

(Work in Progress)

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Creative Writing

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### Lost in the Woods-Part 3

Everything was blurry, and my feet were having trouble supporting my weary body. The white beam from my flashlight cut through the darkness like a knife through butter. Except the butter kept coming back with each slice. I tried (and failed) to control my ragged breaths. The woods were alive with the sounds of animals: crickets, owls, and in the distance... Pigs. This time they weren't frenzied squeals though. I stumbled forward, each shadow making me jump back and whimper. *My bag—I've lost my fucking bag!*

None of this made sense. There was no way that *thing* that had chased me was real. It had to have been a man—a freak—yet just a man. Not a pig man, or some hybrid. That shit only happened in the movies.

As I tripped over tree roots and bumbled my way forward (going nowhere), I came to a sudden halt. A realization had hit me, and I didn't know what to do, how to act. I did a quick 360, nothing but seemingly identical trees greeted me in every direction. I was lost; there was no denying it. But my friends... They were gone too.

*What do you do Rebecca? Look for them or save yourself?*

Tears tried to force their way from my eyes, but nothing followed the burning sensation.

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“Take a deep breath. They’re fine. They’re fine,” I whispered to myself. Someone I didn’t know was speaking for me. Someone hoarse with fear and confusion, their voice weak, their brain struggling to formulate any kind of plan. I shook myself. I needed to focus or else I was as good as dead.

Holding my flashlight like a weapon, I pushed forward. Each tree was a man, every shadow a knife reaching for me. The pain in my body was indescribable, yet it was numbing. Maybe my adrenaline was finally kicking in. Every hair on my body was raised, breathing stung my nose, and my eyes strained against the blankets of darkness before me. My senses were all in overdrive. I tasted blood in my mouth but ignored it; I had more immediate problems.

That’s when it hit me. The stench of rotting food. Sour milk, bad meat, possibly rotting fruit. It masked the pine scent in overpowering waves, making me gag. I stepped through a small stream. It ran red with my blood, and I stopped at the sight of something clinging pitifully to a stone in the stream. I took the piece of fabric off the algae covered stone, my heart skipping a beat at the sight of it.

“Josie,” I whispered. Her headband was ripped, but the pattern of flowers was still visible. Blood covered part of it, and my heart dropped into my stomach. *She’s hurt.*

I shoved the headband in my back pocket and jogged forward. Above me, something flew out of a tree causing leaves to fall to the forest floor. I couldn’t see any footprints, but Josie must’ve come this way. She had to be alive. I knew she was still alive. I couldn’t accept anything else.

That’s when I found the source of the stench. As if formed from the darkness itself, a small house appeared in front of me. The roof was the first thing my light’s beam licked and

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judging by the state of this place it had been abandoned a long time ago. Perhaps it was an old hunting shack?

The roof was caved in around the middle, and a thick coat of leaves covered it and the surrounding area. The bug eaten boards of the house stuck out in odd angles, exposed nails just waiting to slice me open. The door moved gently on its hinges, swinging with a breeze I didn't feel. A shiver ran through me at the sight of the place, but I continued forward. I could stop here... Assess my injuries. As I continued forward though, my feet began crunching against not only the dead leaves, but also the bones of dead animals.

That's when I spotted the fenced off pen. It was small—so much so that it nearly blended in with the overbrush that threatened to hide it completely. The smell was definitely coming from the pen, and I could hear pigs snorting lazily in the darkness. *A pig farmer? Out here?*

I was quickly realizing that this *wasn't* an old hunting shack, and it *wasn't* safe to be here at all. Pigs weren't a good sign. Yet, I couldn't stop going forward towards the place. Something was drawing me in, a gut feeling that despite the danger—this is where I needed to be right now.

I gripped the hand holding the flashlight in an attempt to steady it. The beam was shaking all over the place. *Calm down Rebecca. Come on now.*

I reached the door. It swung into my hand.

The pigs snorted from their cage. One let out a small squeal.

I opened the door, its metal handle leaving rust marks on my skin. Shutting my eyes for a second, I trained the light inside and took a breath.

The pigs had gone silent.

