

EVELYN SOMERS

JASMYN MARTIN, PILLAR SAINT

AFTER JASMYN MARTIN'S YOUNGER BROTHER ISAAC was suspended from university, he appealed but was denied. A few weeks later, in early February, Jasmyn had a dream in which he was telling her about his classes. He hadn't been suspended after all, and their mother hadn't been murdered. They were all living happily together, and the dark thing that had been after the Martin family for years and years had never existed.

At first it was their actual house in the dream: a cobbled-construction ranch on the edge of rural Covington, half an hour's drive from University City, where Isaac had gone to school (until his suspension). It was the house where she had grown up and where her father Randall still lived. Randall was a scrapper and a cat hoarder, and the rooms were cluttered with oddities. Cat hair tripped the light with dust motes in the bright midday sun. The house was surrounded by a high blockade of scrap metal that Randall had built. He was crazy that way—worse in the years since their mother was killed. She'd been shot in a tragedy that none of them saw coming. A friend of Jasmyn's had killed her.

In the second part of Jasmyn's dream, their sagging ranch was now a handsome foursquare with tile floors and high ceilings. The bedrooms and bathrooms were vast, and there were expensive electronics everywhere. The kitchen was large, and someone had left it in a pleasant mess, with cracked eggshells and the ends of chopped vegetables strewn across a granite island. French doors opened onto a terraced array of patios and fountains familiar to her in a way Jasmyn's dreaming mind knew was real. And at the lower end of the terraces, there was a portico attached to a long, official building. All around, men and women in summer suits were doing a walk-and-talk thing as in an Aaron Sorkin television production. She wandered out through the French doors and went among them.

Jasmyn worked in a nursing home and dealt with people in pajamas who were not usually upright and mobile. The dream was, in ways, a boost

to her self-esteem, showing her that she *could* move in a different world of the upright, ambulatory, and cogent. But it angered her to see how unpleasant such people could be—people like Kiernan Overwand, the vice chancellor of Big State University who had denied Isaac’s right to appeal. He had not even given an explanation. He made \$335,000 a year (she looked it up), yet he would not spare two sentences in his letter to explain to Jasmyn’s brother why his case didn’t qualify.

The professionals swirling around the fountains and patios were people like that—people who made deadlines and headlines. Jasmyn made beds. She’d gone straight to work after high school. Until recently, after her father got some kind of contract with the city, her wages had gone to pay his utility bills (they once lived without electricity, and she would never let *that* happen again). It was no surprise to anyone that she ended up making minimum wage, as her mother was dead, her father was a case, and they had no money. The only reason Isaac had been able to go to university in the first place was because he was gifted, but now he’d been kicked out.

Jasmyn drifted in her dream down the descending terraces to the large building and the portico beside it. The columns were dizzyingly high. Behind her, people gossiped about Isaac. They were saying he deserved his suspension, but he *didn’t*. He’d been set up by a jealous classmate and thrown under the bus by the school, and the Martins were too poor to do anything about it.

Then she noticed that one of the columns at the west end of the portico was shorter and squatter than its neighbours. How could that be? She went toward it reluctantly, feeling that she was walking deeper and deeper into something she ought to back away from. People continued talking behind her, and she heard someone say the name of her mother, her brother, and the vice chancellor. Then she heard someone yelling her name: “Who do you think you are, Jasmyn Martin? A pillar saint?”

A dare—and she was sick, in her dream, of all their meanness.

“I do!” she turned and shouted at them. “That’s *exactly* who I am.”

Then she woke and remembered that the fountains in her dream were on the mall of Big State University, from which Isaac was now exiled, and that the 180-year-old free-standing columns at the end of the mall were the only extant part of the university’s original building, Old Main.

What did the dream mean? What was a pillar saint? She puzzled over this, and over her claim that she was one, and then went back to sleep.

Mrs. Freeman had died in the night, but by the time Jasmyn got to work the next day the funeral home was already gone and Mrs. Freeman's dark raisin of a body had been taken away. The census was down, and it promised to be a long, slow shift.

She still didn't know what a pillar saint was. In between helping residents toilet, she got out her phone and looked it up.

"Wow, that's intense," she said to eighty-eight-year-old Mr. Burke. He smiled at her feebly. Parkinson's had left him unable to speak, and, perhaps because he couldn't complain, he was a total sweetheart.

