

The blood pooled out from between my legs. I felt it before I saw it; a sudden heat gushing along my thighs, soaking into the wooden floor boards beneath me. Before looking down, I couldn't have guessed what it was. Until that night, nothing had ever entered or exited that orifice. And in that moment, what little energy was left in my body was focused on keeping me conscious.

There was a voice. Its owner was right above me, but the sound seemed so far away, muffled as it was by the ringing in my ears. I began seeing spots, just a few pinpricks in the corners of my eyes and then a barrage of them, thick and swarming, threatening to pull me under. I kept my glassy gaze as steady as I could, my sliver of sight fixed on the bedframe in front me as another wave of nausea threatened to topple me. All I wanted was to rush from the room, but the muscles in my legs had been reduced to jelly. I wasn't cold, but I couldn't stop shaking. The voice stopped. Its owner waited for a response. I didn't know what the question was.

The spots cleared away and I realized I was gripping the bedframe for support. Wordlessly, I returned the hand to my lap and it was only then that I saw the blood. For some reason, the first thing I felt was embarrassment. I apologized and asked for a paper towel. One appeared in my hand. I paused, unsure if I should mop up the floor or attend to the source. I chose the floor.

As I wiped up the last of it, legs firmly pressed together, highly conscious of the fact that it was still coming, another item appeared at my side- a bath towel. "Thanks," I mumbled, unable to meet the giver's eyes as I quickly wrapped it around my fragile flesh and slipped out into the bathroom across the hall.

It was only when I locked the door behind me that I could take a full breath. The white tile underneath my bare feet was cold, the sudden change of texture and temperature an unwelcome reminder that I was alive and present. There was a mirror just a few paces away. Normally, on a night like this, with a person like that, I'd take any opportunity to check my reflection to assure myself that I was presentable, perhaps even attractive. That night was the first night in eight years that I didn't care.

Instead, I made my way over to the open toilet and sat down, slowly unwrapping the bath towel, exposing the soft splotch staining the rough fabric. I wasn't crying. I don't think it even occurred to me to cry. Very matter of factly, I wadded up square after square of toilet paper and

gently dabbed at myself until the bleeding slowed considerably. When I was convinced I wouldn't be leaving a little red trail, I stood up and approached the mirror.

To my surprise, I looked the same. I don't know why this surprised me- nothing had happened to my outsides that betrayed the damage done to my insides, save for my blanched cheeks and the cold sweat still gathering at my brow. But my reflection seemed to exist independently of me, moving just a millisecond behind. Her eyes, not mine, examined her face, her hair, her mouth. The "I"s and "my"s in my inner monologue were replaced with "she"s and "her"s.

My memory of the rest of the night goes in and out, like an old video tape cutting to static and skipping ahead in the blink of an eye. Four years later, this is what I can piece together:

I come back into the dorm room. The gangly curly-haired boy on the bed casually tosses his phone aside and stands up. Words are exchanged, awkwardly. I am still a bit shaken. My eyes fall on my gray yoga pants, discarded on the floor near the head of the bed. I realize I had bled on them too.

-skip-

He and I are standing in the middle of his room. He is holding my trembling frame against his bare chest. He says it was an accident.

-skip-

We're outside. He's walking me to my dorm. My stained pants are stuffed in my purse; I'm wearing a pair of his jeans. He's a foot taller than I am, I'm holding the pants up with one hand to keep them from falling. His friends have invited him to a kickback in the parking lot of the middle school up the street from our campus. It's winter, but it's not too cold if you have a light jacket. He asks me if I want to come, and I say yes, I just need to change.

-skip-

We walk side by side, sit side by side, but I can't really look at him. I can't quite put the reason into words.

-skip-

I'm sitting on a thin picnic blanket on the pavement, a solo cup of some brown mystery liquid in front of me, surrounded by students I don't know. I scan each face, hoping for a familiar one, but come up empty. We're still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic; what would normally have been a fully occupied campus has been slashed down to 25% of the student body. He is surrounded by people he knows. My friends are nowhere to be found.

Among the clumps of girls, there is a boy taking pictures with a polaroid. He snaps one of me. I exchange names with a few of the people there, but I immediately forget them. It's early February. I won't see or speak with any of these girls again until the end of April.

I leave without finishing my drink. I say a quick goodbye to the boy who brought me here. He is unbothered by my sudden exit.

The dorm I return to is called Kobryn . The ten squat brown buildings were clumped together on the southwest side of campus, right around the corner from Bauer- the dorm I was departing from- and across the street from the fitness center. The front doors were glass, completely see-through, so there was little chance of hiding if you were home and in the common area. Normally I'd bypass the living room and retreat to my cozy cave of a room in the semi-basement, but that night my legs decided they wouldn't be carrying me that far.

I collapse onto the scratchy sofa and sit very still. Light powdery snow has begun to fall. I watch the little crystals twinkle in the light of the streetlamps until my phone's default ringtone breaks me out of my daze. It's Brianna. If it weren't for the pandemic, she would be here. The months that followed that February night would've unfolded very differently if she and my other close friends, Dylan, Kayla, and Moria had been there. Reflecting upon this years later, Brianna said that if she'd been with me then she would've insisted I go to the hospital. Moriah would've gone out for Plan B, Dylan would've contacted the dean or gone straight to the police, and Kayla would've packed an emotional support bowl and placed her cat, Clara, on my lap like a furry weighted blanket. They would have given me a much needed dose of reality, provided a shield

against the psychological warfare that would ensue. *No, you're not crazy. Yes, it was rape.* But they weren't there, so that didn't happen. In fact, Dylan, Kayla, and Moriah wouldn't even know until months after the fact. The only reason Brianna knew was because she happened to call that night.

Four hundred miles away in Michigan, she can tell I'm distracted. I don't remember how our conversation went, or at what moment she realized something was off. According to her, I sounded very strange: I was repeating the same phrases over and over again, voice tight, thoughts disjointed, words spoken so rapidly they often bled together. "I knew something was wrong, you didn't sound like you," she'd say, describing the call. "It was your voice, but somebody else was speaking.

By the time we get off the phone, I am back in my room and in tears. I open my diary, grab a pen, and fill out a page with an unsteady hand. Again, my memory is failing me. I don't remember the full extent of what I wrote, nor can I even remember in which diary this was or where it is now. But the final sentence I do remember because, in the midst of all my denial and confusion, this one thought was clear. In quivering letters, vigorously underlined: Jack Adler is pure evil.