

Sigils

I press a hand against the infection in my side—the thing that’s killing me this time—and feel the dull pressure of my fingers against the wet dough of my skin and count out my quarters on the linoleum counter. The gas station cashier takes my money and doesn’t swat away the flies sticking to her forehead.

There are small flasks of whiskey available by the register for a couple of bucks. You can buy liquor here if you’re underage, but only under special circumstances. Some children are whispered about in the post office, their names are spoken in Sunday school prayers, and their mothers bring each other sheet cakes in times of need. But my parents don’t go to church and they don’t own a kitchen aid mixer. So, I’m a special circumstance.

I have enough money for the whiskey, which I could drink to take the edge off, or use to clean the infection, I think. But that would require putting back the honey bun and Susie loves honey buns and I’m going to die anyway. No whiskey today.

When I get home my mom is sitting on the futon watching television and drinking Blue Ribbon. I lift up my shirt half way for her to look at it. “I’d like to go to the hospital,” I say. My skin looks like ten-week-old Wonder Bread, spongy and all the wrong colors. She presses it where it’s tender and I wince. “Man, up,” she says, which is something that women say to women, and then she goes back to watching television. This is good, I tell myself. This will be faster.

I find Susie in the backyard, poking sticks into the mud so that they stand up. She has piled caterpillars and berries in the middle and squished them to a green and purple paste. I ask her

what she is doing. She says she's making a sigil, for protection. I wipe the dirt from her face and brush my fingers through her matted blonde hair and tell her to be careful.

I hand her the honeybun and she defers it to her back pocket. She asks me to lift my shirt and I oblige. She studies the Wonder Bread mold for a while, then dips her finger in the caterpillar juice and draws a symbol on my stomach. She steps back and looks at it. "For strength," she says and then she opens her honey bun.

There are old and molding potato skins under the sink and some egg shells with them. They smell like dirt and decomposition and starch, which is what I smell like half the time. That is why Harold got us mixed up last time, me and the potatoes. I can hardly blame him for the bite or for the infection, which spread far too quickly. I attract things like this.

Opossums are nocturnal, but Harold comes out for me in the day time. I bring the potato skins with me and stand on cinder blocks by the trailer and tap the side of the coffee tin with my fingers and he peeks his nose out from the darkness. I drop the tin and he starts to eat. I forgive him for biting me and let him crawl up my arm and onto my back. Susie sees him and hisses. Her arms are covered in mud up to the elbows.

At dusk Eric, Connor, and Leo arrive in front of the trailer on their bikes. Susie stands behind me, looking through them.

"I want to go tonight," she says.

I get on my knees and look her in the eye. "I need you here," I say. "I need you to make more sigils. That's the only thing that protects me." This could be at least partly true.

"What do you do in the woods?" Susie asks. "I want to know."

"You will one day. And I'm sorry about that." She studies my face, then the blood and pus leaking through my t-shirt.

“I’m going to kill Harold for that.”

“None of this is Harold’s fault. You be nice to him and he’ll do the same for you.” Susie seems angry and unconvinced.

“Karry,” Eric calls from his bike, “You gonna have the balls to do it tonight?”

“I do every night,” I say, walking over to them. “You just don’t remember it.”

“Sounds like some bullshit to me,” he says. Eric owns an Xbox and eats generic cheese puff balls from a big plastic tub, so I don’t take his opinion to heart.

I stand on the pegs of Leo’s bike and hold onto the shoulders of his sweater. He smells like Irish Spring soap and baking supplies. I smile at Susie. Susie stares back.

We follow Connor, because he’s the only one with a flood light on his bike, the only one who can lead us through the suburb streets, with houses painted horrible shades of peach and sea green, and then through the woods. We are quiet and there is only the sound of bike chains and wind and sometimes Eric’s voice which grates against my insides.

“You have a new scar,” Leo says. “On your eye.” And he is right. Leo is the only one who notices scars.

“Don’t you remember the last time?” I say. “With the tree branch? Don’t you guys ever remember?”

“I try,” he says.

Connor leads us to the fairy circle. The boys dump their bikes by a tree and I dig into my pockets for my knife and for the Cherry Mash that I bought at the gas station. It’s been squished in my pocket. I hand it to Leo, because it’s his favorite.

“Let’s go home,” he says.

“Why don’t you homos kiss already?” Eric says. I want to scrape off my wonder bread mold and fill his mouth with it.

“Eric, you’re a homo,” Connor says. “Like, actually.”

“I know, Connor. That’s why I get to say ‘homo.’ You have to learn to take advantage of these things.”

I run my finger over the sigil on my stomach, tracing the caterpillar juice. *For strength.*

The monolith is just outside of town, by the lake that I’ve drowned in at least three times. It has three lines, three lines identical to mine, identical to the scar in my left hand. My mother knows something about it. There’s a reason she never wastes her money on the copay. I reopen the scar and let the blood fall in the fairy circle.

“Do you think it will work this time?” Leo asks.

“I hope.”

“Oh, come on.” Eric says. “She always bitches out, every time.”

“No I don’t, god damn it. You just have a selective memory.”

“Shut up, Eric,” Connor says. Connor doesn’t believe me either, but at least he pretends to. That makes him a good friend.

“Let’s go to the river,” I say.

“Oh, is that how you’re going to ‘do it’ tonight?” Eric puts finger quotes around “do it.”

I could just wait for the infection, but it will be at least a week more before it takes me all the way down. One more painful week. The water is much quicker.

It rained recently and the river is fast and its banks are soft, good for slipping in, good for accidents. The boys never believe I’ll do it, because they always forget. Leo says that he only comes with to watch me, to stop me. He thinks he stops me, every time. He thinks he wins, that

he pulls the batshit out of me and replaces it with sanity. It's a comforting thought. Connor doesn't believe in the criminalization of suicide. And Eric is there for shits and giggles.

"Let's go home," Leo says again, and he extends a hand to me. I take it, squeeze it, and let go. And I am very selfish, to drag them out here with me every time. To make them take my ceremonies with me, just so I can touch someone's skin before I have to go alone. But they always forget, I tell myself. It only hurts for a little bit.

"Okay," I say, "We'll go home." And I slip on the bank of the river.