

PROLOGUE

The tales of Devils Oak, and the Birman Twins as written by Zircon Abyssi:

It was said that the quiet town of Crimson River was once a home to witches. The story starts off with a girl who's name has been long forgotten. Once upon a time a long time ago, this girl had a friend from the same town.

One day, two men appeared out of nowhere claiming to be relatives of the girls friend. Since the town was so secluded from everything else, it was usual for relatives to visit for long periods of time. No one really questioned it when the boys stayed there for months. No one really questioned it when those months turned into years.

The girl, being friend with the other girl, happened to often interact with her friends relatives. She got curious about them; they didn't look like normal people they had eyes that seemed to glow and rarely ever spoke. They spoke so little, and yet the nameless one managed somehow to fall deeply in love.

There were too, one with hair the same color as copper and eyes like a sunset. But the other one—he had hair as black as midnight, skin as pale as snow and eyes as red as blood. Perhaps the girl really did love him, or perhaps she loved the mystery surrounding him, but for one reason or another she became obsessed with him.

The girl would take any chance she could get to talk to the man, but he would just smile and make an excuse as to why he couldn't talk. He seemed to always have something urgent to do. It only added to the girl's infatuation. She often tried to ask her friend why her relatives were so odd, but she was met only with laughter before her friend changes the subject.

That's when she became certain. That her friend was hiding something. She figured that she had to find out what it was. She thought that if she did then just maybe *he* would finally love her back. And so she planted herself in the bushes outside of her friends window.

How naive she had been.

She waited a few minutes before peeking through the window. What she saw terrified her, and it would change the entire town forever.

Her friend, the one the girl had known for years, was holding a candlestick. She started at it for a moment. Maybe two. And then suddenly, fwoosh!

The tip of the candle stick suddenly burst into flames. The girl had no reaction to this, other than a simple smile in someone's direction. The girl stood there in disgust as she realized it was him. And he didn't react with disgust or fear at this sorcery. He simply smiled. *He smiled.* And gave this girl a pat on the back.

With a sudden dizziness, the girl felt a realization as she backed away from the window. That man, that creature that she fell in love with was something other than human. And so was the friend she grew up with, the friend she had known for years. She felt betrayed and utterly horrified. She turned, and sprinted into the night.

A lonely old store owner was closing up his shop, when suddenly a girl came running from nowhere, seemingly as if to escape some invisible danger lurking close behind her. The man questioned her, as it seemed too late for a lady as young as herself to be out all on her own. The girl who was close to hysterics simply begged the man to follow her. At first he thought it was some sort of joke, but something in the girl's voice made him pause to think. She seemed close to crying, as if she really was in danger.

He agreed, and told her to her the way quickly. She told him no, she told him that they probably needed more people. The girl sounded so frightened that even without knowing what the danger was, he set out to gather as many people as he could. Between fear and excitement many people rushed out of their houses, and soon a mob was formed.

And they marched onward through the night into the unknown.

Most of them recognized the house they stopped at immediately. Confusion swarmed among them. They all knew the girl who'd lived

here well. Was she in trouble? She seemed so sweet and innocent, there was no way she could be the one who caused all this panic.

The girl opened the door and marched inside followed by the mob of confused eager citizens. The girl pointed an accusatory finger to her former friend who stood there in a shocked confusion.

"This girl," She said pointing to her friend, a quote that would later become legendary "This girl and her companions are something other than human."

The accused just stood there frozen. The lit candle on the table behind her suddenly flickered out. Slowly, one by one, the lights everywhere else began to flicker out as well. The townspeople all gasped in shock, for there had been no wind, and what they had witnessed was surely none other than witchcraft.

The girl did something rather unexpected next. She grabbed her friend by the collar and pulled her closer. She pulled out a knife and plunged in into her friend's chest.

Her eyes widened. A look of betrayal flashed across her face as she tried to say something, but couldn't, and fell. The black haired man rushed forward to catch her just before she could hit the ground. The other one, the one with the coppery hair, materialized from the shadows. The townspeople had known him as the one who didn't speak much, or show much emotions. They'd known him as the shy guy who sat there quietly in the background.

They'd never seen him show anger. Not like this. His eyes typically gleamed lightly in the dark, but not now. His eyes weren't just glowing. They were ablaze. The shadows in the already lightless home seemed to grow.

Twisting and and writing like worms, the darkness stretched out around him. They took shapes like gnarled twisted claws of darkness. At this point, everyone began to shriek and back away from the house. Some people stood outside and watched the clouds of darkness twisting and engulfing the house, while others ran away in terror. It seems like hours though it was only seconds before the men stepped out, the black haired on still cradling the girl in his arms.

