

There was no one there. Electra pulled out her BlackBerry and looked at the time. It was only nine-fifteen, the cleaners were probably still busy in Saint Petra's. It was against the rules for students to be anywhere near their rooms during class time, unless they were ill or had permission from the sisters or Phumla to be there. She walked past photographs of Our Immaculate alumni hanging from the walls in the lobby. They grinned at Electra as she made her way passed a desk and up a narrow staircase.

She opened doors, and poked her head into vacant rooms, trying to remember which was Cha Cha's. She hardly visited Saint Nakita's, which was smaller than her dormitory next door. It had a mildew smell and the rooms were so cramped that the girls had to sleep in bunk beds. It was also where the Celibates stayed, which was another reason why Electra avoided the dorm. Just seeing their oily pimpled faces made her want to punch a wall. They were such sad little brown nosers.

Whenever she and her friends blazed, they would go to the centre of the Prayer Maze to get high. It was the safest place to smoke and do drugs. No security guard, and especially no sister, bothered working their way to the centre where a large statue of Mary the Virgin stood over a bonsai tree. The maze was big, and by the time the guards or nuns had entered it, one of the Grade Eights hired to keep watch would have sent an SMS to someone in the centre and the girls would scatter. Even Doctor Hamilton was powerless when it came to catching girls in the centre of the Prayer Maze, but construction was being done inside it, and, according to one of the notice boards in the teaching block, work was going to last for a few weeks. It was one of the reasons why Electra had smoked a joint at Nkosi library the previous day and got caught, that, and she was too lazy to find a better place to smoke. Cha Cha had obviously found a way to work around the situation and improvise. Electra wondered how the construction in the maze was affecting her friend's business.

Cha Cha Tarantello sold the works: imported flavoured cigarettes from China, a variety of psychedelics and pills, and, of course, marijuana, both indoor and out. She opened shop after sneaking off to her first trance festival, a party called Englum Symble which took place an

hour's walk away from Our Immaculate. She came back after a few hours, tripping balls with four tabs of acid, which she later sold. The girls went mad for the drug, especially the overworked Matrics at the time, and Cha Cha's popularity grew overnight. Almost every other weekend after that, girls gave her money and the head of prefects granted her safe passage out of the school. She would leave for a party at around ten on a Saturday night and arrive back just in time for compulsory morning mass at Tears of Christ on the Sunday, smelling of booze, smoke, and vomit. Sometimes she'd take a few girls with and eventually got them to sell at school for her when business began to boom. Electra had been to two parties with Cha Cha, but stopped going when her friend noticed she wasn't selling the drugs, only taking them.

She opened the last door at the end of the hallway and stepped inside. Cha Cha and Lana were sitting on a bed holding mugs and talking. They both looked up quickly and sighed when Electra walked in.

Cha Cha laughed. "You scared the shit out of me," she said, "Were you brought up in a barn?"

"Yes," Electra said, "Right next to your family's sty."

Lana got off the bed. "Bitchy much?" she said, and walked over to a small table. On it was a kettle and two cups. "Would you like some mint schnapps and coffee?"

"Sure, why not," Electra said and moved towards the foot of the bed. "How's your Friday treating you?" she asked Cha Cha.

"Much better than yours from what I hear."

"Here you go," Lana said, passing a steaming mug to Electra.

"I heard you got detention," Cha Cha said, "That's fucking bullshit."

"Whatever. Hamiltoe is just being a bitch as usual," Electra said. She took a sip of her drink. It was hot and tasted rich. "So, I'm assuming you have a hiding place we can go to?"

"You assume correctly," Cha Cha said with a smile. She got off her bed and walked over to the table, putting her mug on it.

"We're going upstairs, apparently," Lana said and pointed upwards towards the ceiling.

“What?” Electra said, “Like, the roof?”

Cha Cha opened her closet and felt around her sock drawer. “Sort of,” she said, and pulled out a box of Marlboro Lights. “I found a tiny smoke room up there when I was looking at the stars the other night. It’s a little dirty in there, but no one will see us, or more importantly, smell us.”

“Let’s partytjie then,” Electra said, exhausting what little Afrikaans she knew.

The girls walked out into the corridor and Cha Cha locked the door. Electra took another sip of her drink. Mint schnapps and coffee wasn’t her favourite, especially in Summer, but it hit the spot.

“How was your date with Liezl?” Lana said.

“How’s your liefie doing El?” Cha Cha asked, and the two burst out laughing. Electra rolled her eyes and followed the two down the hall until they got to a window. She wanted to tell them about how Liezl made her feel uncomfortable and wierded out in the Prayer Gardens, and how it felt as though the strange girl was hitting on her, but she couldn’t, not with them making fun of her. Besides, it wasn’t like it was any of their business, they didn’t need to know a thing.

Cha Cha opened the window and stuck her head out. Her blonde hair shone brightly in the sun, so bright Electra had to look away.

“Okay, I don’t see anyone,” she said, “What we need to do is get onto the emergency stairs to our left and climb onto the roof.”

“That sounds dangerous,” Lana said.

“Don’t be silly, if you fall you won’t die, you’ll just break something,” Cha Cha said.

“I don’t want to break anything,” Electra said. She was holding a mug in her hands after all and heights sometimes made her feel dizzy.

“Maybe there’s another place we can go,” Lana said.

“Guys, will you both fucking chill?” Cha Cha said, “It’s fine. I did this when I was tripping and I survived. You can both do this!” She climbed onto the window sill and shifted to the left carefully. She let go and landed on the emergency stairs with a dull clang. “If you guys

follow me and do what I do, you'll get there in one piece," she said, "The view is beautiful up there in the smoke room!"

*

After about five minutes of climbing up the rickety stairs, the three eventually made it onto the roof, but the view was no better than the one Electra saw out her room window every day, the only difference was that she had clear sight of the observatory from the tiny smoke room.

The room itself was dirty and looked like it hadn't been used in years, which was no surprise because getting to it was a mission. The walls were grimy and nests of daddy long legs choked its four corners. A wooden crucifix stood against a wall, propped up by a broken plastic chair.

"Do we have to stay here long?" Lana said and lit the joint. She took a deep drag and held it in, passing it to Electra.

"That depends," Cha Cha said, "How badly do you want to be caught?"

"Very badly," Lana said as Electra passed Cha Cha the joint. "Like, almost Electra-badly."

Electra coughed and her two friends laughed.

Cha Cha slapped her on the back and said, "We're just teasing little one."

"Very funny, bitches," Electra said, wiping her mouth. "Very fucking funny."

"Speaking of funny," Cha Cha said, passing the joint to Lana, "Have you guys heard Dushka Sparkle's new song? That chick knows how to satire."

"Who the hell are you talking about?" Lana asked, toking the joint and passing it to Electra.

"Dushka Sparkle," Cha Cha said, slower this time, "She's an indie punk rock chick from Belarus." She pulled out a Marlboro from her box and put it in her mouth. "She's our age and she's toured fourteen different countries, even came here to Jo'Burg and Cape Town once… and here we are doing nothing and getting high."

"What about Durban?" Electra asked, "Didn't she perform there too?"

Cha Cha snorted and winked at her. "The fuck cares about Durbs?" she said and lit her cigarette. "I should play you guys a song of hers."

“Please don’t,” Lana said and flicked the joint. Flecks of ash fell to the floor like snow. “You know I only like my music over one hundred and fifty beats per minute.”

“Okay your highness,” Cha Cha said, “Whatever. Fuck.”

“What about this Sparkle girl?” Electra asked. Her mind felt like it was starting to swim.

“Sorry, I keep getting side tracked,” Cha Cha said and giggled. “This is good shit, who’s your dealer?”

“I don’t know,” Lana said, “Some crazy Italian bitch. Where’s the Jabu?”

“Cha Cha has it,” Electra said, “Stop hogging it Cha Cha!”

“Shit sorry,” Cha Cha said, but she made no attempt to pass it to Lana. “Anyway, in her new song called Evolve, she sings about firing her manager and juxtaposes that with the political situation over there…”

“Who?” Lana asked.

“Jesus,” Electra said. She plucked the joint from Cha Cha’s fingers and passed it to Lana. “Do you have the attention span of a gold fish? Darla Sparkle.”

“Dushka,” Cha Cha said and she laughed, “Darla? Who the hell is Darla?”

“Can we talk about something else?” Lana said, passing the joint back to Electra, “I’m too effed to be talking about fucking singers from Bela-Bela.”

Electra took the joint from Lana and passed it to Cha Cha. The world felt like it was shifting, and the little smoke room was starting to feel incredibly claustrophobic. She wanted to sit down, lie back and close her eyes for a moment, but she couldn’t in the smoke room, not with the dust and the spiders. She felt dizzy and her skin was buzzing, not uncomfortably, but she was aware of it. Electra couldn’t even remember where she placed her mug.

“I’m going outside for some air,” she said, and opened the door.

A strong breeze knocked her in the face and she shut her eyes. She stumbled, and she forgot where she was. Her mind’s eye flashed an image of her toppling off the roof and landing in a rose bush and she panicked. She opened her eyes, but she was still in the doorway of the smoke room, far from the edge of the roof. Lana and Cha Cha wouldn’t let anything bad

happen to her. They loved her, and she loved them. She was safe, in good hands, she needed to remember that. There was no use in getting para or freaking out, it was only her mind melting.

Everything was fine, exactly as it was twenty minutes ago. Life was great. Sure, she'd been infantilized by Doctor Cow-Face Hamilton twice in two days, but whatever, the old hag was only a school principal, and Electra could beat her up if she had to. Why was she thinking about Doctor Hamilton, when space, time, matter, everything, crumbled around her? More importantly, she thought, getting on her knees and lifting her face to the sky, why was she so high?

She had been on quite a weed binge that week, school had just been so dull. It wasn't as if she had abstained or anything. Perhaps it was an acid flashback, she had heard about those at a drug talk last year. Some crusty man freak stood at the front of her homeroom class, next to the word *DRUGS!* written on the blackboard. He told them LSD crystals embed themselves in users' spines, and if these unfortunate people crack their backs or stretch or twist the wrong way, they experience the trip again for a lengthy period of time. *"It was true*," he said, his tongue apparently fucked from all the drugs he'd chowed, "*A woman I know dropped acid when she was sixteen. When she was thirty, she was driving home from work and she tweaked out. She died because she drove into a tree!"*

Electra hoped it wasn't an acid flashback she was experiencing, and wished they weren't getting high on the roof of Saint Nakita's. This was how people died. She tried to blot the morbid idea of death out of her mind, but it only made things worse. She saw an image of her feet covered in blood.

Her heart raced. She pressed two fingers against her neck. She needed to calm down. She was making herself spiral out, for nothing. She tried not to pay attention to her heart, or the fact that she started to feel pins and needles in her arms.

She shut her eyes again, took a deep breath and held it in. She counted seven long seconds and exhaled. She took another deep breath and imagined warm yellow light baking her body.

She exhaled.

Three more deep breaths and her heart rate was back to normal, sort of. She didn't know what normal was, and the image of her bloody feet flashed itself in her mind once again, but the

pins and needles were going away almost as quickly as they came, and she began to feel more centred. "*Breathing gives you life*," she was once told by some retard named Idik at one of the trance parties she snuck off to with Cha Cha. "*Whenever you feel anxious, stressed, or worried, remember to breath deep and picture a glorious light kissing your skin. You'll feel at peace, irie love fo'sho'...*" He wasn't smart, he smelt like soil and his teeth were worn down to tiny stumps, but his little piece of advice never left Electra, and it always worked.

She still felt a little shaken and slightly disturbed by the bloody feet. She tried to ignore it by paying close attention to the conversation Lana and Cha Cha were having. She got up off her knees and turned around.

They were still smoking the joint, even though it felt like hours ago since they'd smoked. The two girls were sitting on their blazers on the floor, and Electra saw a small spider crawl over Lana's calf. She looked away and focused on Cha Cha's lips.

"…And that," Cha Cha said, "Is why it's kinda shitty to live in Belarus right now."

"So that's why the song is called 'Evolve'?" Lana asked. She took a drag from the joint.

"Totes dude," Cha Cha said. She fumbled an orange lighter in her hands.

Lana frowned and gave her the joint. "You don't think you're reading too deeply into it?" she said.

Were they still talking about the Belarussian singer?

Cha Cha looked over at Electra and smiled. "How you feeling?" she said.

"High," Electra said.

"Awesome, do you still have your drink? I have such cotton mouth."

Electra looked down at her hands and remembered she lost the mug. "I'm sorry, it's gone," she said, then before she could stop herself, blurted out, "Do you guys think the tunnels under the school exist?"

Cha Cha laughed and threw her box of Marlboros at her. Electra reached for it and pulled out a cigarette.

“I’ve heard rumours in the past of an underground school built underneath Our Immaculate in case chaos broke out over South Africa,” Cha Cha said.

Lana nodded. “Me too,” she said slowly, as if forcing the words out of her mouth took a great deal of effort, “Had there been a civil war, the students and staff were meant to stay down there until it was eventually safe to return to the surface.”

Electra thought of what Liezl had said to her in the Prayer Gardens and sighed. She just assumed the tunnels were another of the school’s urban legends.

“Why do you ask?” Lana said.

Electra shrugged and looked at the dirty ceiling. “Something I heard Sister Mahlasang say in the last lesson we had with her made me think of it,” she said. She hated lying to her two closest friends, but if she mentioned Liezl’s name again they would only make fun of her.

“Speaking of which,” Cha Cha said, a quizzical look on her face, “Shouldn’t Sister Mahlasang be sacked? She’s been gone ever since Coach Vickus was kicked out.”

“She’s away,” Lana said, “She’s in the Congo building some church.”

“But she didn’t even tell us she was leaving!” Cha Cha said, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m digging the extra frees, but fuck, how are we going to write the finals if she’s not here?”

“Apparently it was a last minute thing,” Electra said, “Isn’t that what Hamiltoe told us last week?”

“Oh, maybe,” Cha Cha said, “I wasn’t really paying much attention, some Grade Nine bitch was haggling me for MDMA on BBM. Was it when she taught us about the locusts and shit?”

Lana took one last drag of the joint and stubbed it out on the ground. She reached into her blazer pocket and pulled out her cell phone. She groaned. “I have to get to Home Ec just now,” she said, “We’re baking scones, isn’t that ridiculous?”

“That means I have Geography,” Electra said. She wanted to cry, for some reason she thought school was done for the day.

“Shit man,” Cha Cha said, “Good luck on the test then.”

“What test?” Electra said.

“You know, the contours test? My class wrote yesterday. Spoiler alert, you’re given a map of Radiokop.”

Electra’s heard sank. It was like she had Alzheimers, her memory had become shocking. So now it was two tests she had forgotten about, and she was just as clueless about contours as she was with her toets. What did it matter that maps had squiggly lines drawn on them? When would she ever have to read a map again after school?

She could feel the anxiety build in her chest again and her heart picked up, only this time Electra was sober enough to remind herself she didn’t give a fuck.

*

The rest of the day passed by in a confused blur. Electra didn’t remember much of the Geography test, other than the fact that she knew she failed it. She hadn’t been able to answer most of the questions, and the ones she could she completely made up her answers.

After Geography she somehow made her way to the second floor of the teaching block for a History double, where Sister Unathi taught the girls something about the Nazis and the Second World War. She couldn’t concentrate, and she hated to admit it, but smoking a joint so early in the morning during school hours wasn’t exactly the best idea. It wasn’t because she couldn’t concentrate, school was tedious and meant nothing to her. She just felt so groggy.

After lunch break, she had a Maths double which dragged on, followed by Religious Studies, where her class learnt about the Nazis again, but Electra couldn’t remember why.

The two-fifteen bell rang and before she knew it, she was done for the day. She was glad to be finished, it had been the worst day she’d had in a while, and she was exhausted. At least it was Friday, the weekend had begun and she could catch up on all the sleep she had lost that week. She looked forward to taking a long shower, smoking a bedtime joint and going to sleep early.

It was only when she bumped into Delphi outside the dining room that she remembered she had other plans. She had completely forgotten about detention, and the thought of going made her insides turn. She didn’t know who she resented more: Doctor Hamilton, or the newly crowned head girl.

Delphi smiled at her as Electra walked out the dining room. Dinner had been mostly average (green beans, unidentifiable brown slop and two slices of bread) but she had eaten it anyway, she had skipped lunch earlier that day to work on a history essay during break, she had only managed to write ten words, and was starving by the time seven o' clock came round. Her mind was elsewhere. She had been thinking about Liezl in the Prayer Gardens again, and she hated to admit it, but she hoped the weirdo wouldn't do anything stupid. If there were tunnels under the school, built long ago, surely they would be too dangerous to navigate through now?

Emma Shelby, a Grade Eleven girl with a pointed nose and birdlike features pushed past Electra through the doorway. She heard Emma talking to someone on her iPhone about the midterm break and something about a person named Kelso. Electra didn't have the energy to confront her and demand an apology, so she kept quiet and glared at the back of Emma's head.

"Don't be rude Shelby," said Delphi as the girl walked past her, over the gravelled path towards Saint Petra's. Emma kept on walking, head down, ignoring her. Delphi frowned and reached for Emma's arm. She pulled the girl towards her and said, "Don't be rude. And cover that damn sea horse tattoo on your wrist, it's revolting."

"Whatever," Emma said, her sharp nose pointed to the air. She put a hand over the iPhone's mouthpiece and wriggled out of Delphi's grasp. "You're just jealous because I have balls to get a tattoo and you don't."

"Act snappy with me," Delphi said, and narrowed her eyes. "Go ahead, I dare you. You want to know why that Kelso Makenzie slut is fucking your boyfriend behind your back? It's 'cos you're a real bitch, and he can't stand to be with you."

Emma looked down at the gravel, returned the iPhone to her ear and continued her conversation.

"That crow-looking whore was right about one thing," Delphi said as Emma rounded a corner and disappeared out of sight. "She has balls of steel to talk to me like that."

"Yeah," Electra said, "You should go full throttle on her like you did with Liezl last night."

Delphi cocked an eyebrow and took out her cell phone, thumbing the screen. "Are you on your way to detention?" she asked, ignoring Electra's comment.

“I guess.”

“I’ll walk with you,” Delphi said, “I’ve been trying to get hold of Malin van Zyl the entire day… Maybe Phumla knows where she is.”

Electra didn’t bother asking her who Malin van Zyl was, she just walked along the path with Delphi until they arrived at the quad.

“Detention is being held in one of the seminar rooms at the observatory tonight,” Delphi said and Electra nodded, suddenly remembering something about an announcement being made over the intercom during Religious Studies. She tried to keep up with Delphi who walked at a brisk pace. Electra looked at the water fountain. The hadeda body was gone, probably removed earlier by one of the gardening staff, but the fountain wasn’t trickling. It gargled loudly like the toilets in Saint Petra’s as the two crossed over the quad.

Delphi looked down at her phone again. “Detention starts in five minutes, we better hurry,” she said.

You’re the reason why I have to go for a whole fucking week in the first place, Electra thought. “The observatory is just a few minutes away,” was all she said.

They passed the Back Route and the infirmary. It was a warm evening, but a breeze had picked up and the air smelt of rain.

“I know you’re the last person I should ask this,” Delphi said, turning back to face Electra who was following closely behind, “But have you seen any of the Celibacy Girls today?”

Electra laughed. Delphi was right, she was the last person she should have asked. “No, I haven’t seen those inbreds since assembly, it’s been great,” she said.

“They’re not inbreds,” Delphi said, “They’re not even lesbians or anything else you keep calling them.” She thumbed her cell phone’s screen and sighed. She slipped the phone back into her pocket. “I don’t get why you hate them so much.”

“Are we talking about the same seven goody two-shoes retards you once lovingly referred to as the Kiss-Ass-Kartel, or KAK?” Electra said with a grin. She caught up to Delphi and slapped her friend’s left butt cheek. “Don’t tell me you’re trying to suck up to Doctor Hamilton too?”

“People change,” Delphi said.

“They haven’t.”

“I wasn’t talking about them.”

“You?”

“Yes.”

“How have you changed?” Electra said, “You’re just as much of a bitch as I’ve always known you to be.”

“Mahlosha,” Delphi said and rolled her eyes, “I don’t know how to explain it, but being head girl is different to being just another student. It’s better.”

“You’ve been head girl for, like, a day,” Electra said, “How porous is your mind that you’re suddenly a different person?”

“How porous is your mind that you thought it was cool to smoke dagga behind a rose bush at Nkosi yesterday?”

“It was a shrub,” Electra said.

The two walked the rest of the way in silence.

Phumla stood in the entrance of the observatory as a faint “*Our Father…Who art in Heaven…”* came from inside. She held a rosary in her hands, and smiled as the two girls climbed the steps to the entrance.

“Nice to see you two hanging out again,” Phumla said, “You manage to work things out?”

Neither Delphi nor Electra said a word.

“…Hallowed be thy name… Thy kingdom come…”

Electra groaned. Phumla was making the girls do Rosary Squats, the senior prefect’s favourite punishment. Phumla would make the detentionees stand in rows and get them to pray the Rosary out loud in its entirety. She kept track by counting down the beads, and after each line of every Our Father and Hail Mary the girls had to squat. Anyone who failed to

squat properly were forced to repeat the Rosary a second time, only the squats were replaced by burpees.

“Do you want to have a cigarette before you start?” Phumla asked Electra, who shook her head. “Alright then, c’mon in. It’s not such a big group tonight, only a few ladies, mainly Grade Eights who forgot to hand in Business Economics homework.”

Delphi walked up the stairs until she was on the same level as Phumla. “I wanted to ask you something,” she said, “Have you seen Malin van Zyl at all today?”

Phumla shook her head.

“What about the Flebbins twins?”

“No, can’t say I have. I saw them at assembly, but that’s the last time.”

“What about Frida Vorster? Babette Fluxman? Tumi Mahlasela?”

“No,” Phumla said, “But Tumi wasn’t in Art today if that makes a difference.”

“…Give us this day our daily bread… And forgive us our trespasses…”

“Who the hell are these people?” Electra asked.

“The Celibacy Girls,” Delphi said without looking her way, “You hate them so much, but you don’t even know their names?”

So Doctor Hamilton’s pets had names, Electra thought and smiled. She was awful when it came to remembering names and faces. Eight years before, when she first came to Our Immaculate, it took her a few months to realize Delphi wasn’t Daphne, and Lana wasn’t Lauren. She still didn’t know the names of half the students at the school, which was why it surprised her when she was awarded head girl at the end of the previous year. It occurred to her that she didn’t know most of the people who voted for her. Electra came to the conclusion while abroad on holiday, that if she didn’t know who people were now during her Matric year, she never would. She knew names of people worth knowing, and that was all that mattered.

“…And lead us not into temptation… But deliver us from evil…”

“I can’t hear you!” Phumla shouted, snapping her head towards the door. The praying became louder, more shrill. She turned back to Delphi, “The electricity is out in there, can’t understand why ‘cos everywhere else is fine. It’s why the girls are in the lobby tonight, it’s the lightest spot in the entire building.”

“I’ll tell Doctor Hamilton when I see her,” Delphi said and walked down the steps. “If I see her. I’m supposed to be meeting her and the Celibacy Girls for prayer hour tonight, but I don’t know when or where I’m supposed to meet them. None of those girls are answering their phones and I haven’t been able to find Doctor Hamilton since assembly.”

“Don’t you know where prayer hour is held normally?” Phumla asked Electra.

She shrugged. “No, Doctor Hamilton never invited me to join them,” Electra said, “A blessing in disguise don’t you think?”

“How you were head girl for as long as you were, I’ll never understand,” Phumla said, “Now come inside before the others start accusing me of nepotism.”

Delphi gave them a half-hearted wave and walked away. Electra watched her walk in the direction of Tears of Christ. She had taken out her phone again.

“One more thing,” Phumla said and Delphi stopped and turned around, eyes still on her phone. “While on the topic of missing persons, if you find Liezl on your way tell her to get her fat ass to detention, she’s late.”

“Gladly,” Delphi said, “Though to be honest I never want to set eyes on that creep again.”

“Would you even care if she doesn’t come?” Electra said.

“Yes, I run detention in case you haven’t noticed,” Phumla said, “But would you? I overheard Sonali say she saw you two making out.”

“Well, Sonali Prishnu is a dick.”

Electra followed Phumla into the dim lobby and joined the row of girls at the back, next to two large portraits of Mark Shuttleworth and Elon Musk. The room smelt of sweat. She stretched her arms out and began to squat.

“Hail Mary…” Squat.

"…Full of Grace…" Squat.

"…The Lord is with thee…" Squat.

Her phone beeped.

CHAPTER FIVE

"O Merciful, O Loving, O sweet Virgin Mary, Amen…"

They stopped squatting. Her legs felt like lead, her thighs were on fire. Electra tried to stand up straight, but her knees buckled and she fell down. The Grade Eight girl next to her giggled, but she was too exhausted to care. This is what happens, she thought as she rubbed her thighs, when you bunk PT to go suntan on the teaching block roof.

"Alright ladies, you're done for the evening, head back to your dorms and go straight to bed," Phumla said, "For those of you I'll be seeing tomorrow evening, we'll be meeting in Sister Monroe's art class."

The girls slowly gathered their bags and headed out the door. Electra couldn't move.

Phumla laughed. "Hang in there," she said and walked over to her, helping Electra up, "Only six more days left."

"I hate you right now," Electra said, and ran a hand through her hair. Her phone vibrated in her pocket, and she frowned. It was reminding her of the message she received when she began her rosary squats. She needed to change the settings, it annoyed her how it vibrated every ten minutes until she read her messages. She took out her phone and opened the SMS.

im gwin bak 2nyt

plz cum wit me plz

L.

"Didn't you find Religious Studies fascinating today?" Phumla asked, her back turned to Electra.

"I wasn't really paying attention," she said.

Phumla laughed. "Well maybe you should try doing that some time… It was all about how the Nazis were obsessed with anything to do with the occult. They stole a bunch of idols and statues and talismans, but when the war was over most of those things were never found." She turned around just as Electra put her phone in her pocket. "What's with that facial expression?" Phumla asked. She hung the rosary around her neck and picked up her bag. "Bad news?"

“Just Liezl,” Electra said, “So yes, I guess.”

Phumla slung her bag over her shoulder. “Liezl messaged you?” she said, “Did she say where she was?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Electra said.

“Yes it does,” Phumla said, ushering her out the lobby. She shut the door of the observatory behind them and locked it. “She bunked detention so it matters a lot. Where is she?”

Electra rolled her eyes. The last thing she wanted was to rope Phumla into what happened at the Prayer Gardens that morning, but the senior prefect left her no choice. No one disagreed with Phumla Mthembe. As they descended the steps of the observatory and walked towards the dormitories, Electra told her about what Liezl had said.

“It’s crazy,” she told Phumla, “I’ve heard about underground passages under the school and shit, but still I think Liezl is losing her mind.”

“If these Apartheid tunnels exist, she can’t go down there!” Phumla said with an exasperated look on her face, “We have to go find her, she could hurt herself.”

Electra sighed. “Would that be such a problem?” she said.

Phumla ignored her and quickened her pace. She began to jog by the time they reached the quad. She motioned for Electra to catch up to her, but with her bag on her back Electra had a difficult time keeping up. The gravel crunched loudly under their feet as they ran past the water fountain, which was silent. The gardening staff must have turned it off.