Stylites, they were called, and they'd been a trend in third- and fourth-century Syria. Ascetics ascended pillars to withdraw from the world and be closer to God. Some of them preached from their heights, and one of the most famous, Alypius, had built and run a monastery from on top of a pillar that he stayed on for sixty-seven years.

"Don't try it at home," she said aloud and laughed.

Mr. Burke laughed a little, too, in an ominous, croaking voice she didn't know he could use anymore—or was it his? A cold chill fell over her.

She went about her work and tried not to think about the dare she'd accepted in her dream, but as she passed the now vacant room of the dead woman she started to cry. This was so out of character that she started cussing herself out between sobs. She had liked Mrs. Freeman, but not that much. What was making her cry was the injustice to Isaac and the idea of going up on a pillar, which, she now realized, she was going to have to do. Alypius had stood for the first fifty-three years on his pillar. Then his feet wouldn't hold him anymore, and he'd had to lie down for the last fourteen. Even then, he'd continued directing the monastery. It was too much to expect of anyone with a life, but she remembered how she'd been drawn to that column in her dream. Then she thought about her brother, who was lonely, cast out, and had lost his scholarships and his only chance. She was afraid of what it might do to him.

Someone told her boss, Loretta, and she came running. She'd always treated Jasmyn in a creepily maternal way. She took her back to the office, where she had been eating a doughnut from the Hole. She had a box of them and offered one to Jasmyn, but Jasmyn declined.

"How are you doing, hon?" Loretta said as she shoved the doughnut in her mouth. She rubbed the corner of her mouth with a scaly thumb tipped with burgundy polish and swallowed.

“I’m okay,” sniffed Jasmyn, calculating. She had stopped crying when Loretta showed up. If she said she wasn’t okay, she might be made to lie down in one of the empty beds that dozens of sick old people had died in, tucked in with a blanket that had formerly covered a corpse.

“Bailey said you were cussing.”

“Yeah, sorry about that. I just lost it for a minute.”

“Boyfriend cheat on you?”

“No.”

“Expecting?”

Jasmyn ignored this. There was no way she’d let Loretta in on her sex life. “I was wondering if I could go home?” she asked.

Loretta licked doughnut sugar from her fingers and stared at her. She was kind of a gross woman who ate all day long, sucked food off her fingers in public, stared at you like she was having sexual fantasies, and picked at herself like a methhead. These were uncouth and unsanitary habits anywhere, but they were even worse in a care facility.

“Except for the swearing just now—which I didn’t actually hear, so I can pretend it didn’t happen—you’re one of our best employees,” Loretta said.

It was true, though the bar was quite low.

“Thank you,” said Jasmyn. “I might have to be out a few days. I’ll call and let you know.”

She drove away slowly, deep in thought. She needed to work this all out, so she went to her father’s house. His truck was gone, but the back door was always unlocked. A furry mob of cats greeted her, and she had to climb over an old fertilizer spreader and part of a primitive pie safe to get into the mudroom. Then she opened the kitchen window and threw several handfuls of dry cat food through the hole in the screen. The cats, who had been tracking her from outside, came galloping around the back of the house and darted here and there after the fishy nubs. “Jasmyn Martin, Pillar Saint!” she shouted to them through the screen, suddenly feeling better about everything.

Just then her father drove up. He made his way in through the back and came into the kitchen, rubbing his rough hands against the chill. “Put that window down,” he said. His buffalo-plaid overshirt was buttoned wrong. “How come you ain’t at work?”

She told him about her commission to be a pillar saint. If anyone would understand something so bizarre, he would. He opened the fridge while he

listened and found some turgid French fries. He waved one at her. “Want some?”

“Dad, I have to fast.”

“Don’t lose no weight. You’ll wannit back someday.”

“Listen,” she insisted. She explained about the columns on the Big State University campus and what she’d learned from an online translation of an ancient biography of St. Alypius the Stylite.

Her father was difficult to deal with, but he knew firsthand about divine commissions and architectural salvage.

“You gotta do what your inner voice tells you,” he said, “but do you really think this could help Isaac?”

“I have to try.”

“It probably won’t make any difference, and those columns are tall. I don’t want you falling off one of them.”

“The internet doesn’t say how Alypius got up on the pillar.”

