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Obsession with Humanity

The tall buildings reached higher than the gray clouds. Snow was present on every green street sign. Hundreds of people walking on the busy street had every inch of their bodies covered, except their eyes. Nothing but eyes peeking out from fur coats followed me on my way to work. Southerners weren't used to snow.

I wore a single leather coat, thin gloves, and Vans sneakers without socks. The cold weather never bothered me much. I liked the numbing sensation it gave my fingers and toes. The smell of trash from the gutters made my nose crinkle. Several homeless people hid under their blankets, trying to capture every trace of warmth possible. I finally reached my building on Lenox Road. Working near Buckhead was strenuous.

I removed the top from my scalding coffee cup, and threw the top into a trash can. Steam escaped into the air. I walked over to the side of my work building and left my coffee sitting beside the rusted railing, near the side entrance. The entrance was almost completely iced shut, but with a quick twist of the handle, I entered the building.

I was working as an assistant editor for a medical journal named the *American Journal of Public Health* in Atlanta. A woman set up an appointment with me to publish a story about her father, who died of a rare blood disease. Her name was Camilla. I don't remember the name of the disease. I only remember being enthralled by Camilla. The second she walked through the door, I couldn't look away. Her tanned olive skin was smooth. Her light brown curls glided across her shoulders. Sweat cascaded down her temple. She had been late for the appointment.

"I'm so sorry again, Ms. Louis, I'm usually never late," she said.

“It’s fine, and you can call me Miranda,” I replied. I felt nervous, and I didn’t understand why.

I noticed a small gap between her two front teeth as she spoke of her father. Her face consumed my mind.

The interview was quickly over, but I realized I didn’t want her to leave. Her hair slightly masked her face. She pushed her curls out of her green eyes and stood up. She covered her bare arms with her pea coat.

“Well, I know you’re busy, but I would love to talk to you more about publishing. I’m interested in the field, and I bet you could teach me a lot. Here’s my number. Let me know if you’d like to meet for coffee sometime. I’d love to see you again,” she said. Words were lodged in my throat. She placed her card in my hand and walked away. I watched every confident step as she walked out the door.

Emotions never surfaced inside me before this. My fingers were shaking. My heart pounded at an abnormal rate. I nervously picked at the loose skin on my lips. I felt excited. Camilla intrigued me. I had to see her again. I had to discover why she made me feel.

I left my desk in a rush to get some fresh air. I didn’t even bother to grab my coat. I needed to feel numb. The cold wind blew in my face as I opened the side door exit. Goosebumps rose all over my arms. The dark clouds still refused the sun any life. Numbness consumed me once again. I could breathe normally. I retrieved my drink. My lips welcomed the frosted cup as I sipped my cold coffee.

How did she do that to me?

Things moved quickly with us. I started craving Camilla. I longed to understand her influence on me.

However, as she grew closer to me, I realized my stealth grew more important. My violent journal was tucked away. My knives were cleaned and stowed. My cherished leftovers were thrown out. Camilla was at my house so often. It was too risky. She could never find out about the animals.

I needed to stop. Guilt left my stomach in flames. Camilla was making me feel more and more. Emotions I never dealt with surfaced with each animal I hurt.

I grabbed my black leather jacket and faced the frosted night. My thoughts were too overwhelming. How could I ever become as pure as Camilla? She was so much more human than me.

Streets with differing levels of poverty passed by. Some streets housed immaculate mansions, with snow piling on top of the metal fences bordering the yards. Other streets held nothing but frosted trash in the patchy front lawns.

I had no sense of time. I also had no idea where I was going. My hot breath came out in clouds, disturbing the cold air.

A flickering street light interrupted my trance. A decaying street presented itself. The houses circling the cul de sac appeared abandoned. I turned to face the house beside me. The rusted mailbox bent at an angle. Gutters were overflowed with brown leaves. The dew in the limp grass was frozen. A cobblestone walkway led to the front door. There were a couple stones missing. All that was left were indentions of the lost stones in the dead grass. I approached the house.

Leaves crunched under my weight. I peered in the foggy window.

My heart rate slowed. I was numb.