They didn't look like men any more though.

The black haired one looked like a living shadow, just like the one that was currently whirling around the house like a tornado of darkness. He spiked out in every direction, he didn't seem solid he seemed like mist that could be easily parted with a wave of the hand, but he was solid enough to hold the girl. The only thing that made him remotely resemble a human being, was the bright red eyes that glowed like rubies, they didn't blaze like the other ones, but they gave off the same pure rage. The one on who's previously been the coppery haired man, now stood almost seven feet tall, with rough twisted skin that was appeared blistering in several areas. He was thin, very thin, so thin that his skin appeared to be thinly stretched across his bones. Upon his head, there were long twisted goat horns which looked like enough to make him topple. But that wasn't the most terrifying part. Whether it was the eight eyes dotting his head like a spider, or his long black nails, or possibly his wide mouth, which had appeared to be almost half of his face. When he opened it to speak it revealed several rows of long sharp teeth and and a long slimy forked tongue.

Horror struck the crowd as they heard his voice, now much deeper than it ever was before and accompanied by a gravely hissing sound.

"Follow us not to our spot treacherous mortals, For from now on this woods belongs to us and any human foolish enough to stumble through will succumb to our curse."

And with that, the two demons and the girl fled into the woods. The shadows engulfing the house died down into nothing and a few people ran into the house. Everything was left neat and untouched as if nothing had ever happened. The only odd thing was, that brave girl who'd led them there had seemingly vanished without a trace.

And with that, unbenounced to everyone at the time, the curse of devil's oak had begun, and would soon claim the lives of many.

1

3:48 am. I stare at the glowing blue clock, knowing that I won't be able to fall asleep. Not after that dream. It was the same dream that I had every time, but it scared me nonetheless. And not only did it scare me but it left me in tears feeling hollow. It left me with that sinking feeling of helplessness you get right when something bad happens. It left me remembering why I marched into the woods in the first place...

I shake my head, wiping the tears that had begun to form in the corners of my eyes and took a deep breath. *It's ok now.* I tell myself *They can't hurt me anymore. They think I'm dead.* But that didn't help much. There is still part of me, though I know that I want to deny it, part of me still wishes to go back. Part of me is still homesick for the past, the one I know that I can't return to. But did they miss me as much as I miss them? I highly doubt it, and though part of me still yearned to go back, still yearned for the life I can never reclaim, deep down I know that I left for a reason.

No. I think, lightly pressing my hand against my head, as if simply touching my head can somehow stop the thoughts seeping into my mind. *If I keep on thinking like this I'll end up crying even more.* I need something to get my mind off of it. I need to distract myself so I don't cry. Because crying is weak and I'm not weak. I took another deep breath and slid off of my bed, my feet landing on the cold stone floor of what had used to be a dungeon, but had been fixed up to act like a room—more or less. The darkness covers my room like a fog so thick you can't see through it, only illuminated by the slight blue glow the alarm clock was giving off. 3:53? Had I been just thinking staring into the nothingness for five whole minutes?

I hold my hands out in front of me, and walked slowly through the dark room, knowing I could trip over any of the random things scattered across my floor. The light from the clock outlines the furniture in my room, my large dresser, my desk, the bed which is behind me, and the bookshelf. I make my way through the room to the bookshelf, which is conveniently also right next to the light switch. I flick the lights on then blink a few times, the light is almost blinding. I then reach into the bookshelf, picking up a random book which I never finished. I'd gotten bored of it, but seeing as I've finished all the other books they bought for me, I might as well read it now. I want to fall asleep anyway so this book might be just the thing.

I plop back down on the bed and stare at the cover of the green leather book. The pink index card I'd been using for a bookmark was starting to curl at the edge. I realize just how long I had left the book sitting there, Jasper had lent it to me the first night I came here and I still haven't finished it. Yikes.

I yawn as I open the book, and skim the page that the bookmark was left on. It had been so long since I'd last attempted to read this story, so I can barely remember the story from where it left off. From what I can remember it seems that the main protagonist is sitting in a room with some corrupt politicians with plans of assassination, except he's been in that room for almost three chapters now making small talk. Too much talking and not enough stabbing for my taste, but I hope that maybe it'll get better or at least put me to sleep. As I try to read the chapter, I notice that I can make little sense of what's going on. One moment the Main character is narrating every little movement of every single character, then out of nowhere there's a flashback that takes up half the chapter.

I somehow don't notice myself growing increasingly tired, or even remember falling asleep, but I must've fallen asleep at some point because next thing I know I'm being shaken awake.