“Of course it doesn’t. Undoubtedly no one saw him get up there. Would you think someone was a saint if you saw him clawing to the top of a pillar or getting hoisted by a bunch of monks? You’d think he was an idiot. It’d be different if the sun just came up and he was sitting there, like a levitating wizard. Come see what I got in the back of the truck,” he said.

They went out the front door this time, so they didn’t have to climb over anything. It was after ten now. The wind was brisk and dry, and the cats had settled down for their long day of sleep. In the back of the pickup was a column. *The* column. It was longer than the extra-long truck bed and stuck out quite a bit. She recognized it from her dream, although it was made of wood, whereas the one in her dream had been made of stone.

“They were tearing down the old Turner Society building in Shell City. There was two pillars, but I just got one. Good thing, ’cause two wouldna fit in the truck.”

“Dad,” she said, “it’s *perfect*.”

On the first morning of her sainthood, she found herself on top of the column on the university campus dressed in fleece leggings, comfortable old Uggs knock-offs, and four layers on top. Her best feature, her endowment, was unbound: abiding indefinitely on a pillar with her breasts in their usual rigging was not an option.

Folded under her were a compact down throw and a heavy tarp, though

she would not use them unless she absolutely had to. Her father had built a plywood platform on top of the pillar. It was sturdy enough to hold 140 pounds of woman and a case of bottled water. There was a chain-and-basket arrangement to pull up food, if she decided to eat, and a vintage white enamel vessel with a lid for her other needs. She also had a packet of baby wipes, a stick of deodorant, and her diva cup. She was makeup free for the first time since age thirteen.

The weird thing was that she had no memory of getting up on the column and barely any memory of assembling all these supplies. Her father had hauled the column over on the Sunday night of a dreary weekend at the season's nadir, when absolutely nothing was happening on campus. He'd erected it beside the freestanding columns at the end of the mall across from the administration building, Hollows Hall, which was jokingly called "Holy Hell." She and Isaac had never figured out exactly how their father operated. He had a network of connections all over five counties going back decades and an uncanny talent for calling in time-worn favours. He could barter for anything when he seemingly had nothing to trade, and he was nuts in a way that made others want to help him. Maybe people just thought it was bad karma to turn their backs on a crazy cat man.

Jasmyn had fallen asleep in the pickup on the drive from Covington and had slept through the placement and securing of the pillar. She had even slept through her own ascension. Someone must have helped, but by the time she woke up the accomplices were gone.

She'd awakened at about 4:00 to her phone vibrating and found herself in the air on a small board in the darkness. It was her father on the phone. "Hon, you levitated," he said. "Don't wiggle around or you'll fall off. I'm gonna sleep in the truck for a while and then get some coffee at about six. You want some?"

"Sure, thanks," she replied. It occurred to her that saints probably did stimulants.

It was cold, but not as cold as she'd expected. She pulled her fur cap over her ears and tucked the ends of her gloves inside the sleeves of her jacket. As she was doing this, she heard her mother's voice.

"What are y'all doing up in the sky without a bra, Jasmyn? Didn't anyone tell you about gravity? Either you're gonna fall down or your tits are."

Jasmyn looked around. She couldn't see anyone, but a hand brushed her face tenderly and her heart unfurled like a blossoming lily.



W. E. F. Britten, illustration to "St. Simeon Stylites" from *The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, ed. John Churton Collins (London: Methuen, 1901)

“You’re getting more and more crazy like Randy,” her mother said.

Then the hand pulled back and slapped her, and a roughened version of the same voice started laughing.

“Thought you’d found Mommy?”

She drew a deep, stuttering breath. She’d known that sainthood wasn’t easy, and she’d been expecting spiritual warfare. She wondered if she *would* see her mother, but she tried not to think about it. Right now there was just the ghostly row of columns across the grass in front of Hollows Hall. The sky was still black, and clouds covered the stars and moon. She readjusted the case of water and the chamber pot so they wouldn’t tumble off and waited to see what would happen next.