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The interior was trashed. It mirrored the general look the exterior had. Dead plants were intermixed with vines and shrubs in the broken floorboards below. A ratty nest of blankets and sleeping bags had been set up in a corner that still had roof covering it. The rags were covered in blood and unidentifiable yellow fluids. I had to cover my face with my hand, as the smell of rotting meat was becoming unbearable here.

“Hello?” I said, my voice barely audible, even for me. As I stepped further in, I noticed the spiders. They were everywhere in here. Some dangled from webs, others scurried along and throughout the hollowed walls, and some were running across my feet, their speed making them look like nothing more than brown blurs.

I couldn’t stay here. I don’t know why I came here in the first place. I stepped back but found that I couldn’t move. I bumped into what I thought was a wall of the shack, but the force that threw me forward told me that it was no wall. That’s when I heard it. Flies. The buzzing had returned. My skin crawled with fear.

My face stung as the flies bit me.

I’d fallen into his bed. His hovel smelled like vomit. I gagged, forcing myself to look back. My flashlight found him, the beam attracted to him with magnetic force.

Towering above me was an abomination. A crime against nature. My brain didn’t believe the information my eyes were giving it. I stared numbly at him, equally disgusted and horrified.

Long black stitches kept the wrinkled rotting skin attached to his face and neck. Maggots squirmed from open pores along his skin, pus and blood oozed from the hollows they’d made. I couldn’t see his face—it was obscured by the decaying pig head he’d sewn to himself. Two dark holes where the eyes should’ve been stared down at me. The mouth was open, allowing flies

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easy entry and exit. He wore a tattered jacket covered by a bloody apron. It had a smiling old woman designed on it, but her eyes had been cut out. His arms were leathery looking tree trunks, infested with worms. In his hand was a dirty meat cleaver, the blade chipped deeply in spots. His nails were thick and long and caked in mud. He cocked his head, a small snort escaping his mask.

Taking all of this in, I vomited on myself. My bladder went, and I felt myself shaking. Bells. Did I hear bells? Impossible... Yet their melancholy echo rang around the edges of my mind.

Another fly bite.

The Pig Man roared with fury, the loose boards shaking. The pigs behind him began screaming. The air was once again a cacophony of madness. The flies began swarming as the bells reached a crescendo. I rolled to my side, blinded with fear, shaking from head to toe. Nothing made sense. I was running on pure instinct. I was nothing more than a scared animal.

On the wall, hanging awkwardly above a ruined dresser. A shotgun. Or at least what looked like a shotgun. My panicked brain couldn't tell what it was. I flew forward, narrowly dodging a wild swing from his cleaver. His squeals sounded excited now. I didn't stop to see what was happening behind me. My ears were filled with the sounds of everything that shouldn't exist. The bells rang louder, trying to raise me to heaven with each ring.

The trigger wouldn't pull. Something was wrong. I struggled to keep the heavy weapon pointed at the Pig Man.

Flies inside my ears. Flies inside my skin. Everything hurt.

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The trigger was stuck. He walked forward, a stitch on his meaty neck coming undone. His muscles flexed. I dropped my flashlight.

The screams of the pigs had become my own. My throat ripped with every brutal shriek that escaped me. I backed up into a wall and felt a nail dig into my shoulder, but I was already crying.

My thumb hit a knob on the side of the gun. I jammed my finger against the small steel trigger. It depressed completely.

The bells stopped ringing. The flies flew back as chunks of their master hit the wall behind him. The gun jerked in my arms, hitting my right shoulder like a battering ram. I was shoved back, the nail going deeper into my other shoulder.

The trigger wouldn't pull. Frenzied my hands felt the gun. A shotgun. Pump. Pump shotgun. Just like in the games my brothers played.

"FUCK!" I screamed, a shell blowing past me. The gun shot back again, this time the pellets hitting below the Pig Man's feet. Parts of the floor were blown away, leaving smoking plants in their wake.

Now *he* was screaming. A deep guttural cry, very unlike the pigs. My heart pounded in my head. *PUMP*.

Another shot. This one blew him out of the doorway. The nail couldn't go any farther into my arm. I tugged myself off the wall, stopping only to grab my flashlight. Still blinded with white hot fear, I stumbled outside, stepping through pools of his blood and flesh.

