

Prologue

Everything below her waist was agony. Even though he was across the room, she could still feel him in her, tearing her apart from the inside. She lay on her side, curled up to try to minimize the pain, and felt something warm and wet trickle down across the top of her leg just below her butt. She suppressed the urge to vomit, and instead lay very quietly, listening to him move around her bedroom, violating her in a new way as he examined and commented on everything he saw. She lifted her head slightly and chanced a look.

He was focused on one of the posters, paying no attention to her. *God, I need you now—please help me get out of here...* He took another step away from the room's door and her path to it, not looking back at all. *Please, if he can just move a little further away.* The monster took another step; he was standing by the desk now, looking at the pictures of her high school field hockey team. *Please, God, please...* Slowly she extended her legs, gritting her teeth against the pain inside her. *Please...*

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"I can't wait!" Shailene said excitedly, grabbing the light blanket on her bed in both fists, which she bounced off her concealed legs.

"Well, you're going to have to, because school doesn't start until tomorrow morning. And if you don't settle down and get some rest you'll be too tired tomorrow to want to be at school. Now—"

"Is the real school far from here? Farther than the kindergarten school?"

"Um," her mother paused, thinking. "Um, no, they're—they're about the same distance away. What difference does it make?" She asked, her tone changing from thoughtful to a mix of amusement and exasperation. "Now come on, settle down and say your prayers, and then it's lights out."

"Can I have another story first?"

"No, one story per night—that's the rule."

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In some stories I've read, usually the ones about magic, knowing the true name of someone or something gives you power over it.

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"Now say your prayers so you can get to sleep."

"OK," she said, finally giving up her attempts at procrastination. She clasped her hands, closed her eyes, and bowed her head. "Our father, who art in heaven, Harold be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses," (she always had trouble with that word), "as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen."

Shailene opened her eyes and looked up at her mother.

"Did you—did you say 'Harold be thy name'?"

Confused, Shailene looked back. “Um...yeah?”

“‘Harold be thy name’?”

Shailene felt her brow crunch up. “Yes!”

Her mother smiled. “That is so cute! But honey, it’s ‘*hallowed* be thy name’.”

“‘Hallowed’? What kind of name is that?”

Her mother continued to smile. “It’s not a name; it means ‘holy’.”

“Oh,” Shailene said, suddenly feeling dumb, but still not sure how that made more sense.

“It’s OK, baby,” her mother said, putting her arms around Shailene and squeezing. “It makes perfect sense the way you said it. And I’m sure God doesn’t mind you calling him Harold.”

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I wonder if that’s true, if I’d remembered his name when I needed him, things would have turned out differently.

* * *

He shouted and it was like a starter’s pistol going off; she launched herself off her bed; her feet hit the floor. She jumped over her mother’s body and was through the door, but he was already close behind her.

Please God please God please...

The impact from behind sent her flying over her legs, past the top of the stairs, and down hard on the polished wooden floor, her chest and arms absorbing the impact of both bodies as he tackled her.

“You *gash!*” he hissed in her ear. “You’re *mine* now! Can’t you get that through your fucking head?”

But Shailene was still running, her knees knocking against the floor helplessly, going nowhere. *Please God please!*

Everything went black.

One

I run down the dark hallway, get tackled from behind, but continue running, my legs flailing uselessly against the hardwood floor.

Now I'm on my back, pinned down. The knife stabs me: hot, hard pain penetrating my upper abdomen, just below my breast bone, driving for my heart, but stopping short.

The knife slides out, scorching me again. The blade makes a soft metallic clank as it hits the floor.

He straddles me, his weight pressing down, squeezing the air out of my lungs as he violates the new opening he's created, the deep, sharp ache making me want to throw up, but I don't. I'm too busy synchronizing my breathing with his movements: I take air when the weight lessens, and he forces it out of me again.

I feel the tip of the blade prick the thin skin on the inside of my forearm. My fingers find the handle; it's still warm from his grip. I pull it into my palm, and poise it, blade up, my thumb down, under my chin. In my head, everything stops for a long second or two and I see his neck, stretched and white, his head thrown back above me, oblivious to what is about to happen, focused on what he is doing.

The stabbing is wild, frantic, and desperate, but somehow, by chance, at least one of the blows finds its mark. Hot liquid sprays down on me, stinging the inside of my nose and forcing me to close my eyes.

I keep stabbing until his bulk presses down, trapping my right arm and the knife, suffocating me. I pound his back with my left fist, the only part of me still free to move.

He can't feel my punches, or anything else.

Rather than elation, I feel panic at being trapped beneath the corpse, soaked with its blood, unable to move.