

Blackwood

written by

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EXT. BLACKWOOD ACADEMY - GROUNDS - NIGHT

The moon hangs low over the gothic spires of the academy and raining. RIAN (21), athletic but looking tired, paces near the iron fence. He's on a video call, his phone illuminating a face filled with forced patience.

RIAN

Yeah, yeah... I know. It sucks being without you, babe. Trust me.

Beat

Rian cracks a small, weary smile.

RIAN (CONT'D)

It's wild here. Everyone's got some kind of... "thing," you know? Powers, whatever. There's this one girl, though. Total weirdo. But honestly? She's kinda cool in a dark way.

Beat

Rian's eyes widen. He starts backpedaling.

RIAN (CONT'D)

Wha- no! No, babe, relax. I'm not saying she's better than you. She's just... different. Both her parents are dead, so... I guess she's just dealing with some heavy stuff.

Beat

RIAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, for sure, but-

A SHARP RUSTLE breaks from the bushes behind him. Rian freezes.

RIAN (CONT'D)

Babe- lemme call you back.

Beat

RIAN (CONT'D)

No, everything's fine. Seriously. Love you. Bye.

He taps the screen. **BEEP**. Silence returns, heavy and cold.

Rian squinting into the treeline. He focuses, his body tensing as if preparing to use a power that hasn't quite kicked in yet.

A BLUR of shadow streaks through the undergrowth. Fast. Too fast.

Rian flinches, nearly dropping his phone.

RIAN (CONT'D)
Holy shit... what the hell is that?

His breathing hitches. He takes a shaky step back. Then another.

The sound of HEAVY FOOTSTEPS crushing dried leaves gets louder. Closer.

A HOWL rips through the air. It's deep, guttural, and sounds like it's vibrating with pure agony.

RIAN (CONT'D)
Oh, fuck this.

Rian turns to bolt, but he's not fast enough.

A MASSIVE CLAWED PAW lunges from the dark, raking across Rian's ankle.

CRUNCH. Rian hits the dirt hard.

A blood-curdling SCREAM escapes him as he clutches his mangled leg. He tries to crawl, dragging his body through the mud, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

RIAN (CONT'D)
Help! Somebody! Help me!

He trips over a protruding root and flips onto his back.

He freezes. A HOT, GROWLING BREATH hits his face. The stench of decay is overwhelming.

Rian looks up, eyes wide with pure, unfiltered terror. He lets out one last SCREAM—matched by the MONSTER'S DEAFENING ROAR—as the creature lunges, its razor-sharp claws silencing him forever.

FADE TO BLACK.

Another day.

EXT. BLACKWOOD ACADEMY - DAY

Police cruisers and FBI black SUVs line the driveway. YELLOW CRIME SCENE TAPE flutters in the wind.

Two CORONERS wheel a gurney toward a waiting van. A black body bag is zipped tight—RIAN'S final resting place.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS (50), sharp-suited and stone-faced, stands by the iron gates, watching the chaotic machinery of the law.

SHERIFF JOHN (55), tired and smelling of cheap coffee, steps out of his vehicle and approaches Williams.

SHERIFF JOHN

First time?

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

First time.

SHERIFF JOHN

Hm.

The Sheriff stares at the blood-stained grass where the body was found.

SHERIFF JOHN (CONT'D)

Did the cameras catch anything?

Williams looks at the Sheriff, his expression unreadable.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

No. Only the moment he was on his phone call.

SHERIFF JOHN

And after that?

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

(A beat)

Nothing. The feed cuts out. Glitch in the system.

SHERIFF JOHN

Convenient.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

Isn't it?

SHERIFF JOHN
Any students see what happened?

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS
No. They were all in their beds,
exactly where they belonged.

Sheriff John turns his full attention to Williams, eyes narrowing.

SHERIFF JOHN
Then what the hell was he doing out
here in the first place?

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS
I don't know, John. I really don't.
All I know is... he shouldn't have
been out here.

CRACKLE. The Sheriff's radio cuts through the tension. **BEEP.**

DEPUTY (V.O.)
Sheriff, you copy?

John sighs, hitting the response button. **BEEP.**

SHERIFF JOHN
I copy. Go ahead.

DEPUTY (V.O.)
Got some bad news, sir.

SHERIFF JOHN
Just spit it out.

