Scarlet

by scisaacugh

Summary

Clove, destined for greatness, is cheated out of a good life. All there is is darkness, darkness, darkness.

Notes

wow. I wrote this a few years ago, back in my dark days, and found it on my phone so I was like "why not publish it" and yeah, it happened. I never finished it and I doubt I will, cause it's better than anything I could write now and I don't feel like getting back into that mind.

also this is the first thing I've posted here yay

"Do you want to play a game with me and Warren?" Father asks me, kneeling down to my height. Looking into his eyes, I think, Hazel. Just like mine.

And I want to act just like Father, too.

"Yeah!" I squeak, jumping up and down and clapping my hands. "What game are we going to play? Is it fun?"
"You'll see." He takes my hand and gets to his feet. "Tons of fun. I know you're going to love it," he assures me as we walk back toward the house.

Warren is my cousin, but he doesn't look like the rest of us. Instead of pretty, flaming hazel eyes, he's got plain brown ones to go with his sandy blonde hair. Mama, Father, Indie, Willow, and I all have shiny brown hair, though mine's darker and straighter than the others', so I look even more unlike my cousin than everyone else. At ten years, Warren is older than me, too. I'm five, Indie is nine, and Willow is thirteen.

Mama says Father spends so much time with Warren because they're the only men in the house. I don't understand.

Even so, he cheers when my toy finally finds its target. "That was great, Clove!" he encourages, draping an arm over my shoulder. "Someday you'll be an expert, like me."

"Just 'cause you're older than me doesn't mean you're better." I pout and fold my arms across my chest defiantly, craving respect like some people crave chocolate. (Both are unbalanced rarities.) Everybody treats me like I'm just a kid, which, I am, but do I not deserve more? Age is just a number, as Warren's sister Raleigh tells me. But my cousin only laughs, brushing off my comment, and goes to retrieve my toy.

"Now, Clove," my father says firmly, placing a large, calloused hand on my shoulder. "This is a very expensive and valuable toy, so you can't let anyone else see it or even know about it. Do you understand?"

I nod vigorously. "Yes, Father. I understand."

"Good." He pats my hand and disappears inside the house with Warren with at his heels.

I turn the knife over in my hand and admire the way its smooth, cold metal reflects the golden sunlight so beautifully. This is unlike any other toy I've had. It's not soft in the way of a stuffed animal, or hard like the dolls Indie and Willow played with. It's both new and old, and very, very different.

Indie likes to paint; today my wall is the canvas.

My older sister dips a fat brush into a huge can of scarlet paint. When she pulls it out, several drops trickle down the bristles and plop back into the can. We giggle at the noise, then grow serious again as she starts to paint. Indie is only nine, so her strokes are slightly sloppy and too thick. Father comes over and takes the brush from her, lightly stroking the wall with the dark red bristles. Indie and I are mesmerized by both the colour, soft and elegant, and the beauty and grace of Father's brushstrokes.

When we ask how he learned, he tells us he's been practising for years.
Mama tosses an apple to me from the other side of the counter. It lands in my palms, all shiny and bright red. When I bite into it, its sweet juice splashes onto my tongue and somehow into my eyes as well. I giggle and rub away the stinging. Taking the apple out of my mouth, I examine the bite marks in the thin outer layer. They're small, but deep for a five-year-old's teeth. Father says my teeth are like razors, take advantage of them!

"I bought a bunch of red apples for you," says Mama. She looks at me over her shoulder. "I know they're your favourite."

Two weeks ago fifteen-year-old Willow Sharster was reaped for the 64th Hunger Games. Miraculously, no one volunteered, which is strange because there is a volunteer almost every year. It must have been due to the illness going around; several of our best fighters have come down with it, and Mama told me they are waiting until another year to participate in the Games.

Someday I'll be a tribute myself. But first I have to train more. I will climb higher and higher up the chain until I am at the top. Until I am the best in the district. Watch me.

Now I stare intently at the high-definition TV screen, leaning forward on the couch with my hands clasped in my lap. My eyes widen in shock as the District One girl and District Four boy sneak up behind Willow, swords shimmering in the pearly moonlight. The boy, all brawny and wicked, lifts both arms in the air at an agonisingly drawn-out rate, a smile tugging at his lips...