By the time they reached the edge of the quad, she felt her phone vibrate in her pocket. She stopped and pulled the BlackBerry out. Electra looked at the screen.

“Wait Phumla, stop!” she called to her friend and Phumla turned around. “It’s Liezl,” Electra said, “She’s calling me.”

“Give me the phone.”

She passed the Blackberry to Phumla who snatched it out of her hands. She thumbed the answer button and placed the phone to her ear. “Where are you Liezl?” she paused. “Hello? Liezl?... This is Phumla, I suggest if you don’t want to spend the rest of the year in detention you speak up now. Where are you?”

A few meters away, on the grass by the Prayer Gardens gate, Electra saw a tiny dot light up like a star. She peered over Phumla's shoulder as her friend spoke on the phone, and tapped her twice. Phumla turned around and her voice trailed off, her eyes following where Electra pointed.

"Is that a cell phone?" she said, and Electra shrugged.

Phumla held the phone to her ear as they walked towards the tiny glowing dot. "Liezl?" Electra heard her say, gentler this time, "Liezl please… Answer me. Are you hurt?"

A hadeda squawked nearby, making the girls jump. Thunder rolled in the distance, but when Electra looked up, the sky was cloudless. As they walked closer to the glowing dot, Electra could make out a tiny rectangular shape on the grass.

"It is a cell phone," she said, and bent down. It was a BlackBerry, just like hers. The screen was off, and lit up when she picked it up. She looked at the screen.

CALLING

ELECTRA

Phumla removed Electra's cell phone from her ear and frowned. "This is Liezl's phone?" she said, and gave the phone back to Electra, taking Liezl's from her. "Where the hell is she?"

"She must be inside the Prayer Gardens," Electra said, "She said something about an entrance to the tunnels being in there underneath some bushes."

"We have to go in," Phumla said.

Electra shook her head. "No," she said, "Let's go find a security guard or something… Maybe call one of the nuns."

"There's no time," Phumla said. She squeezed Liezl's phone and the screen turned off. "This stupid girl could be lost, or hurt. We're here, we need to find her."

"Forget it!" Electra said. She could feel the anxiety bubbling up in her chest again but tried to ignore it. She had a bad feeling she couldn't shake, a feeling that had sunk into the marrow of her bones. "I'm not going in there, she wanted to go into the tunnels, it's her problem, not mine."

“But it’s our duty.”

“It might be your duty,” Electra said, “But it sure as fuck isn’t mine.”

Phumla grabbed her arm and pulled her towards the Prayer Gardens gate. Electra tried wriggling out of her grasp, but it was no use, Phumla was far stronger than she was.

“Let go!” Electra said.

With her free hand, Phumla slipped Liezl’s phone into her blazer pocket and opened the gate. A shiver ran down Electra’s spine as Phumla pulled her into the gardens and locked the gate behind them.

“Are you crazy?” Electra said when Phumla finally let go of her arm. She massaged it tenderly and wondered if it would bruise.

“Liezl?” Phumla called. They waited a few moments as another thunderclap resonated above their heads. Where was the thunder coming from? Phumla took off her bag and opened it. She sunk her hand inside and pulled out her iPhone. She turned it on. “Let’s see if this stupid torch app actually works…” she said. A beam of light shot out from the phone, illuminating the overgrown path at their feet. “Do you remember where the entrance was?” Phumla asked her. She left her bag at the gate and walked down the path.

Electra groaned and bit her bottom lip. All she wanted to do was take a long bath and get high. “It’s by a statue… of Saint Tobias I think. The douche with the book,” she said. She took off her bag and placed it next to Phumla’s and stopped. If I wanted, she thought as she watched the senior prefect make her way deeper into the garden, I could jump the gate without a problem. Phumla would be furious though, and would make an example of her in detention for the next six days despite being her friend. Why did she have to be such a good god damned Samaritan?

“Wait up,” Electra said, and knew she would regret following Phumla down the path.

The air in the garden smelt of sulphur and made her eyes water. She kept close to Phumla, who shone her light on the path and called Liezl’s name over and over. She stopped suddenly and Electra walked into her.

“Shit,” Electra said, “Sorry…”

Phumla raised a finger to her lips, motioning for her to keep quiet. Electra concentrated, trying to make out what Phumla had heard. She held her breath. Somewhere in the garden she could hear sobbing. It was faint at first, but became louder the more they stood still. Phumla took a step forward, but dropped her phone when a bloodcurdling shriek erupted from nowhere.

“My God!” Phumla said, and looked at Electra. For a moment, she looked scared. “Liezl is that you?” she called over the scream.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here damn it!” Electra said, backing away towards the gate.

“No!” Phumla said, “She’s obviously hurt, we can’t leave her!”

“Or she’s gone fucking nuts!” Electra said, and turned around. She ran up the path towards the gate but she stopped in her tracks when she saw a dark silhouette crouched next to their bags. The screaming stopped. She heard another sob, followed by a giggle and the silhouette sniffed.

“Is… Is that Electra?” the silhouette said.

She could feel her insides turn and she gasped. It sounded like Liezl, only more deranged. She heard Phumla’s footsteps against the path come up behind her and stop suddenly.

“Who is that?” she said.

“I… It’s Liezl,” Electra said.

“For God’s sake,” Phumla said, brushing past her, “Liezl what the hell has gotten into you? Are you crazy?”

“We are all past the point of crazy,” The silhouette said. It slowly stood up and from what Electra could make out in the darkness she could tell the girl was naked. Liezl held something in her left hand, while she flexed the fingers of her right. She took a step towards the girls and stopped. The object in her left hand clicked. She took another step forward. Then, another. Phumla raised her phone in front of her as if she was holding a gun, and thumbed the screen. A beam of light shot from the phone and bathed Liezl in a bright glow.

“Jesus Christ Liezl,” Electra breathed, and clasped her hands over her mouth. “What have you done?”

*

Think of the bong. The bong in that tiny Amsterdam apartment under a store in the Red Light District. The party I was scared to go to, but was one of the greatest nights of my life. Think of that night. It was the night my perception of everything changed. The night I changed. Evolved. I drew out two months' worth of pocket money from the bank and set off for Europe the afternoon eNews reported that terrorist attack in Cape Town that left all those fat pig cops dead. It wasn't so much a terrorist attack as it was an act of good will. Cops are such bastards, they need to be disciplined. Think of that night. Think of the tall horned bong with a bowl full of B52, prepared by some lovesick Turkish drug dealer. I took it in my hands and it was frosty and slippery. He put ice cubes inside the three chambers filled with water. They rattled with each toke, and the smoke tasted like snow. As if it wasn't freezing cold already. The dealer's electricity was turned off, so we sat around in our coats by a makeshift fire we created with a dustbin and anything that could burn. Someone, cooked out of their mind, pulled out a pistol that night, firing four rounds and hit some prostitute next to me in the arm. It was hectic. There was a lot of screaming and shouting, and I couldn't understand a word. In the end, it was no big deal. The gun man was grinning ear to ear with a bottle of vodka in one hand, a smoking crack pipe in the other, and the prostitute said her tearful goodbyes about half an hour after she was shot and, bandaged up, snuck out to a twenty-four hour free clinic. That night taught me something I'll never forget. Had I been sitting a few inches to my right, one of those bullets would've gone through my skull. I would've wasted my life at school sitting behind fucking text books learning useless shit when I should've been living *my actual life.*

I don't know why out of all my memories this one is the first to come to mind. It just is.

Anything to take me away from what's in front of me right now.

*

Liezl looked like an angry pug with her bottom jaw exposed and raw, her lip gone. She extracted and retracted the rusted Stanley knife she held in a tight grip in her left hand, and cocked her head to one side.

Click – click. Click. Click – click. Click. Click.

She took another step closer to Electra and Phumla, and the two backed away. The girl looked like something out of a nightmare, naked and bleeding, but Electra couldn't tear her eyes away. Liezl flexed her right hand again, and balled it into a fist. She punched herself in the jaw with a sickening crack. A few teeth fell onto the path.

"Why?" Phumla said, the light from the iPhone's torch still shining on Liezl. "Who… Who did this to you…" she glanced quickly at Electra, then back to the naked girl. "Did… Did you?"

"Liezl…" Electra said, but stopped. She swallowed and looked around the garden, trying to find another way out. "We need to get fucking campus security," she said to Phumla.

Liezl grinned at them and blood ran down her chin, down her neck and between her breasts.

Click – click. Click. Click – click. Click.

"We're… We're going to get help," Phumla said, taking Electra by the hand. They inched their way around the path, around the girl. Liezl stared at them and watched their every move. "We'll be back, alright Liezl? Just… Just move away from the gate…"

Liezl hissed at them and crouched down suddenly, her eyes wild and deranged. Phumla stumbled backwards, knocking into Electra.

"No one can help us now," Liezl said slowly, her eyes boring into Electra's. "We are all dead, every single one of us. We've been dying ever since we arrived at this school, but up until tonight, we didn't know that." Liezl's hand shook and she brought it to her wounded mouth. "I saw what they did to the members of the Celibacy Girls Society, down there in the tunnels."

"You went down there?" Electra said.

"Where?" Phumla asked.

"The tunnels under the school," Liezl said, "I watched as they pumped *shit* into their bodies through tubes piercing their arms and legs. There were even tubes down their throats. Whatever it was they put inside them… It bloated them. Some of the girls swelled so badly their skin split open like ripe fruit. The one that didn't split was massive. The ones that did were sewn up." Liezl coughed and specks of blood splattered her feet. She twitched, "The boy starts his descent into our dimension. He will lead us into a paradise with feet covered by

the blood of the wicked, and he shall rejoice…" Liezl stood up and raised the Stanley knife over her head and screamed, "We shall all rejoice!"

She ran at them, slicing the air with the knife. Without thinking, Electra grabbed Phumla by the arm and dragged her down the path, deep into the dark garden.

"Liezl, please stop!" Phumla shouted as the two girls stumbled over the uneven path.

Electra let go of Phumla's arm and could hear Liezl thundering towards them. They needed to get out of the gardens and get help. *She's going to kill us! Where is the entrance to that fucking tunnel?!* It was their only way out. They could run in circles until they got back to the gate, but what was stopping Liezl from catching up to them before then?

Electra's eyes darted around the garden, frantically looking from the statue of Saint Tobias. If they found the entrance, the two of them could lock themselves inside and phone for help.

She could hear Liezl's heavy footsteps behind them, catching up. The girl wheezed loudly.

"There!" Phumla shouted. She pointed to a statue and made a right. Electra followed her through the garden until they reached Saint Tobias. The bushes from that morning were gone and the large hatch was open wide. Phumla shone the torch at it and Electra saw a flight of steps leading down into a pit of darkness. Phumla ran down a few of the steps while Electra grabbed hold of the door and yanked it up. It was lighter than it looked, but she still struggled to lift it up.

She stopped when she saw Liezl standing in front of her.

"Electra, c'mon!" Phumla screamed.

Liezl stood still, first looking at Electra, then Phumla. She looked down at her own chest. Her breasts dangled, her large brown nipples stared at the ground. Liezl wiped the knife on her hip and it left an angry smear.

"Please…" Electra said, trying to catch her breath, her hands still gripping the door of the hatch. "Please… Don't hurt us… Please…"

Liezl was silent, looking down at her naked chest. She pinched one of her nipples. She twisted it and brought the Stanley knife towards it, and sliced the nipple off.

Electra looked away, wanting to be sick. She ran down the steps, letting the door fall down with a dull metallic bang.

“Is it locked?” Phumla asked, but Electra said nothing, she could only shrug. She couldn’t believe what she had just seen. The crazy girl cut off her own nipple as if it had been nothing. There was a tiny window in the centre of the door and through it she could see Liezl’s dark silhouette, standing as still as before.

Something fell on the window, small, dark and round. Liezl’s dark nipple stared down at them.

Phumla gagged.

“Get away from there,” Electra said. She put a hand on Phumla’s shoulder and her friend shuddered. “Don’t let that psycho see you.”

She led Phumla away from the hatch and the two sat down in the darkness. Electra watched the silhouette through the tiny window but Liezl didn’t budge. She tried to think of a plan, but her thoughts were muddled and she couldn’t stop thinking about the bizarre girl slicing off her own nipple. She turned away from the hatch and gazed into the darkness of the tunnel. What had Liezl seen down here that made her tweak out?

She had always been an odd girl. Electra remembered once during a camp in Grade Nine they all went for a hike except Liezl, who apparently suffered severely from asthma. The girls had chided her, and a rumour spread that she was just too fat to walk more than one hundred metres at a time. When they got back from the hike, a girl who had since left Our Immaculate by the name of Sylvia Mason found a turd in her sleeping bag and everyone blamed Liezl. But even crapping in a sleeping bag was a far cry from what Electra and Phumla had just witnessed.

“Why won’t she go away?” Phumla said. She sounded like she was on the verge of tears. “Why won’t she leave us alone?”

“I don’t know,” Electra said.

“What was she even saying to us? Something about a boy and blood… Paradise? What does that even mean?”

“Try not to think about it,” Electra said and bit her bottom lip. “It’s just crazy talk, she’s insane.” There was more to what was going on than they could comprehend, she was certain of that. Hadn’t Liezl said something about taking medicine that morning? She had mentioned seeing a boy then too. Perhaps she had finally snapped, she was caught masturbating in Delphi’s room after all. Maybe the effect of the meds were wearing off and Liezl was trapped in her own sick little fantasy world.

Electra closed her eyes and tried to relax. She imagined a ray of light warming her body and she took deep breaths.

When she opened her eyes, the silhouette was gone.

She heard Phumla snoring softly next to her. Electra must have fallen asleep too, her eyes felt sticky but her mind was clear. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and reached into her pocket for her cell phone and pulled it out. The BlackBerry’s screen read 01:34, they had been in the tunnels for hours, but it felt like only minutes had passed.

She nudged Phumla, who woke with a start.

“Hey,” Electra said, “It’s just me. Liezl’s gone, let’s get out of here.”

Phumla wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her blazer and nodded. Electra got to her feet and helped her friend up. She cracked her back and thought of the creepy speaker at the drug talk who told them about acid flashbacks. Electra hoped what she had just experienced was a flashback, but it was highly unlikely.

The two made their way up the flight of steps and Phumla pressed her palms against the door. It didn’t move. Electra tried to help push the door open but it was locked.

“Shit,” Phumla said and slumped onto one of the steps. “We should just call someone for help.”

“That’s if there’s anyone left to help,” Electra said.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t want to be a pessimist, but there’s a chance we aren’t the only two Liezl came after.”

“There are four hundred and fifty students at Our Immaculate,” Phumla said, “She couldn’t have killed all of them with a Stanley knife.”

A shadow passed over the window, making Electra jump. Tiny hands placed themselves against the window outside and suddenly her skin prickled and her vision became hazy. She gasped and tried to breath, but it was as if something was crushing her lungs. Electra staggered backwards.

“Electra!” Phumla said, standing up and grabbing her by the shoulders, “What’s wrong?”

She felt woozy and blood fell from her nose to the steps. Her knees buckled. Before she toppled over onto Phumla, the last word that escaped her lips was a weak and bewildered, “Why?”

Everything faded to black.

PART TWO

CHAPTER SIX

The inscriptions on the walls were what frightened her most about the room. The spidery hieroglyphs were scribbled in rows and rows of angry red. Some symbols looked Greek, she could make out what seemed like four omegas with lines down their middle. Others looked Asian, mixtures of sharp lines and dark blots.

Her stomach churned, she felt nauseous. She wanted to get out, but Electra had already tried opening the rusted door twice while the other girls, locked in the room with her, lay passed out on the dirty floor.

There were nine of them. They weren't dead, she had checked their pulses after she woke up. They'd been knocked out just as she had, but she hadn't bothered waking anyone up, not even Delphi, who lay next to her. The silence in the dark room gave her time to think, she wouldn't be able to work a way out with the other girls talking over one another hysterically, which she knew they would.

Glancing over the room for what felt like the hundredth time, Electra could find no way of escape. She sighed and walked back to the spot she had woken up, careful not to stand on a Grade Nine girl, and sank to her knees. The room was bare, save an old cupboard between Phumla and that Emma Shelby bitch. The plaster on the walls was cracked and peeling, and a fluorescent light illuminated the room in a dim glow. Perched in the corner was an old intercom which looked like it had seen better days, dusty and covered in cobwebs.

Perhaps I should wake her up, Electra thought, looking down at Delphi. If there was anyone who should have been awake with her out of the nine sleeping girls, she wanted it to be her. Delphi would know a way out of the room. She would, wherever the room was. It was cold inside, and the walls were damp. They had to be underground. Were they still in the tunnels? She remembered hiding by the hatch with Phumla as Liezl watched them from the outside. She remembered the nipple.

She nudged Delphi, and her friend grunted sleepily, slowly waking up.

"Delphi," she said, shaking her shoulders, "Wake up!"

Delphi's eyes opened and she squinted at her, a confused look on her face as she propped herself up onto her knees. She yawned. "What the hell is going on?" she said, "Where are we?"

“I don’t know,” Electra said quietly, almost whispering. She didn’t want to wake the others up yet. “We’re in a room somewhere. I think we might be underground.”

Delphi looked around and rubbed her eyes, “How did we…”

“I don’t know. The door’s locked and my cell phone is gone.”

Delphi prodded the pockets of her blazer and groaned. “Mine too,” she said, “I feel awful.” She stood up and looked around the room, “What’s with the writing… If you can even call it that?”

“I don’t know.”

“How many of us are in here?”

“Ten of us, I counted when I first woke up. Everyone’s alive though, so don’t freak out.”

Delphi looked at her, “The last thing I remember was going to Doctor Hamilton’s office to see where she was… Now I’m here. What happened to us?”

A few of the girls started to shift and wake up. Phumla was one of the first, her eyes blinking open. She stared up at the two girls, rolled over and got to her feet. The girl next to her woke up, then another by the door.

“Electra you’re alright!” Phumla said, and looked around the room, “Are we still in the tunnels?”

“What does she mean ‘you’re alright’?” Delphi asked.

“God Delphi,” Electra said, “It’s a long story.”

The room began to fill with voices, some frantic, others tired:

“Where’s Sudesha? She was with me two minutes ago…”

“Last thing I remember I was sitting by the fire…”

“Where the fuck did I put my phone?”

“Guys,” Delphi said, raising her voice, “Everyone, just settle down alright?”

“How did we get here?” Sonali said.

Delphi raised her hands and everyone looked at her, “I don’t know. I don’t think anyone does. But talking over one another isn’t going to help. We need to stay calm and maybe we can work this all out.”

Delphi was good at crowd control. People listened to her, she never had to work for their respect, but perhaps it was because she frightened most girls at the school, more now probably after the whole Liezl incident. Electra spent a good three years working to please the girls when she had wanted to get head girl, but for Delphi it just came naturally.

Delphi took a deep breath and walked into the centre of the room. The girls crowded around her. “Right,” she said, “We know four things so far. We are still in the tunnels. There are only ten of us in this room. Our cell phones are gone, and the door is locked.” Emma walked towards the door and fumbled with the knob. “What did I just say Emma?”

Sheepishly Emma looked at the floor and walked back to where she had woken up in the corner.

“Now,” Delphi said, turning around slowly on her heels, “Is there anyone here who can…”

A scratching noise, followed by a muffled *“Hello?”* interrupted her, and everyone went quiet. A few seconds passed, then more scratching, and a *“Can anyone hear me? Is anybody there?”*

“Well don’t just stand around picking your goddamned noses,” Delphi said, “Find where the voice is coming from!”

The girls scrambled around the room. Some ran their fingers over the walls, over the angry hieroglyphs. Phumla pressed her ear against the door. Electra’s eyes fell on the old cupboard. She walked over to it and ran her hands over the surface. She gripped the cupboard and pushed it away from the wall. It was heavy, and took a lot of effort, but when it shifted she could see a rusted vent behind. Two fingers poked out from it.

“I found it!” she said, and Delphi walked up to it, crouching down.

She touched one of the fingers. “Who is that?” Delphi asked, “Lana?”

“*Yes*!” the voice from behind the vent replied, “*Are you guys alright*?”

Emma rushed up to the vent, knocking Electra and Delphi out of the way. Her birdlike face was contorted into an ugly expression, which Electra guessed was probably shock. “Lana!” Emma said, “Is Sudesha with you?”

Delphi stood up and grabbed the girl by the collar of her blazer, pulling her away from the vent, “Back off Shelby, you’ll get your turn.”

Emma got to her feet and pushed Delphi away. Tears trailed down her face and she snivelled. “Go fuck yourself!” she said, and crouched down by the vent again, “Sudesha? Su-“

Delphi planted her foot against Emma’s side, knocking her over, winding her. The girl moaned and fell to the floor. The whole room went quiet, all eyes were on her. Delphi straightened her blazer and cleared her throat. “Let me make one thing clear,” she said, scanning the room of girls, “We might be in a strange predicament, but that doesn’t mean anything’s changed. I’m still your head girl. I’m still the one who makes the decisions. Anyone who has a problem with that will get another one of my kicks, next time to the head. Understand?”

Emma gasped for air. The girls looked at their shoes. Electra looked at Delphi, who took another deep breath and exhaled slowly through her nose. “Lana?” she said, “Are you still there?”

“…Yes, you don’t have to shout, I can hear you just fine,” came the voice from the vent. The fingers were gone. *“Are you guys also in some sort of room?”*

“It looks like a storeroom,” Electra said, ignoring Delphi’s glare. She had known Delphi for eight years, even vacationed with her family a few times. She could frighten the girls, but not Electra. “We worked out that we’re still in the tunnels,” she said, “There’s ten of us here, how many in yours?”

“Same. Who’ve you got?”

“Me, Delphi, Phumla, Emma, Sonali… The rest I don’t know.”

Delphi knelt down, her face close to the vent. “Xolile, Yuki, JoAnne, Belinda, Bernadette…” she said. She looked up at Electra, “You were head girl once, how do you not know some of these people?”

Electra rolled her eyes, “Whatever, sorry for not studying the year book like a nerd.” She turned back to the vent, “Who’s in your room?”

Lana mentioned nine names, but nobody Electra really knew. She wondered if Cha Cha was alright, or if she was trapped in a room just like theirs.

“So Sudesha’s not there?” Emma asked, and propped herself up with her elbows, still panting for air.

“*No dumbass*,” Lana said, “*If she was I would have fucking said*!”

“Let’s keep it together,” Electra said, “What’s more important is what happened to us.”

“We all passed out, at least, that’s what we’ve been talking about in here. How about you guys?” Lana said.

Electra looked around the room and most of the girls nodded. A few were already in tears. “So we’ve been kidnapped?” she said.

“Don’t jump to conclusions like that,” Delphi said, “You’ll only scare everyone. What’s the last thing you remember?”

Being chased by a manic Liezl through the Prayer Gardens, what she had said about a boy, the nipple. That damned nipple. Her nausea got worse.

She took a deep breath, and looked away from the group of girls, swallowing what felt like a ball of burning bile rolling up the back of her throat. If Delphi was worried the girls would be scared about a potential kidnapping, she couldn’t say anything about Liezl.

“Electra,” Delphi said, “Tell us. Now.”

Just say it, Electra thought, *they need to know. They’ll find out eventually, and it might as well come from you.* She looked at Phumla, searching for assurance. Her friend met her gaze for a second, before looking down at her shoes. “Liezl,” Electra said, “She’s the last thing I remember.”

Delphi narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest. “Well what about her?” she said.

“She chased us, me and Phumla… Into the tunnels and she…” Electra thought hard about how to phrase the next part of the sentence, “She cut herself up. Pretty bad.”

The room broke out into wide-eyed stares and a few of the girls gasped. Voices rose and fluttered around the room:

“What?”

“Liezl?”

“She’s insane.”

“How bad?” Delphi whispered, barely audible over the noise. “Keep quiet!” she said and turned to Phumla, “How bad?”

Phumla sighed and shook her head. “It was pretty disgusting,” she said, “I’m not going to repeat what I saw.”

“How fucking bad?”

She glared at Delphi. “When we found her, she was naked and bleeding. She had already taken off her bottom lip with a Stanley knife. She tried to cut us up, so we… ran and…and…”

“She sliced off her own fucking nipple,” Electra said.

A girl giddily walked into a corner and threw up, retching loudly.

“Why would she do that?” Delphi said, biting a fingernail, “It makes no sense.”

“Does anything right now make sense to you?” Phumla asked her. She paused and looked at the walls, “Just look at where we are, the shit written everywhere. Something insidious is at work here.”

“Right,” Delphi said and laughed, “Liezl, the most sinister student at this school, went crazy and locked us up in here.” The rest of the girls kept quiet, but Delphi was in hysterics. She doubled over, her laughter bouncing off the walls. “Liezl!” she said, tears rolling down her cheeks, “The stupid moron we used to make fun of in Home Ec ‘cos she was too scared to use a knife to cut anything.”

“You think there’s a connection?” Electra asked Phumla. She wasn’t sure what crazy Liezl was connecting to, or how, but what Phumla was saying made sense, at least to her. She thought Liezl was merely suffering a mental breakdown, but she had warned her about going into the tunnels. She had spoken about a boy. Was he down here with them? Electra shivered and brushed the thought to the back of her mind.

“There’s no connection!” Delphi said, and she stopped laughing. “We’re forgetting that this is the same stupid bitch who fucked out last night and sat fingering herself in my room. She was obviously mental, which is why she did what she did. End of story.”

“*You all need to be level headed*,” Lana said, and for a moment Electra had forgotten about the vent. She wished Lana was in the same room as them, it would have brought her some comfort.

“Explain what’s on the walls then!” Phumla said and licked her lips. She stared at Delphi, “What does it all mean,” she said, “Huh?”

“I don’t know, it’s probably from a bunch of people fooling around,” Delphi said.

“*...Actually*,” another voice from the vent spoke up, “*It looks like Sumerian, mostly…*”

“Who said that?” Delphi asked.

“*It’s me, Karli van Heerden*.”

“What did you say again?”

“*That the writing kind of looks like ancient Sumerian? At least that’s what I think… I had a project to do for History last term for Sister Unathi on ancient civilizations, so*…”

“Yes, okay. Whatever,” Delphi interrupted, “Do you know what it says?”

“*No, I have no clue*.”

“Well thanks Karli, you’re a real help.”

“We can talk about that later,” Electra said, her mind swimming with what Liezl said to her in the Prayer Gardens and how she should perhaps have listened, despite brushing it off as crazy talk. “For now, let’s figure out how to get the door open and find out who did this.”

“Maybe it was the sisters,” Emma said, sitting cross-legged on the floor.

“The nuns?” Delphi said, “Yes, you guessed right. The frail retard nuns knocked us out and locked us all in the tunnels so that we could repent for absolutely fucking nothing.”

“I was just saying,” she said, and sniffed quietly.

Although Emma wasn’t exactly Electra’s favourite person at Our Immaculate, she couldn’t help but feel as though Delphi was being a little harsh. They were getting off track and wasting time. “Look,” Electra said, “There’s ten of us here, and ten girls in the other room. There should be at least one girl who knows how to pick a lock, right?”

The girls looked at each other but no one said a word.

