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THE LEGEND OF BANNACK

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Preface

The most imperative part is making sure they never find each other, for if they do, one, as the legend goes, will instinctively know she must kill her sisters, drink their blood, and eat their heart. She will become very powerful. Invincible against death itself.

#

Grimborough Hospital was a tiny facility in Bannack, an isolated country town in the state of Montana. The building of the hospital was all for show; it sold the story of this ghost town's history. However, the founder of the hospital, Doctor Nibal, knew it'd be profitable to care after unknowing tourists.

This town was so isolated the government was unaware that Grimborough took patients. And although the hospital was far younger than the town itself, its interior was filled with flickering fluorescents, old school tools, grimy walls, blood splattered floors, and wall clocks that ceaselessly gave a loud *tick* and a louder *tock*.

One night, a woman came in crying, "They're early! They're early!"

Sammi, Sahasra, and Sephaniah were born on Friday, the thirteenth of October at 1:23 in the morning. The mother died two hours later at 3:33. It was the time of the death that made Doctor Michael confident in her suspicions. She sat in the delivery room looking at the triplets' dead mother. She was a small young woman who lied so still and more still yet, until the doctor could no longer pretend that she was sleeping. She excused herself to see Doctor Nibal.

The Doctor's office was the same pasty snot-green color that lined the walls of the hospital. Though clean, it gave a stench that forced its way into Doctor Michael's nostrils, even though she'd developed the habit of holding her breath. The smell nearly blinded her, forcing her vision into her imagination. Forcing her to picture awful things. This time, animals being slaughtered and encased in the office's walls. The smell intensified as she gasped for air, horrified by the sounds of bones snapping and animals whining and the sight of blood pooling around animal carcasses. She knew what was next, so she excused herself just in time to retch. Once recovered, she knew she could enter the room unaffected. Doctor Nibal sat at his desk staring into his computer screen.

"Doctor, I think we have a case—"

"Of?" Doctor Nibal interrupted.

"A case of... You know—one of those cases. I plan on separating the triplets before the sun rises, before the connection sticks. I—"

Doctor Nibal switched his attention from his computer screen to her. He leaned back in his chair, his right eyebrow raised. Doctor Michael was glued in place by his stare. "I thought we agreed, if we ever had one of these cases, to killing them in their infancy."

"We did. But—"

"But?"

Doctor Michael's voice lowered to a repulsed whisper. She hunched forward. "You try delivering three babies then contemplating killing them. You think that'd be easy? To kill babies?"

Ones you've just delivered, no less." She huffed. "To kill at all?" She straightened her posture and dropped the disgust in her voice. "We're in no danger—so long as I separate them. I'm separating them."

She left the office with her heart attempting to escape her chest and bile eroding away at her throat. It soured the taste of her saliva. Her heart was so loud, so loud that she didn't hear Doctor Nibal's office door creak open nor the echoing *tap..... tap..... tap... tap..* of his shoes in the corridor as he pursued her, knife in hand. In an instant, Doctor Michael felt the cold chill of the wall against her cheek.

The sharp blade tickled her neck. "Listen to me, Michael," Doctor Nibal began. His breath was warm and harsh in the canal of her ear. "You're going to take this knife and make those babies bleed out." Doctor Michael began to struggle against Doctor Nibal's hold now. "Then I want you to bring their cold bodies to me."

He released her from the wall and shoved the knife into her pocket. Without responding or looking back, Doctor Michael walked away. After her, she heard, "Don't take the easy way out, Michael. I don't want any plastic bags or hands involved. Use the knife. Take the edge off and make it fun, will you? Carve a pretty picture in their back or something. I expect you back before sunrise." Doctor Michael retched, and vomit splashed to the floor. "Make sure you get that up," Doctor Nibal said. "It's putrid enough in here."

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Doctor Michael went to the infirmary that held the only patients of Grimborough. She twirled the knife in her pocket, staring at Sammi, Sahasra, and Sephaniah. She watched their little chests go

up and down, watched their eye lids flutter. Doctor Michael's breath slowed as she released her grip on the knife.

She took the triplets to her home. She quickly made arrangements to have Sahasra go to Nigeria and for Sephaniah to go to Australia. She packed a few boxes and bags and was on her way with Sammi to Alaska. Soon Sammi grew up, graduated college, and started a life of her own.

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Sammi's life began in Eagle River, the quiet suburbs of Anchorage. She loved her Alaskan home because it was big and gave her all the privacy she would ever need. She was neighbors with the woods and had a beautiful view of the mountains. It was nearly always cloudy in October, but on this night the full moon was fully visible. She sat by her bonfire as she talked with her mother.

