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ALL IN

or how fate broke the rules

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Translated by: Robert Meissner

Language of original edition: German

Publisher label: Dark Art

ISBN Softcover: 978-3-347-58801-1

ISBN Hardcover: 978-3-347-58802-8

ISBN E-Book: 978-3-347-58803-5

Printing and distribution on behalf of the author:
tradition GmbH, Halenreihe 40-44, 22359 Hamburg,
Germany

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PROLOG

The darkness of the night had settled around the world like a protective cloak. And the moon was majestically enthroned like a huge, ripe lemon disk above the deep black, small lake. Only a narrow, brightly illuminated, somewhat shapeless stripe could be seen on the surface. It looked as if a huge fruit in the sky had lost a few drops of its juice and the body of water had caught it. The petite girl, walking through the dark forest, paused briefly to pay full attention to the beautiful magnificence of the moment. In this instant of silence, the past seemed only a vague memory and the future not yet tangible. Only the everlasting now was clearly present in all its glory. A mild wind blew inland from the lake and somewhat cooled the sultry, pent-up air. It gently caressed the delicate skin of her fair face and played around her long hair. She could have stayed like that for hours. But suddenly an eerie crackling pierced the silence sending a cold shiver down her spine despite the warm temperatures. It unconsciously urged her to move on. Instinctively, as if for protection she pulled her extravagant

tailcoat tighter around her body and started moving again. Although she normally had a brisk step, at that moment she seemed unable to move. At this point the rain of the past few days had softened the terrain so much that her heavy boots formed a vacuum with every step, making rapid progress impossible. Because of the danger that lurked in the darkness, an uneasy feeling came over her. Even though she could not see anything, she still felt that she was being watched. She forced herself to remain calm and to focus only on the beautiful and the true things in life, as she had done for most of her existence, when she was in danger of losing control of her emotions. Thus, her gaze lingered steadily on the mighty weeping willow that stood at the edge of the pond. A few isolated branches of the large plant reached into the water. And the gentle swell rocked the fine branches back and forth as tenderly as a mother rocks her child to sleep. But despite the vulnerable scene, this overwhelmingly symbolic display of life portrayed such majestic bliss that the remaining trees, which were to the left and right along the shore, seemed quite unnoticeable. The entire scenery triggered such a deep feeling of confidence in her that all fear was let go at once.

Her muscles relaxed and the muddy ground under her feet became firmer again. A late duck appeared in the moonlight and disappeared quacking in the shelter of the reeds that had spread along the shore, bent back and forth by the wind. It seemed as if the whole wide universe had formed a fine melody to which all of nature moved in unison. Without any further effort, the girl reached the mighty tree within a few minutes. She sat down and leaned her delicate figure against it, without withdrawing her senses from the overall harmonic performance. A rustling sound could be heard. A stone came loose and rolled down the slope. At the foot of the slope and amplified by the silence of the night it hit a somewhat larger one of its kind with such a deafening bang, that she flinched and just saw it further being catapulted out into the darkness. The stone danced over the lake's surface. It touched the cool water only lightly and almost imperceptibly before it took off again into the air, finally disappearing into endless darkness. At the same moment, a star appeared in the sky. The stone had changed its shape. Like a human being who had discarded its human shell after death. The wind shifted suddenly. A slightly musty scent of damp earth and

mushrooms filled the air. Only now and then a light breath of decay resonated. It was not exactly clear whether this smell came from the wet ground or rather from the rotting remains of the small rowboat that was leaning against a collapsed jetty on the opposite side of the bay. The sight took her back to her childhood in an instant. She remembered how she had often come here as a six-year-old girl with her older brother and his best friend. They would get into the wooden boat and row out onto the lake, even though they didn't know who owned it. These little adventures gave them an indescribable feeling of freedom and daring. But a good twelve years had passed since those days. She was no longer the same. And the shape of the little ship only gave an idea of what it must have once looked like. The ravages of time had gnawed away at it considerably, with the result that only the bow still surfaced from the water. Over time, it started resembling a drowning man, desperately searching for a foothold. This image evoked the thought of imminent transience. Inevitably, this saddening melancholic aftertaste forced itself upon her. Again, she realized why she had not visited this place too often since then. In an inexplicable way, this place was able to

reveal her innermost hidden feelings like no other, which again terrified her. She wondered why she had to come here today of all days. But before sheer panic could entirely take over, she spotted a tiny sunflower standing in the sand a few feet away from the sunken barge. The ugliness of impermanence seemed to dissolve into charming splendor of new life. For by its very presence the flower testified not only to new beginnings but also to the comforting effect of beauty. She felt deeply attached to this little plant. Since she considered it her duty to fully appreciate her uniqueness and guide her gracious beauty into the world as a dowry. In view of the many unpleasant things that happened every day, however, she was sometimes struggling to understand why this was still such a concern for her. Because in the overall picture of life, it obviously amounted to only a little drop in the bucket. Nonetheless, the very sight of this flower and the accompanying uplifting state of mind reminded her vividly and helped sweeping away all doubts effortlessly. She had never felt more connected to the universe as she did at that blissful moment. Suddenly, another crack followed by a soft rustling could be heard and tore her out of her thoughts. Alt-