DEPUTY (V.O.)
We found another victim. Out on
Route 265, heading toward Indiana.

John's eyes snap to Williams. The air between them grows cold.

SHERIFF JOHN
How far is that from Blackwood?

DEPUTY (V.O.)
Uh... hang on. Checking GPS... It's
about an hour's drive, sir.

SHERIFF JOHN
Right. I'm on my way.

DEPUTY (V.O.)
Copy that. Backup units are already
en route.

John kills the radio. **BEEP**. He looks at Williams, his voice dropping to a low growl.

SHERIFF JOHN
Another one.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS
I heard.

SHERIFF JOHN
Something ain't right about this.

Beat.

SHERIFF JOHN (CONT'D)
Anything happens, you call me.
Immediately.

John turns his back, climbs into his cruiser, and cranks the engine. The gravel crunches as he speeds away.

Williams watches the dust settle. He looks back at the CSI team scouring his lawn, his face a mask of hidden secrets.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. JADE'S BEDROOM - BLACKWOOD ACADEMY - DAY

The room is a temple of neutral tones and unsettling precision. On a shelf, glass jars hold a macabre collection: spiders, an owl's eye suspended in formaldehyde, cemetery soil, and half-melted black candles.

JADE (16) sits at her desk, hunched over her private grimoire. She writes with a steady, sharp hand.

JADE (V.O.)
My Infernal Journal... another day
in this monochromatic purgatory.
Last night, the soil drank well. A
student was harvested by something
foul. The Sheriff calls it a wolf—a
lazy explanation for a jagged
truth. I don't know what it was
yet, but I'm aching to dissect the
mystery.

A sharp KNOCK startles her. She doesn't jump; she simply freezes, her eyes darting to the door. HEADMASTER WILLIAMS stands there, his shadow long across the floor.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

Jade. We're holding an assembly. Be at the courtyard in five minutes.

He shuts the door before she can respond. Jade turns to her shelf. She unscrews a jar and lets a large spider crawl onto her pale hand.

JADE

(A ghost of a smile)

It seems the world is screaming,
Suffering. For now... it's just you
and me.

She gently tucks "Suffering" back into its glass prison and slips out of the room.

EXT. BLACKWOOD COURTYARD - DAY

Jade moves like a dark ink blot through a sea of anxious students. She takes a seat, her eyes scanning the crowd with clinical detachment.

Headmaster Williams stands on a makeshift stage. He taps the mic. **FEEDBACK WHINE.**

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

Attention, everyone. Please.

The murmurs die down into a heavy silence.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

As you are all aware, one of our own, Rian, was taken from us last night. The authorities believe it was a rogue wolf. A tragic, predatory occurrence.

Panic ripples through the students.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Silence! The Sheriff has ordered hunters to patrol the perimeter for the next month.

ROSE (17), looking pale, raises her hand.

ROSE

Are we just supposed to sit here
like bait while a monster is on the
loose?

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

No, Rose. We are installing an
electric perimeter. At night, the
fence will be live—300 volts of
deterrent for any beast... or
intruder. You are safe.

Another student raises a hand.

STUDENT #1

Did the cameras catch it? Did they
see what killed him?

Jade's gaze narrows, locking onto Williams.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS

No. Unfortunately, the system
suffered a critical failure at the
exact moment of the attack.

Beat.

HEADMASTER WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Any more questions? No? Then let us
observe a minute of silence for
Rian.

As every head bows, Jade slips away, vanishing into the
school like a shadow retracting.

INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jade enters. The air smells of old paper and expensive
scotch. She rifling through papers on the desk. Bureaucracy.
Garbage.

She tries the laptop. **PASSWORD PROTECTED.**

JADE

(A hiss)
Curse it...

She scans the room. Her eyes land on a date etched into a
plaque on the wall: **24/11/2010.**

She types it in. **ACCESS GRANTED.**

She navigates the folders, her mind racing.

JADE (V.O.)
Student lists... history...
Security Feeds. Bingo.

She clicks the file from last night. There's Rian, pacing, talking to his girlfriend. Then, the screen doesn't flicker. It doesn't fail. Something massive, dark, and blurred lunges from the trees.

JADE
 (To herself)
 "Critical failure," Headmaster?
 Your lies are as hollow as your
 soul.