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Still standing was the Pig Man. A gaping red crater had formed on his chest. Now the old woman's head had been removed entirely. I watched in confused horror as hordes of flies forced themselves into his wounds. His flesh writhed with them. I saw them moving under his skin, armies of fat black shapes squirming and writhing. Maggots fell from his arms and mask as he doubled over, one arm clutching the fence of the pigpen, the other loosely holding onto the cleaver. *PUMP*.

This shot knocked me to a sitting position. My wrists were in agony from the kick of the gun. I felt warm liquid pouring down my back. Each pump of my heart forced more blood out, but now *I* was the one with the upper hand. The Pig Man was blown through the ramshackle fence and into the pen. I moved myself away as fleshy sounds and the grunts of the pigs filled the dead silence left from the gunshots. He screamed... This time not in fury—but in pain. The pigs... His pigs were *eating him*. I sat petrified in a bed of dead plants, watching his feet twitch with each *rip* of meat. Something inside me went off, and I scrambled to my feet and sprinted into the woods laughing and crying.

...

I sat shaking, trapped in the confines of the questioning room. The walls seemed to compress closer each day, and I wondered if I'd die in here. Adrian looked at me, his eyes scanning my own, as if he was trying to see information swimming around my soul. Retelling the story over and over again... How long had I been here?

"Doctor, how long have I been at this hospital?" I asked, my voice distant. Adrian frowned.

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“Weeks. Months maybe. What happened after you ran away Rebecca? You said before that the Pig Man, that he... Pursued you?” Adrian asked. I noticed that he’d begun sketching things in his notebook. A twisted figure holding a cleaver—the Pig Man. A horrible black shape surrounded by flies. I couldn’t tell what that was.

“Yes, YES. LOOK. Listen, we already went over this. Please,” I pleaded.

“How Rebecca. How was he alive?”

“I don’t know.”

“How did you escape? Where is Josie? Ashley? Michelle?”

“I DON’T KNOW!” I screamed. Silence followed the outburst, heavy and cold. Adrian’s pen clicked.

“Weird how the human brain works, wouldn’t you agree?” he said. I must’ve misheard him though. That comment didn’t make sense.

“Excuse me?” I asked, my head beginning to throb now.

“Sorry if I was unclear Rebecca, I asked you what happened in the abandoned mines. You said you killed the Pig Man there, er—killed him again. That’s where you broke your arm, correct?” He looked at me with crystal clear eyes, his fist raised to his mouth.

“Yes, like I said before, there was a collapse. My arm was crushed by a-a rock, o-or something,” my eyes darted to his pen as it sketched out a rock hitting a stick figure, “the Pig Man, I managed to wrestle him away, and he fell deeper into the mine. I never saw him again.”

“Did you love her Rebecca? Josie, that is?” My heart skipped a beat.



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“What?”

“I asked if you were alright. We can always take a break you know,” he said. His words were carefully chosen. I blinked.

“Okay. Yeah. A break sounds good,” I said back. He nodded. I watched him message the nursing staff. Several expressionless blue uniformed nurses walked in almost immediately, two taking each of my arms and standing me up. My head hadn’t felt this clear in a long time. I was led past Adrian and through a maze of unremarkable gray and green halls. I couldn’t see past the fog outside, and honestly, I had no idea what time it was. No one spoke. I saw two police officers motion towards me.

One, a cleanshaven redhead, grinned at me. I distinctly heard him mimicking a pig. Shutting my eyes, I tried to focus on not throwing up.

### Epilogue-Adrian

My name is Adrian Abrams. I can’t quite remember the name of this hospital, or even the people who work here. Day in and day out, I see Rebecca Winters, alleged murderer. I don’t remember what my bed looks like, if I own a house. My work has become my life. I am a doctor. I protect people. I protect her.

I watched as the two policemen made fun of Rebecca. This whole case had become a witch hunt, and the people had found their witch.

A rainstorm started outside the hospital, its already featureless grounds becoming covered in thick plumes of fog and rain. The windows rattled in the wind.

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I followed the nurses who escorted Rebecca. Watched as she faked taking her meds. We passed her room. Had she been moved?