For a long time, there was nothing. Then something brushed her shoulder and made a breeze beside her cheek. A new voice, very faint. Next came a direct slam into her back that all but knocked the wind out of her. Her kidneys ached. A disembodied arm appeared in glowing outline and went for the water, but Jasmyn grabbed it and kept it from falling off the edge. The wind came back around her ears again, harsher and louder. She could hear a new voice but couldn’t understand anything it was saying. Something grabbed her boob through the layers and twisted it. “Stop. STOP!” she screamed. The glowing arm came back, holding a noose of light. The noose became a gun. It vanished, and something pushed her harder than before. She had been half crouching, and she spun on her feet to see, but of course there was nothing. She held back a scream. It occurred to her that a saint was supposed to pray, but none of the Martins prayed and she had no idea what to say or to whom to say it. She decided just to speak whatever came out to whomever was listening. If she really was a saint, then whatever she said would be appropriate.

“All right, whoever you are,” she said. “I’m up here, and I’m here to stay. This glowing hand hits pretty hard, but I know you’re *more* powerful because you’re all good and nothing bad, right? Please, if you can, just hang out and help me—even if it’s only for part of the time.”

Then she had another thought. “Is this going to happen during the day or just at night?”

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, came the reply.

By 6:19 the façade of Holy Hell was entirely visible, and the colonnade was no longer a ghostly blur but extremely concrete in her peripheral vision.

She saw Randall walking up the mall with a tall coffee in each of his gloved hands. He lifted his right arm in salute when he knew she'd seen him and came on, walking briskly despite having been up most of the night. At the base of the pillar he called up to her, and she sent down the basket on a chain and pulled up the coffee. He had breakfast biscuits, but she refused.

"You're gonna get weak!" he called up to her.

"I'm fine," she yelled down. She didn't even try to tell him about the demonic assault in the early hours.

He sat on one of the benches near Hollows Hall and kept an eye on her as the sun rose. A couple of groundskeepers crossed the mall at around 7:00. They saw her, came over to the base of the column, and started yelling. At first they seemed to think it was some kind of sorority stunt or student protest. She was flattered that they took her for a student; she felt embarrassed about her only credential being a small-town high-school diploma.

"Do you have a permit?" they called.

Randall got up, headed toward the pillar, introduced himself, and offered them breakfast biscuits, which they accepted. "She don't need no permit," he explained. "She's a resident of this state, and this is a public campus. She brought her own pillar. What's the difference between that and a camping chair? One's taller—that's all. She's got her drinks and a blanket, just like camping."

Jasmyn could hear pieces of the dialogue and guessed the rest. If her father was arguing that there was no difference between the pillar and a camping chair, then it must not be anchored in anything. She wondered again what was holding it stable.

The groundskeepers eventually left, and she saw them talking on their phones on their way into Holy Hell. Soon the campus police showed up. They walked around, looked at her, and talked to Randall. Then some kind of elite team arrived that dealt with people on bridges and ledges in suicide situations. They told her that she had to come down, although they didn't say how she was supposed to do that. They also asked what was in the enamel pot, as they must have been worried about a possible bomb threat.

She tossed down a note that read, *The pot is my slop jar. I've already used it. Do you want proof? I'll come down when Dr. Kiernan Overwand explains why he rejected my brother Isaac's appeal.*

The administrator on the scene wrote something and threw the note back up, but his arm and aim were terrible and it went straight up eight feet

and fell back down on his shoe. Then he cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, “Could you please come down and talk to him?”

Jasmyn shook her head.

The rest of the day was a standoff. Law enforcement came, taped off the area around the columns, and talked to the administration and her father. They issued orders via bullhorn, but she ignored them and no one attempted to remove her.

Students gathered to watch, and campus and local journalists began photographing her and aggressively trying to send questions up in the basket—an effort her father resisted. Every once in a while she became aware of something happening on the ground. It wasn’t that far below her, but she felt that she was, quite literally, occupying another plane.

She tried to think like a stylite. What did their band director, Mr. Wright, used to say in band class? “If you’re giving it everything you *have*, it’s not good enough. Give it everything you *want*.” She guessed that the same principle that applied to playing her clarinet also applied to sainthood, but it had been clearer in band: you made yourself want to be better, you hit the right notes, and the tone was clear. She remembered, then, that she was supposed to be praying, so she attempted the awkward speaking-aloud once more. “Please, make me want to be a better saint,” she said.

It worked. It was as if she’d loosened a valve or uncapped a pipeline of knowledge, and suddenly she knew stuff. She knew Isaac had heard about her and was upset because he was banned from campus and could not come over here and make sure there wasn’t any trouble. She couldn’t see how this would all turn out, but she saw how he would be in ten years: older, and just as smart, but sadder and far, far away.