She hears VOICES in the hallway. Williams is returning. Quickly, she yanks her flash drive from the port and kills the screen.

She cracks the door. Williams is tied up in a conversation with a student a few feet away.

Jade slips out, staying low, and disappears around the corner just as the Headmaster's hand touches the doorknob.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. JADE'S BEDROOM - BLACKWOOD - DAY

Jade throws the door open, enters, and bolts it shut. She dives toward her bed, reaching underneath to pull out a sleek, black laptop.

She sets it on her desk and plugs in the thumb drive.

JADE
 The world can try to hide from me,
 but you... you won't be able to.

She hits play. On the screen, Rian is mid-call. He hangs up, heads toward the rustling in the bushes. The moment the creature strikes, Jade slams the spacebar. She pinches the trackpad, zooming in.

It's not a wolf. It has a human-like frame but a bloated head and a skeletal, shriveled body. Long, clawed hands. A hunchback. Needle-sharp teeth.

Jade grabs her phone and snaps a photo of the screen.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK. Jade snaps the laptop shut, yanks the drive, and hides it in her pocket.

ROSE

Jade? What are you doing in there?

Jade opens the door just a crack, her face a mask of cold fury.

JADE

What do you want?

ROSE

Whoa, chill. I'm just trying to be a friend.

JADE

Friends lie. Don't expect me to ever consider you one.

ROSE

Oh... wow. Harsh.

Rose pushes her way in, looking around the room with a judgmental squint.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Look, I noticed something was off with you during Headmaster Williams' little speech. You okay?

JADE

Were you watching me?

ROSE

Please. Who has the guts to spy on you?

Rose lets out a dry, sarcastic laugh, then her face goes dead serious.

ROSE (CONT'D)

For real, though. What are you hiding? And god, this room is creepy. It's like a funeral home in here.

JADE

It's where I feel safe.

ROSE

Ugh. Imagine if you didn't.

JADE

What was that?

ROSE

Nothing. Look, you were acting weird today. Well, weirder than usual. You were looking at the Headmaster like you wanted to strangle him.

JADE

I do.

ROSE

Yikes. Anyway, I followed you. You didn't even notice. That's how I knew something was up.

Jade lunges forward, pinning Rose against the wall.

JADE

WHAT DID YOU SEE?

ROSE

(Stammering)

I-I saw everything! You snuck into his office and stayed there for like, a full minute.

JADE

And?

ROSE

Nothing else! I saw Williams heading back to his office, so I intercepted him. I kept him talking so you could get out in time. It worked, didn't it?

Rose tries a weak, terrified smile. Jade slowly backs off.

JADE

What's the price?

ROSE

What? What do you mean?

JADE

What do you want in exchange for your silence?

Rose's confidence returns. She crosses her arms, smirk widening.

ROSE

Ooh, is the great Jade Nightshade making an offer to cover her tracks?

Jade's eyes turn pitch black, a piercing, soul-level stare.

JADE

I'd hate to have to use your blood to ink my journal and your heart to feed my spiders. So, I'll ask again. What do you want?

ROSE

I want to know.

JADE

Know what?

ROSE

Ugh, don't be a moron. I want to know what you were doing in there.

JADE

I asked for your price, not your curiosity.

ROSE

Fine. Then maybe I'll just go ask Headmaster Williams what you were doing in his office.

JADE

Do that, and you'll end up without arms or legs.

ROSE

Well? Are you gonna show me or not?

Jade sighs, a sound like a dying breeze.

JADE

If you open your mouth, I swear your teeth will be the least of your worries. Your soul will rot in the Abyss.

ROSE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Cut the spooky talk and show me.

Jade sits back down, plugs the drive in, and hits play. Rose watches the footage of Rian's death. Her face goes pale.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Oh my god... that's... that's
horrific.

JADE

What's horrific is someone in power
hiding this from the students.

Jade stands up and heads for the door.

ROSE

Where are you going?

JADE

To find proof.

ROSE

I can help! I'm actually pretty
good at-

JADE

No. I don't need a rat scurrying
behind me, ruining my plans. I will
trample your feelings and put
myself first, always. Stay here.

Jade slams the door behind her. Rose stands alone in the
creepy room.