And so, we walked.

The tiles cracked under my steps. I'd have to call someone about that. This hall... It was rather long. We passed countless rooms. Some had their number plates falling off or gone completely. Others were left open. I ignored the bodies I saw inside of them. Rebecca's safety was all that mattered. I wouldn't let the people burn her at the stake.

The walls were covered in vines. This part of the hospital definitely needed a facelift.

Somewhere in the world, there was a group of campers hiking through the woods. They probably didn't read the news. The woods aren't safe anymore. Strange isn't it? Forests have always represented *life* in art. They represent growth, rebirth, love, and tranquility. In World War I, British soldiers idealized the woods, wished nothing more than to live with their families in secluded forests or prairies.

I followed behind Rebecca, my hands brushing against the trees.

What happened though, when the leaves went from green to red? Not with the passing of the seasons, but instead, with the passing of life? Death is an artist too. Blood is his paint, bones are his tools, and flesh is his canvas.

Within each of us lives an artist, whether we want to believe it or not.

My office. The lights were all off, the computer was powered down, and my water dispenser had run dry. The walls were bare, save for a small mirror behind my desk. It had a

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handcrafted frame, and a small crack scarred the top left corner of it. I felt no fear. Perhaps I didn't fear death, just like Rebecca.

I walked to the mirror, each step echoing in the distance of the empty hospital hallways. It was hard to see well in this dim lighting. I looked down and was startled to see that I was no longer in my uniform. A white hospital gown covered me now. I felt my arm throb. Who had put me in this?

"Adrian, who are you?" Rebecca asked. I finally reached the mirror. When I leaned forward, Rebecca stared back. I moved my hand to my brow. Rebecca did the same.

I heard the bells now.

...

### **The Woman**

Rain. The sky mirrored the woman's mood. She parked rather quickly, splashing the white truck next to her with dirty water. Hopefully the owner didn't notice, but she didn't care much. She pulled an umbrella from the backseat and got out of the car, slamming the door a tad too hard. It was like this every time.

Each month she raced here, desperately wishing for some kind of change. No one understood it. Maybe they'd all given up, but she sure as hell wasn't going to do that. Thunder boomed overhead, briefly covering the clicking of her heels. She didn't care much for heels, but these boots made her feel more intimidating in ways. Not that it was going to help. Nothing

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helped when your greatest wish in life was impossible to grant. No amount of praying would help her, no secret magic tricks.

The Pinewood Mental Institute was a fine building. If someone drove past on the highway, they might even describe it as beautiful—inviting even. In a society full of ghost hunters and paranormal movies, Pinewood attempted to break the stereotype of haunted asylums. Their patient care was top notch, or so they said. A couple of months ago, they'd gotten a case deemed unsolvable. No one knew what had happened, how it happened, or how to cure it. It was coined a medical mystery.

Still though, the woman could not deny the fact that Pinewood had tried their best. The massive steel and glass structure seemed to be welcoming her through the main doors. She imagined it like walking through the doors of a funeral home every time she came here. Yet, maybe death would be better.

She greeted Harry, the receptionist. They knew one another on first name basis' now. His favorite color was green, and he'd once dated a stripper. Or that's what he said anyway. Pleasantries were exchanged, and he gave her the visitor's badge. A burly looking guard touched her arm and motioned towards the nearest elevator. She was no stranger to the layout of this building. She found it frustrating that the staff still had to walk everywhere with her.

"Right this way ma'am," the guard said. She merely nodded in return as she stepped into the small brown tiled elevator. The floor shined with polish, which she quickly muddied with her wet boots.

*Ding.*

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The elevator began its slow climb up. She closed her eyes, dreading what would happen next. Funny how that worked. The reason she came here was the same reason she feared this place, hated it even. It was why she walked through the doors every month, and why she walked right back out every time.

The silver doors opened. She smiled at the bony doctor that stepped inside the elevator. The doctor had short brown hair, and if she didn't use creams and makeup, her age would be beginning to show. She was a thin woman with a firm grip. She often chose to carry a briefcase, which was no different today.

"Dr. Weber," the woman said.

"Josie," the doctor replied.