"Come on, Titus," Father hisses, much to my confusion, as he bends forward and narrows his bloodshot eyes at the screen. Death wishes for my poor sister, trapped in that place of hungry children (hungry for all the worst reasons), have been whispered throughout the town ever since this year's Games began. "Why? Kill her now, while you have the chance!"

And kill is what he does. Though, once I am older, that is not quite how I would describe it. Maim is a better word. There's blood everywhere, and even once Willow is clearly dead they just keep going. Stabbing her stomach, watching the blood flow and slick their fingers. The girl smears it under her eyes like a savage. My hands, shaking and sweaty from anticipation, threaten to clap over my eyes, but they only wipe away the salty tears that begin to spill. I choke back the sob tightening my throat. I don't want to watch this, knowing I will never see her alive again, but I have to, or Father will yell. I can't have him angry with me, so I keep my gaze on the screen and hope my sister's killers have deaths as horrible as hers.

Even when I bury my head in a pillow, my only comfort, and press my tiny hands against my ears in futile attempt to drown out the noise, the high-pitched screams of my dying sister ricochet throughout my head for the rest of my life. They are endless nightmares, haunting me in both sleep and in wake, shattering what was left of my purity. Death, which I had not witnessed until today, suddenly takes control of my life. It affects both my outward and inward body, altering me into a monster at the age of only seven. But it is only the beginning. First you see death, then you understand what it means (no, Clove, darling, your sister is not an angel, she is dead, dead, dead, never coming back). It destroys you quickly and slowly all at once.
"She didn't deserve to live," Father explains softly when I ask about his commentary during the beginning of the Games. "Willow was a coward. You won't be like her, will you, Clove?"

"No, Father, I won't." Stiffly I stand up and force my body past the shadows and towards the door. It takes nearly all of my energy to move through the unrelenting darkness.

"Promise me that I will never watch you die on that screen."

At the doorway, I pause and look over my shoulder. "Yes, Father. I promise."

It is my eleventh birthday party. Voices drift through the walls, faint and jolly. It seems as if everyone but me is enjoying the party my Father threw for his little girl.

I am not a fucking child.

Absently I stroke Rain's soft, fair cheek. "What's wrong, darling?" she asks, voice as smooth and soft as silk. "Are you not enjoying your party?"

I vigorously shake my head. "No, Rain, I'm not. All they want is my food. No one cares about me, ever. Someone always just wants something from me, and I keep giving it."

"Oh, poor baby," purrs my friend. When she embraces me, an icy shiver travels up my spine. Something about this girl is a little off. But she is here to help me, and she's the only one who cares, so I can deal with that. Besides, I'm sure that's what people say about me too. "Darling, they need to show you some respect. Why don't you do something about it?"

Again, I shake my head. "They would never listen to me. I'm just Clove, the daughter of a victor and the sister of a dead girl. I don't have my own claim to fame. Father says I need to be stronger, Rain, do—"

"And you need to tell him to fuck off," she spits, leaping to her feet. "Tell him! Tell him how powerful you are!" Rain is screaming so loudly now that I'm sure everyone can hear. My ears ring, then throb. As she steps backward — or is she being pulled? Her steps do not seem willing — she continues to screech foul words at me, blue eyes flashing in the dark. Then she's gone altogether and the wails fade and my tight-strung body relaxes.

Suddenly light floods the room, and a girl walks through the doorway. A little blonde boy clutches her hand, peering at me with wide, fearful eyes. Urgently he whispers something in the older girl's ear, tugging at her arm and jumping up and down in dismay.

"Get off," she snaps, shaking the boy away from her. She rubs the spot on her arm where her companion had grasped her, muttering obscenely under her breath. Then she sees me. "Oh — hello! My name's Deva, but you can call me Red. I'm Indie's friend." Red sticks out her hand with a good-natured smile, though she drops is with a puzzled look when I don't move a muscle. I just stand there and stare at her, unsure what to do and wishing she would leave. "Um, I just came to find the bathroom. Could you show me where it is?"