hough she shuddered a little, she did not feel any fear, but enjoyed this thrill. Somehow, it gave her the same liberating feeling of being truly alive as when she was a child. As troubling as this place was to her on the one hand, there was no comparable spot where one could have been more frightened. The rustling sound grew louder and eventually came towards her. Her heart was pounding even faster. It seemed as if it wanted to break free from her chest. She didn't dare to move but even enjoyed being afraid. Because in the end, there was no real danger, only her own imagination that triggered this reaction. She knew she had the capability to end the spectacle at any time. It was beyond her comprehension that some people were afraid of something that they, obviously, had only created in their own minds. It seemed as if they had forgotten that all was just a game. On the other hand, it was probably hard for these people to understand why one could be afraid of their own feelings. There was a reason, but she didn't want to think about it now. Approaching footsteps became clearer to hear. Her innate instinct for self-preservation told her to hide. But she saw no reason to follow this hint. According to her own conviction this would have been quite

illogical. Her frightened mind surrendered and gave way to an indescribable serenity. As if by magic, the branches were pushed aside. For a fraction of a second, her anxious sanity returned in the face of uncertainty. A creature entered the stage. But the spotlights remained off, for a cloud had in the meantime moved in front of the light-giving heavenly body. She tried hard to recognize something. But although her beautiful, large eyes had quickly become accustomed to the darkness, her human visual organ could not quite grasp the creature's shape. Meanwhile, the shadow stepped out of the black darkness and continued approaching her. Either her last hour had really come, or everything was dissolving into oblivion. Regardless, she felt the warmth emanating from the stranger. She wanted to rise and get up, but her limbs did not obey her. It felt like someone had poisoned her which paralyzed her entire body but somehow not the mind. Now it would become clear once and for all whether her strong beliefs would still hold up in the face of this imminent threat. Overall, it was only in her own power and will to either let herself be really intimidated, or to give the whole display a different twist. After all, it was her play. Her life's work. Her drama

or her comedy. She was an actress, director, cinematographer, and producer all at once. A smile swiftly crossed her voluptuously full, well-shaped lips, despite, or perhaps because of this seemingly un-real scene that presented it to herself. The mysterious stranger was further approaching her. Her heart was pounding faster and faster. Heavy beats all the way up to her throat.

"Hello, my beauty," a voice whispered in her ear and the dreaded stranger turned into the beloved. But although the end had given precedence to pleasure, more than ever she felt eyes of an observer resting on her.

1

In deafening volume the insistently buzzing alarm clock broke the morning silence. I sleepily stroked my black-turquoise dyed, long hair back, while I looked around questioningly. (I was in my bed, of course. But since I usually had the wildest adventures in my nighttime dreams, I sometimes didn't know where I was in the morning). "You look so pretty in your casket..." the singer of the group Blitzkid yelled at me, which made me smile involuntarily. Although I didn't get much sleep last night, the punky music managed to wake up my spirits. Euphorically, I jumped out of bed and softly hummed along to the music. Swinging my hips to the beat and in a good mood, I went to the bathroom next door. I was mighty proud of myself. Because I had been living in my own apartment for a good three months now. Although it had taken a lot of convincing to get my parents' agreement having one of the two apartments, which was actually meant for the employees. They had their doubts about their daughter's ability to run a household. For my part, however, I could only see wrong images in the

heads of my old masters. And that is why I did not give in, of course, which finally paid off after countless hours of negotiations. In the end, I was ceremoniously handed the key to my own three-room apartment. And I knew right then how a true princess must feel at her coronation as queen. Perfectly styled - which in my case meant a flawlessly light skin tone with smokey eyes - I left the wet room to pose frowning in front of the closet in my bedroom. Like every morning, I asked myself the question of all questions. What on earth should I wear today? After, mostly the same procedure followed again and again. I tried out all kinds of combinations. And then, when the whole back-and-forth scenario finally became too stupid for me, I spontaneously grabbed some clothes and wildly threw them on together. (Yes, I know. The whole procedure could be much shorter, by simply grabbing some random clothes right from the start. But where would be the fun in that, right? Plus, the repeatedly unnecessary time pressure.) As it appeared, today's final outfit and dress up winner turned out to be a dark dress in 50s-style featuring several skulls as decorative accessories and a pair of fishnet stockings. I hurriedly packed my school bags while not entirely be-

ing able to ignore the mess in my apartment. I could literally feel the admonishing look of my mother behind my back. I hastily moved the dirty plates and glasses that were already piling up into the sink and spread a dishtowel over them. This made everything look much neater. Satisfied with myself, I reached for my bag. Just now as I was lacing up the straps of my high-heeled platform boots embellished with various horror patterns all over, a honking could be heard from outside. Hastily I closed the apartment door behind me and swiftly hurried towards the car.

"Good morning gorgeous" the driver greeted me as I dropped into the passenger seat of an old '69 Camaro SS and gave me a heartfelt kiss, which felt extremely good. "Been a pretty short night, huh?!" (Allow me to introduce Jared to you! Probably the coolest guy under the sun. Plus, my boyfriend.) he said, alluding to the fact that we'd had a ton of fun together last night. That's why I hadn't gotten home until after midnight.