My bare hands were steady as I twisted the front door's handle. A welcoming creak echoed through the house as I entered. Dust invaded my nostrils. Jagged pieces of wood lined the floor. Plastic tarps draped over the furniture. A grand piano with a broken leg slumped on the floor.

A large couch resided beside the piano. A family of cats slept peacefully on the dusted couch. A tabby adult cat curled around her three kittens. My teeth grazed over my dry bottom lip as I bit down.

I picked up one of the jagged planks without a sound and approached the family. I lifted the plank well over my head and sent the twisted end straight into the mother's neck.

As I walked away from the decaying street, numbness still overcame me. Camilla entered my mind again. I needed to see her. She would help. I needed to feel. Just the thought of her brought slight shaking to my fingers once again.

I approached Camilla's house, she lived on Sugar Creek Trail. A wooden fence surrounded her quaint house. The honeysuckle in her small garden finally bloomed. The two rocking chairs on the front porch were still. I knocked on the door. It took a few minutes for Camilla's pure hands to open the door.

"Miranda? It's nearly two in the morning. Are you all right?"

"Is it ok if I come in? I just really missed you," I said with my eyes on the ground. I tore the skin on my lips while waiting for her response.

“Oh, baby, of course,” she said while widening the door. Camilla grabbed my face and kissed me. My lips were trembling. I needed more.

“I missed you, too,” she said.

“I’m sorry I woke you, Camilla.” My stomach was on fire, but I tried to focus on her bronzed face.

“Aw, it’s ok, sweetie, come on up to bed. Let’s get you out of those clothes.”

I followed her up the spotless carpeted stairs into her bedroom. The only disheveled part of her room was her crumpled comforter. Her tall dresser featured a picture of her and her father. I still struggled remembering that disease.

She pulled the belt on her robe and placed it on the hook on her bathroom door. She climbed into bed. The light from her bedside table illuminated her bare, curved back before the blanket covered her. Her hair masked her eyes. Spiraled shadows danced around her wooden headboard. She covered her smile with her hand. My hands shook uncontrollably.

“What did I say about those clothes?” she asked.

I smiled and began undressing. My shaking hands forced me to stumble as each article of clothing was shed. I got into the warm bed.

Camilla kissed my lips. I hungrily kissed her back. I still needed more emotions. Her pure hands grazed my naked neck. Her breath now filled my nostrils. More emotions filled my stomach. I felt drunk. Her lips traveled around my body.

“Don’t stop,” I whispered.

Creaks in the hardwoods floors sounded with each step as I paced around my bedroom. Images from the abandoned house were tattooed on my mind. Thankfully, Camilla's influence was back inside me.

My innards cracked as guilt set my stomach ablaze. I walked over to my bed and felt inside my pillowcase for my journal's key. I grasped the cold metal and made my way over to my closet. I opened the chest lying in the shadows towards the back of the closet and retrieved my journal.

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I hurt an animal yesterday. A cat. The numbness controlled me again. I felt like my old self, and I didn't realize how much I hated it until after she was gone. I left the three kittens there. I shouldn't have done that. I need to go back for them. I went straight to Camilla's after I hurt the mother. Her purity was all I needed. I felt human again right after she touched me. I wish I would change faster. Emotions make things so difficult, though. I think it's worth it. I think I'm fully understanding what it feels like to be human. It's beautiful. It's pure. I want more.

My pen was halted by a strange noise outside. I dropped the pen into the center of the page and closed the journal. I grabbed my leather jacket and made my way down the cluttered stairs.

A half moon was peeking out from under the clouds as I stepped outside. I searched for the unusual noise. Underneath my kitchen window was a black starling. Snow crystals covered its frozen feet. The feathers were puffed and bent. The neck twisted too far. I tried to look away. I needed to leave.

I licked my textured lips. The cracked sores stung underneath my tongue.

The freezing air invited me out.

My house grew smaller. My thoughts distracted my feet. I allowed my feet to continue as the starling filled my mind. I obsessed over the still body.

My insides fought themselves as I tried pushing out the numb. My stomach lit with each numbing thought. I forced emotions inside. Camilla's pure bronzed face replaced the starling. My stomach slightly cooled.

I walked further into the night as my body fought itself. Snow started to fall. The bright street lamps illuminated each snow particle as they fell to the iced ground. I needed to find those kittens.