“How was your birthday, Sammi?”

“It was okay... Each year gets worse, more and more lonely. Why is it that I feel like this? I truly feel like a part of me is missing, you know? I'm incomplete. I'm not all that I'm supposed to be. It's hard.”

“Honey. That's just a part of life, a part of growing up. I know you're 26, but you'll forever be discovering who you are. Maybe, Sammi, if you could keep a boyfriend, that'd help. I'm sure of it... But—hey—I gotta go now. Happy birthday, again. Talk to you soon.” The line went dead.

Sammi let an exhale out into the frigid air and put her head in her mittened hands. She stayed there for a moment focusing on the sounds of her surroundings. The wind, the trees, the leaves, the wolves, and the crackling of wood which provided as much comfort as the heat itself. She let out another breath, put out the fire, and walked to her door that was cracked open.

Sammi always kept her home dark when she went out at night. It helped to better see the stars. But now a little fearful, she peered into the darkness, sliding a knife from her pocket. She flicked on her light, and immediately stifled a scream. She quickly looked back to confirm that the foyer did not transform into her living space. She needed to be sure she wasn't staring into a giant mirror.

“Who are you?”

The woman stood, and Sammi resisted the urge to turn around once more. Her body. Their body. Her hair. Their hair. Her eyes. Their eyes, and by extension, their soul... Sammi could tell that they were one. “Sahasra,” the woman said. She took a step forward and held out her hand. Sammi just looked at it until she returned it to her side. “You and me are sisters, by the way, Sammi,” she said.

“How do you know about me?”

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

“I suppose so, sure. How do you know who I am?”

“Well, I can speak to ghosts. I can recall people from the dead, in a way. Our biological mom, for example. I can speak to her. She tells me so many interesting things and stories about

her past life, about her pregnancy, about how I have two sisters, one of which is you, Sammi; about how you have a knack for murder; about how you love to kill...; about how she thinks you're ashamed of what you do... Is that why you live in the middle of nowhere? To keep yourself at bay?" Sahasra paused, expecting Sammi to respond. When she only stared with wide eyes, Sahasra gave a chuckle. "Anyway, that's when I began to do a little research because I, too, have a thing for spilling blood. I think we're special, you and I. Together, with our third sister, we can do some real damage. Do whatever we want. Kill however many we want. No fear. No consequences. Invincible." Sahasra turned away from Sammi to stare out the window. "Her name is Sephaniah, but it's difficult to find her. It's like she can just drop off the grid. Will you help me locate her?" Sahasra turned back to Sammi, leaning on the wall, hands crossed against her chest, eyes potent with expectation.

Sammi had no need to agree. But with her sister standing there, she finally had what was evidently true to have been missing. She was more complete than she had ever been. "Okay," Sammi said. Sahasra gave her a sinister smile.

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It took weeks of preparation for Sammi to finally broach the topic with her mother. There were many *I don't know*s and *I don't know what you're talking about*s, when Sahasra finally told Sammi that she'd have to kill her own mother. "The dead can't lie." Sahasra said.

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It was late. Sammi sat in her car staring at her childhood home. She could see the flicker of the TV from her mother's bedroom, but she knew the TV would be turning off—now. She stepped out of her car.

She found the spare key to have been moved from the front yard into the backyard, attached to the underside of a fake lily that floated in an artificial pond.

Like any other time since moving out, stepping into her mother's house made Sammi twelve again. This time, sneaking around the house after bedtime.

She hadn't been in her mother's room since she moved away and was surprised to see the changes in décor. Where the walls were once bare, hung photos of the two of them. At home. On vacation. Plain smiles. Silly faces. And, in the bed, next to her mother was the pillow Sammi used to comfort herself through the years. When frightened as a child. When heartbroken as a teen. When angry all the time in between.

She looked at her mother, already snoring in her sleep. Sammi's mother's heartbeat thrummed in her ears, became a second pulse. Sammi embodied the breath of her mother. When she inhaled, so did Sammi. When she exhaled, so did Sammi. Blood rushed to the tips of Sammi's fingers and through every vessel of her brain. She could now smell the flesh of her mother: light, fresh, and slightly metallic beneath the vanilla-scented skin that I so badly wanted to bloody. I could hear the blood rushing up her veins and roaring down her arteries; see my mother's clothes move in sync with each thud of her heart, the ins and outs of her breath; taste the blood in my salivating mouth, on the front of my tongue—oh, how badly did I want to feel

my mother's warm blood spill onto my hands, painting them my favorite color as I glide my knife through her delicate, loosening skin, taking care to take my time, my sweet, sweet—as sweet as blood—time, but I only place my childhood pillow atop my mother's face and watch her body struggle, listen to her awakened muffled scream.