Silently I point to the right, indicating a pale blue door. "Thanks," she murmurs, scurrying off.
The blonde boy turns to me, ocean-blue eyes piercing mine, and says, "Hi. I'm Cato." When he lazily extends a hand towards me, I shrink back a bit and glare. "Alright, whatever. Hey, aren't you Roman's daughter? It's Clove, right?" And when he speaks, his cool, empty voice reverberates in my head, momentarily replacing my sister's agonised screams and my mother's sobs and Indie's shouts. All the noise in my mind dies down, reduced to nothing but a whisper. However, I do hear Rain laugh and murmur in my ear, "Oh, Clove, does he not mesmerize you? Speak, darling, and show him what you're made of." Yes, this is my chance to prove myself, even if it is to a boy I only just met. Pleasing just one person is good enough for me — I've learnt to take what I can get.

Scarlet lines dance in my vision. "Daughter of Roman Sharster, sister of Willow Sharster. Soon-to-be Hunger Games winner." I flash him the best, most victorious smile I can, aching to prove that I am not just another girl. That day will come. Be patient, I tell myself.

"That was my sister over there. Red Furoris. She was Willow's friend." Another shiver spikes my body at the sound of her name. I feel myself slipping once more. No! Stay away, stay alive, don't fall, he will know, he will see!

I groan, disconcerted by the mass of heavy, sluggish words once again echoing inside my head. Shut up! I hiss at Rain. But she keeps talking. Pain, burning and wild, takes hold of me. It is relentless; no matter how hard I try to free myself, my headache only worsens as I feel my bones combust and snap. Mind overload...

"Shut up! Just shut up!" I finally yell, alarming both Cato and myself. And they do. Rain's voice quiets down, and the wailing stops. I am at peace now.

But for how long?

My head connects with the wall. Rain sighs.

Get a hold of yourself.

"The Furoris family will be eating dinner with us tonight. Be on your best behaviour." Mom snatches the expensive white bowl from Raiv, my baby brother. "Raiv, no! Bad boy!" she scolds gently, clouded eyes gentle.

The doorbell rings, and the bowl slips from Mom's hands, crashing to the floor. Shards of cream-coloured something from the broken dish coast across the tiled floor, creating a mess. Throwing her hands in the air, Mom groans in exasperation. "Indie, will you clean that up, please? I have to get the door." Just as she finishes her sentence, the bell rings again, and she shouts, "I'm coming!"

Before Mom turns away, I notice the dark rings under her eyes, and the distinct wrinkles of fatigue on her forehead. What is she so worried about? Indie, Raiv, Father, and I are fine, and we all help with the housework. So what can be the matter?
I decide that I will ask her later.

"Clove," says Indie, "go get dressed. Mom laid out your new dress for you. Oh, and I picked out the shoes!" she adds as I sweep myself gracefully up the stairs.

Sure enough, a brand-new ruby-red dress awaits me in my room. But the outfit is not the only thing that has been expecting me. On my king-sized bed sits a beautiful, long-legged girl with fair skin and piercing green eyes that often float around in my dreams and in my thoughts.

"Rain," I bitterly acknowledge, giving her a terse nod. The young girl stands, tucking her hair behind elf-like ears. "Rain, why is my mom so sad? It hurts me to see her like this. I can't even do anything."

With cat-like elegance, Rain strides over to me and stops only inches away. Then she plants a resonant slap on my cheek, and I don't know how but I suddenly hear myself screaming. Wails, pensive and shattering, resound throughout my body. Pressure rises beneath my skin, burning like a wildfire. I collapse, body crumpling to the floor, and scramble on all fours into the corner, where I stare, wide-eyed and breathing heavily.

Rain steps into the wall, passing effortlessly through the dark colours with a crisp laugh. After a few minutes of solitude, I shakily get to my feet and grab the dress. It slips easily over my body, loose and silky. This scarlet dress, ruffled at the bottom, fits me perfectly.

At first I wobble a little in the strappy three-inch heels. Eventually, though, I become accustomed enough to stroll downstairs and quietly slip into the kitchen.

When I sit across from Cato, my dress glowing in the orange light, he hands me a bouquet of crimson roses. I smile.

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