

Crimes

My mother's words echoed in my mind: "It happens to everyone." I stared at my left shoulder in the mirror. A slight pain surged under my skin and the mark began to materialize. Elegant curves crossing and intertwining with each other. I couldn't take my eyes off it. I knew it would happen sometime this year, I just didn't think it would be now. I tore my eyes away from the reflection in the mirror and began to head back to class. It happens to everyone, I thought.

"Hey Angeline," Carmen said as I sat back down at my desk, "what did you get for question 4?"

"Twenty seven," I said, rearranging my papers. "You'll never guess what just happened."

"What?" she said, seemingly oblivious. I looked at her, narrowed my eyes bit, and then saw the realization creep into her mind. A smile painted onto her face and she grabbed my arm. "No way!!! Where is it?!" she said, excited, taking my arms and trying to roll up my sleeves of my sweater. I rolled my eyes and laughed.

"There isn't much to look at," I said, brushing her hands off me. "It's just the standard mark." I pulled down the neck of my shirt to expose my left shoulder.

"Ooooh, it looks so cute there!" she squealed. Carmen was only a few months older than me and had gotten her induction mark first. She was always the first to do or get anything. She starting losing her baby teeth first, she got a phone first, she got a boyfriend first, etc.

Since then, she had a few other little marks. There was a slanted line with a small open circle on the top that was on the side of her wrist representing the first time she'd gotten drunk, another one on her ankle which was a triangular hourglass for the time when she'd broken curfew and, lastly, an X on her one of her upper knuckles for when she lost her virginity.

At age 16, everyone native to our country, Linienbourg, would receive one mark of induction. From then on, our skin would act as a "record." Any time you did something, it would appear imprinted somewhere on your body in hard-to-decipher symbols. The things that got recorded were mainly anything bad you'd done, unless you'd made some stellar achievement.

Although the symbols were cryptic, it was easy to tell which symbols were clearly good and which were bad. The governmental rules briefly followed the biblical 10 Commandments (no murder, stealing, lying, etc.) but had all different rankings as to which were considered the harshest. The main acts that were looked down upon were any violent crimes, whereas your typical wrongdoings were not acknowledged all that much. The worst that would happen is that you'd be the talk of the town. It was the government's way of keeping everyone in check. When my 16th birthday came around, I was extremely careful keeping my slate clean, literally. I secretly wondered how Carmen could just be so carefree and do things without living in fear of the marks.

Linienbourg was a relatively small country, and my town, Prail, was very small as well and news spread fast. It wasn't long before everyone in the town had known what I did...or what they thought I had done.

As school ended, Carmen and I walked home together as we usually do. For a while we just walked. Not much talking was involved. It wasn't a bad thing, really. It was just us. Our friendship was at that point where we'd been friends for so long that we didn't need to talk to feel connected. Just being with one another was enough. But every now and then one of us piped up. Usually it was Carmen.

"I'm so jealous that you got your induction mark on your shoulder. I hate having mine on my hip, no one can see it! Imagine all the cute tank tops you could wear in the summer to show it off!" Carmen seemed more excited about it than I was.

"Yeah, I guess," I said, listless. I really just wanted to go home. It's been a long day and all this talk about the marks were tiring me out. We were only a few blocks from my house.

"What? You don't think they should be shown off?" Carmen asked.

"I mean...I just wouldn't want strangers knowing all these personal details about me."

"They're not even all that bad! You're acting like someone got killed. Lighten up."

"I didn't mean--"

"I love them. I think they're so cool. They really show who you are," Carmen said, completely ignoring what I had started to say.

"I just don't want to draw attention to myself." My voice shook. "You wouldn't know what that's like."

"Excuse me? At least I'm doing something with my teenage years."

"You're just so careless! You have no consideration for the ones around you, and you do all these dumb things," I spat.

"Oh, please. You never do anything fun."

"I just don't want you to get hurt," I said trying to steer the conversation in a different direction.

"Plus, so many people do things in their lives that they're not proud of. Why should it matter to us?" Carmen added. "Honestly, sometimes I feel like you're kind of jealous of me."

I scoffed. "I am not jealous of you! Why would I be envious of someone as attention seeking and absent minded as you?" The expression on Carmen's face changed. Regret instantly shot through me. "Oh my god.. Carmen, I didn't mean that."

"Whatever." The pitch in her voice raised. "Call me whenever you want to start having fun again."

I didn't even know what to say back. At this point I felt like a dog with its tail between its legs.

Before walking off, Carmen huffed loudly and rolled her eyes. She just left me in my driveway feeling like a terrible friend.

Just as I got in the front door, I felt yet another surge of pain beneath the skin on my arm. Oh, shit. I thought. I rolled up my right sleeve. Just above the bend in my arm, a diamond loop mark appeared-- the mark of insolence. Looks like it'd be long sleeves for awhile now. How could I have been so stupid? To only just be inducted today, and then get my first mark for saying unnecessary and stupid things to my best friend. Good going, I thought at myself.

The next morning, I awoke to the sound of my mother softly sobbing next to me.

"Angeline, wake up. It's important." My eyes fluttered open, laced with tiredness. I met her gaze. There was a sense of urgency in her eyes.

"What...?" I didn't know what she could possibly tell me. Maybe she found out about the mark. Maybe she told my father. Maybe--

"It's Carmen." My eyes widened and thoughts dissipated.

“What about her?” I asked timidly. I began to get nervous.

“She’s... dead.” My mom spoke the words slowly and softly.

“Dead?!” I screeched. Again, regret filled me. How could my best friend be dead? I just saw her! But the last time I did see her she was pretty angry. The thought of not having her around just kept running through my head.

“The police are downstairs, and they want to talk to you,” my mom told me. I sighed heavily and trudged downstairs.

“Angeline Maclachlan?” One of the cops asked as I descended down the stairs.

“That’s me,” I said.

“Great. We just have a few questions for you regarding the death of Carmen Saetren.”

I nodded my head.

“When was the last time you saw her?” he asked.

“Yesterday, we were walking home from school.”

“And what was your interaction like?”

“It was alright at first, until we got into a small, um, argument.”

“What was this argument about?”

“Just dumb teenager stuff, nothing important or major.” The policeman nodded and furrowed his brow.

“Have you gotten your induction mark yet?”

“Yeah...Just yesterday actually.”

“Do you happen to have any other marks?”

“Yes...” I looked down at the ground, ashamed.

“Is that one of them?” He pointed to my arm. I didn’t even realize I was wearing shortsleeves.

“Um, yeah.”

“When did you get it?” I wanted to lie so bad. But then I’d end up getting another mark.

“Just after the fight.” I half whispered.

“Thank you for your time.” He began to toy with his belt. “Angeline Maclachlan, you are under arrest for the murder of Carmen Saetren.”