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Sammi and Sahasra found their sister in New Zealand. Her house was located on the cusp of the bush, a place Sammi thought unlikely to have so many houses. It was as if Sephaniah's neighborhood was created with tourism in mind: vacation homes near the bush with other friendly tourist neighbors you can meet and go camping with.

There was a keypad that Sephaniah blocked off with her body while inputting a code. The door clicked open, and the sisters filed in. The interior was gorgeous. Very open, the site of wood everywhere. It was a luxurious tree house on the ground.

“You're free to sit anywhere,” Sephaniah said, but they all remained standing: Sahasra, against the large glass west window that was practically a wall. Sammi, at the front door, with Sephaniah.

“How is it to be able to disappear whenever you feel?” Sammi said.

“It feels good, of course. I never like being seen much, anyway.”

Sammi looked around. She observed her sister's home. Exits guarded with security codes. A backyard that dips into the deep woods. A machete hanging right there at the front door.

“Then why do you live in a place like this? Very private, very protected, but with neighbors and glass walls?”

“Surely you understand it doesn’t matter where I place myself as I can disappear at any moment, yes? I don’t mind other people. In fact, I like people. I love my neighbors.” Sephaniah turned her attention to her other sister. “Well, we’re together now. Nothing’s happening, Sahasra. What’s up?”

“I’m not sure,” Sahasra started, looking from Sephaniah to Sammi. Slightly embarrassed, she turned to look out the window. Creating fog on the glass, she continued, “Maybe it takes some time for the connection to take hold.”

There was a cracking noise and Sahasra turned her head. Her pupils doubled in diameter. On the floor laid Sephaniah’s twitching body and standing above it was Sammi holding the machete in one hand and Sephaniah’s head in the other. Sephaniah’s dead eyes barreled into Sahasra’s. Blood pooled around Sephaniah’s body. Sahasra took several steps back toward the south wall.

“What did you just do?” Sahasra saw Sammi’s body relax a bit. Her nostrils widened and her chest puffed. She rolled her neck and a creep of a smile appeared on her face. Sammi released Sephaniah’s hair, and a deep *thud* echoed in the open space. Sammi charged for Sahasra.

Sahasra tried the doors, but without the code they wouldn’t budge. She ran upstairs and was now backed into a window. She unlatched the lock and jumped. She hit the ground hard with such a loud *crack*, she was certain it was louder than her scream. The pain was so immense, so brutal. Sahasra tried to stand but was unable. She began to drag herself by one hand into the back

woods, each movement causing an overflow of tears. Eventually she could no longer keep silent, and she cried aloud with each movement, each cry longer, louder, and more high-pitched until she could move no longer.

She turned onto her back.

The last thing she saw was a cutout of the starry night sky through the thick of the trees. The last thing she felt was a hard grip on her leg, and her body being dragged along the forest floor. The last she heard was a shrill, piercing scream.

Back in the house, Sammi was delighted with what she saw. She was so energized, so thrilled, so pumped, she nearly went back into the night to see if she could bring back more bodies. Her appetite for victims, however, was overpowered by a physical thirst and hunger. She so craved nothing more than the lives of her sisters that it was natural for Sammi to grab a knife and make small incisions in Sephaniah's wrist. She placed her open mouth upon the cuts. Sephaniah's remaining blood was still warm.

Sammi plunged the knife into Sephaniah's chest—out *crack* in *crack* out—until she could handle her sister's heart. It felt good in her reddening hands. She took a bite and immediately felt stronger, but not fully satiated. She craved to know the difference between Sephaniah and Sahasra, so she looked at Sahasra's mangled body, bones sticking out here and there. Sammi grabbed hold of one of the bones until it ripped her skin fully apart. She licked the muscles and bit an artery to get a fresh gush of blood. It tasted so good on her tongue, as satisfying as water after a long run. She removed Sahasra's heart. As she took a bite, she heard a pounding.

There were beeps and clicks at the door. “Police!” The door flew open. Sammi expected them to charge. She expected a fight. Instead, the officers stood still, examining the feral sight.

One by one, they began to look up from the bloody mess. Sammi locked eyes with each horrified officer. She gave a wide smile that exposed her blood-dyed teeth and the bits of human flesh that remained in the tight crevices.

Then, Sammi disappeared.