I returned home to my front door partially open. I wondered if I left the door open myself. The patch of carpet by my front door was soaked. Ice began forming on each fiber.

I walked into my kitchen and noticed my favorite bottle of red wine, *Apothic Inferno*, was open. The cork was still twisted in the bottle opener. Strings of wine swam down the bottle. There were small splashes of red on the counter.

I kicked off my loud shoes and journeyed up my cold stairs. I opened my bedroom door. Camilla's curved back faced me. Her shoulders hunched forward. Her glass of wine was spilled over my hardwoods. A puddle was formed around my bed. Damp red footprints travelled around my floors.

"Camilla?" She didn't respond. I walked over to her. Wine stained my feet.

Her slumped hair covered her face. I peered over her hunched shoulders. My journal resided in her still hands.

I snatched the journal from her fingers.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I’m sorry, baby, I just saw it lying on the bed, and I was curious. I didn’t mean to snoop, honestly,” she replied.

“How much did you read?”

“Pretty much all of it.” My face fell into my hands.

“Please don’t hate me. I couldn’t take it,” I pleaded.

Her shoulders straightened as she walked over to me. I could hear the spilled wine being crushed underneath her weight. “I could never hate you,” she said. She ran her fingers through my long hair. Camilla climbed into the bed and patted the empty space beside her. “Come lay in the bed with me.” I rested my head on her rising chest. Camilla’s tangled hair masked her closed eyes.

She wasn’t supposed to discover my journal. I was changing. This new love she showed me cooled my sullen insides. New emotions were greeted with each breath I tasted. The numbness inside was fleeting. I longed to be pure, like her.

My lips swelled as I ripped off more skin. Why didn’t she run? Why was she not scared of me?

I roused her shoulders.

“Why did you stay?” I asked.

“Because I love you, silly.” Patches of her green eyes showed through her hair. My head hit the pillow. I closed my eyes. She was so pure.

“I love you, too.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” She asked. Her lip slightly pouted.

“I was changing. I didn’t want you to see that side of me. I was becoming a better woman for you,” I said. She lifted her head off the pillow and kissed my cheek. Her curls wrapped around her chin. “What was that for? Are you not afraid of me?” I asked.

She laughed. Her hand covered her mouth. She was always insecure about her smile.

“Baby, of course I’m not afraid of you.”

My thoughts gave me a headache. I did not understand. The things I wrote were something I never wanted her to read.

“You know, your love was foreign to me. It made me think maybe human’s not such a bad thing to be,” I said.

“Oh, baby, of course you’re human. Your flesh is the same as mine,” she said. She placed her hand on my chest. Our chests rose together. “See?”

She came closer. She kissed my forehead, my lips, my neck. More emotions filled my body as her lips touched me. I craved more.

“Do you like it?” She asked.

“I used to. I always felt numb whenever I hurt the animals. But, then I met you. You made me feel. For the first time, I felt guilty.”

“Have you stopped?”

“Kind of. I hurt a mother cat a couple days ago. I saved the kittens, though.” Camilla looked me straight into my eyes.

“Why?”

I laughed. “I don’t know. I felt so guilty for leaving the kittens. I went back for them and took them to an emergency vet. It actually made me feel better.”

“Will you hurt more animals?” Her green eyes never blinked.

“I don’t want to. I want to be better, for you. I don’t want to lose you. I promise I won’t hurt anymore animals. I promise.” I laid my head back on her chest. I needed to be close to her.

“I want to help,” she said.

“What? Don’t you want me to stop? I don’t understand.”

“No, I want to kill with you. Please show me how.” She further confused me. How could she want that?

I misread her. She wasn’t pure. Maybe these emotions she filled inside me were only masking the truth from me: she lusted for blood as well. The numbness tumbled back into my body stronger than ever before. My emotions completely cut off.

I needed blood.

I pushed Camilla’s shoulders back and got on top of her. Her hair covered the pillowcase. I looked into her naked face. She smiled. I would never forget the small gap between her teeth.

I sunk my teeth into Camilla’s neck. Her neck snapped underneath my palm. Strings of blood dripped down my chin. She was poisonous. She was tainted.

She could never make me feel human again.