The downside of her new knowledge was that she discerned evil hovering close by. Had the stylites of old felt this darkness—the demons massing, licking their lips?

The upside was that she knew her mother was watching—her real mother rather than the impostor who’d appeared last night. But there was also a downside to this, as her mother could not communicate or come near her.

Later she learned that the press had tried to interview her brother about his suspension and what he thought of his sister standing on a pillar, but Isaac was hiding in a homeless shelter and couldn’t be found. Instead, they concentrated their efforts on Randall and the various deans and assistant vice chancellors, most of whom didn’t know anything except that Kiernan

Overwand was somewhere else. No one seemed to know where or why.

Toward the end of the afternoon they informed her that Overwand was in Lisbon and that he'd agreed to Skype with her.

"My phone's at home," she called down. "Stylites don't have phones."

It was the first time anyone on the ground except her father had heard her voice since she'd ascended and the first time the assembled company had heard about her sainthood. "What's a stylite?" people started asking. They began searching for it, but knowing what a stylite was didn't quite explain why there was a woman on a pillar on the mall demanding an explanation for her brother's appeal not being heard.

There was some scuttling and talk below, and soon an iPad was rising up to her in the basket along with a fragrant blueberry muffin. She plucked the muffin out of the basket and tossed it down to the spectators, even though she was ravenous. Then the iPad blurped at her, and she answered the call. She saw Overwand in a hotel room. He had a chestnut mustache and looked stiff but reasonable. He introduced himself first. "This is Kiernan."

"Dr. Overwand, I'm Jasmyn Martin," she said. To formulate her words, she sucked on the pipeline of knowledge and recited, from memory, the letter he'd sent Isaac. "You said his case didn't qualify for an appeal, but you didn't explain the appeals criteria or give him a chance to respond. So what I want to know is why you did that. What do you have against my brother?"

The expression on Overwand's face stayed the same for a while. Then it changed to a dark scowl, and he began to rant: "What the hell is going on back there? You blow up my inbox with emails about some demented woman scaling one of the columns on the mall. You say it's a PR disaster and that she's DEMANDING to talk to me. I get dragged away from my kids' vacation plans for a Skype date, and there turns out to be nothing there? What woman? What pillar? I don't see a damn thing but the front of Hollows Hall. Is someone supposed to be talking to me?"

The call had been set up as a group chat so that the deans and assistant vice chancellors could monitor and help negotiate. Now they all started apologizing and saying that there must be something wrong with the video. There was definitely a woman on a pillar, and she was causing a lot of consternation.

"I don't believe it," he said and abruptly ended the call.

Then Randall explained things to the campus officials: "He can't see her on his phone or tablet or whatever 'cause *she's* a saint and *he's* speaking

the devil's tongue. You got to listen to my daughter. She's a saint now, man. Whyn't you let Isaac appeal and find out what Mr. Doctor Overwand sees then?"

This argument fell on deaf ears, and as dinnertime came on everyone gradually left except Randall and a couple of security guards. Finally he went to the truck to sleep, after trying one last time to get Jasmyn to eat.

The assault that night was worse than the first night, as there were more voices and crueller slaps and shoves. After a while, it hit her that the demons were bodiless, even though many of them looked quite real, so when they grabbed her, pulled her hair, or drove a pin into her leg, it was an attack not on her body but rather on her unbodied soul. She thought about trying to fend off these attacks with the slop jar or by clubbing them with a bottle of water, but something stopped her. It was almost like she was frozen in place each time she thought about lashing out physically. Then she remembered that she was supposed to be a saint and that she ought to be praying. She tried again, awkwardly asking if the blows could please stop. The blows didn't stop, but she started to sense them coming before they hit, so she was at least ready. Then she discovered that if she pictured a sheet of galvanized steel blocking the attack, it would be deflected.

She woke late the next morning. Her father was at the base of the pillar, yelling at her that coffee was here. He sent up two cups—a tall latte and a regular coffee—and she swigged alternately from both cups while trying to check out her wounds, lifting her four top layers and pulling down the waistband of her leggings to see where the demons had bruised her. She still felt sore, but her skin remained unblemished.

The second day was the same as the first, without as much drama and only a fraction of the media and police presence. Unfortunately it was colder, and it rained a little, but she refused to cover herself. She didn't know it at the time, but the administration of Big State University had nervously decided that it was best to let her stay there and not mess with her until a hopefully more credulous Dr. Overwand returned from Portugal in ten days. By now she was terribly hungry, but she steadfastly rejected food and kept throwing down the many curious viands that people seemed to think she would eat. Some of the Covington contingent had driven over, mostly high school students but also a few of her own cohort from her school days. They tried giving her slices from Pizza Casa and bacon rolls from the Hole. Loretta showed up one morning and stood at the base of the pillar bitching

about her being gone and about Bailey and all the other CNAs who didn't want to work and would rather hide in the laundry room and smoke than do their jobs. She offered Jasmyn a raise if she'd get off the pillar and come back to work, but Jasmyn could not hear her. Whether she was delusional from hunger or growing more sainted, everything people said was now faint, and the little she could hear often sounded like it was about something else. When Loretta offered her a raise, for example, all she heard was *shela shela, loquanomoro, ding-ding alá, you, the only flower of lost hope*.

At the end of the fifth day, when everyone had gone but Randall, Jasmyn let down the enamelled bucket, which was again full. He took it away without saying anything, came back twenty minutes later, and sent it back up, sparkling inside and smelling of lemon-scented Lysol.

By day nine, she was extraordinarily cold and hungry, but she refused to use the down throw, and any food that came up to her hurtled back to earth in seconds. That night was the worst yet, as she was visited by the dead, including her grandparents and dozens of people she'd cared for at the nursing home. They came one by one, arriving in white oval pods that opened on top like miniature teapots to let the occupants out. Each one stepped out and talked to her, calling her by name and looking as he or she had in life, but hyperreal and overly made-up, like HDTV. Suddenly their faces would screw into a rictus of rage, and they'd snarl and say, "Look at me. Look at what I am now. This is you, Jasmyn." Then they would shrivel, rot, or bleed out before her eyes—still as real-looking as if this were truly happening.

The worst thing was that the mental shield didn't work against the white-pods-of-the-dead tactic, and she had no idea when the rotting or bleeding would start. She was forced to watch. Close her eyes? It made no difference; she still saw it.

When she felt she was on the verge of jumping off the pillar to make it stop, the arm from the first night returned. This time it held a rifle, which Jasmyn recognized as the gun used to kill her mother. When the next pod arrived and her mother stepped out, Jasmyn was expecting it. Her mother was smiling her country smile, and her blond hair and pretty face were just as Jasmyn remembered. She held out her arms, and then her face twisted like the others. "Look at me. Look at me, *Jammy!*" she hissed. The ghostly arm aimed the weapon, and Jasmyn watched her mother fall, bleed, die, and revert to a puddle of nothingness.

The last to come was her brother, but he didn't come in a pod. She was

now freezing and moaning with hunger and fear. She didn't think she could watch one more dead person die again. She curled into a ball, her hands clasped behind her legs, and lay on her side on the platform, trying to crawl inside herself like a turtle. But the demons decided to have a good time with this, and soon they were rolling around curled-up Jasmyn like a pill bug, sending her from corner to corner. She knew she couldn't actually fall off unless she deliberately jumped, but knowing didn't help much.

Then the arm came back with the noose it had shown her the first night. The noose swayed back and forth, swinging and twirling like an ornament on a string, and a body started to take shape in it. It was Isaac in the noose, and she knew that this was why she was up here—to keep him from despairing and hurting himself.

As the predawn lightened the sky and the columns beside her grew definite and stony again, she sought spiritual guidance about whether she could eat something and found that a chocolate nutritional drink with extra protein would be okay. When her father arrived with her coffee that morning, she told him, and he was back ridiculously fast. Maybe he already had some in the truck, or maybe he'd already received the divine message.

She wanted to chug the drink, but she sipped it instead. New warmth flowed through her, and she set down the bottle, stood to full height, and stretched, working out the kinks from rolling around on the platform like a fleece marble during the night. She turned in a circle, arms out. Being a saint was a little like being a planet, she thought. From close up, they were both so irregular, constant, and covered with dirt.