*Ding.*

"Any improvements?" Josie asked miserably. A long pause.

*Ding.*

They stepped off the elevator. The low murmurs of this floor always made Josie's skin crawl, although it was nothing more than doctors talking quietly with patients, or patients spending time in the open ward together. Josie's boots clicked along the polished flooring, cracking the subtle sound of the place with each step.

"I, I'm sorry Josie. Your friend has gotten considerably worse," Weber said. She seemed to be choosing her words carefully. Josie felt her eyes burn, but no tears came.

"How—how so?" she asked, trying to keep her composure.

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“Well, last night, she fell into a coma. We’re getting very low brain activity. I’m afraid if this keeps up, she’ll be in a vegetative state,” Weber explained. Josie sniffled, but tried to pass it off as a deep breath.

“Why? What went wrong?” she asked, but she already knew the answer. They wouldn’t know. They never did.

“As of now, it’s hard to determine what caused the coma. She’s in the care ward now, but we wanted to ask *you* a few questions before you went up to see her,” Weber said. Josie nodded. They were going to *her* room.

“Fine,” she said simply. The two walked in silence for a few brief moments. They passed the open ward, but Josie refrained from looking inside. They took a left turn and walked for a few more steps, until they stopped outside Room 12.

Josie didn’t know what to expect. Was it going to be a mess? Had the staff left things as they were? What could they possibly want from her?

Weber opened the door, revealing the room of Rebecca Winters, Josie’s best friend.

It looked surprisingly normal.

The bed was made, and the place was clean. The walls were bare, as usual. Becca didn’t like too many things crowding the place up. Weber stepped forward and hurried to Becca’s night table. On it was a sketchbook. Josie had seen it before. After... After *it* had all happened, Becca had taken quite a liking to drawing beautiful scenes of forests and farms in her book. She’d never been a big artist in school or anything, but after... after *it* happened, it became her only pastime.

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“The last few pages are—well—they’re rather disturbing. Please, if these sketches mean anything to you, anything at all—”

“Let me see them, please,” Josie said. Weber handed over the book. An electric shock went through Josie when she picked it up. This book, this was Becca’s lifeblood in this place. She put her soul into these drawings. She thumbed the book open. The first sketch was of the campsite. Josie easily spotted her own tent. The tears welled in her eyes now.

She skipped to the most recent drawings, and her heart dropped. Gone were the tranquil scenes of nature and camping that Becca had been drawing before. Josie covered her mouth with one hand, horrified by what she saw.

The first image was an arm—presumably Becca’s—covered in large flies. She saw that Becca had drawn herself to be bleeding. Were the flies biting her?

Next, she saw a large figure, this scene almost childlike in how it had been drawn. The figure towered over a featureless stick figure and had the head of what looked like a pig. It had a knife of some kind raised towards the huddled stick figure below it.

“It’s been like this for weeks. Rebecca stopped talking to me. She also stopped drawing your other friends. After they... Well...”

“Stopped coming to see her,” Josie said bluntly. She had already burned the bridges with Ashley and Michelle for their actions. They thought Rebecca was beyond hope. Hope had become Josie’s life... Eating away at every waking moment.

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The third page was of a room... Maybe inside a small house of some sort. There were spiders everywhere in the drawing, and the place looked like a dump. On the side of the page was an extremely detailed gun. Josie struggled to connect the dots here.

Her heart dropped when she saw the next two pages. The first had been completely dedicated to a portrait of her own face. Josie traced the lines of her own chin, touched her starry looking eyes gently. She shook at the absolute care Rebecca had put into drawing her.

Lastly, there was another lifelike portrait, this time of a man. His face was extremely realistic. It looked like he might start talking at any moment from the page. Above the man's smiling face was a pair of church bells. Josie frowned. The man had the name 'Adrian' written below his chin, and below that, in the same childlike style the pig man had been drawn in was the word 'LIAR'.

"She's been talking endlessly about running away from something, and these drawings—they're rather strange," Weber said before clearing her throat.

"Ms. Torres—Josie—do these pictures mean anything to you? Rebecca, as we know, was very disturbed. I know we can't tell what happened in the woods that day, but do you think any of this means anything?" Weber asked, gently tugging the book from Josie's hands.