“No one?” she asked. She sighed and rubbed her forehead. What did she expect? Our Immaculate Academy was a school for the elite, and not the cool bad-girl-elite kind either. There had to be another way to leave the room. She looked down at the vent again. It was quite small, but a girl Emma’s size would have no problem fitting through, she was so bony. But what good would sending Emma through to the other room do? The girl was pathetic.

Phumla said, “We could look up how to on our…” She groaned and shut her eyes. “No phones. I forgot,” she said.

Delphi pushed past a few girls, stepping over Emma, and walked to the door. She put her hands on her hips and stared at it. The rest of the girls looked at one another aimlessly, some began to break up into smaller groups and pairs. A quiet murmuring filled the room. Electra looked at Phumla, who sat on the cupboard. She looked worried, and Electra didn’t blame her. She pondered going over and talking to her, but she had no idea what she would say. She eventually decided against it, and walked over to Delphi. She stood beside her.

Delphi glanced over at her and nodded towards the rusted door which she had been studying. “We’ll have to bust it open somehow,” she said.

“The sooner we get out,” Electra said, “The better.”

“Obviously,” Delphi said.

For now, there was control of sorts in the room, but sooner or later, the longer they spent in the small dirty space, the more worked up the girls would become. They had to get out as soon as possible, or not even Delphi would be able to retain her power over the girls for much longer.

Suddenly, from above their heads, the old dusty intercom crackled to life. Everyone went quiet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Doctor Hamilton addressed them slowly over the intercom. Her voice was insect-like and metallic: *"Girls, this is your principal speaking. While I am quite aware that you are all experiencing some sense of confusion by now, I think it is in your best interests to concentrate on what I am about to say…"* She paused and the speakers crackled softly.

Hearing the old lady's voice over the intercom made Electra's hair stand on end. She knew the old bat had always been cracked in the head, but locking students up in dirty rooms underground was something even Electra thought their principal was incapable of. She thought of the story passed down by Matric girls of how Doctor Hamilton made members of the ground staff walk over glass when she caught them drinking behind the pool clubhouse. She always thought it was simply a school legend, like the hairy ghost of the cleaning lady.

"Each of you has been placed in three separate rooms. In a few moments I shall read out the names of six girls, and when I do, the doors to your rooms shall unlock. Only the two girls whose names I've called will be permitted to leave each room, the rest of you shall stay behind to await further instruction…"

"This is a joke," Delphi said, and a small smile crept over her lips. "She can't be serious, I'm head girl."

"…Failure to comply will result in immediate punishment."

"Punishment?" Electra said as the girls started to murmur amongst themselves. "As in, like, expulsion? If there are three rooms, and there are ten girls in this room and next door, that means there's probably thirty students altogether. She's not going to expel thirty of us."

"…The boy with red feet lives on." The intercom crackled and died.

The girls stared at one another. Phumla got off of the cupboard and paced around the room.

"That's what Liezl was talking about in the Prayer Gardens," she said. She turned to Delphi who rolled her eyes, "A boy with red feet… leading us into some sort of paradise. Now do you believe there's a connection?"

"Shut the fuck up," Delphi said, "This is probably some sort of team building exercise or something."

"I doubt it," Electra said. She sunk down to the floor and hugged her knees against her chest tightly. "Phumla is right. Liezl said something about this… Who is he?"

"He's the reason we're down here," Phumla said.

The girl who threw up earlier started to cry. It was starting, panic was creeping up on them and soon the whole room would be full of hysteria, Electra knew it. Perhaps that was what Doctor Hamilton wanted all along, but what did their principal have to do with all of this? Electra couldn't think of an answer. This was more than just Liezl freaking out, she wasn't the only one caught up in a twisted fantasy land, Doctor Hamilton was too. And so were they, whether they liked it or not. Her head spun with unanswered questions, but she had to stay level headed. There were more important issues to worry about. They had to get out of the room, and back to the surface. Once they got out of the tunnels, she'd worry about the boy with red feet then. *If we get out of the tunnels…* Electra screwed her eyes shut and tried to stay focused. *We will get out. Eventually, people will notice thirty girls have gone missing. Doctor Hamilton can't keep us down here forever.* The room felt colder than it was when she woke up.

"Maybe she'll only expel the six girls she's going to ask for," She heard Emma say. She opened her eyes and saw Delphi had moved into the centre of the group, an angry look on her face.

"Will you relax?" she said, "You're all forgetting who's down here." She pointed at Phumla, "You are senior prefect. I am head girl. We have the spirit and recreation ladies in other rooms, and a fuckload of girls whose parents have donated millions to Our Immaculate. The worst that could happen is a slap on the wrist and a month of detention. Boo fucking hoo."

"Really?" Phumla said, "Do you honestly believe Doctor Hamilton meant we'd be expelled when she said 'immediate punishment'?"

"What else would she be talking about?" Delphi said.

Electra sighed, "You might not believe we're in danger right now, but Phumla and I know what we saw. Liezl came down here and saw something that fucked her up for good."

"Jesus Christ Electra, not Liezl again," Delphi said.

“And didn’t you say you couldn’t find any of the Celibates? Who knows what’s happened to them.”

“They’re probably in chapel, or confession or something.”

“Oh my God,” Emma said, her voice quivering as her hands shot to her mouth, “Oh my God.”

“They’re not in chapel Delphi, and they’re certainly not in fucking confession!” Electra said, standing up.

“You’re crazy!” Emma muttered behind her fingers.

“Watch your mouth!” Phumla said, “That’s your old head girl you’re speaking about. And we saw Liezl do that shit with our own eyes.”

“No,” Delphi said, “I think Emma has a point, maybe Electra is crazy. Maybe you’re both crazy.”

“I will take you down, Makholwe,” Phumla said. She balled her hands into fists.

“Not before I rip out your uterus with my teeth bitch!”

“Enough!” Electra said. She walked between the two girls and put a hand on each. “This fighting has to stop, we need to work together if we’re going to get out of here, okay?” She looked at Emma, “I am not crazy. If anyone is cooked here, it’s fucking Hamilton.”

A girl with big teeth and frizzy hair walked over to Emma and put her arm over her shoulder. “Your dad should sue Doctor Hamilton,” she said. Some of the girls nodded in agreement. The frizzy haired girl smirked, “I mean, this isn’t normal. The old cow had us drugged, obviously, and locked up in a really unsanitary place. We could get sick down here, I’m pretty sure this place is crawling with disease.”

Delphi sighed, and walked back towards the door. She leaned against it and looked up at the intercom. “This is becoming more and more like a dirty torture porn,” she said, “Hamilton is just fucking with us. And besides, she couldn’t have drugged us and put us in these rooms by herself. Someone must be helping her.” She grabbed the doorknob, “Is somebody going to jimmy the lock?”

"*Hey! Hey!*" Lana's voice called from the vent, "*Louise Beukes has a compass on her, fucking Hamiltoe didn't take it when she threw us in here. We're going to try open the door and then unlock yours, sit tight girls*."

A few minutes passed as they waited for the girls next to them to break open their door. The frizzy haired girl pulled out a box of Marlboro Gold and walked around the room offering the girls cigarettes. Emma lay down on the floor and cried, but no one went over to comfort her. Delphi cracked her knuckles and stared at the intercom intensely. Electra sat next to her and tried to figure the situation out, but she could think of nothing. She thought of reasons why Doctor Hamilton would want to single out two girls from each room, and wondered where the third room was.

Eventually, Delphi turned to her and said in Zulu, "Remember when my parents invited you to our house in Llandudno when we were in Grade Six? The two of us stole that bottle of Cognac and hid away in one of the closets, remember?" Delphi laughed, but it sounded hollow. "We got so drunk after three sips, and we accidently locked ourselves in the closet. God my parents were angry when they eventually found us."

She smiled wanly, "Yeah," she said, "They were pissed. What's made you think about it?"

"The fact that we're locked in a tiny room, knowing that the only way out is to be punished. My parents don't scare me, they never have. But I'm scared now."

Electra shifted closer to her friend, and the two sat shoulder to shoulder in silence.

*

A crackling above their heads made some of the girls groan. Electra could feel her stomach tighten and twist into knots. "Who do you think she's going to call for?" she asked Delphi, but all her friend did was shrug. Electra didn't know what she was expecting from her, Delphi knew about as much as she did. It was the unknown which scared her the most, like at the party in Amsterdam when the prostitute was shot. She remembered how shocked she had been, how unprepared she had felt. All those feelings had come back, multiplied by a thousand.

The intercom crackled, *"Girls, this is your principal speaking. The first pair of women asked to leave their room are Cynthia Boitseko and Lana di Clemente from Room A."*

A muffled *thunk* was heard coming from the room opposite theirs, and Electra bit her bottom lip. *Jesus, not Lana!* She felt her eyes well up with tears and her heart leapt into her throat. Of all the girls that old bitch had to choose, why did she have to pick Lana?

Electra walked to the vent, and stuck her fingers through the grate. She hoped and prayed the girls in the next room had managed to pick the lock. "Are you really going to go?" she asked. She tried to keep her voice steady and her mind focused. She couldn't fall to pieces now, not when Lana's name had been called.

"*Do we have a choice*?" Lana said.

"Please make your way out the room and to the right of the tunnel, where you shall receive further instruction. Do not waste time, there is still much to be done."

Electra felt Lana's fingers against hers and she squeezed her eyes shut. She wanted to protect her friend, and tell her she'd come find her, but Electra couldn't, not when she didn't know what to expect. Her heart beat loudly in her ears. Her breathing was shallow. *Of all the fucking girls the toad could've chosen, why her?*

"*This is bullshit!*" She heard a girl, who sounded like that Karli van Heerden, shout from Lana's side of the vent. "*The door is open, we should all go! I'm not waiting around to get punished. This is insane!*"

"*Don't be stupid!*" Lana said, and let go of Electra's fingers, "*Now isn't the time to fuck around*."

"*Why not? Maybe Hamilton should've thought about that before she locked us in here like a bunch of animals Lana!*" Karli screamed.

"Don't be stupid," Delphi said, suddenly appearing next to Electra, "Lana is right, let's just do what she says."

"*Fuck this, I've had enough!*" she heard Karli say, "*If any of you have any balls you'll do the same!*"

Electra wanted to hit the moronic van Heerden girl, she had no idea what they were in for, none of them did. But if Liezl was anything to go by, they had to listen to Doctor Hamilton. "Follow her orders," Electra said.

She could hear the girls on the other side talking excitedly with one another:

"*Karli's right!*"

"*Fuck Hamilton! The door's open!*"

"*Let's get the hell out of here!*"

"*No!*" Lana screamed, as Electra heard the dull screech of the door opening. "*Wait! Just fucking-*"

A deep roar bellowed from the vent, and Electra pulled her fingers out, grazing her index finger against the metal.

"Oh God," she heard Phumla say, "What the hell have they done?"

She could hear the girls scream, and she jumped back. The bloodcurdling shrieks bled through the vent into their room, and everyone crowded around it in a panic.

"What the-" Emma said, eyes wide as they all listened helplessly. "What's happening?"

"Keep quiet for fuck's sake!" Delphi said and slapped the girl hard across the face.

It sounded like pigs squealing in an abattoir, terror-crazed and confused. It made Electra's skin turn to goose flesh. She shuddered, tears rolled down her cheeks and onto the grimy floor. Girls howled in pain. Some, she could hear, were begging for their lives. It made her stomach turn and her nausea returned. She was going to be sick. Panic bells sounded in her head. Lana was in there. Lana was *inside* the chaos.

We have to do something, she thought. She bit her bottom lip. *We have to get her out of there!*

Suddenly, Lana's fingers shot through the vent, bloody and frantically scratching against the grate. One of her fingernails snagged against it, bent backwards and tore off her finger.

Electra reached out for Lana's fingers, but her hands shook too much and she couldn't get a proper hold.

"*Help me!*" Lana yelled, but it was hard to hear her over the havoc, "*It… It's inside here with…*"

She didn't manage to finish. She screamed and the grate bent inwards. Electra tried holding the tips of her friend's fingers, but they disappeared, leaving behind the fingernail stuck to the grate.

Something banged against the wall and they heard a dull crack.

What was inside there with them? Electra wanted to call out to Lana, scream her name, but she was scared whatever it was that had entered the room would hear her.

There was another roar, something banged around the room and landed close to the vent. Electra could hear a muffled shriek and something rip. The screaming began to die down to a low moan and weak sobs. "*Please… Don't… Don't…*" rasped through the vent. A dull *thud*, and the plea and sobs were gone.

"Jesus Christ," Electra whispered. The bile rose up in her throat, and she it took every inch of her being to keep it down. She put a hand over her mouth and shut her eyes, trying hard not to retch. She felt woozy, and when she opened her eyes the world swam in front of her as if she was high. She had to stay calm, she couldn't freak out, even though all she wanted to do was scream at the top of her lungs for Lana.

Something trickled through the vent's grate and the girls around her started to back away. For a moment, Electra stared at it listlessly, unable, or unwilling to comprehend what she was staring at. She crawled back as the blood began to form a pool.

This can't be real. This is all a horrid nightmare. I'll wake up any minute now, drenched in sweat. Lana will wake me up, she's probably rolling a joint as I'm sleeping. Oh God please, let me wake up…

"Are they dead?" Emma said, giant marble tears rolling down her face.

No one said a word. Delphi, breathing heavily out of her nose, walked away from the group, and leaned her back against the opposite wall, her eyes cast to the dirty floor.

"They can't be dead," Phumla said after moments, or hours, of silence dragged by. "They're not dead."

A loud metallic *thunk* made a few girls jump, and the doorknob twisted slowly. Emma screamed, running to the opposite end of the room. Most of the girls followed her, holding onto each other in a frightened whimpering bunch. The door opened slightly. Phumla and

Electra glanced sideways at each other but neither moved. Delphi stayed where she was, her eyes on the door.

A brown shoebox was pushed through the gap, across the floor into the centre of the room. The door closed and a few of the girls screamed.

Phumla said, “What do you think is inside?”

“Don’t touch it!” Emma said, “Just leave it alone!”

Electra waited for her stomach to settle before she took a step forward. She looked at Delphi. Her eyes were fixed on the box, biting her thumbnail.

She took another step forward. The box was in arm’s reach.

“Don’t look inside, please!” Emma said, her crying getting louder.

“Shut up!” said Delphi, “Just shut the fuck up!” She took a deep breath and exhaled through her nose. “Of course we have to look inside,” she said, her eyes locking onto Electra’s. “There’s a reason it was pushed through!”

Electra knelt down and examined the box. It was a normal shoe box: brown, a little tattered. It looked like the type of coffin for dead babies. She put her hands on the lid and the cardboard felt rough. She wasn’t sure she wanted to see what was inside, but Delphi was right, whoever pushed it into the room did it for a reason. She looked up at Delphi. She gave her a small nod, and Electra gripped the lid. Without hesitating, she threw it back. She gasped and stumbled to her feet. She fell backwards onto her elbows. The bile from before churned inside her and she lolled her head to the side, vomiting onto the floor.

Lana’s face rested inside the box on top of tissue paper, like a mask.

“Jesus Christ!” Phumla said, backing away from the box. The group of girls screamed.

Delphi ran up to the box and threw the lid over it, kicking it into a corner. It bounced against the wall and fell to its side. Pink flesh poked out the bottom.

“You still think Hamilton is just fucking with us?” Phumla asked Delphi. Her lower jaw trembled.

Electra looked at the box in the corner and she felt her stomach turn again. She tried to hold it in, but she failed and threw up more. Lana was dead. Her face was inside a shoebox. One of her best friends, her sister, had died and it was all Doctor Hamilton's fault. Anger boiled inside her veins.

The intercom came alive again, and the group of girls began to moan. The frizzy haired girl started crying out a Hail Mary.

"Quiet!" Delphi said, trying to regain control of the situation, but Electra wondered if there was even a point after what they'd just heard coming from the other room. "We won't be able to hear who she wants next!" she said.

"In order to prevent further punishment, I suggest only the two girls whose names are called out leave the room. I hope I have made myself clear…"

Electra stared at the box in the corner of the room and her throat went dry. Lana was really dead. She would never speak to her again, never smoke a joint or hang out or swap secrets. She was gone forever, and that dirty ginger cunt was responsible.

"The second pair of girls asked to leave their room are Delphi Makholwe and Electra Almacy from Room B."

She went cold. Her nerves stood on end. Doctor Hamilton still had it in for her, she wasn't surprised. The old lady had had something against her from the start, ever since Electra transferred to Our Immaculate those eight years ago. Had she sucked up to her from the beginning, she might have escaped all of this. She thought of the Celibates, and how no one had seen the girls for a while and doubted if sucking up would have made a difference at all.

Delphi walked up to her and extended her hand. She pulled Electra to her feet. Their eyes met, but she had to look away. Electra had never seen Delphi look so terrified, and it unsettled her. If Delphi was scared, what hope did the rest of them have? She knitted her fingers in between her friend's as the door opened.

Without looking back at the rest of the girls, in a steady voice Delphi said, "Don't follow us. Do as you're told. There's been enough stupidity and horror for one day."

"Please make your way out the room and to the right of the tunnel, where you shall receive further instruction. Do not waste time, there is still much to be done..."

CHAPTER EIGHT

As soon as the door slammed shut behind them, Delphi let go of her hand and made her way down the tunnel to their right. Electra stood still, rooted to the spot. She couldn't leave yet, not without seeing what had really happened in that room. She turned to the door opposite the one they had come from. It was closed, but like the vent in their room, a puddle of blood leaked out underneath.

"What are you doing?" Delphi asked.

"I have to see what happened to them," Electra said, without looking at her friend. She walked over to the door, minding not to stand in the puddle. Her fingers touched the doorknob and she paused.

"We all heard what was going on through the vent… Do you think there's anything left to see?" Delphi said, "There's no point in looking behind that door. Besides, it's probably locked."

Electra stared straight ahead. "I have to see it with my own eyes," she said, although she felt reluctant to open the door. "One of them could still be alive."

She clutched the doorknob and twisted it. She placed her other hand on the door and pushed. It opened. She didn't push it open further, instead she closed her eyes and stuck her head through the crack. She felt cool air on her face, colder than the air in her room. She counted to three, and trembled. She opened her eyes.

The first thing Electra noticed was the blood.

It was everywhere, covering the walls and the ceiling. It dripped off the swaying light bulb hanging in the centre of the room into dark puddles on the floor. The room was empty, the girls were gone. The room's bareness made the hair on Electra's arms stand on edge. What did that… thing do with the bodies? She had felt somewhat prepared to find a heap of corpses and torn off limbs in the centre of the room, but the emptiness was far more eerie.

"Nothing?" Delphi said, and Electra felt her friend's hand touch her shoulder. Electra pushed the door open wide and the two walked into the room. Delphi walked in further than she and touched the walls. She looked at her fingers. "Where are the bodies?" Delphi said.

Electra shook her head, at a loss for words. What could she possibly say, or suggest, that would make the situation any less terrifying?

“This is real blood,” Delphi said, quickly wiping her fingers on her skirt, leaving light red smears over the checkered black and green. Electra saw her hands shake, but Delphi crossed her arms, hiding them from view. “This is all real. They’re all dead.”

Electra could tell Delphi had stopped trying to fight the idea that something evil was at work, it was a losing battle. Her friend was realizing there was more to the situation than what she had thought, and Electra hated to admit it, but so was she. Doctor Hamilton wasn’t the only evil against them, something more powerful was at work. “C’mon, let’s go,” she said and motioned for Delphi to follow her, “Who knows what Hamilton will do if we take our time.”

Delphi walked out of the room, taking one last look behind her as Electra shut the door. The girls were gone, Lana was dead. They could be next. There was nothing more they could do. They began walking down the corridor, which was just as dirty as the little room, and passed rows of rusted doors, similar to their room. Each was locked. Electra tried to figure out which door the last group of girls was trapped behind, but the thought made her uneasy.

She tried to think about something else and asked, “How far from the school do you think we are?”

“Maybe halfway to Leon Boschoff?” Delphi said, “I remember some Matric years ago telling me the tunnel also led to the hospital in case anyone got wounded during an attack.”

Leon Boschoff General Hospital was about a fifteen minute car ride from the school, Electra remembered being taken on a school trip by Sister Mahlasang for Biology a few years back in Grade Eight. The hospital itself was grim, poorly lit, and the equipment had seen better days. Had Doctor Hamilton brought them down this far into the tunnels? She stopped walking when an idea crept into her head. What if the sisters were a part of this too? Someone had mentioned it inside their room, but Electra didn’t remember who, only that Delphi had brushed the idea off with a snide remark. Perhaps the entire teaching staff were working together, kidnapping students for the boy, whoever, or whatever, he was.

“Liezl warned me about coming down here, not that we had much of a choice,” Electra said, thinking back to the morning in the Prayer Gardens. “I didn’t understand what she was saying…”

“Right,” Delphi said, walking ahead, “Because you don’t speak fluent retard like she does. Or at least, I didn’t think you did until you started with your conspiracy theories.”

“You’re just scared, Delphi, I know you are,” she said. She had caught up to her friend and tried to look her in the eye. “You saw the blood in that room. You said yourself that it was real! This bitchy attitude of yours is just a front because you’re too afraid to admit that something greater than what you think is happening. But we’re all shit scared, in case you haven’t noticed.”

Delphi stopped and Electra walked away. Suddenly, she felt her grab the back of her blazer. Electra turned around.

“I am head girl, I’m responsible for each and every one of these girls down here,” she said, “You’d know that had you taken the position seriously.”

“You’re taking it too seriously. We don’t need a head girl now, what we need is to work together.”

Delphi rolled her eyes and looked away. They walked on in silence. She looked as if she was about to say something, but didn’t. They weren’t surrounded by overexcited girls working each other up into a frenzy like they had been in the room, Delphi didn’t need to pretend she wasn’t scared when Electra knew she was. Why did her friend always have to act so strong and cold? She had been that way for years, and often Electra thought it was because Delphi feared she would lose the respect she had.

Electra could never understand why the opinions of stupid private school bitches and uptight seniors meant so much to her friend.

How far did they have to walk? Doctor Hamilton hadn’t specified over the intercom. All they were told was to go right and wait for further instruction. She bit her lower lip. If anything, all Electra wanted was to get out of the tunnels alive, but she hated the fact that she didn’t know what to expect.

The tunnels were getting darker the deeper they walked, their only source of light blinking from dying fluorescent tubes on the low ceiling. The walls felt like they were closing in and the air began to smell odd. Her heart raced, beating hard and fast against her ribcage, and sweat broke out on her forehead. She wiped it away, but she could feel her skin was clammy and her clothes were sticking to her and this made Electra sweat even more.

“Who do you think the boy with the red feet is?” Electra asked, trying to ignore the claustrophobia and her hands which had started to shake.

Delphi sighed. “She’s just making stuff up to scare us,” she said.

“Liezl too?” she said, trying to concentrate on what she was saying and ignore the realization that just came to her that they were deep underground, far away from the surface.

Delphi turned to face her, her sharp features half-cloaked in shadow, “Well, she did chase you and Phumla around with a Stanley knife, she doesn’t exactly sound like your best friend.”

The corridor felt as if it was getting slightly wider, and her heartbeat eventually slowed down to a jog. Electra breathed deeply through her nose, focusing on what she wanted to say to her friend. Communicating with Delphi was making her feel better. She felt like she could breathe properly again.

She yanked off her tie and held it in her hands. It was navy blue, with a white embroided crucifix sewn into it. When she first enrolled at Our Immaculate, she remembered Cly asking Doctor Hamilton why the emblem wasn’t on the tie.

Our beautiful emblem is already on the blazer and the jersey, Miss Almacy, why go overboard and spoil it by having it on the tie as well?

Doctor Hamilton had come across as such a sweet lady when Cly was on campus, bidding Electra farewell. But as her mother climbed into the red Ferrari and drove out of the school’s gates, Electra witnessed an almost instant transformation as her principal spoke to her condescendingly, with a scowl on her wrinkled face.

Go to Saint Petra’s, it’s the dormitory you’ll be residing in for the rest of your time here at Our Immaculate. And you better be quick, here at this establishment we do not take kindly to slackers! Move!

“What the hell does he want with us?” Delphi asked, bringing her back from her first day at the school.

“Who?” Electra said.

“That boy you, Phumla and Doctor Hamilton keep mentioning, with the red feet,” Delphi said, “If he exists, he must want something, he wouldn’t be here if he didn’t.”

“Let’s keep walking,” she said, “I’m sure Doctor Hamilton will tell us, we have a right to know.”

“Yes,” Delphi said, “Because Doctor Hamilton gives a shit about our rights. If she did, we wouldn’t be trapped down here.”

Electra’s eyes had adjusted to the darkness, though only slightly. She saw bricks and old pieces of wood on the ground, some mouldy boxes stacked on top of one another next to the remains of what appeared to be an old Christmas tree. It was impossible to see properly, and Electra wished she had her cellphone on her now more than ever. A flashlight would have been great too, but how useful could it be if you couldn’t use it to call for help? A pang of fear suddenly shot through her like a lightning bolt. If they had no phones, and couldn’t find a way out of the tunnels, how would they get help? Sure, parents would start to worry when they arrived at the school to pick up their kids, and search parties would be formed, but it could take years for people to work out the girls were trapped underneath Our Immaculate. If they ever did.

She had to try stay as positive as she could. They had to get out. Doctor Hamilton and whoever else involved were going to pay for what they did to Lana, Electra would make sure of that.

Delphi raised a finger to her lips and Electra stopped walking. “Do you hear that?” she said.

She tried to concentrate but she heard nothing. Electra shook her head, and her friend crept further on. Suddenly, from somewhere inside the darkness in front of them came a low moan. Both girls looked at one another.

Electra crept towards Delphi and spoke in her ear, “It sounds like an animal,” she said, trying to speak as quietly as possible. “God, you don’t think it’s the one who killed those girls?”

“I don’t know,” Delphi whispered, “Let’s just keep walking.”

“What? You want us to go towards it?” she said, panic swelling in her chest once more. She could feel a drop of sweat roll down the side of her face and dangle off her chin.

“I’m not going to let anything happen to you, I promise,” Delphi said.

“You can’t make promises like that!”

“Electra!” Delphi said. She looked around as if she were worried she was speaking too loudly. “I can make promises like that, I’m head…” Her voice trailed off as she stared in front of her.

“What… Who is that? Who’s there?” Electra said.

She turned around and could see the tunnel split into two. In between the two tunnels stood a figure. From what she could make out, its head was bowed and its arms stretched out as if nailed to an invisible crucifix. She immediately thought it was Liezl and cringed. The figure didn’t move, didn’t look up to acknowledge the two girls as they came to a stop right in front of it.

Electra could tell it was a girl, dressed in a stained school shirt and skirt, her long black hair hanging in tangles over her face.

“Liezl?” she said, scared to get any closer. The letter *D* was drawn on the girl’s right arm, the letter *E* on her left.

Delphi looked at the girl’s feet. “It’s Sudesha…” she said.

Sudesha moaned loudly and lifted her head. Electra stepped back. She couldn’t deal with something like Liezl again, it would break her. A buzz above their heads made her jump and a fluorescent light came to life.

There was a dark patch where Sudesha’s nose used to be, and one of her eyes was sewn shut. Electra stayed behind Delphi, refusing to move.