ROSE

(To herself)

Okay then.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. BLACKWOOD COURTYARD - DAY

Jade moves like a ghost, sticking to the long shadows of the
stone walls. She scans the perimeter, dodging the gaze of the
few students left outside, and slips through the main gate.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

She sprints across the asphalt, disappearing into the dense
treeline on the opposite side.

EXT. THE FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Branches claw at her face as she pushes through the thick
undergrowth. She doesn't flinch.

Her eyes are sharp, searching the forest floor for anything that shouldn't be there. A scrap of cloth, a footprint, a drop of black bile.

INT. JADE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose is still there, sitting on the edge of Jade's bed. She looks bored, then curious. She stands up and begins to inspect Jade's collections.

ROSE
(To herself)
Okay... maybe they aren't that hideous.

She picks up one of Jade's ritual books. She flips through the weathered pages, her eyes widening.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Ooh. Now this looks interesting.

As she reads, her gaze drifts to Jade's laptop. The thumb drive is still plugged in. She can't help herself. She sits down and hits play on the video again.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Jade is drenched in sweat, her breathing heavy but controlled. She's deep in the woods now.

She stops. Up ahead, partially hidden by ancient oaks, stands a dilapidated WOODEN SHACK.

She approaches cautiously. The air here is different—heavy, stagnant. The house looks abandoned, but as she reaches the porch, she sees rows of BLACK CANDLES burnt down to the floor. A metallic, rotting stench fills her lungs.

INT. JADE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose leans in closer to the screen, squinting at a specific frame of the footage. Her blood runs cold.

ROSE
Oh... holy crap.

She grabs her phone and frantically dials Jade's number.

EXT. THE FOREST SHACK - DAY

Jade steps inside the shack. Her boots crunch on something. BLACK CROW FEATHERS. Dead crows litter the floor, their bodies arranged in a circle around UPSIDE-DOWN CROSSES.

Her phone VIBRATES. She pulls it out, annoyed.

JADE

Rose.

She answers with a hiss.

JADE (CONT'D)

Which part of "do not disturb me" was too complex for your brain to process?

ROSE

(Panicked)

Yeah... look, I didn't want to bug you, but there's something seriously wrong with your investigation.

JADE

What? What are you talking about?

ROSE

Just get back here. Now. I'll explain everything when you arrive.

BEEP. The call cuts off.

Jade sighs, looking at the dead crows one last time. She turns and starts the long trek back.

CUT TO:

INT. JADE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose is hunched over Jade's computer, biting her nails nervously. The blue light of the screen washes over her face.

Jade bursts into the room. Rose jumps out of the chair.

ROSE

Thank god you're back.

JADE

I hope you have a flawless argument for making me abandon my investigation.

ROSE
Okay, okay. Just... I need you to
stay calm.

Beat.

JADE
I am calm.

ROSE
Right. Sure. Anyway...

Rose sits back down in front of the monitor.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Everything you saw, everything I
saw... it's not real. At least, not
all of it.

JADE
What the hell are you talking
about?

ROSE
That video, Jade... it's a fake.
It's been edited.

JADE
No. Impossible. That footage came
directly from the security server.

Jade strides over to the desk, leaning over Rose's shoulder.

ROSE
Look. See the file name? It says
"Final Edit." If the monster we saw
in there...

JADE
(Finishing the thought)
...isn't the actual monster.

ROSE
Exactly. There is something much
bigger behind this.

JADE
Then we find the answers. Now.

Rose holds up her hands, stopping her.

ROSE

No, not now, Jade! Everyone is going to get suspicious of our case.

JADE

Your case? It's my case!

ROSE

Oh, please. If it weren't for me, you'd still be acting like an idiot trying to figure this out.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

The door creaks open. DAVID (17), looking awkward, sticks his head in.

DAVID

Uh... sorry to interrupt. But Headmaster Williams wants to see you in his office, Jade.

JADE

I'm on my way.

David nods and pulls the door shut. Rose looks like she's about to have a panic attack.

ROSE

I knew it. I knew this would end in disaster.

JADE

Get a grip. I'm the one being summoned, not you.

Beat.

JADE (CONT'D)

Just stay here. Make sure no one comes in. And hide that drive.

ROSE

Right. Okay. I can do that. Hide the drive. Keep watch. Got it.

Jade exhales a heavy sigh, opens the door, and disappears into the hallway.

CUT TO: