

GENESIS

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In the beginning, there were three witches who spoke to God.

Me, Mary, and Hannah. We were all young witches, hiding right under the nose of the church. We had been baptized not as infants, but as grown women, twelve years old. We had been born with spells lying under our tongues, but first we were taught to speak the words of God. And after we were taught to speak the words of God, we were taught to read them and to follow them, and to stay in our place. And then, very shortly afterward, we were taught to lie.

On the first day, God created me, Mary, and Hannah. He created me, Kenlie, the Standing Pool, Mary, the One Who Wept Over Him, and Hannah, One of the Wives. But that's exactly it, you see; I'm not so sure he created us at all (but more on that later). On the first day, he must've made us witches, or perhaps we fell to the earth like demons... but didn't God create the demons too? So, yes—on the first day, God created the witches.

On the second day, God sent us to summer camp. Christian Church Camp, to be more accurate. We were still too young to process what we actually were, how God had actually made us, and so we thought we would play pretend a little bit longer, whether that was subconsciously or not. We immediately found we didn't fit in with the others, especially the other girls at the camp.

We were interested in the moths, the large, beautiful ones the size of birds that would come out around dusk, when the night was welcomed as a squeezing, see-through mist of purple. We enveloped this time of time, it became us, exactly when all the other campers went indoors. "Too many mosquitos!" they'd say. We would just look at one another—seeing something in each other's eyes, but at the same time not sure of what we were seeing—and then look away, at the gathering milk of the moon.

That particular night, we slung up three papery thin hammocks, all jewel-toned and glowing in the thickness of the trees. There weren't many trees at the camp, as they had all been cut down years prior, but there was a suspicious clump near the edge of the campgrounds by the pool house, where people could choose to get baptized.

But the moths, of course, were attracted to the light and the darkness. And we were attracted to them. So, we went up and away from the slung hammocks, from the thickness of the trees, and near the campsite where the motel was. The motel was a hunk of white cinderblock, crumbling in almost everywhere you could imagine; inside the rooms, there were innumerable types of insects, arachnids.

Every summer, the three of us always came back. We all started in 2008, Hannah and Mary eight years old, me only seven. We knew nothing except that we could recite Bible verses with ease, and that sometimes we found ourselves awake at night after dreaming of the Rapture, unable to recall what the significance of the visions had been, but we would forget them quickly all the same, as if they had never happened.

One day, we were running around in the woods, and dusk was nearing. This was the time of day where the moths would come out. We found a pale pink one sitting delicately against the crumbling cinder block, directly underneath a light. We found a couple of smaller brown ones, a fuzzy orange one, and wrote their descriptions down in a leather bound journal. We drew pictures of the moths; we thought they were so magical, just like us.

While the others were at chapel, 9 p.m., we were inside the cinder blocks, reading Greek mythology story books. We didn't know if they weren't allowed—there were a lot of things that weren't allowed at camp—but we decided to keep them hidden anyway. It was more fun that way. We read about Aphrodite, Artemis, about Hera, Demeter, Persephone, and Athena. We thought the names and the stories were so beautiful, and we often talked about them late into the night. We had already read about all the gods in the book we were supposed to be reading, the Bible. We had already memorized all the verses, read through all the paper-thin pages, but now there were other things that attracted us.

Like the moths! We noticed a particularly large flutter outside by the naked lamp outside the cinder block. We got up from our beds, the springs creaking anciently underneath us, and scurried out into the dim light. The moth had landed on the cracked sidewalk, spilling into a pool of golden light. It was the biggest moth any of us had ever seen; it looked more like a bird. It had furry red wings with the most exquisite black markings. We had never seen such a vibrant moth before. I thought she must've been Athena herself.

We gasped at her beauty, and Hannah hurriedly went back inside our cabin to get the leather bound notebook. We wrote down everything we could about Athena, drawing multiple different pictures just so that we capture every angle of her beauty. Even after we were done, it still didn't seem like enough. We didn't want her to fly away; she seemed like she was one of us. But after a while, the other campers came back from chapel, marching up the grassy hill, the green turned black in the darkening night. We had to act like we had been among them the entire time, and slipped back into the group as if we were made of shadow; no one seemed to notice we had been gone, though, not ever. We just thought this was one of the many different types of power we had over the others, even though we weren't sure what was different about us. Maybe it was something like what the moth had; the beauty, the strangeness, the look of intelligent understanding in her eyes.

The next day, I told everyone to start calling me Athena.