“Who did this to you?” Delphi asked, moving a lock of hair from Sudesha’s face, revealing a scar above on her forehead.

“Don’t touch her!” Electra said, “She could snap! Like Liezl...”

Sudesha didn’t answer Delphi. Her one eye stared ahead of the two girls, where they had come from.

“Did you do this to yourself?” Delphi said, “Answer me.”

“Don’t provoke her,” Electra said.

A clicking noise came from Sudesha's throat, followed by a loud grunt. The girl opened her mouth and a thick dark substance dripped from her lips onto her feet. Her eye blinked and for the first time since they saw her she looked at them, first at Delphi, then Electra. The dark substance spilled between the girl's feet and toes. Sudesha grunted again and her eye looked at Electra.

"Two separate paths. Two separate fates," she eventually said, her voice a painful croak, "You may feel like you'll be alone, but the boy with red feet walks with us all." She closed her eye and her head went limp, her arms still outstretched. Another low moan, and Sudesha went quiet.

"This is insane," Delphi said, "Doesn't sound like her at all."

"We can't stay together?" Electra asked Sudesha. She didn't want to leave Delphi, she couldn't. There was no way she was walking through these tunnels alone. "Is that what you're trying to say?"

Sudesha said nothing. The dark substance still dripped from her lips and fell thickly on her feet.

Delphi touched the girl's head, then poked it slightly to get a reaction. She remained still. "Who stitched her up like this?" she said.

Electra looked at Sudesha's arms, at the *D* and *E*. The D arm was pointing to the left tunnel, the other was pointing to the right. "I think they're meant to tell us where to go," she said.

"What?" Delphi said, "No, fuck that. I'm not leaving you."

"You think I want to leave you either?" she said and she could feel her eyes start to sting. The worst thing that could be asked of them was happening right now, but Electra remembered what happened when students defied Doctor Hamilton the first time. "You remember what happened to the girls in Room A?"

Delphi stared at her, her mouth open as if to oppose what she just said. Finally, she grabbed Electra by the shoulders and pulled her into a warm embrace. They wrapped their arms around one another tightly, neither wanting to let go.

"Be careful, please," Delphi said.

Electra sniffed, holding back her tears and nodded. Delphi pushed her away gently with a small smile on her face. “Stop,” she said, “Cry when we’re out of here. Together. Alive.”

With that, Delphi walked past Sudesha and into her tunnel, disappearing out of sight. First Lana, now Delphi was taken away from her. Two of her best friends, gone.

Electra’s sorrow turned to rage.

*

She’d been walking for what felt like hours, taking each step as carefully as she could, trying to make as little noise as possible, when she saw the message written on the wall, right underneath another epileptic fluorescent light. The writing was red and scribbled in such a way it made it almost impossible for Electra to read, but when she worked out what it said, she cringed.

HE SHALL WASH HIS FEET IN THE BLOOD OF THE WICKED.

HE SHALL TRIUMPH OVER THEM, AND THEY SHALL BE SO UTTERLY VANQUISHED THAT THEIR OVERTHROW SHALL BE FINAL AND FATAL, AND HIS DELIVERANCE COMPLETE AND CROWNING.

THE DAMNATION OF SINNERS SHALL NOT MAR THE HAPPINESS OF SAINTS.

What did it mean? She recognized the message, it was Psalm 58:10. It had been drilled into their heads for a few years now at almost every Sunday morning mass, but no one had ever explained it to the girls, not that they’d ever bothered to work out its meaning. She should have paid more attention to the priest, the Psalm was a clue staring her right in the face, but she had no idea how it translated to her situation. It had something to do with the boy, that she was certain of. It explained why his feet were red, in a strange biblical sense. But what made him righteous, and who were the wicked, the students? The girls in Room A who were slaughtered like livestock? No, only Doctor Hamilton was wicked, she and whoever (whatever) were causing all of this.

She sighed. Nothing was making sense, and she felt like nothing ever would. She couldn’t bear to look at the message on the wall for much longer, it made her ill. She shook her head and kept walking. If she stayed in a place long enough, who knew what would happen to her. The person who wrote the message could return, and if she, or he, found her there Electra had

an awful feeling in her gut that the next message would be scribbled in her blood. But perhaps that would be a better fate. She felt like a lab rat in an elaborate maze and it made her want to-

A door, similar to the hundreds she'd already passed made her stop. The same strange red hieroglyphs from before ran up the one side of the door, over the top, and down the other side. The door itself was slightly ajar, and it seemed to beckon Electra forward, daring her to see what lay behind.

This is it. This is where I'm supposed to go. She felt eyes at the back of her head as if something was spying on her, so she turned around, but the tunnel was empty. At least, it appeared that way. She knew the time for moving on was over. This was where Doctor Hamilton wanted her. She could keep moving, but she knew that to defy orders and break rules would only result in death, or something far worse. She didn't want to die, not after everything she had been through. Not after craving the chance to live her life.

She took a deep breath and walked towards the door. She pushed it open, and stepped inside.

The room was bright, the walls white and spotless. It looked out of place in the dirt and grime. There was an old plastic blue chair in the centre, under a fluorescent light. She left the door open and walked around the room, expecting something, anything, to jump out at her. Eventually, she sat down in the chair, crossed her legs, and folded her arms over her chest. She was starting to feel cold, even with her blazer on.

Her eyes were fixed on the door, and she stared out into the darkness. It was like ink. Was something moving in the tunnel outside?

"Hello Electra."

She got to her feet and spun around. She gasped and her knees felt weak. Lana was standing right behind her. Lana was alive! Her face was still attached to her head, as if nothing had happened. Her chest swelled and Electra laughed. She threw her arms over her friend and squeezed her. Lana was here and still alive! This was all one evil trick planned by an unbalanced old lady, and although that idea still frightened her, Electra couldn't have been happier. She didn't want to let her friend go, and now that Lana was here the two of them could work out a plan and find a way to the surface. Everything was going to be alright.

“What happened in that room?” Electra said, finally letting go of her friend. She brushed a lock of scarlet hair out of Lana’s eyes and hugged her again. “I thought you were dead!”

Lana pushed her away and guided Electra back to the chair. Why hadn’t she noticed Lana when she walked into the room? She must have been so worked up about the whole situation to even notice her friend when she walked in. But surely Lana would have been the first thing she would have seen? Electra ignored the questions floating in her head and smiled as she kissed Lana’s hands. She sat down on the chair.

“How are you doing?” Lana said, stroking Electra’s head. “I can’t stay long. I am only here to tell you that the ritual has officially…” She stopped stroking her and looked down at her right hand where a gold Cartier was strapped to her wrist. She raised an eyebrow and waited. “…Commenced. You should be out of this room in approximately six to seven hours. Get comfortable.”

Electra stared at her, and her smile disappeared. She stood up and cupped her hands over Lana’s jaw. It felt prickly and rough. “I saw your… face,” she said, “In a shoebox.”

“That was my other face,” Lana said.

“In a fucking shoebox Lana!”

Lana sighed and guided Electra back to the chair. “Sit down,” she said, “I’ll repeat. That was my other face. Can’t you see I’m wearing a new one?” She tucked locks of her hair behind her ears and grinned. “This one suits me far better, don’t you agree?”

Under her jaw Electra could see a row of tiny stiches, and it made her stomach flop. Eight years ago she had helped Electra carry her luggage all the way to her crappy Grade Five room next to the first floor bathrooms. They’d lived together as roommates, but they were more than that, they were sisters. *Who is the girl standing in front of me?*

“Who are you?” Electra said. She could feel sweat breaking out all over her body.

“Lana.”

“No,” she said, “Who… What are you?”

Lana sat down and closed her eyes. She opened them and looked at Electra. Her pupils were black and dilated to the size of golf balls.

“It’s me,” Lana said, “The same girl you’ve known throughout your entire sentence at Our Ifuckulate.”

“What are you?” Electra said.

“I suppose I owe you some explanation about what’s going on,” Lana said, “After all, we have been pretty close these past few years.” She stood up and twirled. She laughed and her large eyes glistened under the light. “I am a doll,” she said.

She unbuttoned her shirt, throwing it into Electra’s lap.

There were red lines of stitches all over her body, in between her breasts, around her neck and circling her shoulders. She bent over and pulled off her socks, displaying more stitches hiding underneath, around her ankles and below her knees.

Electra’s hands started to shake.

“See?” Lana said, “I am his most perfect doll. Look at my face. My body. My eyes. None of this will ever change, unless it is required. I’ll be perfect forever.” She got back down on her knees and looked up at Electra. “Other dolls were also built, but they’re created for a darker purpose,” she said, “You’ll recognize them when you see them. One was waiting outside my room back there. It wiped out all those girls in seconds, it was beautiful.”

Electra was at a loss for words, unable to tear her eyes away from the stitches criss-crossing Lana’s skin. “What…?” was all she could manage.

“I’m sure this has come as a surprise to you, but what you need to do now is just sit back and relax. It will all be over before you know it.”

“But I’ve known you since we were eleven!” Electra said, “We’ve grown up together.”

Lana said nothing, only stared at her with her giant black pupils.

“What is happening?“ Electra said. She felt like she was dreaming again, experiencing a never-ending nightmare. She felt pins and needles in her arms.

“It’s been happening for a while,” Lana said and smiled, “Many years ago a treasure was brought to the school. This place would be the last anyone would ever bother to look for it. It was locked away and kept hidden from the rest of the world. But recently, this treasure, this statue, has starting speaking to us. It has been telling us what to do.”

“But why are you doing this?” Electra said. Lana was making no sense, she couldn’t process what the stitched up girl standing before her was saying.

“Because he told us to.”

“Who the hell is he?”

Lana smiled and squeezed Electra’s knees, “What is *it*, that’s what you mean Electra. I don’t know. No one does. It is so beyond our understanding that we shall never fully comprehend what it is.” She took the shirt from Electra’s lap and grinned when she saw her hands shake. She grabbed her socks from the floor and turned around. She walked towards the door. “But one thing is clear,” she said, “He eats. A lot.”

Instantly Electra felt her stomach somersault, as if she were on the top of a rollercoaster ride about to hurtle towards the ground. Her body shuddered and she fell off of her chair, unable to breath. The area between her legs became damp and she started to sweat. Her body tingled. She felt as if she was about to split open or burst. The sensation was strong. She tried to move, to say something, to think. It was no use. Unbearable.

“I pretty much fucked Liezl up the other night,” Lana said as she walked into the doorway and put a hand on the door handle, “I did the same to thing to her that I’m doing to you right now. She only lasted twenty four minutes before she dived into the nearest room, which just so happened to be Delphi’s, and fingered herself blue. You need to last a few hours, or at least until the last of the prey is caught.”

She let go of the handle and walked into the tunnel outside. “I’ll leave the door open,” she said, before disappearing out of sight. “If you can even blink in the state you’re in, that’s impressive.”

Electra dribbled out the side of her mouth and her eyes rolled to the back of her head. All she saw was a blinding white. *This is it*, a small voice from the back of her mind said. *This is how I die*. She groaned and felt saliva roll down her chin. Her entire body was hyper sensitive. She could feel everything, which made the sensation stronger.

She tried to move, but she couldn’t take it anymore. Even the slightest movement was too much for her to handle. She could barely breathe. She was going to snap.

Make it stop, the small voice said again, weaker this time. *Please, make it stop*.

Just let me die.

CHAPTER NINE

Her entire body spasmed. Her muscles were taut, rock hard. She could barely breathe and her eyes were dry and stung. She hadn't been able to blink in what felt like years, all she could see was a blur of what she thought was the doorway to her room. She had stopped sweating, and her nose bled. Her senses were on fire.

She was aware of everything around her, what had happened to her, and that Lana was alive and evil. She didn't care. It meant nothing to her, at least not now. She was trapped between reality and a place she never knew existed. She had given up on begging for the sensation to stop long ago.

She felt her brain start to eat itself.

The voice came back, quieter this time, though it wasn't hers or anyone she thought she knew. *Listen to me*, it said, *I want to show you something.*

If it means I don't have to feel this way anymore, she thought, but even thinking took a lot of effort, *Let me leave and never bring me back.*

There was silence and she remained still. Then, she saw red and everything became dark.

*

Her vision returned to normal, and when it did, she was inside Doctor Hamilton's office. She saw the old principal standing over the Celibacy Girls as they sat on the Persian carpet by her desk. She towered over them and addressed them slowly and lethargically. The scene played out before Electra like a film.

Girls, Doctor Hamilton said, *You are all so special to me. Your sensibility, your calm natures, and your beauty are what set you apart from the others here at Our Immaculate…*

She bent down and touched each of them on the head. It was Monday, a week ago. Electra didn't know why, but she knew.

You are roses amongst thorns, and you make me so happy.

Doctor Hamilton walked away from the girls and stood by the window, looking out onto the field. It was break time, and all the girls were outside in the sun.

He knows this, she said, *I've told him numerous times. He approves of you and loves you all unconditionally, just the way I love you.*

One of the Celibates, a fat girl with a pig face, spoke up: *Who Doctor Hamilton? God? Jesus?*

He's been speaking to me as of late, whispering sweet, sweet words into my ear. The old lady said. She turned around to the girls on the carpet and smiled. *He's shown me things I'd never dreamed I would ever see. He wants to share these things with you too, and I couldn't be more proud.*

Doctor Hamilton walked over to her desk and settled into the overly-large leather chair. She looked up towards the ceiling. *He will guide you into a paradise with feet covered in the blood of the wicked. We will rejoice and live for eternity.* She gazed down at the girls. *Will you let him guide you to that paradise?*

Yes, all the Celibates replied, *Of course.*

Doctor Hamilton grinned and drool ran down the side of her mouth to her chin. *I knew you would. You're all so pretty and smart. But, before he takes you to paradise, you need to give of yourselves to him, both body and soul.* Her smile disappeared and she became serious. *Do you accept this tremendous task?*

Yes Doctor Hamilton, we do.

Doctor Hamilton got up from the leather chair and wiped the saliva from her chin. She walked over to the office door and looked up into the corner of the room. *They agree*, she said to nothing.

The office scene faded and Hamilton, the Celibates and the leather chair became blurs which fused into one another.

Then, there was darkness again.

Two large blue eyes lit up and stared at Electra. She felt neither safe, nor afraid. The voice spoke to her, and she listened.

Doctor Hamilton led us underneath the school and told us to hold hands. It wasn't only a tunnel which led to the hospital, she said, it was a vast network, full of rooms and nooks and

places girls like us could go missing. She didn't want us to get lost, not when we belonged to him.

She took us to a room, one like the room you were kept in, only slightly bigger.

There, on a table was Lana di Clemente, pieces of her removed and lying in pans on the floor. A kidney in one. A heart and her feet in others. Someone was working on her, Doctor Hamilton told us, but she didn't say who. We couldn't see the person's face. He wanted her to look as beautiful as we did, she said, he would make us perfect soon.

We left the room as Lana's arms were sewn on. She was awake and watched us look at her the entire time.

Doctor Hamilton took us down into a large space, a circular chamber directly underneath Tears of Christ. An old bronze statue of a little boy stood in the centre.

Doctor Hamilton told us to kneel down by the statue and admire him.

She said the boy would speak to us soon.

The eyes dissolved and once again Electra saw red.

CHAPTER TEN

The sensation came back in full force and she wanted to die.

She heard the sound of running feet slapping against the ground. Suddenly three multi-coloured blurs appeared in front of her in the dark red. The one blur grew bigger and stopped.

“Phumla, watch the door!” it said. Delphi. “We’ve got to get out of here, fast.” The Delphi blur filled her view and everything became darker. “C’mon Electra, get up. Jesus, what’s wrong with your eyes? Come on!”

She didn’t know if what was happening was real or not, but she didn’t care. She couldn’t move. Whether Delphi was there or not, Electra wanted to reach out for her friend, as if to try make the sensation stop. Her heart had started to pound again and her chest was starting to hurt. She wanted to tell Delphi she was in pain, but the thought of using her vocal cords made the veins in her neck swell.

The crimson went away, and Electra felt something sticky on her cheeks.

She felt Delphi’s hands touch her wrist.

Waves crashed over her body and everything inside her seemed to let go. Her muscles softened and colours sharpened as she closed her eyes in absolute relief. She was somewhere else again, only this time the release had taken her to some extra-terrestrial paradise and she thought of the boy and what Hamilton had said in her strange dream. She could smell roses. Her mind melted.

“Shit, we’ve lost her,” she heard Delphi say, “Cha Cha help me lift her up…”

So Cha Cha was down in the tunnels too, she had probably been knocked out just as they all had. Did she know about Lana yet? Her friend spoke and Electra could smell peppermint. Her senses were alive. “El, bro,” Cha Cha said, “Get up, please dude.”

Electra could feel the two girls each wrap one of her arms around their necks and pulled her to her feet. Another voice, Phumla’s, sounded as if it came from further away, “Well I didn’t want to say anything, but I told you guys something big was…”

“Shut the fuck up!” Delphi said, “Stop being an asshole and be ready, something could jump us at any moment.”

They were moving, Electra could tell. She opened her eyes slowly. They still stung, but her vision was better. She could make out the corridor and Cha Cha and Delphi's heads on either side of her. It was still slightly fuzzy, but she was picking up on details here and there: The fear in Cha Cha's eyes and the tear stains down her cheek, the cut over Delphi's right eyebrow and her busted lip. They looked like they had been through hell. There was a monotonous purring sound coming from in front, and Electra saw Phumla in the lead, her hands clutching a yellow bloody chainsaw. The fluorescent lights flickered above their heads.

"Are you sure this is the way we came from Del?" Cha Cha asked.

"I don't know, maybe," Delphi said.

They walked on for what felt like hours. Electra was too exhausted to take in everything going on around her and she kept blacking out.

Stay awake, she heard the voice from the dream say, but she thought she was simply hearing things. *I'll get you out. Stay awake.* Everything went dark again.

Something nudged her in the rib and she woke up. They had stopped and both Delphi and Cha Cha were looking straight ahead. Electra followed their gaze. Rocks and debris were scattered everywhere, blocking their way. Phumla cursed and raised the chainsaw above her head. She walked further into the darkness and groaned. "We're caved in," she said, "They must've set off some kind of explosive."

"Wouldn't we have heard it?" Cha Cha said and lifted Electra's arm off her neck. She sat down on a large grey rock with her back to the three and put her head in her hands.

Delphi guided Electra to another rock, and helped her sit down. "How are you feeling?" she asked.

Electra's breathing had almost returned to normal and her pulse was down to a jog. She could see straight, the fuzziness was gone. She wiped away the crusty blood from her nose and touched her cheeks. She looked at her fingers and there was blood on them. "I'm a little stronger…" she said.

"Good," Delphi said. "You had me worried. Your eyes were bleeding, you know that? They look fine now, so don't worry. Sit here for a bit." She walked towards Phumla and looked at

the rubble. “Well there’s obviously no way we’re getting out this way.” she said and turned to Cha Cha who still had her back to them, “How are you doing Cha Cha?”

Without turning around, Cha Cha shrugged. “That thing is probably waiting for us,” she said, “We’re fucked.”

“What… thing?” Electra said.

“I don’t know what it was,” Delphi said, “It was horrible. Something like that shouldn’t exist.”

Phumla started up the chainsaw again. “We could take it on again guys,” she said, “We have another person with us this time!”

“Can we be realistic for five minutes Phumla?” Delphi said. “I don’t want to die down here, so let’s play it safe alright?”

For how long had Electra been in that room ? The last time she saw Phumla, her friend was terrified. Liezl had scared both of them, but Phumla seemed to have been more affected by the attack than Electra. Even when they woke up in Room B, the senior prefect had seemed nervous and afraid. What stood in front of Electra now was an eighteen year old war angel, splattered head to toe in blood, with a few cuts and bruises, a purring chainsaw at her side. Phumla didn’t seem scared anymore. Electra didn’t know whether her friend made her feel more at ease, or nervous.

“Maybe…” Electra said. Her throat felt like sandpaper. She was so thirsty. She coughed and tried again, “Maybe we should find a room to lock ourselves in.”

“Why?” Delphi said, “That thing could probably find us even if we hid.”

“We could recuperate and try to work out what the fuck is going on,” Phumla said.

“What about the others?” Delphi said, “Shouldn’t we find the others first?”

Electra stared at her. Why did Delphi care so much about the other girls trapped down there. They had each other, that was enough. If there were things, or dolls as Lana had called them, lurking around the tunnels they couldn’t wander around trying to find any survivors when the creatures were far stronger than they were. What was stopping one from attacking them? By the sounds of things, the three had already been attacked by one before finding Electra. At

least Phumla carried a chainsaw, so they had some form of protection, but one of the dolls had wiped out an entire room of girls, so their chances were still pretty slim. They had to stick together. As for the other girls, it was every woman for herself. There was no point in risking their lives to save others. They had to think about themselves.

“Forget the others,” Electra said, “If we run into them, fine. But I’m not putting my life on the line for anyone other than you three.”

“Am I hearing you right?” Delphi said, “Are you really being so selfish right now?”

“What other choice do we have?” came Cha Cha’s voice from the rock. She sniffed and said, “Electra’s right.”

Delphi’s eyes grew wide and she shook her head. “I can’t believe you guys,” she said. She turned to Phumla, “And you? Do you agree with them?”

Phumla looked up at the ceiling for a moment and clicked her tongue. “Let’s find a shelter first,” she said, “Then we can decide what to do.” She laughed, revved the chainsaw and walked back from where they came.

“It’s like she’s enjoying this,” Electra said as she tried to stand up.

“That’s what I’m worried about,” Delphi said, “Chainsaw Sally is going to get herself killed.”

“Help me up will you?”

Delphi shook her head. She walked over to Cha Cha and put a hand on her back. “C’mon,” she said.

Electra bit her bottom lip and it stung. Delphi could be mad at her all she wanted, she was only putting their best interests first. Electra didn’t want to die, and if her survival meant she had to leave people other than the ones she cared about behind, she was prepared to do it. Slowly she got to her feet and her knees trembled. She groaned and took two steps forward and paused, trying to keep her balance. She willed her legs to work. She didn’t want to be left behind. Cha Cha and Delphi were already ahead of her, and she could hear the drone of the chainsaw getting softer. *Catch up to them you silly bitch,* she thought to herself as she took another step. She had to shake off the effects of whatever Lana did to her.

She wasn’t going to be left alone.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Electra followed the three girls back down the tunnel. They passed under a dirty fluorescent light. It felt colder in this part of the tunnels, and her breath burst from her mouth in small clouds. She hugged her arms over her chest and rubbed her hands over her arms, trying to keep warm. The girls hadn't spoken since they left the debris behind, and there were no doors in sight. At least Electra's legs were working better, she had been able to catch up to them in minutes. She looked at the back of Delphi's head and frowned. Her friend hadn't even bothered to look behind her once, as if she didn't care whether or not Electra was still with them. She was being childish.

"Don't be mad at me," she said to Delphi's back, "You know I'm only thinking of our safety."

"You're just trying to save your own ass," Delphi said, without turning around.

Electra rolled her eyes. There was no point in arguing with her, not when they had to find a place to hide and recover. That was all that mattered now, that and finding a way out of the tunnels alive. She would deal with Delphi's attitude later.

She didn't want to panic, but if they didn't find a room soon one of the dolls could easily find them in the tunnels. Where had all the doors disappeared to? Electra could have sworn she had come down this way with Delphi when Hamilton announced their names over the intercom.

The fork appeared in front of the girls, and they stopped. Sudesha was gone. Electra thought back to what the girl had told them: *"Two separate paths. Two separate fates. You may feel like you'll be alone, but the boy with red feet walks with us all."* Was the boy with red feet with them now? Did he choose which two girls left each room, and who lived and died? This wasn't just a delusional principal and Lana they were up against. A ritual had commenced.

Electra quickened her pace and walked past Delphi and Cha Cha who were whispering to one another. She caught up to Phumla and said over the noise of the chainsaw, "What happened after we left?"

"What?" said Phumla.

“Turn off that fucking thing!” Electra said. Not only was Phumla wasting what little gas the chainsaw probably had left, but the noise could have attracted unwanted attention towards them. Was she the only one with a brain?

Phumla looked down at the chainsaw in her hands and turned it off. “What did you say?” she asked.

“What happened after we left?”

Phumla wiped the sweat from her face and looked at her, “Doctor Hamilton announced over the intercom that we could leave the room, and the door swung open,” she said, “You should’ve seen the look on that Emma’s face, she nearly wet herself. We stayed in a group for a while and we tried to figure out a way to leave the tunnels. That’s when we ran into the girls from Room C where Cha Cha was. But something dropped down on us… must’ve been crawling over our heads the entire time. It started mowing through us. There was so much blood and screaming… You thought listening in on it in our room was bad? Think again.” She cracked her knuckles as she spoke, “I ran down the tunnel with Cha Cha, and we hid in a room, where I found this bad boy.” She pointed to the chainsaw in her other hand. She said, “We left after a while and found Delphi as she was about to go into some room with that weird writing, the same from our room, on the door. That creature must’ve followed me though, because it came out of nowhere again… But we got it good.”

“It was awful,” Cha Cha said from behind.

“What did it look like?” Electra said.

Phumla lifted the chainsaw to her face, examining the drying blood on its blade. “Some kind of creepy patchwork thing. Different parts and skin stitched together to make one ugly bastard.”

“It had four long arms and legs,” Cha Cha said.

Phumla laughed, “Had.”

Cha Cha grabbed Phumla’s shoulders and pushed her against the wall. “It had four arms and four legs!” she said, “How does this not freak you the fuck out?”

“Stop,” Delphi said, putting a hand on Cha Cha’s shoulder, “Please. We can’t fight with one another, not now.”

“Don’t be so bleak,” Phumla said to Cha Cha with a smile, “We’ll get out of this in one piece. Once we’re back on the surface we’ll call SAPS and they’ll put an end to this.”

Something had definitely snapped in the senior prefect’s mind, Electra was sure of it. She only hoped Phumla didn’t do anything stupid that would cost them their lives. They all had to remain focused and find a room.

“And what if we run into another one of those fucking things?” Delphi said, “Or Doctor Hamilton?”

“Then we’ll slice that unholy bitch and those creatures into chunks of meat and stick them on sosatie sticks,” Phumla said.

Electra looked away from her friends and down the tunnel where a fluorescent light buzzed in the distance. This was the tunnel where Delphi had been told to go, and looked similar to the one she had gone down. She walked away from the girls, careful not to stray too far and noticed the tunnel made a sharp left. She walked towards the corner and poked out her head, checking to see if the tunnel was empty. It was well lit and filthy, but at the very bottom where the tunnel seemed to make a right, she saw a door. She breathed a sigh of relief and without thinking she thanked God, although she felt like such a hypocrite for doing so. It wasn’t like she believed in the imaginary friend many people seemed to share. The door could have been locked for all she knew. She turned around and ran back to the others.

“You guys!” she said, “I found a door!”

“Where?” Delphi said.

Electra motioned for them to follow her and she walked back to where she stood by the corner, waiting for the others to catch up. When they did, she turned the corner and jumped.

The door was wide open.

The three girls started to walk towards it. Electra ran in front and spun around to face them.

“Stop,” she said, “Don’t go in there.”

“But you said…” Cha Cha said.

“It wasn’t open when I saw it, something could be inside.”