On her second rotation, she saw that a window shade in Hollows Hall that had been closed for almost two weeks was now open. It was in Kiernan Overwand's office. She knew this because when he was at work, he tweeted about "the view from my window," by which he really meant what was happening on campus, but the profile pic was of that portion of the facade of Hollows.

She was excited and waited to be summoned down or to see him come out to talk to her, but nothing had happened by the time the sun passed its apex and started heading west. A few students paused to watch as she sent a message down to Randall. With minimal media coverage and the cold weather keeping people indoors, she was no longer of much interest, though passersby still threw food at her occasionally.

Her father was gone an hour and a half. When he returned, he stood be-

neath her, shrugged, shook his head, and called up, “They said he’s catching up on email.”

“Didn’t he have email in Portugal?”

“He’s gonna get to you soon,” Randall called.

But he didn’t get to her. After a week back on the job and some pressure from his superiors to engage with the media on the question of the woman on the pillar opposite Hollows Hall demanding an appeal for her brother, Overwand explained that he had nothing to say because there was no woman and no pillar. He had photos to prove it, snapped with his phone through his office window, documenting the mall, the columns, and the fountains beyond them.

“See?” he said irritably, showing the pictures to the small group of campus leaders who had gathered to figure out how to resolve the issue.

It was pointed out that he could have taken these photos months ago, so he went to his window and snapped again. “All right, what about *this*?” he said defiantly. Indeed, the space where Jasmyn’s pillar stood was empty.

This confused Overwand’s colleagues, who could see her unmistakably through the window. “May I?” said one of the deans, offering to try it herself.

“Sure,” he said.

She took a photo of Jasmyn doing side stretches to get rid of a cramp and showed it to the others. “Look!” she said.

“At what?” said Overwand, staring hard. “I spy, with my little eye, the mall between classes and a bunch of idiots throwing pizza slices and doughnuts at something in the sky.”

The next morning, before the maintenance crew crossed the mall, before the landscapers drove by in their carts, before her father came strolling up with coffee and her protein drink—how many days now?—she woke after another night of wrestling with the friends of her tormentor (or the Devil, if you prefer), looked down, and saw Overwand standing at the foot of the column. He wore a plaid Scottish cap, very dapper, and his expensive overcoat hung over his expensive pressed pants. His shoes gleamed. His mustache was trimmed. He looked up at her, and she knew that he could see her—that he’d seen her there all along.

“Why wouldn’t you hear my brother’s appeal, you overpaid chicken-shit?” Jasmyn shouted down.

“If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound?” he

shouted back. “If an appeal is requested and I, the appellate officer, refuse to consider the rationale for it, does it even meet the criteria? If a woman protests by going up on a pillar, and I do not see or acknowledge her reality, can she win her hopeless battle? Do I even have to acknowledge her? You should know, I have talented friends in high places, Ms. Martin. They’re so talented that they can alter digital images without any software or even without touching my phone. They’re mostly nocturnal. You’ve probably met some of them over the past few weeks. I see whom I choose to see. I *explain* what I choose to explain. My friends have my back. You may have guessed at their leader?”

Jasmyn thought about her family, especially her eccentric father. “I know some things you probably don’t,” she challenged him. “Even when everything is against people, there’s still something in the universe that’s *for* them. So if someone really needs a friend, a pillar, or whatever, they’ll find it. I also know that my dad’s a human saint who doesn’t even realize it, and my mother is dead yet still alive; I can feel her all around us. And I know that there’s nothing anchoring this pillar, but it hasn’t fallen over in months, and I haven’t fallen off, even though your ‘friends’ have been trying to hurt me. Go ahead. You’re a big guy. Give it a hard push and see if you can tip it.”

Overwand suddenly looked flustered. He backed away, turned, and ran through the main doors of Holy Hell. She never saw or spoke to him again.

The sun continued to set and rise. The wind blew ice from the north and then turned and came the other way with a puff of tepid air from lands already in bloom. Each morning Jasmyn drank a stout coffee and a sweet chocolate protein drink to keep herself going. She planned to stay there as long as it took for something to happen, though she wasn’t sure what that might be. During the day, she watched her father from on top of her pillar. He was the most dependable, wonderful, crazy-ass father she could have asked for. What other dad could have made all of this possible?

At night, she held on. The demons were efficient and sly, though repetitive. She was pretty sure she had their number, but she stayed alert in case they tried something new.