"No. I don't know what these are," Josie said, the tears finally spilling out. Weber rested her hand on Josie's shoulder.

"It's not your fault. You, Ashley, Michelle... None of you could've stopped this," Weber said gently. Josie shoved Weber's hand away.



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“Think that makes me feel better? We were all asleep doctor, and Becca... She begins screaming from her tent. Crying. She sounded like a wounded animal... We could’ve found her faster! When she ran away—fucking got herself lost in the woods—we could’ve been there if we’d... Just. Been. A. Little. Quicker,” Josie cried. The memory was still strong in Josie’s mind. She smelled the air from that night, heard Rebecca’s bloodcurdling screams. Felt the hairs on her arms rise.

Becca had emerged from her tent with a wild look in her eyes. She was swatting at things that weren’t there and had turned to face the other side of the camp. She’d brandished a knife at Josie and the rest of her friends before sprinting away into the forest. Despite their best efforts, none of the girls could find her that night, and she’d been lost for weeks until she crawled onto a road outside the forest.

“Why? Why did she run away? What did she see? Why couldn’t any of you FIX her?” Josie sobbed. Weber stepped back, her face to the ground.

“We tried everything Josie. Rebecca Winters—her mind was shattered in ways our most veteran staff had never seen,” Weber explained, “it’s hard to diagnose something that for us, doesn’t exist.”

Josie cried more, the tears coming in relentless waves now. Becca had never had a mental illness, hadn’t even been to general therapy. Josie wasn’t a doctor, but she *knew* that mental illnesses like what Becca had... That didn’t happen overnight.

And yet that’s *exactly* what happened to her.

“It is... Unfortunate that you couldn’t identify these drawings. After all, you were her closest friend.”

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In the distance, Josie heard the clock tower sound off, its bells ringing twice to announce the time. Even from inside Becca's room, the bells were quite loud.

"S-so what now?" Josie asked as Weber took her shoulder and led them from the room.

"Well, Rebecca's family is coming down later today. They'll discuss what to do with Rebecca and her coma. For now, I don't think there's anything left for you to do," Weber said as they walked back to the elevator.

"I want to see her," Josie said. Weber frowned.

"She—she is not well, I must warn you."

"So what? She's my best friend, I love her," Josie replied.

*Ding.*

Silence filled the elevator like a poison cloud. It was a long way down to the treatment floors, so Josie took the time to check her phone, not wanting to speak with Dr. Weber any more than she had to.

She saw the messages from Ashley and Michelle that she'd been ignoring and continued to ignore them. She quickly scrolled past all the social media shit and saw the top trending news stories. One time she and her friends had made headlines, after Rebecca was taken to a local hospital by a truck driver who'd found her crawling on the roads at night. Josie swallowed the memory away, trying not to vomit at the thought of it.

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**Louisiana Butcher Identified**

*The man accused of killing dozens in the forests of Louisiana has been identified as a man named Hector Ramirez. Reports say that Ramirez is deluded, and thinks he is an FBI agent, and that his victims were part of a cult. Open to read more...*

Josie shuddered at the thought of a single person killing that many. Although it sounded like Ramirez was just as far gone as Becca might've been. What a sickening thing.

**Renowned Colorado Doctor Found Dead in Office**

*Doctor Adrian Abrams, a doctor famous for his advancing mental health care in his area, was found dead today in his office. Nurses found him early this morning in his office chair. It is reported that he died from a self-inflicted gunshot. It is unknown what caused the suicide. Open to read more...*

Adrian... The same name that Becca's portrait had in her sketchbook. Just a coincidence, but strange nonetheless. It's not like Becca had any access to the outside world. Even if she did, she wouldn't have understood it. That had been the worst part of the last few months, Josie seeing her friend not even know who she was.

Josie didn't recognize the name of this doctor off the top of her head. She opened the story.

Her breath caught in her throat. The provided picture of Adrian Abrams...

It was *identical* to Becca's drawing.

Josie's phone dropped from her hand. She was shaking, an *odd* feeling crawling up her spine. Weber looked over.

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“Josie? Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Josie whispered, “I’m fine.”