Phumla switched on the chainsaw and it came to life. “We have this baby,” she said as she walked past her, “Wait for me here. I’ll go first and see.”

Cha Cha, Electra and Delphi waited by the corner as Phumla made her way to the door. She leaned against the side of the door and stuck her head inside the room. She turned back to them and nodded. “No one’s there!” she said, “But it’s full of boxes.”

“Let’s go,” Delphi said, taking one last look behind her before walking away. Cha Cha and Electra looked at one another and followed.

*

Her eyes took a second to adjust to the dim room. It was packed with brown boxes stacked on top of one another. Some were open, others taped shut. She stuck her hand into one of the open boxes and gripped something smooth and rectangular. She pulled it out. She held a Stanley knife in her hands. Electra thought of Liezl and she dropped the knife back inside the box. She turned around and walked to the door, and closed it.

“What is all this stuff?” Cha Cha asked.

“It looks like old stationary,” Delphi said. She opened a box and took out a compass. “Why would they keep this stuff down here?”

Another unanswerable question, Electra thought as she grabbed the closest box to her and slid it in front of the door. She picked up another and put it down on the box, and continued to stack boxes until she felt the door was barricaded sufficiently. She wiped sweat off her brow and joined the others as they unpacked some of the boxes.

They found mostly rubbish inside each of the boxes: erasers, pencils and rulers. Phumla rested her chainsaw on top of a box and dug into another.

“I found sellotape,” she said.

Electra heard Cha Cha gasp. “Guys,” she said, “Look!” In both of her hands she held silver tins, the kind one would find in a Pick n’ Pay or a Checkers.

“Do you think it’s food?” Electra asked.

“God I hope so,” Phumla said as she took one of the tins from Cha Cha’s hands, “I’m starving.”

“Animal,” Cha Cha said and put the other tin back in the box, “How can you eat after what we’ve been through?”

Delphi looked inside Cha Cha’s box and sorted through the tins. “We’re going to have to eat sometime I suppose,” she said, “We could be down here for long. These things don’t have an expiry date, and we don’t even know what’s inside. Would it be too much to hope it’s water? I’m so fucking thirsty.”

Electra walked over to the box of compasses and picked one up. She gave it to Delphi. “Try using this,” she said. Without looking at her, Delphi snatched the compass from her hands and this annoyed Electra. She couldn’t believe her friend was still pissed off with her.

Delphi poked the can a few times, before the compass broke the top of the can and it made a *hiss*. Brown liquid seeped out the holes she had made and she brought the can to her nose and sniffed. “Baked beans?” she said. She continued to poke the can, the brown sauce splattering over her hands and face. After a while, she used a ruler she found in one of the boxes to pry open the jagged lid.

The girls stared at the open can. It had baked beans inside, that much was certain. Electra took out another compass and crouched down. She poked one of the beans with it and raised it up for the other girls to see.

“Who wants to try it?” she said.

“Fuck,” Cha Cha said, pulling a face. “Not me.”

Phumla cocked an eyebrow. “You guys are pussies,” she said, plucking the bean off of the compass and stuck it in her mouth.

Electra held her breath as she watched Phumla chew the bean. She swallowed.

“It tastes…” Phumla said, as if trying to find the correct word, “…Okay?”

“Eat another one,” Electra said.

She passed Phumla the can and Delphi got up, walking over to one of the boxes. She took out a ruler and bent it. With a sharp *snap* the ruler broke in two and she handed it to Phumla. She stuck it inside the can and scooped up more beans, which she ate. She nodded and licked her lips. The beans were fine.

“We might as well get some food in us while we’re here,” Electra said, and took the can from Phumla’s hands.

Cha Cha shook her head. “El dude, no,” she said, “There’s no fucking way I’m eating that shit.”

“It’s good,” Phumla said, “Just try it.”

“You might as well,” Delphi said, breaking more rulers in half. She passed one to Electra and gave the other half to Cha Cha. “You don’t know when you’ll be eating again.”

Reluctantly, Cha Cha took the ruler, but made no attempt to dig it inside the can. Electra stuck hers in and scooped up a few beans. She didn’t want too many, in case they tasted bad. If they were anything like the baked beans served in the dining room on the surface, she probably wouldn’t want to eat that much anyway. She held the half-ruler up to her mouth and hesitated. She still found it strange that the door had been closed when she first found it, only to see that it had been opened when she went back to the corner with the others. Maybe the boy, or Lana, or even Doctor Hamilton wanted them to go inside and eat the beans. It could all be part of a trap they were falling right into. Brown juice dripped over the edge of the ruler and pattered onto her skirt. She wiped it away and before she had time to think, stuck the ruler into her mouth and chewed the beans.

I need to speak to you, the same voice from before said and Electra whipped her head around. The voice was as clear as if the speaker was sitting next to her, but only the four of them were in the room. She felt the hair on her arms stand on end, but decided to ignore it. She was just tired after everything that had happened. No one else looked as if they had heard it. Delphi and Phumla were quietly eating from the can of baked beans, even Cha Cha had finally given in.

She heard the voice again, louder and more forceful this time. *Find a room where you can be alone. I need to speak to you.*

Electra shut her eyes and tried to remain calm. The voice wasn’t real, it was residue from the weird dream she had in that room when Lana fucked with her. She had once read in a Cosmopolitan about how young healthy people always heard voices when they lacked sleep, not that the ridiculous magazine was anything to go by, but still. It was all in her head. She needed to relax and take a nap.

Fuck off, she thought, and ate more beans.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"I'll take the first watch," Delphi said as the girls finished the can of beans. "You guys get some rest, alright?"

Phumla nodded and reached into the box for another tin. She stuck the compass into one and pulled it out. She tilted her head back and raised the tin to her lips. She slurped at the brown sauce. Cha Cha grimaced.

"I can't believe you are going to eat more of that shit," she said and took off her blazer. She put it on the floor next to a few boxes and lay down on it. She tucked her hands under her head like a pillow and turned away from the others.

Delphi stood up and stretched her back. She picked up the chainsaw from one of the boxes and walked over to the door, and put it on the top of the boxes Electra had stacked against it. Electra watched her from where she sat on the floor, silently hoping her friend would look her way. She didn't. Electra hated it when Delphi was angry with her, which these days seemed to be happening more times than not, although if anyone should have been pissed off, it was her. Delphi had accepted the position of head girl without even giving the slightest thought to her, but Electra chose to forget about it and let the whole thing slide. She couldn't help it if they shared different views, but the least she could do was try get Delphi to see where she was coming from. She didn't think she was a monster for not going to look for the other girls, but Delphi made her feel that way and it upset her. She was only looking out for those who meant something to her.

"How are you feeling?" Electra said.

Delphi shrugged. It was a stupid question, she knew it was. Electra just wanted her to say something, anything.

"Will you be okay to keep watch by yourself?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Fine," Electra said and picked up the empty can and examined it. Strangely it didn't look that old, but judging by the boxes the tins were kept in, they had been stored in the tunnels for a long time. She put it back on the floor and rubbed the back of her neck. She only realized now how strained it felt.

Phumla stopped slurping and dug the compass into the can again. She pried it open and stuck the half ruler inside. She pulled it out and put it in her mouth.

Cha Cha sat up in her corner of the room and glared at Phumla. “Will you cut that out damn it?” she said. Phumla stuck out her tongue covered in brown mush. Cha Cha rolled her eyes and groaned. “You’ve lost your fucking mind,” she said, and lay down again, “When we get out of here I never want to see you again.”

“Cool,” Phumla said, her mouth full of more beans.

Cha Cha grimaced and pulled something out of her blazer. It was a bankie, and a pack of rizzla. She ripped off a flap from one of the nearest boxes to her and bent it in half, making it a maul pad. She poured some of the weed out onto the bent flap and began to break it into tiny pieces.

“You’re smoking Jabulani now?” Phumla said, eating another mouthful of beans.

“I’m fucking stressed out,” Cha Cha said, “And Jabs is the only way I’m going to deal with you.”

“You know,” Electra said as she got to her feet and walked towards the door where Delphi sat, “I could stay awake too, I could keep you company?”

“No thanks,” Delphi said, tenderly touching her busted lip. It looked swollen but the bleeding had stopped. It had started to bruise.

“But you might fall asleep…”

“Whether I go to sleep or not, what difference will it make?” Delphi said, “It’s not like we’re looking out for survivors or anything, right?”

Electra groaned and rubbed her temples. She was too tired to be arguing about what she had said earlier and she knew her friend wasn’t going to let up any time soon. The best solution was to give Delphi space. She wasn’t going to listen to her now. Delphi was stubborn like that.

Electra walked back to where she sat on the floor and got down on her knees. She looked at her hands. They were caked in dry blood and she tried to peel it off, but it stuck to her skin and she soon gave up. She accepted the fact that she’d probably be dirty for a while and tried

to ignore how the idea of being covered in blood and dirt made her skin crawl. She took her mind off it by thinking of something else, and she pondered whether any of the other girls trapped in the tunnels were still alive.

For all she knew, they were the last four left. Had the others been smart, they would've been holed up in hiding places too. For the ritual to work, she assumed the girls had to die, but if the creatures couldn't find the girls, surely nothing would happen? Hamilton, Lana, the boy and whoever else involved would have failed, and they would have won. She hoped the other girls had enough brains amongst themselves to work that out too, but she doubted it somewhat. She had been at school with most of them for eight years, they didn't know how to wipe their own asses, let alone fend for themselves against a bunch of monsters. She thought of how many creatures, or dolls, were lurking down here with them, and how many had managed to slaughter the girls. She had a feeling they were the last remaining survivors, but she didn't feel guilty for not trying to find more, if there were any at all. She felt lucky that the three found her when they did, and that they hadn't run into any snivelling stragglers holding them back. It wasn't that Electra was a bitch, she was simply being practical. How far would they have come had a girl like Emma tagged along with their group?

The dream she had in the room, while under whatever Lana had done to her, came to mind.

It had been both vivid and surreal, and reminded her of what Phumla had spoken about before they ran into Liezl in the Prayer Gardens. Electra was surprised she still remembered what she said about relics stolen by occult-obsessed Nazis.

Their principal kept referring to 'him', who Electra assumed was the boy with red feet. In her dream, he had started speaking to her through some kind of statue. From what she remembered, Doctor Hamilton seemed to be possessed by this boy, or the statue, and was holding the Celibates under some kind of spell. The boy was telling them what to do, and promised her principal and the girls eternal bliss if they carried out his plans. Doctor Hamilton hadn't spoken to them over the intercoms since they left the room, was her job done? Perhaps she was in that so-called paradise already.

Then there was that voice… It had spoken to her in the dream, when the three girls had found her and again when they were eating. Was there something more to it? After everything that had happened, should she have even bothered to wonder?

It said it was going to get her out.

If something was really communicating with her, could she trust it? For all she knew the voice could have belonged to Lana, or even the little boy. She had had the dream when she was alone in that room, maybe Lana planted it into her brain. It was probably just one big mind fuck she couldn't begin to understand. Surprisingly, she was too exhausted to think more about it. She would have thought the idea of sleep in a situation like this was impossible, but her eyelids were heavy and she yawned. She stretched her legs out and lay down on the dirty floor. She closed her eyes and listened to the rhythm of her heart beat until she drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Electra woke up to a red sky and she quickly sat up and looked around. She was in the middle of the athletics track. The stadium was empty and quiet. She was out. Somehow, she had escaped the tunnels and she was back at the school. She grinned and stood up. There were no tunnels, and she had never been under the school. It had all been one foul dream.

She didn't remember coming to the athletics track, but it didn't matter. She marched over the track and walked up the flight of stone steps, past the stands and the stadium tuck shop where she once had sex with a boy from Saint Vincent's High School during confirmation, and headed for Saint Petra's.

It had started to rain by the time she reached her dormitory, big warm red drops which soaked her clothes, into her skin. It felt fantastic. She never wanted to fall asleep again. She thought about Liezl and the boy and whether or not Our Immaculate even had tunnels underneath the school, not that she ever wanted to find out. She giggled when she remembered Lana covered in stitches, with her massive pupils and sinister agenda. Lana would get a kick out of her dream when she told her, Delphi and Phumla too. She opened the gate leading into the dormitory's garden and walked into the lobby to get out of the rain.

It was dark and stuffy inside, so she felt around for a light switch. What was the time? The school was quiet, but it didn't feel like it was that late. Electra guessed it had to be around five in the evening. The red raindrops hammered against the windows and bathed the room in a dark crimson. Her fingers fumbled over a tiny switch and she flicked it. A glow gradually poured into the room from the dusty, cracked light in the middle of the ceiling.

Flecks of dust danced and swirled in the air of the room. A sofa was overturned, torn open. Its insides spilled onto the floor in clumps of white fluff. The coffee table had been smashed to pieces. One of its legs was embedded in the wall behind the reception desk.

What the fuck happened in here?

She heard footsteps above her head, and when she looked up, Electra saw the ceiling was covered in red foot prints. They were small, the size of a child's. There were hundreds. The footsteps got louder, as further away she heard someone walk down the flight of steps leading to the bedrooms. Her dormitory had been trashed, probably by the same person walking down the stairs. She turned on her heels and quickly ran out the door.

She got as far as the fountain on the quad when she noticed the statue. It was massive, the size of a sky scraper, and through the sheet of red rain she could make out what it was. It was a statue of a boy. Perhaps she hadn't been dreaming after all. Where the hell was everybody?

From behind the fountain a small figure rose and walked towards her. It was a girl, one Electra didn't recognize until she came closer. It was the fat Celibate with the pig face. She stared at Electra listlessly, chubby arms at her sides, the rain pelting down on her.

You left me no choice, she said, but her lips didn't move. *So I visited you here instead.*

"Who are you?" Electra said, "What's going on?"

It doesn't matter, not anymore.

"Where are we?"

I don't know. But he lied to me. He lied to all of us. I need to get out from under here and so do you.

The rainstorm became fierce and soon it was impossible to see through the red.

Let me show you what he has done.

*

Electra was in Doctor Hamilton's office again. Outside, from what she could see through the principal's window, the rain had cleared. The sky was blue and the statue gone. Everything was back to normal.

The pig faced girl was sitting on the Persian carpet with the rest of the Celibates, and Doctor Hamilton, just as before, stood over them. Neither her principal, nor the girls, showed any interest in Electra or acknowledged her existence. She was invisible to them, a fly on the wall.

His descent is drawing closer my girls, Doctor Hamilton said. *Paradise is in sight.*

It was Saturday, a week ago.

Doctor Hamilton walked over to her desk. She picked up a box of cigarettes and pulled one out. She lit it and blew out a wisp of smoke. *Lana has chosen the prey which you must ingest*

down there at all costs. Another puff of the cigarette. *Failure to do so will result in eternal damnation… But I doubt any of you shall fail. You are all so diligent.*

The girls responded in unison, hypnotically. *Yes Doctor Hamilton.*

Electra wanted to leave. The scene made her feel uneasy and being in Hamilton's presence always made her feel ill. She walked towards the door, but suddenly it opened. Sister Mahlasang walked inside.

Doctor Hamilton put the cigarette out in her own hand and glared at the nun. *What do you think you are doing?*

I'm… Sorry Eva, I had no idea you were busy… Sister Mahlasang looked confused, slightly alarmed. *I just…* But her voice trailed off. Doctor Hamilton's attention was elsewhere.

The old lady looked at the same corner above the door and remained still.

Then, she nodded. *If it must be done, it is done.*

On her desk was a metal ball, which, Electra saw, read THE POWER OF PRAYER. Doctor Hamilton grabbed the ball, ran towards the nun and in one swift move, sunk it into the side of her head. It was as if she had lost control, her body taken over by some force. She kept beating the bleeding nun until Sister Mahlasang fell to the floor in a red mess, her mouth wide and gagging. Doctor Hamilton got on top of her and peered into her eyes as she raised the bloody ball above her head. Electra watched as she brought the ball down onto Sister Mahlasang's skull three more times, before a crack was heard and the nun's skull caved in.

Panic stricken, Electra threw her head to the side and looked away. What she had seen was hideous, perhaps even more so than Liezl cutting off her own nipple. She wanted to scream and wipe the ghastly scene from her mind. Appalled, she shrank into a corner of the office. Doctor Hamilton was a murderer, coldblooded and cruel. Why hadn't the Celibacy girls stopped her?

Close the door Malin, the principal said, covered in blood.

The pig faced girl, eyes round and scared, walked over to the door and shut it, turning the lock.

Do not be frightened dear girls, Doctor Hamilton said as she got off the body and threw the ball to the ground by Electra's feet. *Nothing awful has happened, he wanted me to do this. Do I not want paradise for myself too? I'd be a fool not to listen to him and carry out his word. I'm not a fool, am I girls?*

The Celibates shook their heads. *No. No, you're not Doctor Hamilton.*

Precisely, she said, and towered over the girls once more. Drops of blood fell from her face and her clothes and onto the top of Malin's head.

Now, it would be foolish to allow such a fresh carcass as that to go to waste, when you should practise feasting on the wicked… She motioned for the girls to stand up and she led them to the body.

Electra stood up and pressed her back against the wall, as far as she possibly could from the mad principal and the dead nun.

Doctor Hamilton reached into her coat pocket and removed a Stanley knife. She bent over the body. Electra threw her hands over her face, unable to watch. Through the cracks of her fingers she saw Doctor Hamilton put something red into Malin's mouth.

Chew, she said.

It took us a whole six days to finish eating her, Malin said. When Electra removed her hands, they were standing in the quad again, but the red rain had stopped. The sky was a dark orange. *We kept her body in a shed behind the stadium so no one would notice the smell.*

Doctor Hamilton cancelled our Prayer Hours so that we could finish Sister Mahlasang before the night of the ritual… And we did, on Friday morning before assembly.

Electra remembered noticing the Celibates were acting weird, and how much hate she felt towards them. She suddenly felt a sharp pang of guilt. "I'm so sorry," she said, unable to look Malin in the eyes.

She wanted us to become used to the taste of human meat. He wanted us to become used to it. Malin walked towards the fountain and dipped her hands into the water. *Flesh is strange. It's chewy and tastes like pork. It took a few days to get used to it, but when we did, we wanted more.*

She took her hands out of the fountain, and they were red. She turned to Electra. *After assembly on Friday, we were told to wait outside the office while Doctor Hamilton spoke to Liezl. After she left, Doctor Hamilton told us she was going to help the Boy with Red Feet too, but she was in no way our equal, in fact, she explained, Liezl was inferior to us in all forms and ways.*

Her role is minor, Doctor Hamilton said, She will have to work a lot harder than we do to arrive in paradise.

All Liezl had to do was find a holy vessel to support him when the time was right. Doctor Hamilton told her he wanted you.

Electra felt something fall into the pit of her stomach and she went cold. The boy wanted her to be a holy vessel? What did that even mean?

But later, Malin said, *When she arrived in the chamber without you and tried to explain, he destroyed her.*

So Liezl hadn't been hitting on her at all. She asked Electra to join her in the tunnels because she had no choice. It all made sense.

He didn't have to do much, her mind was like putty after what Lana did to her. All he did was show her the room where we were being operated on…

Suddenly Malin appeared right in front of her face and Electra stumbled backwards onto the gravel. She looked up at her as the girl crouched down by her feet.

I will help you leave this horror, she said, *The Boy cannot descend into our dimension. I can't allow it. I will help you. All you have to do is listen.*

*

Electra woke with a start and sat up from where she was sleeping on the floor. She was covered in sweat and gasped for air. What the fuck just happened to her? She looked around the room. Cha Cha was still passed out in one corner, and so was Phumla, behind the box of tins. Two empty cans stood by her face. She looked for Delphi, and for a second she panicked when she couldn't see her, but her friend sat with her back to her by the door, the chainsaw in her hands. Electra sighed. She needed a cigarette.

“Oh,” Delphi said, glancing over her shoulder as Electra searched through Cha Cha’s blazer pockets for her box of Marlboros. “You’re awake.”

She found the box, and careful not to wake her, she pulled it out the pocket. She opened the box and took a cigarette out. She put it in her mouth and lit it. “I think I know what those creatures… Dolls are,” she said.

“What do you mean?” Delphi said as Electra joined her by the door.

“Tell me about the doll you saw,” she said.

“What doll?”

“The creature… that monster,” she said, unable to find the right word. It felt painful calling the doll that after what Malin had shown her.

Delphi looked at her and frowned. She took the cigarette from her hand and put it in her mouth. “Like what Phumla said, it had eight limbs that were stitched together.”

“Did it… I don’t know. Did it look like one of the Celibacy girls to you?”

Delphi narrowed her eyes at her and scowled. She looked away at one of the boxes of rulers. Then, she frowned and looked back at Electra. “Why did you call it a doll?” she said.

“That’s what Lana called them.”

Delphi’s mouth dropped and the cigarette fell to the floor. “What do you mean? Lana is dead,” she said, and bent down to pick it up. “She is dead, right?”

Electra shook her head. She picked the cigarette out of Delphi’s hand and took a deep drag. She held the smoke in her lungs and counted to ten.

She exhaled and told her friend everything.

Five Marlboros were stubbed out on the ground by the time she finished telling Delphi everything she needed to know. She had a hand over her mouth and her eyes were cast to the floor and Electra thought Delphi was going to laugh.

“You can’t trust her,” she said.

Electra lit another cigarette and glanced at Delphi. “Why the hell not?” she said, “Malin is going to get us out of here.”

“Fine, alright. Whatever,” her friend said, “But she said she wanted to leave too. She’s one of those crea… dolls, she can leave whenever she wants. Why is she telling you all this?”

Electra took a puff and ashed the cigarette. She shrugged. “I don’t know,” she said.

“You mean you didn’t bother to fucking ask her?” Delphi said. She was on her feet now and Electra could tell she was angry, though she couldn’t understand why. “She showed you all of that shit, and not once did you think that maybe you should ask her a few questions?”

“I couldn’t!” Electra said, and quickly looked back at the sleeping girls, worried her voice was too loud. “You don’t understand what it was like. Both times when she showed me that stuff, I don’t know, it felt like I was a passenger or something. And when I did ask her things she wouldn’t answer me…”

“Exactly,” Delphi said, “Which is why Malin can’t be trusted. She’s working for the boy, can’t you see that? You are retarded Electra! But once again, here you’re being as selfish as you always are. You only care about what matters to you and that’s it. You just want to save your own sorry ass.”

Electra sighed and sank to her knees. She put her hands over her face and rubbed her eyes. She wasn’t getting through to Delphi. She had been chosen to be some kind of vessel, whatever the hell that meant, and it terrified her. Delphi didn’t understand a thing, but she was right about one thing, Electra had been selfish. She felt just as exhausted as she did before they took a nap after eating the siff beans. All she wanted to do was escape the tunnels, leave Our Immaculate and never look back.

She heard Delphi crouch down next to her and she felt a hand on her shoulder, but still she didn’t look at her.

“I just don’t want to die,” Delphi said and somewhere in the room Phumla grunted in her sleep. “I’m sorry…”

Electra shuddered and moved her hands from her face. The two sat down on the floor against the boxes stacked up by the door and Electra put her head on Delphi’s shoulder. “You

shouldn’t apologize,” she said, “I’m sorry. Sorry that I was so god damned selfish and unkind to so many people. It’s my fault there aren’t any more of us in here right now.”

“But you were scared,” Delphi said.

“I guess,” she said, “Or maybe I didn’t think the rest were worth saving.”

“Look,” Delphi said and cupped Electra’s head in her hands, “We’ll stay here a little longer, maybe try to make some weapons out of all the shit we have in here, and then-“

Shrieks cut through the tunnels outside, and Delphi stopped talking.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

There was silence, for a moment, and Electra saw Phumla sit up. She got to her feet and said, "What was that?"

They heard another scream, and an angry moan.

Electra stood up and walked over to Cha Cha. She nudged her. "Wake up," she said.

"It's coming from outside," Delphi said, "It's really fucking close."

"Maybe it's a trap," Electra said. She didn't know if leaving the room was a good idea, or if they were even able to help whoever it was outside the room.

"Come on!" Phumla said, and snatched the chainsaw from the stack of boxes. She and Delphi started to pick up boxes from the stack and throw them to the ground.

"Wait!" Electra said.

The girls ignored her. She felt a hand squeeze her shoulder and she turned her head. Cha Cha looked just as perturbed and unsure as Electra felt. Phumla switched the chainsaw on and it drowned out the screams outside. Delphi swung the door open and Phumla charged through, into the darkness. Delphi glanced at Cha Cha and Electra and motioned for them to follow. She ran out the door.

"I… I want to stay," Cha Cha said, letting go of Electra's shoulder. Her eyes were red and she backed away. "Can't you come back for me?"

Electra wished they could. She couldn't shake the feeling that chasing after the screams was reckless, but she knew if they didn't follow Phumla and Delphi now, chances were they would never see them again.

She took Cha Cha's hand in hers and pulled her to the door. "Stay close to me," she said as they headed out into the tunnel.

Why are we doing this? She thought, as they ran down the corridor. *We don't even know what we're up against!*

They followed Phumla and Delphi. Electra's hand started to hurt, Cha Cha held onto it so tightly. They hadn't heard another scream since they went to look, so for all they knew they

were running in a completely opposite direction to where it came from. The screamer could already have been killed. They stopped to catch their breath, and the other two did the same. They looked at one another wearily and Electra tried to listen for more screaming over the noise of their heavy breathing. She looked past the girls, and up ahead was the top of a metal staircase, painted white. It led down to somewhere in the dark. Could the scream have come from there?

“Where do you think we are?” Delphi said.

More heavy breathing. The girls didn’t answer her, what could they have said?

“Underneath the observatory?” Phumla said.

Electra knew from what Malin had shown her, if they were by the observatory, they would have been somewhere near a circular chamber, where the statue of the boy was kept.

“Keep your eyes peeled,” Delphi said, “The screaming must’ve come from around here-“

A roar erupted from down the corridor where they had come. Through the darkness, Electra saw a skinny figure running towards them. As it drew closer, she saw it was her Afrikaans class rep, Sonali.

“It’s coming!” the girl screamed.

Sonali ran through the girls, fighting off Cha Cha who tried to grab her, and headed for the staircase. The girls waited, exchanging confused glances. Further down from where Sonali had run, they heard a noise.

A heavy *domf domf domf* .

It was getting louder. Cha Cha looked at Electra. Phumla stepped forward with a frown on her face, and revved the chainsaw. Electra held her breath. The four of them stood dead still.

From under a flashing fluorescent tube, she could see stills of it. She froze. So that was what a doll looked like.

It had a blank face, no nose or ears, but two hollow eyes. Its mouth was a toothy tear cutting the head in half. It was muscular, unnaturally so, with a bleeding stump of a lower torso it dragged behind it. The creature pulled itself closer on its big red hands and moaned.

Domf. Domf. Domf.

“Don’t look at it!” Delphi said, “It’s one of those fucking things, just run!”

The doll stopped suddenly and lifted itself onto its stump. Its skin was shiny, a nest of dark veins. Electra stood still, stunned and unable to move or tear away her eyes from the monstrosity in front of her. Its hollow eyes looked at her and she felt a chill run down her spine.

“Electra, move!” she heard Delphi say.