"Without a doubt. If I'm forced to repeat this several times, you can watch my beauty wither away," I replied with a grin.

"Sweetie, that's impossible. You will always be the most mesmerizingly adorable creature

on this planet."

"Oh, so much heartfelt romance in these early morning hours already. This day can only become glorious." Jared smiled and turned the key in the ignition. Moments later, his car's V8 engine made its typical bubbling sounds. I knew too well how dearly attached my boyfriend was to this car. It had been the last gift from his grandfather before he passed away. Unconsciously I somehow had to think of my own ancestors. However, I quickly brushed away this thought. The story standing behind it, frightened me so much even until today. That is why I constantly tried to forget all about it. Yet, with modest success I must confess. Quickly, I looked for a distraction to trick my mind and its thoughts into something else instead. As hard as I tried though, I just couldn't think of anything else. My mood was already threatening to change for the worse when, luckily, Jared was just about to turn his beloved Camaro onto the school grounds. Eileen and her boyfriend Stephen were already waiting for us. My boyfriend skillfully maneuvered his car into an empty parking space, stroked his hand through his tousled, brown, short hair and, after turning off the engine, began holding the passenger's door open for

me. He gallantly extended his hand to me and, being quite the gentleman he is, helped me out of the car. (Yes, the two of us made a truly bizarre couple.)

"Well, hello there. You crazy cats! Ready for tonight?" Eileen, my best friend since our childhood days, grinned at both of us and gave me a welcoming hello kiss on the cheek.

"Sure, we are. This is going to be so much fun," I said, referring to the upcoming Halloween party.

"I'm very positive it will. I can't wait to take my costume out for a spin." Eileen moved back and forth on an imaginary catwalk like a model. Her long brown hair swaying slightly through the air.

"Unfortunately, we have another boring day of school to get through first."

"This too shall pass. Come on, let's get it over with." I snuggled up to Jared and the four of us made our way to the school building.



Jared threw his school bag into the corner of his room and lay down on his bed. (Are you wondering who is telling this part of the story, now? Because Vienne can't possibly know

these details. Let me shortly introduce myself. Destiny is my name. I have agreed to be the omniscient narrator of this story. You can also call me the puppet master if you like. Anyhow, the point is that I am holding all the strings in my hands and will therefore occasionally make Vienne worried a bit. Of course, there were certain rules I was supposed to follow. But what are rules for if not to break them, right? Trust me. It makes the whole story so much more interesting. Who wants to read about a girl who has everything? Essentially, you can only wish the worst possible on someone like that, no? But now I'm getting off topic. So, let's better get back to our main story. Where were we? Oh yeah, Jared threw his schoolbag into the corner of his room and lay down on his bed...) He felt that horrible headache again. The annoying pain was almost unbearable and had been haunting him a lot lately. At first, he had thought nothing of it. But with more and more time passing by, he was no longer able finding a satisfactory and real plausible explanation for his ever-returning symptoms. Each time they seemed to appear suddenly and without any warning. Plus, they also vanished just as quickly as they had come. He stared at the room's ceiling as if hop-

ing that the solution would simply materialize in bright letters out of nowhere right before his eyes. Yet, nothing happened. He realized he had to talk to someone about it. Because he was beginning to think that something was wrong with him. But he didn't want to bother Vienne with it. She would only worry, which was unnecessary and therefore better had to be avoided. Although he knew that his girlfriend had a strong personality despite her rather fragile physical appearance, he couldn't help but continuously getting the impression that something was tormenting her deep inside after all, making her so inexplicably vulnerable. Stephen was not an option either. Yes, he had become a good buddy. But they had never really shared a deep conversation until now. Moreover, he certainly didn't want to let Eileen know about his concerns. Even though she was usually nice and polite to him, he often had the feeling that she didn't really like him. Maybe it was because, when he and Vienne had gotten closer, but Eileen had not been with Stephen yet, and therefore rather regarded him as the person who had taken her best friend away from her. He couldn't say for sure. But his intuition rarely fooled him. In summary, all his friends were no option. Fur-

thermore and since he had just moved to the village last year, only his parents or his grandmother were close enough to be seriously considered. However, speaking of his parents he could definitely rule them out, too. They never had a lovingly open relationship with each other. And since he had told them that he wanted to study after graduation, it even cooled down further. Instead, after school they had firmly expected from him that he would start a job education right away, thus being finally able to financially contribute and support the soonest. But since this was not the case, they simply pictured themselves slaving for their offspring for the next fifty years. In addition, they felt to have seemingly failed themselves. Since he could remember, they had always tried to make one thing clear to him, over and over again. Namely, if you are working hard and diligently, you will eventually benefit from it. In his opinion, however, these were empty phrases. Because the only thing he had witnessed in the past eighteen years was that his two seniors were literally working their butts off but still had nothing to show for, especially the money never seemed enough. As a result, only his grandmother remained. He had always gotten along well with