"SAPPHIRE GET UP! BREAKFAST!" Shariha shouts as he aggressively shakes my shoulders.

I groan and sit up shoving the blanket off of me though I immediately regret it, the cold air immediately causes my bare arms to prickle. Shariha continues to glare at me impatiently as I slide off the bed. "And a good morning to you too." I grumble sarcastically as I pass Shariha and exit my room. He follows close behind me, obviously excited by the smell of pancakes which floods my nostrils as soon as I step into the hallways. I walk up the narrow winding stone staircase that leads down into the dungeons. It was kind of fitting almost that we lived in what used to be a fortress. It looks a bit like a castle but smaller and less fancy. It was built in the only clearing in the whole woods, and since it's been nearly two decades since anyone's been allowed in the woods, everyone just sort of forgot it was here. Except for me, and that's the only reason I'm still alive to this day.

When I reach the top of the stairs I'm greeted by Jasper who's attempting to flip a pancake and catch it in the pan. It was almost impressive, until I remember that *I'm* the one who's going to have to eat whatever he makes. Shariha likes to eat too, but he doesn't have to and he doesn't get sick like I do.

Although Jasper is usually the one cooking aside from taste tests I hardly ever see him eat anything. Probably because he gets his fuel from the souls of the innocent and what not. Jasper is also wearing a pink frilly apron with the words “Kiss the cooks” printed in bubble letters across the front. He’s had that apron as long as I’ve known him, but every time it’s almost enough to make me laugh. His copper hair is neatly brushed, it’s pin straight and lays flat on his head, in contrast to Shariha’s hair which is wavy and has been left a mess so that it sticks out at odd angles. There’s even an odd curl that sticks out at the top as if to defy gravity.

I sit down at the circular table in my usual spot, and Shariha plops down next to me. There’s a plate already set out with a glass of milk besides it, and a glass of orange juice for Shariha. Jasper must’ve set it up, he knows that I don’t like oranges. Jasper noticed small details like that, and he knew I would complain endlessly if he tried to feed me something I didn’t like. Meanwhile Shariha is complaining endlessly about the lack of food on his plate. Jasper turns around to glare at him.

“Would you prefer I lit your pancake on fire and burnt it instead?” Jasper asked. That got Shariha to shut up, though it’s pointless since the pancakes are already done. Jasper slides a couple onto my plate, and I proceed to douse them in syrup. Shariha doesn’t even bother with the syrup and starts shoveling them in his mouth the moment that Jasper sets them on his plate. After setting the plate with the remaining pancakes in the center incase we want more, Jasper takes a seat across from me and begins flipping through a book. I almost want to comment on his rude table manners, but then I remember that Jaspers the one who fed me.

After downing three whole pancakes in about two bites, Shariha decided it was time to try and make conversation. He cleared his throat then looked between me and Jasper as if not sure exactly what to say. I couldn’t blame him, neither Jasper nor I were really the most talkative people. It’s not that I don’t feel comfortable talking to them, It’s been nearly a year that’s plenty of time. I guess I’ve just gotten used to having no one to talk to. Jasper, as far as I know has always just been one of those quite observing types. He wasn’t shy like me, in fact he was quite the opposite. I guess someone like *him* would have no reason to be shy around people, after all he could easily destroy the whole town if he so desired.

Shariha lets out a growl and sets down his fork. “You guys are just too damn quiet!” He says glaring at us “I might as well be talking to my pancakes!”

Jasper looks up out of the corner of his eye and smirks while flipping a page mockingly. I grin as suddenly I’m struck with an idea.

“You want conversation?” I ask “Then why not ask Jasper about the book he’s reading?”

Shariha’s eyes widen and suddenly he goes palid. He hates listening to Jasper ranting about things. One time Jasper spent an hour complaining about why Brian hasn’t asked Jessica to marry him yet. It turned out this whole thing was pointless because Brian and Jessica were just some characters in a book that ended up getting married anyway. “No, please, anything but that.”

Jasper looks up from his book fully, a diabolical grin on his face. “You did want some conversation didn’t you *dear brother*?”

“I’ve had a sudden change of heart.” Shariha says quickly.