A long black tongue slithered out of the doll’s mouth and it licked its teeth. It rocked on its stump and fell back down on its hands. The ground shook. *That used to be a Celibate*. The thought made Electra scream. *Why was it so big and bloated?* The doll started to pull itself towards her again and she shrank away. She stumbled over her feet, and almost fell, but she was able to regain her balance and forced her legs into action. She tried to catch up to the girls as the floor under her quaked from the creature pulled itself along.

In front of her Phumla and Delphi had already caught up to Sonali. The girls stampeded towards the staircase. Suddenly Phumla stopped and turned around to face the doll Electra could hear was gaining speed behind her. The chainsaw growled in her hands and she had a sneer on her face.

“I can kill it!” Phumla said and revved the chainsaw, “I’m taking this fucker down!”

“No!” Cha Cha said, “You can’t! Please!” She tried to pull Phumla along, but she squirmed out of her grip. She ran towards the beast, the chainsaw buzzing in Electra’s ear as Phumla bolted past her. She wanted to call her back, but she knew it was no use. The look on Phumla’s face said she refused to back down. Electra kept running, fighting back the tears.

She heard the chainsaw making contact with the creature’s skin. It howled and Electra heard something splat. The buzz of the chainsaw died.

Domf. Domf. Domf.

Sonali snapped her head around and screamed as she tripped. She doubled over and Delphi reached down, grabbing the girl by the scruff of her collar and yanked her up. The four girls ran down the flight of steps, and Electra noticed the walls were covered in dark slime. She thought it was wet cement, but as they descended down the staircase the slime glistened and

dripped like phlegm. There was a large patch of it on the ground below the stairs, and from where she was Electra could have sworn it was moving.

Delphi narrowly missed it and jumped out the way. She ran towards a pair of double doors at the end of the tunnel. Sonali, in front of Electra and Cha Cha, lost her footing on the stairs and fell into the sludge. For a moment she lay in it, her head, chest, stomach and legs submerged.

"Sonali, get up!" Electra said. She put her foot in the slop to try bring the girl out, but it almost swallowed her shoe whole. She yanked her shoe out. It was covered in something thick and grey, and drying quickly. "Sonali! Get your face out of that shit!"

Domf. Domf. Domf.

Electra spun around to see the shadow of the creature rise over the stairs. She had to go, chances were Sonali had already sucked in enough of the stuff to make her suffocate. She wanted to save her despite her feelings for the other girls earlier. She knew Sonali was annoying, and she spread that rumour about her and Liezl making out, but she didn't deserve to die. None of them did. But Electra couldn't try save her if it meant getting herself killed in the process.

The substance rippled around Sonali's body, it was crawling over her skin. The creature roared from the stairs. Cha Cha cringed and headed towards the double doors where Delphi stood, she looked like she was about to be sick. She held a hand over her mouth and swayed slightly. Something sailed through the air and bounced off Cha Cha's back, leaving a bloody mess on her shirt.

Phumla's head lay on the ground, and blood squirted from the bare arteries in her neck. Cha Cha screamed.

Sonali's body shifted slightly and she tore her head from the muck. She looked at Electra. Her face was red and raw. Blood dripped down her chin and mixed in the substance. "I can't… I can't move…" Sonali said. "I can't move! Electra, help me please!"

Electra's stomach turned and she looked at the double doors at the end of the corridor. She could see Delphi with her arm around Cha Cha, standing in the doorway. The doll snarled.

Domf. Domf. Domf.

Electra looked down at Sonali. She felt a cold chill as she watched the helpless girl try worm her way out of the substance. “I’m sorry…” she said.

“Please!” Sonali said and tried to move one of her arms but her skin was stuck to it, stuck inside it, “You can’t leave me here!” Her eyes turned to Delphi and Cha Cha in the doorway. “Guys!” she said, “Help me!”

Delphi remained where she was looking away. Cha Cha stared at Phumla’s decapitated head. Electra knew Cha Cha wouldn’t budge, but Delphi didn’t make a move. Perhaps she finally realized she couldn’t save everybody. What could they do? There was no way Sonali was getting out of whatever the hell she’d fallen into.

“We’ll go get help,” Electra said, and wanted to kick herself for saying that. She could hear the doll’s ragged breath from where she stood. The girl had no chance.

Sonali tried lifting her arm again. More blood dribbled over and into the matter. Electra turned and ran towards Delphi and Cha Cha. She couldn’t bear to look at Sonali any longer, and besides, there was no point in the three of them dying trying to save Sonali, a lost cause. She could hear the girl scream her name as she reached her friends. She ignored Sonali as she and the two girls pulled the doors shut.

Cut into one of the doors was a window Electra looked out of, and watched the doll as it balanced on its lower torso at the top of the stairs, staring down at Sonali with hollow eyes.

“Why is it just looking at her?” Delphi said, “Why won’t it kill her?” Her shoulder brushed against Electra’s.

Sonali turned her head slowly to the top of the stairs, wriggling in the drying gunk. She ripped her arm up, leaving behind a layer of skin stuck to it. Her palm and skin under her arm was red, raw and shiny. She tried pulling out her other arm, which took longer to free. Threads of torn skin dangled from her arm. Sonali tucked both bloody hands under her shoulders and Cha Cha winced, looking away.

“She’s going to try pull herself out of that shit,” she said, hands over her eyes.

Sonali began to lift up her chest and it was grotesque. The creature just looked on, head cocked to one side, like a cat taking pleasure from seeing its prey suffer. Sonali’s eyes met the girls as she tried to lift her body. She peeled her chest off the cement, blood spewing out

and for a moment Electra saw muscle and tissue exposed, right before the creature jumped from the top of the stairs and landed onto Sonali.

It pinned her torn body into the matter as it devoured the skin on her back, biting and scratching her until her screams faded into nothing. Electra looked away, revolted.

“I can’t do this anymore,” Cha Cha said, backing away from the doors. Tears fell down her pale cheeks and her hands twitched. She shook her head slowly and backed away from the door.

“Where are you going?” Electra said, “We don’t even know where we are now!”

“I just… I need to get away from here,” she said, and headed down a corridor. She spoke softly, and her eyes scanned the walls absent-mindedly, “Don’t follow me. Just, please don’t.”

Electra walked towards her, arms outstretched. “Cha Cha,” she said, she didn’t care if the doll might have heard them, “Jesus, please stay with us…”

She felt Delphi’s hand on her wrist. “Leave her,” her friend said, “She’ll be back, she can’t wonder that far.”

“We can’t let her walk around on her own, she could get killed!” Electra said.

A large red hand slammed against the window of the door and both girls flinched. Cha Cha screamed and bolted down the corridor, deep into the darkness.

The creature shook the doors and howled. The girls crawled back. One of the doll’s hands broke through the window and a large finger curled around it. Electra’s eyes darted around the corridor, looking for a quick escape. The doll threw itself against the doors.

“We have to get the hell out of here, that thing is going to rip through the fucking doors!” Delphi said, “Look for a weapon!”

The doors began to dent and buckle.

The doll grunted loudly on the other side of the door, and something broke through the window and splattered on Delphi’s face. She screamed, frantically trying to wipe it from her eyes. Electra stood back. It was the same slimy matter from before, the one that Sonali fell into. It was thick and coagulated, and started to crust.

Delphi stumbled, tendrils of it hanging from her face. She screamed. Electra stood still, unable to think or move. The creature on the other side beat against the doors once more. She didn't know what to do.

She heard a fizz coming from Delphi's face.

Delphi howled and fell to the floor.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Something inside her switched to autopilot, and she snapped into action.

Grab Delphi. Get as far away from the doors as possible. Try find a room to hide away from the doll and any other grotesque abnormalities lurking down here. Wait out the horror, go back to the surface only once it's quietened down.

She lifted Delphi to her feet and led her down the corridor in the same direction Cha Cha ran down. Electra tried working out how far she could have gone just as she heard the double doors crumple and break. She tried locating herself by thinking how far down the tunnel they had gone from the room with the boxes. When they ran off to find Sonali, they turned left out the room (going west?) and she remembered they had run down a corridor in a straight line, down the flight of stairs and through the double doors to where they were now. That put them in a north-west direction from the room, or so Electra thought. She could hear the doll's hands slapping against the floor and her eyes darted to a rusted door nearest to them.

She told Delphi to wait, and moved towards the door fumbling with the knob. It didn't budge, and looked rusted over. She tried the door next to it, the *domf domf domf* getting louder.

"I'm trying to find a door that'll open," she told Delphi, who picked at the gunk on her face. Her friend didn't say anything, all she did was moan.

She had the same luck with the next door, and the next. She heard the doll roar, and ran to the first door she saw on the opposite wall of the tunnel.

"Fuck this!" Electra said, "Jesus!"

The door had a window in it, but when she looked through she couldn't see a thing. She could tell a light was on, but it was very weak. The doorknob turned. They still had a chance. She swung the door open and grabbed Delphi's hand. She pulled her inside. She shut the door quietly and turned around.

There was an operating table in the centre of the room, crusty with dried blood. Empty pans were scattered on the floor. An intercom was perched in the far right corner of the ceiling and there was a light switch by the door. Electra turned off the light and took Delphi by the hand. She guided her underneath the table and put an arm around her shoulder. Her friend

shuddered and cried, and Electra had to put a hand over Delphi's mouth to keep her from making a noise.

The heavy stamping of the doll's hands could be heard from outside in the corridor and her mind raced. She should have tried to lock the door or push the table up against it. There was no time for that now, they had to keep quiet.

The girls sat in silence as the thumping got louder. A shadow passed over the window and for a moment the monotonous *domf domf domf* stopped. The doll was looking through it, its hollow eyes glaring through the glass. Electra took Delphi's hand in hers and shut her eyes. She could feel sweat run down her back and into her shirt, and her heart beat loudly in her ears. She held her breath.

Domf. Domf. Domf domf domf domf domf.

The doll was dragging itself away, the thumping was getting softer. She breathed out and let go of Delphi's hand. She opened her eyes. They were safe, for now.

"We can wait all this out," Electra said, "And if anything tries to come through that door…" She stopped talking, because truthfully she had no idea what to do. Phumla was dead, Cha Cha had run off. The chainsaw was gone, and Delphi was blind. What little hope she might have had escaping this nightmare had vanished.

This is how I die, she thought, running a hand through her hair. She always assumed she'd peg on top of Mount Kilimanjaro or on a booze cruise through Greece. Never did she once imagine dying as some vessel, underneath Our Fucking Immaculate, at the hands of some entity and Doctor Hamilton. It angered her to think her last hours would be spent huddled underneath an operating table when no one on the surface had any inkling as to where she or the rest of the girls locked down here were.

She could feel the anxiety boiling up in her chest again and her brow dripped. She had to crawl out from under the table, she felt suffocated. She turned to Delphi and in the dark she saw the outline of her friend huddled into a foetal position.

She stood up and felt her way around the room until she found the light switch and flipped it. The light didn't make her feel better, nor did it bring her any hope when she saw what Delphi looked like. The phlegmy shit stuck to her face had hardened and it looked crystalized. Only the tip of her nose, her two nostrils and her mouth were saved from the muck.

“How bad does it feel?” Electra asked.

At first, Delphi didn’t say anything. She continued to lie in the foetal position and hugged her knees close to her chest. Electra didn’t know whether she could hear her, but the phlegm looked as if it had missed her ears. Slowly, Delphi raised her head and moved it from side to side.

“Where…” she started, then paused. She sniffed, and coughed onto the floor. “Where are we?”

Electra’s bottom lip trembled. What had happened to Delphi was her fault. Had they not argued by the door Delphi wouldn’t be in the predicament she was in. A tear rolled down the side of her face and Electra wiped it away. Delphi was all she had left, her only friend.

“Where are… you?” Delphi asked.

“Here,” Electra said, and crouched underneath the table again. She took Delphi’s hand in both of hers and kissed it. “I’m… so sorry…”

“I… Sonali is dead… I didn’t help her I’m…Is it gone?” Delphi said, “That thing?”

“Yes,” she said.

“We’re not going to die down here… right?”

Electra looked at her, and wanted to tell her the truth. She paused, and after a moment reluctantly said, “No, we’ll get out…”

You will. Soon.

Electra’s ears pricked up. It was Malin, after her encounter with the massive doll she had completely forgotten about her. *Can you hear me now?* She thought.

Yes.

Was that one of the dolls back there? Electra thought, *Why was it so large?*

Yes. Some of us were injected with a liquid I had never seen before.

Electra suddenly remembered what Liezl had said to Phumla and her in the Prayer Gardens: *I watched as they pumped shit into their bodies through tubes piercing their arms and legs.*

There were even tubes down their throats. Whatever it was they put inside them… It bloated them. Some of the girls swelled so badly their skin split open like ripe fruit. The one that didn't split was massive. The ones that did were sewn up.

She could hear Malin again, *You need to get out.*

Electra could feel butterflies in her stomach. There was still a way out. She and Delphi were going to leave the tunnels and get to the surface. They were going to smell fresh air again and feel sunlight on their skin. They'd be able to get help for Delphi, even the rest of the girls who could still be alive, but most importantly Delphi. If only she knew how to get to Leon Boschoff from where she was hiding…

The intercom in the corner of the room crackled to life and Electra moaned.

"Girls," Doctor Hamilton announced, *"This is your principal. Do not fight the dolls. They are here for a greater purpose than your own. Give yourselves to them, make something of your meaningless lives…"* The intercom crackled again and died.

Tell me where to go, she thought and let go of Delphi's hand. Her chest felt crushed as she lay on her side. She needed to breathe. She rolled onto her back and wiped the tears from her eyes. *Tell me where!*

Not now, Malin said. *Soon.*

Electra started to get irritated. *Fuck that!* She thought, and banged one of her fists on the floor. *Why can't you just meet me now and we can get out? You have no idea what I've been through!*

Yes I do.

No you don't! How about you stop wasting time and fucking do what you say you're going to do! How do I even know you're not going to eat me? I can't trust you. And what do you need me for anyway? If you want to leave so bad, why don't you get out now by yourself?

She surprised herself by being able to make a coherent argument. There was no way Electra wanted to antagonize Malin, not when she was a doll lurking underground with knowledge of entrances and exits, but she used to be a Celibate once, and was still the same Celibate inside, so hopefully she still thought like a Celibate and would give in. Electra didn't want to be a

bitch to Malin, not after what she had shown her, but she didn't have the luxury of looking out for herself. Delphi's life was in her hands now too.

Eventually, she heard Malin say, *Count twenty doors on your left when you leave the room. Turn left and pass another three. You'll find me in the fourth.*

Electra breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, things were starting to look up. But suddenly the realization hit her. She was going to meet a doll. Alone. She couldn't expect Delphi to come with her. Just looking at her friend lying next to her Electra could see how disorientated she was. She would have to leave Delphi by herself while she went to find Malin. She didn't want to, but she had no other option. She could lead her to the room, but that would waste time and Electra needed the meeting to be quick. The thought of conversing face to face with a monster filled her with despair. She touched her friend's hand.

"Delphi," she said, "Malin spoke to me. I'm going to find her and she'll tell me the way out of this shit hole."

"No," Delphi said, and she shook her head, "Not by… By yourself…"

She squeezed her hand. "There's no other way," she said, "You can't come with."

Delphi shook her head again and let go of Electra's hand. She rolled her body to the side and tried to stand up, but the back of her head hit the table and she fell down. Had she not been blind, had they not been trapped underground and fighting for their lives, Electra probably would have laughed.

"Give… me a minute," Delphi said.

Electra held her hand again. "No," she said, "You have to trust me."

"I do," she said, "I just… don't trust her…"

"Stay here," Electra said, and let go of her hand. She crawled out from under the table and walked towards the door. "I'll be back soon, don't make a noise, okay?"

Delphi groaned and put a hand over her face. Electra felt terrible for her friend, but what else could she do? She couldn't have Delphi stumbling behind her. She would only attract more unwanted attention.

*

She took small steps. There weren't any lights in this part of the tunnel, not since they passed through those double doors. Although they bothered her at first, Electra found herself starting to miss the flickering fluorescent tubes buzzing over her head. Wherever she was, she felt like she was walking around a Parisian crypt. Death was everywhere, and the lack of lighting didn't help. She wondered how far down inside the earth she was.

She passed the first door on her left and began to count. She jogged down the tunnel on her toes, making as little noise as she could. The air was freezing and dried her sweat. She passed the second door, and the third, which had been blown open. A hand stuck out of the doorway, the rest of the body lost inside the dark room… assuming there was a body still attached. Next to the hand, she saw a large rectangular object, and when she looked closer she couldn't believe her eyes. A panga lay on the ground.

She considered leaving it, the thought of getting so close to a dead body made her uncomfortable, but being unarmed in case Delphi was right about Malin made her feel worse. Without wasting time, she ignored the hand and picked up the panga. The blade was about the size of her arm and didn't look as if it had been used. She swiped the air with it twice and brought it to her face. It was perfect, not a chainsaw, but good enough.

She quickened her pace. She didn't want to leave Delphi alone for too long.

Seeing her friend hurt and confused made Electra want to cry. If anyone should have lost their sight, it was Electra. She couldn't protect Delphi, she wasn't as strong as her friend, nor as smart. She had to try. She owed her that much. If only she was the one blind and cowering under the operating table, if Delphi could see they would have more of a chance getting out of the tunnels alive…

Snap out of it, she thought. *What's done is done. It's all up to me now.*

The tunnel was a lot longer than she expected, and by the time she reached the twelfth door she had to stop to catch her breath. She leaned against the wall and took quick breaths, anxious to get to the room Malin had said she'd meet her. The sooner she spoke to the Celibate, the quicker she could get back to Delphi and bring her to the exit. She had to stay focused and hold herself together. The end was in sight. As if enough motivation, she found the energy to run again.

As she ran passed the nineteenth door, she saw the corner where the tunnel made a left. She smiled for the first time in what felt like years. She turned the corner and sped down the tunnel and stopped. She felt a pain in her ankle and bent down to massage it. She thought about what Malin would look like, for all she knew the Celibate could resemble the massive slug that blinded Delphi. She could have been the thing with eight arms and legs, the spider creature her friends had encountered before they found her, or something similar.

The fourth door was a few meters away. She saw dark red spots on the floor, and paused. It was blood. She let go of her ankle and her eyes followed the spots and saw they led into the room. The door was slightly ajar, and the blood disappeared into the dark behind it.

What would she see if she went inside? She thought through her options.

A, another one of the girls could have been hurt and decided to hide inside that room. If Electra walked in, she'd either see a dead body, or a wounded hysterical survivor.

B, the trail of blood could belong to one of the dolls, Malin perhaps, and if she decided to step inside she'd see a dead student, or creature, in which case, she'd die.

Or C, It's a trap, and if she went in she'd die.

Electra tightened her grip. She always had the panga if things went awry.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

She opened the door slowly and jabbed the blade into the darkness. She waited for something to jump out at her or for Malin to say something, but there was silence. She dropped the panga to her side and tried to find a light switch. As was the case with the other rooms she had been in underground, the light switch was next to the door and she switched it on. The light flickered and finally glowed a dull orange. The room was empty, but the blood led to something obscure smeared onto the wall at the far end of the room. She couldn't make out what was written, but it looked like the symbols she had seen before.

She began to panic. It was a trap, Delphi had been right all along. She had to get out of there fast, before Malin arrived. She turned and headed for the door, but it slammed shut. Electra dropped the panga and screamed. She banged her fists against the door.

"Let me out!" she said, "Malin you fucking bitch! Open the door!"

She was so stupid to trust the Celibate, and now she and Delphi were going to pay the price. With forces so powerful at work around her, what made her think she would be able to make an ally? To think Electra had felt sorry for Malin. She didn't even understand the situation she was in, and now she never would. She was going to die. She would become the boy's vessel and who knew what he would make Doctor Hamilton do to Delphi, if a doll hadn't found her first. She had to get back to Delphi, she refused to go down like this. She had to get out of the room so she could-

Click.

Electra grabbed the panga off the floor and raised it over her head in defence.

An old battered projector sat on the floor in the middle of the room, and an image flickered onto the wall it was facing. Where the hell did it come from? It wasn't there when she entered the room. Something could have been inside the room with her now. She looked around the room, but no one else was there. It was only her, and the projector.

She looked at what was being projected on the wall.

The film was grainy and flickered. There was a title across the screen which read *Super Cool with Jesus!* It was one of the old films the nuns used to show them in primary school during

religion classes, or during free periods. Electra had seen this one many times. It was one of the favourites the nuns showed to the girls, starring a creepy adult sized baby named Pippi.

As always, Pippi came on screen after the credits and gave a stupid cartoonish grin. The sound was off, but from what Electra remembered Pippi was talking about the importance of prayer and how amazing it was to get in touch with God. Pippi was standing in some studio with a backdrop of a drawn mielie field next to a house that looked like it was built out of cardboard. Pippi gesticulated wildly, beaming at the camera.

Now it's time to say the Lord's prayer, kids! Say it with me!

Pippi brought his hands together and bowed his head. In the past, whenever Pippi prayed in the videos, the girls were asked to do the same.

The film jittered and there was a flash. Rows and rows of symbols filled the screen for a split second, before flashing back to Pippi. Electra frowned. She didn't remember that ever happening in the show, she'd seen it thousands of times. What the hell was that?

Another flash. More symbols. The same symbols written in Room B. The same written around the door she walked through when she saw Lana. She'd see them for a second, before they melted and dissolved into the film. The scene had changed, it no longer showed Pippi or the mielie field. The image was dark, it looked like a tunnel. The same as the ones she had been inside since she woke up in Room B. The tunnel she was being shown had three doors to its left and one to the right. The one on the right opened and something walked out. It took a few steps and slouched.

It must have been a doll, only it didn't look a thing like the one that killed Phumla and blinded Delphi. It was skinny, and stiches ran up and down its back. Its arms and legs were replaced by pincers that it walked on like an insect. Its face was a giant hole. It walked closer and closer, until the hole in its face took up most of the screen. Electra shrank back. It was absolutely grotesque. She hoped it wouldn't crawl out at her. She tried turning the doorknob but it wouldn't budge. She was stuck inside the room with the creepy projection.

This is the only other way I can communicate with you, Malin's voice suddenly said. It was like she was in the room with Electra. She relaxed a little.

"Why can't we meet in person?" she asked, fully aware she was talking to something through a projector. Could anything down here get weirder?

The smell of the wicked is strong, Malin said, *I wouldn't be able to control myself around you.*

"How are you doing all this?" Electra said, "And why is the door locked?"

I am right by your door, it's what is stopping me from tearing you apart.

Electra turned to look at the door, but it didn't have a window in it. "How do I know you won't eat me when I leave this room?" she said, "How am I supposed to trust you? If you need me so bad you need to start answering all my questions…Like, I don't know, why do you want to help me?" She didn't want to be too pushy, Malin was standing right outside, and the pincers looked like they could tear through steel.

I don't need you, Malin said, *You need me. No one should see what I have seen… And I know their plans for you.*

"Right," Electra said, every inch of her trying to keep steady, "I'm supposed to be some kind of vessel. What does that mean?"

You were one of the six chosen to bring the boy with the red feet into our dimension. The others failed to meet his expectations. You are the only one left unscathed. He will come through you, and it will destroy you, both body and soul. No one shall ever experience a greater torment.

The ground underneath her feet seemed to wobble, so Electra sat down, forcing herself to keep calm. "How do I get out of here?" she said.

The scene changed suddenly and an image of the entrance in the Prayer Gardens was projected. As if shot from the point of view of the camera man, the camera panned down into the tunnel and turned left at a corner. It went down a flight of steps, past a row of doors and through an arch. The camera made a right and continued straight for a while until it stopped at a door where Malin stood on all four pincers. Her door.

She gasped. The Prayer Gardens entrance was so close, at the most a fifteen minute walk. She'd have to get back to Delphi's room first, but as soon as she did they would be out. They would be free.

"Thank you," she said, and tried to memorize what she had seen.

Go as the door opens. You don't have much time, the ritual draws to an end soon.

"I need to get my friend first," Electra said, going over the route again and again in her head, "We'll leave as soon as I do, I promise. Thank you."

No.

Electra frowned. "What the hell do you mean 'no'?" she said.

Delphi's fate has already been decided when Babette Fluxman spat in her face, Malin said, *Soon the phlegm will dissolve into her skull and the new plans the boy with red feet has for her shall come into effect. She cannot leave the tunnels alive.*

Electra could feel the anger rising inside her, igniting her veins. There was no way she would leave without Delphi, and if Malin didn't like it, Electra didn't care. The stupid monster had shown her the way out already. "Forget it!" she said, "On the surface I'll take her to Leon Boschoff and have that shit removed. With or without your help."

I'll ask you one last time…

"Not without Delphi!"

The image projected on the wall started to jitter once more and burn.

Fine, Malin said, *Then die.*

She heard a scream and the projector died. Something was running down the corridor outside the room. Another scream, and the lights went off. She crouched into the nearest corner, her heart racing. The doorknob jiggled, and something pounded against the door. She held up the panga. Malin was not going to take her down, she was going to fight her off at all costs. She hadn't come this far just to die by the pincers of a vengeful creature.

The door swung open and something entered the room. Electra froze. She was going to attack Malin with everything she had. She wasn't going to die.

The figure turned around and pushed her to the ground, the panga slipping out of her grip. It clattered to the floor. Electra screamed and tried to fight back, but it was no use. The monster pounced on top of her and swiped at her face. Malin pinned her down.

“You’re dead!” Electra yelled. She scratched at Malin’s face, and managed to punch her in the gut. She punched her again, this time in the face, missing the gaping hole. She fell down next to her. Electra crawled towards the panga, but she felt something wrap around her ankle and yank her back. She kicked Malin in the face with her free foot. She moaned, and she kicked her again. Malin’s face crunched against the heel of her shoe and she finally let go.

Electra got to her feet and grabbed the panga, swinging it wildly.

“You’re dead!” she screamed, slicing through Malin’s right arm. She heard something, probably one of the pincers, fall to the floor.

“You’re dead!” she said again, this time sending the tip of the panga through the creature’s stomach. Malin doubled over, howling in pain. *Run away,* Electra thought. But what if she did run and left the beast wounded? Malin could always come back for them, she knew the way out of the tunnels. No, if she wanted to get out alive, she had to finish Malin off once and for all.

She sat down on Malin’s chest, careful to keep clear of her remaining pincers. Something was squirming – moving – underneath her. She bit her bottom lip and raised the panga in the air, sinking it into the doll’s flesh. “You’re… Dead,” she whispered, getting off of Malin.

She crawled into a corner at the far end of the room and tried to calm her nerves. She was shaking, her whole body burned with adrenalin. She could hear Malin squirming and shrieking, Electra had wounded her badly, but the doll wasn’t dead.

Electra took a deep breath and got to her feet and stumbled over to the projector in the darkness. She picked it up with both hands. It was heavy, but she managed to carry it towards Malin, and dropped it on what she thought was her head.

She stood over the body for some time, and waiting for her hands to stop shaking. She sucked in big gulps of air. She had actually killed something. She brought her hands to her face and ran her fingers through her hair. It was sticky, and by the feel of it locks had stuck together. Being dirty meant nothing to her now as she tried to come to terms with what she had done. She had killed Malin. A doll. And she lived. She ripped the panga from her stomach.

The light flickered above her head, and once again the room returned to its former dull orange. Her eyes fell on the body by her feet and the first thing she noticed was the sea horse tattoo.

Her jaw dropped.

Electra wanted to be sick as a cold sweat broke out all over her body. She looked away and the nausea rose in her throat. It couldn't be… No, it was impossible… That was Malin, she had attacked her! That was supposed to be Malin on the floor, not…

She couldn't bring herself to think it, it was simply too horrific for words. She had to leave. She ran out of the room, and slipped on the gore on the floor. She ran down the tunnel and headed straight back to Delphi's room. She had to get as far away from that room as possible, as if running away from it left the truth behind.

She was losing her mind. She had to move. The tunnel felt like it was caving in on her and she felt dizzy.

She had just butchered Emma.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Delphi was sitting cross-legged on the floor when she walked in. Electra shut the door behind her and went over to the operating table. It took her time, but she managed to push it against the door. She was relieved Delphi was still there when she arrived, it worried her that she could have been killed or was gone.

Electra sunk down to the floor and tried to clear her mind. She had just murdered Emma.

In a bizarre way, something inside her told her it hadn't been Malin attacking her in that room, but she still fought back. She was so caught up in the moment, she hadn't been thinking straight. Her flight vs fight response had kicked in, and the fact that she delivered blow after bloody blow all the while the small part of her knew Malin wasn't in the room disturbed her. Obviously it wasn't as if she wanted to kill Emma, or took any particular enjoyment in doing so, the taboo of murder was what freaked her out the most. She was now a murderer, she had made her first kill and there was no going back. She would have to live with Emma's blood on her hands for the rest of her life.

It wasn't my fault, she kept thinking over and over on the way back to Delphi. Malin was to blame. The Celibate had set her up. There was no way she could have left the room without killing something, it had just so happened to be Emma. But she knew deep down that Malin hadn't forced her to attack, or beat, or slice up Emma. That had all been Electra. Something inside her knew, and she still went through with it.

"Where were you?" Delphi asked when she got back, "You've been gone for hours…"

She wiped away the tears from her cheeks, and tried not to make a noise in front of Delphi. The last thing she wanted was for her friend to start asking questions. She had to forget about Emma now and push her to the back of her mind. They had to get out of the tunnels. She knew the way out, and once they were back on the surface and had Delphi seen to, then she could start to make sense of what happened and why she did what she did. She stood up and walked over to her friend and put the panga on the operating table. She took Delphi's hands in hers and pulled her up.

"Electra? It… It is you, right?"

"It's me," she said, trying to sound neutral. She didn't want to give anything away. "I found the way out. It's not too far away, and if we run we'll make it out in a few minutes!"

“Great…” Delphi said. She wobbled slightly, and had to hold onto the wall to balance. Her friend was still disorientated, Electra could tell. She couldn’t expect her to run when she could barely hold herself up.

Electra had an idea. She took off her tie and then her friend’s, and tied them together. She wrapped the one end around her Delphi’s wrist and the other around hers. Now that they were joined together they would be able to make more ground faster than if Electra had to carry her. It made things a whole lot easier, and she was starting to feel better about the situation, before she accidentally thought of Emma. They headed for the door and Electra squeezed her eyes shut. She didn’t fight the image of the girl’s bird face. It would only make things worse. She wasn’t going to get worked up about it, once they were out it could drive her crazy, but not before. She reminded herself she wasn’t only responsible for her own life now, but Delphi’s life too. She only opened her eyes again when Emma had disappeared from her mind.

“Come,” Electra said, tugging the ties slightly, “We better get going, Malin said the ritual’s about to end soon.” She picked up the panga from the operating table.

“Was she… Could you trust… her?” Delphi said. She spoke slowly, and took her time pronouncing each and every word.

Electra wanted to tell her the truth, but knew it would only complicate things. “Yes,” she said, and opened the door. “She even gave me a panga. Let’s go.”

She followed the same route she had taken to get to the room with the projector, but it took far longer with Delphi tied to her, which Electra had expected. Her friend lost her footing a few times, and even tripped as they turned the corner after the twentieth door. She didn’t want to rush her, it was the last thing she wanted to do. But had they taken any longer the ritual would be finished by the time they reached the arch she saw in the film. Six girls had been chosen by the boy with red feet, to become potential vessels for him. She was the only one left that he wanted, and according to Malin, he had other plans for Delphi. They had to pick up the pace. She wasn’t going to bring some boy into the world. They were so close to getting out.

Finally after what felt like hours had passed they reached the projector room, and, refusing to look inside, Electra kept walking, facing forward.

“How are you doing?” she asked Delphi, who had been quiet since they left the room. She needed to get her talking, she was worried she’d lose her if she didn’t try.

“Okay,” Delphi said, “I can’t feel my face anymore.”

Electra stopped and turned around. Her friend’s face looked worse than what it had when she arrived back at the room. It looked infected and the wound dripped. She didn’t know how much time Delphi had left.

Why hadn’t the Celibate killed her? Was it because she had been picked by the boy to become his vessel? Obviously the creature still wanted her alive, otherwise Malin wouldn’t have set Emma on her. But if she didn’t want her to see things she had seen, wouldn’t it have been more humane to kill her right there in the room? Electra breathed deeply and thought it out. The Celibates, she had to remember, weren’t human anymore. They couldn’t be humane or think logically. They were under the boy’s control, like Doctor Hamilton and Lana. Nothing Malin told her could be trusted.

They didn’t have time to waste. They needed to get to the entrance as soon as possible. They continued to walk and finally got to a corner. Electra turned left, and in the near distance she saw the arch. She felt her stomach turn again and she quickened her pace. All they had to do was pass through double doors and go up a flight of steps. They were almost there.

“We’re close,” she said to Delphi as they walked under the arch, “We’re so, so close…”

Delphi groaned. “I can’t… We need to stop, I need to… rest…” she said.

There was no way she was stopping now, not with the end in sight. Delphi sounded exhausted, but they had to push through, if they didn’t they would be dead. “No you don’t,” she said to Delphi, tugging her along, “We’re nearly there. Rest when we get to the Prayer Gardens.”

“I… can’t go any further!” Delphi said.

“Yes you can,” Electra said, “You’re head girl, remember?”

A few meters away, through the dark of the tunnel, Electra could make out the double doors. Her grip tightened around the panga. It felt incredibly heavy in her hand and she wished she had something like a sheath that she could slide it into. She was starting to feel tired again but they couldn’t stop.

They got to the double doors and for a moment Electra worried they were locked. Malin could have tampered with them while Electra went to fetch Delphi. It wasn't something she would put past the Celibate, especially after the spiteful incident in the projector room. She put her free hand on the door handle and twisted it. Her heart stopped as the handle stuck, then after a jiggle it gave way and opened. She pulled Delphi inside and closed the door behind her.

The part of the tunnel they were in now was lit up, and the fluorescent lightning was sharp against Electra's eyes. After being in the dark for so long, she wasn't used to bright lighting and it took a moment for her eyes to adjust. They stung and teared up so she rubbed her eyes until the pain went away. When she opened them, she saw the staircase. It was similar to the one she had climbed down with Cha Cha and Delphi, when Sonali fell face first into the puddle of phlegm.

"This is it," she said to Delphi, "We're at the staircase. We need to climb the steps and at the top make a left. The exit is just up there somewhere!"

"Good," Delphi said. She sounded weak. "I feel… A little sick… And dizzy."

"It's from breathing all the shitty air down here," Electra said and yanked her friend forward. She was trying to be considerate towards Delphi, but she couldn't wait any longer.

They took one step at a time. There were fifty steps in total, and by the time they reached the top of the staircase she was exhausted. They stopped to gather themselves and Electra wiped a hand over her face. Already it was starting to feel warmer at the top of the staircase. They were getting closer to the surface.

"Are you ready?" she asked Delphi, who was bent over gulping in air. "We're right by the Prayer Gard-"

"Alright!" Delphi snapped. She placed a hand over her mouth, but removed it quickly as she vomited onto the floor. She retched and threw up onto her shoes. Electra looked away, the smell was terrible.

Delphi stopped vomiting. Electra placed a hand on her back and rubbed slowly. She didn't blame Delphi for feeling irritable, she couldn't imagine what it was possibly like for her to be blind, ill and stuck in the situation they were in.

“I’m sorry,” Electra said and gave her shoulder a small squeeze. “I don’t mean to be pushy, it’s just…”

“I’m okay now,” Delphi said and stood up straight. She brushed away Electra’s hand. “Where do we… have to go… now?”

Electra looked down the tunnel. After one hundred meters or so it made a sharp right. The exit was right there. She smiled, “We’re right by it,” she said, and took Delphi by the hand.

The two walked down the tunnel and followed it as it turned to the right. She saw the hatch and her knees started to shake. They had arrived. They were going to get out. They were going to live.

In her mind’s eye, she saw the spot where she and Phumla had sat and waited for Liezl to leave, it felt like decades ago when they saw her in the garden, naked and crazy. She remembered the last time they were by the hatch it was locked and she froze. She had completely forgotten about that up until now. Fuck. But surely if Malin had shown her this way out, the hatch would be unlocked? Or had the Celibate managed to get to the hatch first, and make sure no one could leave out of it? There was only one way to find out.

They walked up the last flight of steps leading up to the hatch and Electra told Delphi to sit down. She undid the tie from her wrist and looked at the hatch. Through the window Electra could see it was pouring down with rain. Drops beat against the tiny window. It could have been early in the morning, or afternoon, she wasn’t sure. The Prayer Gardens looked empty, at least by the hatch. There was no handle, so she had to push it open. If it was locked, she’d kill Delphi and then herself. She was beyond the point of surrender.

She thought back to how Phumla had attempted to open it. Electra placed her palms flat against the hatch and pushed. At first, nothing happened and she wanted to scream. Then, she heard a sucking noise and the hatch lifted up. She pushed it all the way, until it fell to the side of the entrance.

She looked down at Delphi who sat with her back to her, and grinned as rain pelted her face.

“We’re free,” she said.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Away from the hatch now, the two girls sat on the clay floor of a pottery shed deep within the overgrown garden. Delphi lay down on her blazer, and snored softly. She had fallen asleep almost as soon as they entered the shed, so Electra kept watch.

She yawned and rubbed her eyes. It was as if thousands of ants were crawling behind her eyeballs. Nothing had happened in over two hours, the adrenalin was starting to wear off. She felt sleepy, and more than anything wanted to lie down next to her friend and pass out. She thought about the others trapped down in the tunnels with them. Did anyone else manage to get out alive? And why hadn't Malin tried to stop Delphi from reaching the surface?

The rain came down in fierce sheets and lightening crackled through the sky. She drew up her knees and rested her chin on them. She hugged her legs tightly and tried to keep warm. She wanted to get out of the school, put as much ground between it and them as soon as possible, but in this weather it would have been impossible. Although it killed her, they had to wait until the rain became a mere drizzle or stopped altogether. The rain was like nothing she'd ever seen, even by Magaliesburg storm standards. At least they were out of the tunnels, but Delphi's face looked worse than it did underground. The mucus had turned a sickly green colour and it smelled ripe. Electra worried they wouldn't make it to the hospital in time.

As soon as the last drops of rain fell from the sky, Electra woke Delphi up and the two of them left the shed. The rain had cleared up nicely, and the nimbus clouds had moved on, but it was still really warm, and the smell of rain was overpowering. Electra looked over her shoulder in case something was following them, and opened the gate. She wasn't sure if Liezl was still lurking around, and she had shut the hatch as soon as she had helped Delphi out. Under the tiny window was a rusted wheel, which Electra turned until she heard a *click*. She checked twice to make sure it was locked, then guided Delphi through the overgrown trees and shrubs until she saw the shed. She had decided to lay low inside. The closer they were to the hatch, the better. If anyone unlocked it and came out to look for them, the last place they'd expect to find Electra and Delphi was in the Prayer Gardens.

The school was quiet. They walked through the quad and up through the Back Route. They were headed towards the parking lot behind the teaching block, careful to stay behind trees and bushes. They had to avoid open spaces as much as possible.

Electra nudged Delphi out of the way of the twisted root sticking out the ground. The path had become even more uneven since the storm and a grey mist clung to the skeletal trees. As they passed through the orchard behind Tears of Christ, Electra heard a noise. The radio she had seen on her way to Afrikaans was still on the tree trunk, covered in raindrops. It was still playing kwaito, though it cut out every few seconds.

She led Delphi to one of the evergreens and told her to wait and stay still. She stood next to her and poked her head around the side, eyeing the teaching block. They couldn't walk over the lawns in case something was watching them through one of the windows. If they were going to make it to the parking lot, they would have to go around the large building. Electra looked to her right, and saw the infirmary hidden behind more trees. If they walked to it from where they stood behind the evergreens, they could reach the parking lot without being detected. There were too many trees and bushes for them to be seen behind.

"Come on," Electra said to Delphi, and led her away.

They were almost by the infirmary when Delphi said, "I don't hear anything."

"Me too," she said, pulling her along, "It's like everyone's gone. Vanished."

"Dead."

Electra frowned and ignored Delphi, though there was a chance she was right. Although it was an open weekend for the girls to go back to their homes and visit their families, Our Immaculate would still be busy. Doctor Hamilton could have gotten rid of them, sent the rest of the school off on some 'spontaneous' camp trip to the Kruger while the ritual took place. Whatever the reason, Electra didn't like the school so empty. She felt dwarfed by everything, though being trapped below might have added to that. It was far too quiet, the only noise coming from the hadedas in the trees.

As they passed behind a large shrub and the back entrance to the infirmary, she stopped. Three hadedas were perched on the stoep, staring at them with black beady eyes. Their sharp beaks glistened in the dim sunlight coming through the trees. One of the birds flapped its wings but the others didn't move. It stopped and cawed. Electra couldn't help but giggle nervously. *They're hadedas for fuck's sake.*

"What's so funny?" Delphi asked.

“Nothing,” Electra said, and began to walk away.

Suddenly, the trees rustled above their heads. She looked up.

Dozens of hadedas sat on the lower branches of each of the trees around her and Delphi. All their beaks were pointed at the two. They were silent and staring. Electra gripped the panga and swiped it over her head at them. They squawked deafeningly and shook their wings. Leaves and feathers fell on them and Electra took off, dragging Delphi behind her.

“What’s going on?” her friend said. She stumbled and Electra helped her up. Raindrops caught on leaves fell to the ground. One hadeda swooped down at them and stuck its claws into Delphi’s back. She screamed and threw her arms around, spinning in giddy circles as the bird pecked at her head.

Electra swung the panga at its head and the bird’s beak landed on Delphi’s shoulder and fell to the ground. The hadeda let go of her back and flew into the trees.

“Hurry!” Electra said, taking Delphi by the hand. She ran through the trees and bushes, looking up every so often for hadedas, but they didn’t seem to follow them. Instead, the birds stayed in the trees and squawked. Electra could still feel their charcoal eyes against the back of her head.

“What the hell was that?” Delphi said, but Electra didn’t answer her. They were so close to the parking lot, she could make out Sister Geldenhuys’ dirty Ford parked in the corner. Delphi gripped her hand and stopped. Electra turned around.

“We’re almost at the parking lot!” she said.

“I’m not going anywhere… until you start fucking filling me in,” Delphi said, “In case you’ve forgotten… I can’t see for shit!” She moaned and sat down on her knees, cradling her head.

“Delphi, come on,” Electra said.

“No! I don’t even know where we are!”

“I’m sorry!” she said and bit her bottom lip. She had to be more patient, it wasn’t fair on her friend. Electra was so used to Delphi being the leader she didn’t know how to treat her. She had no idea how defenceless her friend felt. Electra couldn’t think of anything worse than

losing her sight at a time like this, though she was sure that whatever being a vessel for the boy with red feet meant came pretty close. She got down on one knee and placed a hand on Delphi's shoulder. "I'm really sorry," she said, "If you were standing in the front of the teaching block, we'd be on the far right, just by the infirmary."

"And…" Delphi said, "The thing that hurt me?"

"It was a hadeda," she said, "There were hundreds of them. I cut off its beak though…"

Delphi snorted. She lifted up her face and she laughed. "A hadeda?" she said.

"Yes."

"And you cut off its beak?"

"Yes, so?"

Delphi chuckled and wiped snot off the top of her lip. "Of course you did," she said.

Electra smiled. At least her friend was laughing now and wasn't in such low spirits. Maybe Delphi was starting to feel better, she thought. Then again, she did tell her she couldn't feel her face.

"Come, get up," Electra said and pulled her to her feet, "We're almost at the car park."

"But, the keys?" Delphi said, "Where… Where will you…"

"The nuns keep them on hooks in the teachers' lounge," Electra said as the two started walking again, the leaves under their shoes crunching with each step. "Being head girl, shouldn't you know this?" she added with a smile.

They walked up three stone steps and arrived at the parking lot. There were seventeen cars parked in rows of three and a tree grew in the centre.

Electra had driven a car once, on a farm her uncle, Cly's brother, had owned somewhere in the Free State. She and a cousin had smoked some bud and had stolen the keys to a beautiful Chrysler. Needless to say, they managed to drive the car into a dam and her uncle was far from impressed. There were no Chryslers in the parking lot, only old beaten up cars, except Doctor Hamilton's Phantom parked in a shelter at the far end. It always surprised her how their principal could afford such a piece of machinery, yet the bathrooms in Saint Petra's

decayed more and more with every passing year. She cocked an eyebrow and could feel the corners of her mouth turn up.

“Wait here,” she said, and left Delphi underneath the shade of the tree. “Give me a minute, I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?” Delphi said.

“Into the teaching block, I’m going to see if one of the entrances is open,” she said, and placed the panga in one of Delphi’s hands. “I’m leaving this with you, okay?”

“But what about-“

“Don’t worry about me,” Electra said, and patted her friend on the back.

After trying three of the back entrances, Electra was about to give up and go through the front, when she turned the handle of the fourth door. It was unlocked, and she walked inside.

She had entered through the kitchen in the teachers’ lounge. In the sink were dirty plates stacked on top of one another. Two flies buzzed around them and one of the taps dripped. The door to the lounge was open and Electra could hear the opening theme song for *Generations* playing in the background. She crept towards the door and looked inside.

On the big screened TV the opening credits were playing. The door leading into the foyer of the teaching block was open, but there was no one in the room. In the far left corner of the lounge were the keys. They hung from silver hooks under tiny name cards and she could tell a few of them were missing. She scanned the room once more and went inside, running straight towards the hooks.

She ran her finger over the cards until she saw Doctor Hamilton’s name. Her keys dangled underneath and Electra smiled. She swiped them off the hook.

Someone screamed behind her and Electra heard something shatter on the floor. Behind her was Lindiwe, the head of the cleaning staff, and on the floor by her feet, a broken cup and a puddle of coffee.

“Lindiwe,” Electra said and stopped. She didn’t know if she could trust her.

The woman shook her head. “What are you doing here?” she said, “Why aren’t you on the bus?”

Electra frowned and watched Lindiwe bend over to pick up the pieces of the cup. She poured them into a pocket in her white apron. Did she know about the boy with red feet? About the tunnels and Doctor Hamilton? Electra had known Lindiwe since she was eight years old. She was the only person to be kind to the students and seemed to dislike the teaching staff as much as the girls did. Electra bit her bottom lip and remembered the last time she foolishly trusted someone. A girl had been murdered. But if she could trust one of the fucking Celibates, what made her so uneasy about Lindiwe? Perhaps, for once, Electra was starting to learn from her mistakes.

“Well?” Lindiwe said and put her hands on her hips, “Don’t act like a stupid, why aren’t you with the other girls?”

“Where… Did they go?” Electra asked.

Lindiwe frowned. “To Camp Freedom, remember?” she said, “You did go to the emergency assembly right?”

Electra shook her head.

“There was a gas leak,” Lindiwe said, “Very dangerous, so you have to go now. I’m going to call Sister-“

“No!” Electra said. That was the last thing she needed. Lindiwe narrowed her eyes at Electra and looked her up and down. She frowned and put a hand under her chin. The coffee from the broken pieces was starting to drip from her pocket.

“Wena why you so dirty?” she said.

There wasn’t time to explain, Electra had to get out of there fast. She fought over telling Lindiwe the truth, or making up a lie. In the end, the truth won, but she had to be brief.

“Delphi’s sick,” she said, “We need to take her to the hospital and call the police, some girls have died.”

She started to run towards the door with Hamilton’s keys in her hand. Lindiwe followed her.

“What?” she said, already gasping for air as she caught up to Electra by the kitchen door. “Who died?”

“Lots of girls,” she said, “Lots and lots.”

Delphi was still standing under the tree with the panga in her hands by the time Electra got back. Lindiwe yelled when she saw her face. Startled, Delphi swung the panga around.

“Stop Delphi,” Electra said, “It’s just Lindiwe!” She took the panga from her friend and shook the keys in her hands. “I have keys. Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

“What happened to you?” Lindiwe said and backed away from Delphi.

“It’s a long story,” Electra said and yanked Delphi towards the Phantom. “Phone SAPS,” she called back to Lindiwe.

She pressed one of the buttons on the key and the lights lit up. She opened the back door and told Delphi to lie down. Inside the car smelt of old coffee and nicotine. It was spotless, with only a Bible lying behind the driver’s seat. Delphi got in and Electra shut the door. She ran to the driver’s side and pulled the door open. She got inside and locked the doors. She stared at the dashboard. *Now what?* She thought.

She heard a knock coming from the passenger’s window. It was Lindiwe. Electra rolled her eyes. She specifically told her to call the police, why was she still in the parking lot? She knocked on the window again.

“Hello,” she said, “I know you can see me.”

Electra sighed and got out of the car. She would have rolled one of the windows down if she knew how. She glared at Lindiwe. “What?” she said, “Delphi needs to get to Leon Boschoff! Can’t you see what she looks like?”

“Luister skat,” Lindiwe said, pointing a finger at Electra, “Do you even know how to get to Leon Boschoff from here?”

She was planning to go by what she remembered from the biology trip, but now that Electra thought about it she really had no clue. She wasn’t going to tell Lindiwe that. “Sort of,” she said.

“And do you know how to drive one of these?” Lindiwe said, and pointed down at the Phantom.

Damn it. Electra didn’t have time for this, they had to leave Our Immaculate for good. Finally after staring at Lindiwe she gave in. “Fine,” she said, “I don’t know.”

“Good,” Lindiwe said, walking around to her side of the car. She snatched the keys from Electra’s hand and motioned for her to go to the passenger seat. “I have a drivers so I’ll take us. We can call the cops when we get there, it’s not too far.”

Perhaps it was a better idea, since Lindiwe had a driver’s licence and knew where to go. They would get there quicker, but Electra wasn’t comfortable with waiting any longer to call the police. As she sat down in her seat, she slammed the door and opened the cubby. She hoped a cellphone or iPad was inside, but it was empty. Lindiwe turned on the car and the engine roared to life. She laughed, gunned the car into reverse and put down the hand brake. The Phantom sped backwards over the tar and its boot collided with the tree. Delphi fell against Electra’s seat.

“What happened?” she screamed.

“I thought you said you had a drivers!” Electra said, “What the fuck was that?”

“Baby,” Lindiwe said, and raised her finger in the air. She closed her eyes. “If you don’t want me to hit you, put on your seat belt and do not curse at me again. Clear?”

Electra put her seat belt on.

“I can’t see,” Delphi said from the back. She slowly lifted herself onto the seat and rubbed the back of her head.

“You do not need to see to wear a seat belt,” Lindiwe said, and changed into first gear. Carefully this time, she drove out the parking lot, and down the lane which led to the Western gate.

The car sped down the path. Trees, buildings and greenery were all a blur as the gate came into sight. Electra turned around in her seat and looked at Delphi, who’s head rested against the window. The crystalized phlegm made a dull *thunk* against the glass, but she looked as alright as she could. Electra turned around and looked into the rear view mirror. The teaching block was getting smaller and smaller. The hideous building was almost out of sight, and so was Our Immaculate. She thought about what she would do once they got Delphi seen to at the hospital and notified the police. She’d probably wait around for as long as it took Delphi to get better, and once her friend could see again Electra would convince her to leave Johannesburg and head overseas. They could visit Amsterdam, or live in a monastery in

Tibet. It didn't matter where they went, so long as they were as far from the school as possible.

"Now tell me, what's going on?" Lindiwe asked in Zulu. The car jolted as she drove over a pothole.

"Watch out!" Electra said, rocking in her seat.

"If I need advice about how to drive," Lindiwe said, "Then you can tell me to watch out!" She clicked her tongue. "What happened to you girls?"

In the rearview mirror Electra saw Delphi lift her head from the window. The phlegm on her face glistened in the sunlight. Her fingers were knitted together on her lap and she hung her head. "We…" she said, then sighed. "We woke up down in the tunnels… Under the school… Doctor Hamilton was there… Spoke on the intercom and there were things… They killed the others…" She took off her seat belt and lay down on the car seat.

Lindiwe looked into the rear view mirror and back at the road as the gate drew closer. "What is she talking about?" she asked Electra.

"Something evil is going on at Our Immaculate," she said and her fingers fumbled the seat belt. She wished she had a cigarette, she didn't remember the last time she smoked. She was anxious to get out, the gate couldn't have been further away. Why was it taking so long? Surely there was a quicker way to the Western gate, one that didn't involve potholes.

Lindiwe looked in front, as they took a corner around the swimming pool clubhouse. She shook her head and frowned. "You two are mad, you're on drugs," she said, "I think if there was something evil here I would've sensed it. I come from a line of people sensitive to the unknown. My gogo was a powerful woman who killed a fifteen-foot snake beast with her bare hands… It was one of the Devil's pets causing havoc in her township and eating little boys and girls. Then, my mother, she had the-"

Her head exploded.

Grey matter, blood and pieces of skull splattered everywhere inside the car. Electra screamed. Lindiwe's body fell against the steering wheel and it turned. The car rolled off the side of the road. Electra felt her stomach flop as the car knocked into the gate of the swimming pool and fell onto its side.

*

The first thought that came into Electra's head was whether Delphi was alive. She opened her eyes. She was on the tiles by the swimming pool. Her body ached and her head screamed. She coughed and spat out blood. She tried to lift up her head. It was painful and her neck felt as if it were cut in two. For a startling moment she thought it was broken, then realized if she could move it she was probably okay. She pressed her arms against the tiles and slowly lifted her body off the ground. Her insides felt torn to shreds. She groaned and got to her feet. She was shaky, and almost fell over, but she managed to limp towards the car wreck. The overturned Phantom lay by the pool and was on fire. If Delphi was inside, she had to get out before it exploded. She started to feel her legs again and made her way as fast as she could to the wreck.

The back seat door was open, but Delphi was not inside. She looked around the pool area and called out for her. She noticed a red patch growing in the centre of the pool and a body floated on the surface. Electra gasped. Lindiwe's body bobbed in the water.

She tried to remember what happened. She was telling Lindiwe about what went down in the tunnels, or maybe Delphi had… Then her head exploded? She wasn't sure her memory was intact, it all felt jumbled and made no sense to her. How did she even wake up outside of the Phantom, when she had her seat belt on? Had someone tried to pull her out, was it Delphi?

"Delphi!" she said, looking over the pool area again as the flames got higher. "Where are you?"