“Oh but I’m sure you would love to hear about this.” Jasper says “It starts off in a factory in london where-”

“SAPPHIRE HOW COULD YOU I THOUGHT WE WERE FRIENDS!” Shariha shouts, his pathetic red eyes are beginning to water. A look of betrayal is painted on his face, and I have to bite my tongue to stop laughing. It’s not everyday that you nearly make a grown man cry. And it’s even funnier since Shariha looks so tough. He’s a pretty big guy, I don’t know his exact height but I would guess he’s about six feet tall. Jasper is a lot shorter, he’s only around 5’10 or so. Shariha normally wears clothing that fits him, while Jasper takes a liking to oversized turtlenecks and jeans that are a bit too tight. For people who didn’t know them, it would probably be easier to see Jasper fake crying then the big scary looking Shariha.

Well, at least, he has a scary looking resting face. It’s not even particularly scary, but he just looks tired all the time. The real scary one is Jasper, aside from intrigue and the joy he gets from messing with people all of the emotions he shows seem to be fake. Something about hearing his fake laugh sends chills up my spine. Maybe Jasper would be more likely to fake cry, probably because Shariha’s cries would be real.

That’s when a sudden banging interrupted my thoughts. All three of us paused to look at the side door closest to us. It was an entrance that leads into the kitchen and it was right behind Shariha so he had to turn around to look at

it. It was a typical white plastic door with a screen. Nothing special. You'd see this in any home.

Jasper looks back down into his book and Shariha turns back around. I continue staring at the door for a couple of seconds when-

BANG!

There is was again! I'm almost ready to dismiss it when BANG, BANG, BANG! More pounding against the door. It doesn't sound like knocking, but still I stand up to go see what it is.

I peek out the window on the side door not seeing anything. I turn the doorknob and slowly open it peeking out the small crack I still see nothing. At first. Then out of nowhere a giant black furred beast bursts through the door and pins me to the ground.

2

My vision is blocked almost completely by the black furry mass that lies on top of me, snapping, growling, and flicking its disgusting slobber all over my face, but out of the very corner of my vision I see change. Shariha's typically dark red eyes now glow with a sudden brightness I haven't seen before. The shadows around him seem to become more dense, making the intense light even more fearsome. I don't have much time to admire the sight however, the viscous angry beast snaps at me once more, I have to move my head out of the way just to avoid having my face ripped off. I grasp the paws of the beast which are digging into my shoulders and attempt to fling it off of me but it's no use. The darn creature won't budge. Luckily, I don't have to fight the creature off for very long. Shariha smashes into the foul beast with his fist, sending it sprawling across the kitchen.

Now that the giant creature is not on top of me I can get a good look at it. It's not a monster, it's a dog. A vicious, bloodthirsty, rabid, shell of a dog. It was rather big for a dog, but quite not the size of a bear or a miniature horse. The thing had black fur that was falling out in patches, even now it spread across the floor like a trail. It's face was plagued with scars as if it had been torn apart and stitched back together, and it's eyes...It's eyes might have been the only thing more terrifying than the yellow teeth dripping with a foamy saliva. Its eyes were glossed over like they had no life in them.

The creature lies still for a moment. Shariha reluctantly moves closer to the dog. Closer...closer...when suddenly the dog snaps at him, causing Shariha to jump back in surprise. The dog ignores him and darts directly to me. Realizing the thing is bounding straight towards me, I scramble away quickly as I can. I slide under the table in an attempt to reach the entry way which is closest to where Shariha was sitting, but instead find myself face to face with the dog. It has somehow managed to wedge itself between the table and the exit. Trembling, I move back, only to be met with Jasper's legs. The dog growls, sticking its long nose underneath the table. It stops an inch away from me. Behind me, Jasper gets out of his chair, then gets on his knees so he can look under the table.

“What an adorable little doggie!” he remarks reaching his hand around me at the growling canine. The dog monster snaps at him, causing Jasper a second of hesitation before he places his hand on the dogs snout.

The dog suddenly goes still right before flopping over limply like a lifeless husk. I’m suddenly conscious that I’m trembling. Jasper stands up and walks over to the other side of the table over to the dog. He kneels down besides it, then picking a fork off of the table, jabs the thing in the thigh with it. I gasp jumping with surprise and bump my head against the table.

“I was right!” Jasper boasts to himself with a look of pride. Shariha rushes over and joins Jasper at his other side to stare at the corpse.

“Please tell me you didn’t hurt it!” He exclaims looking at dog corpse.

“I-I think he killed it!” I gasp in bewilderment. Jasper waves his hand at me dismissively.

“Pssssh, I didn’t kill it, I merely removed the curse set upon it! Really I’m just offering mercy here!” Jasper says as he crosses his arms.

“S-so you’re saying it was a...” I stammer, still shaken up from the whole attack.

“A zombie dog?” Shariha asks with about as much disbelief as I have.

“Precisely!” Jasper says with his signature smirk as he adjusts his glasses.