She heard a crumpling noise and out of the fire something rose up from the car. It was a girl, standing in the flames. Electra inched backwards, away from the car. She cringed when the girl jumped to the ground. Lana, unscathed by the flames, grinned at her. The car exploded, and Electra was thrown back. Her body collided with the bottom of the stands by the pool and the air escaped her lungs. She couldn't move.

Out of nowhere Lana stood by her head, casting a shadow over Electra's face. "Delphi is where she belongs," she said, and bent down. She grabbed Electra by the scruff of her shirt and pulled her to her feet. The air rushed back into her lungs but she felt dizzy and the earth moved under her feet. She toppled over, but Lana held her up. "Listen to me, Electra," she said, her golf ball pupils digging into the back of her skull. "We can't have you running away

like that again. The ritual is almost at an end. We need both you and Delphi down there more than ever."

"Lindiwe…" Electra said. Her voice was hoarse, "What… What did you do to her?"

A look of confusion crossed over Lana's face. "Are you blind like your friend?" She said and laughed, "I blew it off, which is what I'll do to you if you don't come back down into the tunnels with me."

Electra glared at her. She wasn't going back down to the tunnels, and Lana couldn't threaten her. The boy with red feet needed Electra alive. She didn't feel like she had broken anything, but her back was sore, she had a few cuts and bruises and her entire body ached. She had to act now, or face whatever torment Lana would throw at her next.

Without thinking, she pushed her towards the edge of the pool and ran towards the clubhouse. She didn't get very far, and was about to reach the door, when one of her ankles gave way. She moaned and fell against the clubhouse wall, and tried to push herself up.

Lana walked up to her and pushed her head against the wall and she closed her eyes. The girl was strong and held her head down against the bricks. It was as if her skull was about to crack open. Lana pulled her from the wall, both hands clutching her shoulders. Electra threw her head back and she made contact. She could feel something break against her parietal bone and Lana moaned, releasing her from the powerful grip.

Lana staggered backwards and slipped, falling down with a loud *thump.* She clutched her nose and blood gushed from between the cracks in her fingers.

Electra opened the clubhouse door and ran down the dark hallway, looking for an escape. She tried to open each door she passed but they were all locked.

"Running will do you no good!" she heard Lana shout from the doorway as Electra turned down a dark corner and saw an exit sign glowing in the distance. "I have eyes *everywhere*!"

Electra reached the exit sign next to a trophy rack and tried opening the door. It rattled, but something was jamming it from the other side. She pounded her fists against the door, cursing out loud. She heard footsteps coming towards her, so she stepped away from the exit and felt her way down the corridor. Why was it so dark? The deeper she went inside the clubhouse, the more impossible it was for her to see. Behind her, the footsteps came closer.

She walked with her hands outstretched, feeling the walls for a light switch, when the tips of her nails jabbed against what felt like a door frame. She bit back the pain as she fumbled for the door knob. The door opened and she ducked inside, shutting the door.

She was in a bathroom, similar to the one in her dormitory. She pressed her back against the door, praying she would find a way out. The light was on, coating the bathroom in a dull green and Electra could make out four cubicles, a large pipe nailed to the ceiling, and a sink. At the end of the bathroom were two windows, one already open. She ran towards it. Lana burst through the door as Electra climbed onto the window sill and jumped out.

The bathroom was further away from the ground than she expected, and she screamed as she fell into a rose bush, missing the spiked fence. She lay still for a moment, the pain from the fall and the rose thorns too much for her to get up and keep running. “Please get up,” she whispered to herself, “Keep running…” *But where to?*

She lifted her head. She would have to run to the Prayer Maze or the observatory. Maybe she could break into the stadium tuck shop if no one was around and hide out there for a while, but it was on the other side of campus and far away. It wasn’t like she had a panga anymore to use for protection. She would have to hide out in the Prayer Maze and figure out what to do from there, it was the closest to the clubhouse. She got to her feet, crouching down so Lana or anything else couldn’t see her, and removed a thorn from her palm. The coast was clear. She kept her head down and ran away, hoping Delphi was still alive.

She only got about three feet away when the boy stepped out from nowhere and wrapped his skinny arms around her waist. His grip was tight for a child and Electra tried pushing him away. He wouldn’t let go, and she could hear Lana’s laughter getting louder. Electra turned her head to see where she was, but everything started to become hazy and blurred. She felt exhausted, sore and drained. Her nose started to bleed.

She fell to her knees and the boy finally let go. She looked into his eyes, and fainted.

PART THREE

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I'm back in that tiny apartment underneath the store in Amsterdam. There are people around me doing drugs and flirting. A couple in a room in the back are fucking on a dirty futon. I take a hit from the horned bong and close my eyes. I allow the weed to take complete hold of me. I let go and want to lose control.

When I open my eyes, everything is silent. The people are lying by my feet. I'm standing up and I drop the bong. The water falls over the prostitute who had been shot. I bend over to pick it up, it's strange it didn't break. I stop when I see my feet. They're red, as if I've been stomping in a barrel of crimson grapes. The people lying by my feet are all dead. The floor glistens with their blood.

I want to scream, but I can't. I look up, and out of the back room where the dead couple lay on top of one another on the futon, I see the little boy. I don't look into his eyes.

"Why did you do this?" I ask him, "Why did you kill all these people?"

The boy doesn't say anything, not for a while at least. Then, with a deep voice unlike any I've ever heard, the boy says, "I'm hungry."

His mouth doesn't move.

He touches his stomach and rubs it, slowly at first, then faster and faster until his hand becomes a blur. Blood is drawn from the floor around him and it crawls up his feet until, like mine, they are red.

I feel something twist and dig inside my stomach. It's painful and it makes me scream. I fall over and hug my stomach tight, begging the boy to make it stop but he keeps rubbing his stomach and the pain gets worse. Something is alive inside of me. It bites and claws at my intestines and digs its way out.

*

Electra awoke, sweating from the bad dream. She tried to sit up, but she couldn't. She looked at her hands and saw they were tied with rope. She lifted her head and saw her feet were also tied to what seemed to be an operating table she was held down on, similar to the one in the room she had left Delphi when she went to meet Malin. She wriggled her hands and feet, but the bonds were too tight. She looked around the room.

She was back inside the tunnels, in a dirty room with a rusted door. The air was just as cold and damp. Someone stood in the corner and held the body of a bloody hadeda in their hand. The person dipped their finger into the blood and removed it, drawing hieroglyphs on the wall.

Electra screamed and squirmed. She had to get out, there was no way she would allow the boy, Doctor Hamilton or Lana to win. She had to find Delphi.

The person turned suddenly and looked down at her. It was Coach Vikus. She thought he had been fired. He was a large man, covered in grime. He grinned at her and from where she was tied down she could see a few of his teeth were missing.

He slouched towards her and giggled. It was a disturbing sound and it filled her with dread. He lifted the hadeda over her face and blood dribbled onto her forehead and cheeks. She shut her eyes and turned her head away, but she could feel the blood drip down her neck and into her ear.

“Get away!” Electra said, the blood falling into her mouth, “Leave me alone!”

Coach Vikus giggled again and when she opened her eyes he placed a grimy hand over her face and rubbed the blood into her skin. She bit his fingers and his palm, but the coach wouldn’t stop. All he did was laugh.

“Enough!” came a voice from the door, and Coach Vikus finally stopped what he was doing.

He removed his hand from her face and she saw Doctor Hamilton walk in, smoking a cigarette. She had a smile over her tight lips. She signalled for the coach to leave and he dropped the mangled hadeda next to Electra’s head. He left the room and slammed the door shut.

Hamilton stood at the head of the table and took a drag from her cigarette before putting it out in her hand, like she had done in Electra’s dream. She dropped the stompie and it fell to the floor.

“You’ll have to pardon Coach Vikus,” she said, “He’s been in the tunnels for some time, working on the dolls.” She laughed and her dead eyes shone. “He’s forgotten how to interact with other… humans, not that he ever has to again.” She placed two wrinkled hands on Electra’s feet and her smile disappeared. “In all my time of knowing him, I’ve never

questioned the boy," she said. The old lady spoke slowly, pronounced her words carefully, "Up until now." She walked towards Electra's head. "I will never understand why he chose you," she said.

"Who… Who is he? Where's Delphi?" Electra said.

"…Truth is, I've known him for years. It was only recently when he started talking to the others," her principal said with a distant look in her eyes. It wasn't as if she was looking at Electra, more like she was staring right through her, trance-like. "He saved me once. It was in 1978 and there was a protest at Wits university. It became chaotic and someone pulled out a revolver. People ran away and I tripped and fell. I was only in my twenties, I was as foolish as you are now. I should have been crushed, but he spoke to me and said I was protected. He told me there was something I had to do. He told me to come to this school. The boy with red feet has been at my side ever since."

Electra was losing the feeling in her hands or feet, she was tied down firmly. Her wrists and ankles hurt. "Why are you doing this?" she said. She was afraid to look Hamilton in the eyes.

"He has searched all corners of the vast universe for food," Doctor Hamilton said, "He is hungry and must be fed, but can only do so properly once he has arrived in our dimension. You see, human flesh would be too strong in taste for him to eat now or during the ritual, which is why the dolls were created. The dolls would eat the girls, the prey, and during the last moments of the ritual, they shall offer up themselves to the boy and he will take them to paradise." She put a hand on her shoulder and squeezed. "Your role is very important Miss Almacy," she said, "You have been chosen out of the potential six to become the vessel he passes through. Do not *fuck* things up for him, or I swear to the boy with the red feet, I shall kill you myself."

The old lady placed a hand over Electra's eyes. She felt dizzy and she thought she was about to be sick.

"It has begun," Doctor Hamilton said, almost soothingly, as Electra saw stars and drifted off to sleep.

*

The chanting woke her up. She could feel she was still tied down onto a table. She heard what she thought was a fire, crackling close by. She opened her eyes.

She was still on the operating table. People were standing around her in a circle. They wore long red dresses and Electra could make out the faces of Sister Geldenhuys and Unathi. The nuns held hands and continued to chant. A large bonfire roared near her table behind a statue similar to the one in her dream. The bronze statue of the little boy stared down at her on the table. She saw Doctor Hamilton standing by it with a knife. Delphi stood next to her.

“Delphi!” Electra said and tried to wriggle out the knots again, “Delphi help me!”

Her friend ignored her. She took the knife from Doctor Hamilton and took a few steps forward. The phlegm was still stuck to her face, but she moved as if she was able to see again. The chanting became louder and over it their principal said, “Bring in the dolls.”

Electra recognized the room from what Malin had told her in her dream. She was inside the circular chamber underneath the chapel. Behind the circle of nuns, a large door opened and Coach Vikus walked inside with Lana, who blew a kiss at her and grinned. She had a cut over the bridge of her nose where she had headbutted her. She was followed by Malin and Babette, the slug creature who killed Sonali and Phumla. The creature with eight limbs, the one Delphi and Phumla had spoken about, walked in, though now it was down to three arms and a long leg, and stumbled behind the other dolls awkwardly. Its limbs were sewn together and its face had a scar down the middle. The dolls moved behind the fire and, together, lay on the ground.

“Malin!” Electra said, but the creature didn’t look at her. The hole in Malin’s face looked up at the ceiling. “Help me please! You said you’d get me out!”

Coach Vikus whispered something in Doctor Hamilton’s ear, but what he said was drowned out by the chanting and Electra couldn’t hear. The old lady frowned and shook her head. “Leave them then,” she said, and the coach joined the circle. “We shall continue without them.”

Delphi made her slow way towards Electra’s head and the chanting became louder still, and fierce.

“Delphi,” Electra said, “Please… Get me out of here! What’s wrong with you?”

Her friend didn’t reply. The phlegm on her face had turned a pale red, and all she did was open her mouth. With her free hand, Delphi grabbed Electra’s jaw and forced her mouth open, and bent down. Fear gripped Electra as she tried to move her head, but her friend held

her jaw fast. Delphi gagged and began to retch. Saliva dripped into Electra's mouth. She had to get out of her bonds, she couldn't become the boy's vessel. She wouldn't!

Delphi's jaw widened unnaturally and something black fell from her lips and into Electra's mouth. Delphi pushed her jaw shut and Electra could feel the black thing worming around inside her mouth. She felt it crawl down her throat and dig deep inside. She was choking, but Delphi held her jaw shut and refused to let go.

"The foetus of the hadeda will be replaced by the body of the boy," Hamilton said over the chanting. The nuns and Coach Vikus, hands still joined, began to swing their arms. The chanting became faster.

Delphi let go and Electra gasped for air. She could still feel the bird inside her burrowing deep into her intestines. She screamed.

"Delphi!" she said, but her friend continued to stand still by her head. She didn't move. "Get me out of here… Please!"

The hadeda inside her started to claw and snap at her. The pain was horrific. She cried. Her stomach swelled.

Something thundered from above, and Electra looked up. The ceiling started to crack and bits of stone fell to the floor. Pieces of the ceiling narrowly missed the circle. The crack grew and grew until it looked like a dark gaping wound. Something, nothing like Electra had ever seen before, came down from the dark wound in the ceiling and hovered over the Celibates. She felt another pang inside her. To her horror Electra saw her stomach was getting bigger. She screamed for Malin, and for Delphi.

The thing from the ceiling reached down and lifted Lana up. It pulled her over their heads and into the dark gap. The fire roared. Doctor Hamilton raised her arms to the gap and her eyes rolled to the back of her head. Her mouth was open and her tongue flicked about, flapping over her yellow teeth and lips. The thing came back down, and picked up the spider beast. It took it back up into the gap, and moments later reached down for the slug.

Doctor Hamilton was on her knees now, her skeletal body pulsating as her tongue, longer than it should have been, curled around the side of her wrinkled face and licked the whites of her eyes. It wrapped itself around the old lady's head and licked her cropped ginger hair while her body rocked.

“Malin!” Electra screamed. Her stomach felt like it was going to split open. She twisted her hands and feet and tried to pull herself out of the knots. “Malin please don’t let this happen! Please!”

The slug disappeared into the gap. Malin got up onto her pincers and scuttled out from behind the fire. The thing from the ceiling was making its way down again, and headed towards the Celibate. The black hole in Malin’s face looked up at the thing, then at Electra. The creature disappeared behind her growing stomach.

“It is almost time for the caesarean,” Doctor Hamilton announced over the chanting, but how she was able to talk Electra wasn’t sure. Her eyes were black and she grinned widely as her tongue slithered over her eyebrows. “Keep chanting,” she said to the nuns and Coach Vikus, “Miss Makholwe’s role is almost complete! Keep her in the trance!”

The circle began to shout the chants. Malin continued to look at Electra as the thing entwined around one of her pincers.

Suddenly, the Celibate jumped back, and the thing recoiled.

What happened next was awful.

Malin charged towards the circle, and cut through nuns. Sister Geldenhuys’ head flew into the centre of the circle, and knocked into the side of the table. The others screamed and the circle broke.

The knife Delphi held sunk into her swollen stomach. Pain shot through her body as her nerves caught on fire. Electra screamed.

“Electra I’m sorry!” Delphi said over the havoc. She pulled the knife out and a black substance dripped from its tip. “It was the only way to stop it… Malin… Malin told me…” She dropped the knife and Delphi’s hands touched the phlegm on her face. She screamed and fell to the floor.

Electra’s stomach deflated almost as quickly as it had grown. As it shrank, she saw a black liquid seep out of the gash. Blood sprayed onto her face and she turned her head to the side.

Malin swung her pincers around wildly, slaughtering everyone who stood in her way. Hands, arms and heads of nuns sailed over the operating table. Electra saw Coach Vikus, his left leg cut off at the knee, crawling away from the chaos, wailing loudly.

That'll teach you, Electra thought, and the bonfire suddenly went out. The large gap in the ceiling started to disappear, and the thing along with it. Nuns ran towards the large door, and tried to open it. They banged against it and screamed and prayed, but it was no use, Malin pounced on them and cut them to shreds. She couldn't see Doctor Hamilton anywhere. Suddenly, a hand shot up from under the table, and Delphi pulled herself up from the floor. Most of the phlegm had broken off the one side of her face, and Electra could see her friend's eye.

"It came off!" she screamed, and began to cut the rope with the knife. "I can fucking see!"

"Get me out of here!" Electra said. She could barely move and her wound stung.

Delphi worked the knife through the knots around Electra's right hand and then her left. A rope of intestines, long and slick, slid across the floor by the bonfire and coiled around the bronze statue. The screaming died down.

Delphi cut the last of Electra's knots and helped her sit up. She pressed a hand against her stomach, and carried her off the table.

"Can you walk?" she asked.

Electra nodded. Strangely enough, the pain was slowly starting to ebb away, as if her friend had never stabbed her. Delphi moved her hand and Electra gasped. Only a jagged silver scar remained where she had sunk the blade.

"How are we going to get out of here?" Delphi said.

Through the door, came Malin's voice. Both girls looked at one another, and then at the Celibate as the creature flung Sister Unathi's abdomen into the ashes of the fire pit. *You'll go through a corridor which eventually makes a left. Follow it and turn right. You will be out for good. Go now before it's too late.*

"Let's go," Delphi said and ran to the large door.

"Wait!" she said and Delphi stopped. "Where the fuck is Hamilton?"

The buzz of the chainsaw cut through the air of the chamber and Electra spun around.

Doctor Hamilton raced towards her, her head wet with spittle, screaming hysterically, Phumla's chainsaw in her hands. She swung the chainsaw. Electra jumped back and fell over. Her head knocked against the floor.

"You little fucking cunt!" the old lady shrieked, and brought the chainsaw down between her legs. Sparks flew as the chainsaw made contact with the floor. "He was supposed to come back!" she said, "And he will! You think you stopped his descent? I'll find more girls, I'll make more dolls and he will feed!" She raised the chainsaw above her head and Electra put her arms over her face.

She heard a dull crack and she looked up. Doctor Hamilton's mouth gaped open. Her eye twitched. Her arms gave way and she dropped the purring chainsaw onto her own head. It cut her skull in half and blood sprayed over Electra's legs. The old lady fell to the floor in a miserable gory heap.

Delphi stood behind their principal, holding the bronze statue in her hands. Blood dripped off it and onto the floor. "Not while I'm head girl, bitch," she said. She threw the statue away. It bounced off the ground twice, before coming to rest in a mound of torn flesh which used to be Sister Geldenhuys.

Delphi helped Electra to her feet and the two walked towards the large door. Her friend opened the door and walked out of the chamber.

"Hold on," Electra said, and turned around. Malin had vanished. *Where are you?* She thought, *Malin?* There was silence.

She was gone.

Electra walked back over to the body of her principal and picked the blood splattered chainsaw up. Without looking back, she left the chamber and shut the door.

CHAPTER TWENTY

They walked in silence for what felt like hours. The way out seemed to take a lot longer than Malin suggested, and she was starting to get anxious. Had they taken a wrong turn? Impossible, all they had to do was follow the tunnel.

A drop of sweat ran down her nose and dangled on its tip. She sniffed and wiped it away. The chainsaw was heavy in her hands and it was making her back hurt. It was so dark, she could only make out a few feet in front of them. She prayed nothing was lurking in the darkness beyond.

“After the car accident, I woke up in a room down here” Delphi said, breaking the silence, “Before the nuns put me in that fucking trance I remember Coach Vikus saying something about some rejects…”

“Do you think there are more dolls down here?” Electra said.

It was possible, but with the ritual failing and all, would the rejected dolls still be a threat? Malin had disappeared after all. The dolls seemed to thrive off the boy’s power, but he was no longer here.

“There is that chance…” Delphi said, her voice soft. “Hopefully we don’t run into the fuckers.”

The left corner was nowhere in sight, and Electra could feel the exhaustion coming back. She didn’t want to stop now, but if they had to walk any further she had no choice. She was about to ask Delphi if they could take five minutes to rest, when from above their heads came a buzz and a fluorescent tube came to life, bright and sharp, filling the corridor with light. Electra lifted the chainsaw in front of her and stopped short. Delphi stopped behind her.

“What is it?” Delphi said, “Jesus you don’t think it’s those things?”

In the light, a few metres away, Electra could see the left turn. She was relieved, “It’s nothing,” she said, “We’re really close now, all we have to do is take a left and we’re almost there.”

“Thank God,” Delphi said, “Let’s just get out of here.”

At the end of the tunnel, they turned left and walked quickly. Electra turned the chainsaw off. She felt a quiver of excitement suddenly. They were going to get out this time, for good. Alive. The thought of returning to the surface after being sent back down had never felt better. When they got up there, Electra thought, they wouldn't waste time breaking into a car. They'd leave the school on foot. It wouldn't take them as far from the school as a car would, but with the boy gone it wouldn't be a problem. They'd probably reach Krugersdorp first, it was the closest town to Magaliesburg Electra knew of, where they could alert the police. She thought of heading back to Leon Boschoff, but the phlegm on Delphi's face was falling away in crusty pieces even as they walked. Delphi was going to be fine, and despite what they had been through, the wounds the two had weren't that bad. They could call the cops as soon as they arrived in Krugersdorp. The authorities probably wouldn't believe them at first, but with both girls caked in blood and one of them carrying a chainsaw concern would be raised and something would be done. SAPS weren't *that* stupid.

Another fluorescent light switched on above their heads. It was almost like the lights were working in their favour, it was about time something did. Or perhaps it was Lana, watching them at a distance, but Electra was being paranoid. Lana had been taken up into that gap in the ceiling.

Electra turned around, but the corridor was empty. They weren't being spied on, or at least, she didn't feel like they were. She looked back in front of her and in the outskirts of the pool of light from the tube above their heads, she saw a right corner half cloaked in darkness. That was it. The exit was close.

"Almost there," Delphi said when she followed Electra's gaze. They turned around the corner and raced down the corridor, their shoes slapping against the floor. They were almost at the surface, the nightmare was coming to an end. They would be free and-

Electra stopped in her tracks when she saw something floating further down the corridor, and Delphi knocked into her. The two girls fell to the floor and Delphi cried out.

"Quiet!" Electra said, and looked up. Had she imagined it? She squinted, and in the gloom she saw it again, coming closer.

"What is it?" Delphi whispered. Her eyes were focused on the silhouettes in the dark. Her fingernails cut into Electra's hand.

“I don’t know,” she said, as more fluorescent tubes in the corridor buzzed to life.

Her heart sunk when she saw the monstrosities in front of them.

Three bodies moved towards them, dressed in school outfits. They were jittery, almost mechanical. They had no heads, and instead of hands, large meat hooks gleamed at their sides. Each decapitated body wore the gold Celibacy rings on necklaces around their necks. It was them. The reject Celibates.

Floating above them, tied in a bundle with barbed wire were their heads. The barbed wire cut through their eyes and stretched over their mouths. The bundle made a soft *pit- pit-patter* as blood fell to the floor. The Celibates crept closer towards the two girls. Why hadn’t they disappeared like Malin? They didn’t make a sound.

Electra looked at her friend on the floor next to her. Delphi’s mouth was open and she was breathing heavily. There was nowhere to hide, there were no rooms in this corridor. It was empty, save for them and the Celibates, who inched closer and closer. Electra bit her lip. *We’re so close. So close. Why now?!* She knew it had been too easy.

The Celibates seemed to move in a circle of sorts, the bundle of heads floating in the centre. They were so close now Electra could smell their rotting flesh. It made her nose tingle and she gagged.

The Celibates stopped suddenly and raised their meat hooks. They stood there, motionless like obscure statues. What are they waiting for? Electra thought. They didn’t move. The headless bodies remained rigid, their meat hooks shining under the fluorescent lights.

Electra slowly pulled the chainsaw towards her and the Celibates snapped back into action, swinging their meat hooks in the girls’ direction. Electra grabbed Delphi and covered her face as the Celibates came towards them, before stopping suddenly once again.

Then the heads spoke. “Where… Are… You?” they said in unison. They repeated their question, louder this time, “Where are… You?”

The Celibates couldn’t see. They stopped because they had heard her gag, and because she had moved the chainsaw. They were standing less than a metre away from the girls now. Had they been able to see, Delphi and Electra would surely have been attacked. Electra burrowed her face into the back of Delphi’s neck. All they had to do was keep quiet and still.

The three Celibates jittered to life, turning to face the walls on the opposite sides of the corridor and shifted towards them. Electra watched as they climbed up the walls and onto the ceiling. The bundle of heads lowered itself towards the ground.

Electra couldn't believe her eyes, and it reminded her of what Phumla and the others had said about the eight legged doll crawling on the ceiling.

The Celibates started moving again, inching away on the ceiling above the girls. The bundle hovered over them, only a few centimetres above their heads. Electra cringed as blood dripped onto her and she shut her eyes, praying the Celibates would get away as soon as possible. She wanted to be sick, but she put a hand over her mouth and prayed the bile rising in her throat would subside.

The bundle of heads floated away, and she relaxed when the Celibates, still on the ceiling, walked further down the corridor until they were almost at the corner.

"What the hell…" Delphi said.

"Don't make a sound," Electra said into her friend's ear as quietly as possible. Her own heartbeat was pounding in her ears. "Get up as quietly as you can. They're almost gone."

Delphi lifted herself up, and Electra followed her, but as she did, the chainsaw slipped from her grip and clattered to the floor.

Fuck.

Electra spun around just as the bundle of heads screamed in horrific unison and the Celibates jumped from the ceiling onto the floor, swiping the air around them with their meat hooks as they ploughed towards the girls.

Electra turned the chainsaw on as the Celibates raced towards them.

"Faster!" she said as Delphi ran ahead of her, "Run faster!"

The heads roared.

The girls charged down the corridor, the Celibates so close Electra was afraid to look back. She felt something slice into her back and she screamed, almost doubling over, but managed to regain her balance. *Keep moving! Don't stop!*

At the end of the corridor Electra saw a flight of metallic steps. She sprinted towards it, as Delphi made her way up. She took two stairs at a time.

Electra looked up and saw the staircase led to a hatch, and she panicked. What if it was locked? There was no time to think about that now, whatever happened, happened. She ran up the steps, but as she caught up to Delphi, her friend tripped and her head smacked against one of the steps. Electra reached down and grabbed her by the collar, and lifted her up just as she saw the Celibates' heads fly over them. The bundle stopped right in front of the hatch.

Without thinking, Electra threw the chainsaw. The blade sunk into one of the heads, and the bundle screamed, spinning around in dizzy circles like an inflated balloon, a trail of blood bursting from it, the chainsaw wedged in deep. The bundle of heads drove into the three Celibates as they made their way up the stairs, knocking them over.

Electra took Delphi's hand and ran up the last remaining steps. "We're here!" she said, grabbing the large iron lock and twisting it. There was a loud *thunk* and the latch gave way. She cried out as Delphi pushed the hatch open and they both lifted themselves out.

The centre of the Prayer Maze had never looked so beautiful. The statue of Mary was gone, and the uprooted bonsai lay in a corner. The Celibates were making their way back up the stairs. She and Delphi seized the hatch, and raised it up until it was over the exit. One of the Celibates was about to crawl out when they let go of the hatch. It slammed down over the opening, and sliced through the Celibate's arm.

Electra got down on the hatch and twisted the wheel, locking it. She gasped in fresh air as the last few rays of sunlight shone down over the centre of the maze from the sky.

She sat on the hatch until the Celibates stopped scratching it with their meat hooks.

She laughed and raised her face to the sky.

The severed arm twitched by the hatch in a pool of blood.

Her laughter became hysterical.