

Partly because of her youth and the glory of the day, partly because of her blossoming need for a cigarette, the girl half ran with her flowers along the path that went by the river, by the old diving pool with its mossy brick wall, before curving away through the oak woods.

A girl of her class- you'd never expect it. She found an amusing irony in the thing that they were all protecting her from was herself. Despite being dubbed the most romantic killer the town had seen, her reasoning was anything but.

Lifting up her dress as not to get grass stains on the knee, the girl, whose name you need not know, laid a single rose on the young man's lifeless body, taking his hand and holding it over the stem.

"Hard, luck, darling." She whispered, pulling herself up.

She wasn't a killer- at least she didn't refer to herself as such. She thought herself a saviour- a saviour of girls, of ladies, of young women. In her mind, all the so-called 'atrocities' she committed were for the good of her kind, and that they'd one day reward her for her great sacrifice.

The girl turned for one last look at the boy- "a great suitor" they called him. Her sister remarked just the day before that she'd never felt so enamoured with someone, even daring to call him "the one". The silly girl finally thought her 'luck' had turned!

With a murderous glint in her eye she turned to him, tilted her head and pouted. "I suppose it just wasn't meant to be." She shrugged.

And it wasn't. Nothing, nobody was ever 'meant to be'. How could something be destined, written in the stars, if somebody had tried, and failed, to arrange it many times? She decided a long time ago that nobody would join her sister at the throne, that nobody would deprive, or split with her her birth-rite of glory.

Their mother was old and easily tired, yet she was nothing compared to their father. Both monarchs, although still great and lovely souls, were not in a fit state to rule, and so the throne was set to go to Princess Briony, our hero's older sister.

Most young girls would rejoice at becoming queen, and with a youthful age to ensure you get to enjoy it. Briony was over-the-moon when she heard of it, and initially so was our hero.

It was the clause that caught them, that made our hero snap.

"A queen must rule with a strong King." Their father explained lovingly. "And to make sure he's to your liking, we've arranged meetings with potential suitors- it's up to you to simply make the choice."

The evening of the suitor's ball was mad- girls in killer dresses, the men in gentle suits. Briony browsed the suitors at her leisure, having a grand old time.

Our hero sulked in the corner, her foot against the wall (most likely ruining the paint, but at this moment she did not care). Why did Briony have to share the throne? Why didn't they think her competent enough to rule alone? Their mother had managed to do the same for many a year...

After a frustrated sigh it struck her.

If there's no suitors, then they can't force Briony to marry...

But how does she...?

Oh.

With a cool confidence, she strolled up to Briony, who had her arm linked with that of a young man wearing chains around his neck- perhaps she was a magpie, enchanted by all things shiny and valuable.

She painted on her best smile and stood before them. "Hello! Who's your friend?"

Briony perked up, freeing one arm and motioning between the three of them. "This is Lord Highline. Your Lordship, this is my sister."

They exchanged formalities and went their separate ways- all seemingly cheery.

A few hours later, Briony expressed her tiredness and told our hero that she'd have to go to bed.

"Oh, of course! Surely you've had a busy day..." she empathised.

She saw her chance and ran with it. As the men began to mull toward the door she fixated herself upon the Lord and followed him to the patio. "Lovely to see you again!" She smiled, forcing him to stop and chat as the grounds began to clear.

"And yourself. Your sister truly is a remarkable young lady."

"I know." She said bluntly. "I could show you her favourite spot if you like? That way you can surprise her there some day."

He, of course, obliged and the rest was history.

It was addicting- once she'd had her first taste of blood she couldn't stop- what was one more death if she was already guilty of another?

They began to go through suitors sooner than they were coming in.

Things were made worse when the first body was discovered. At first she was scared- would they find her out? Seemingly not. Most appeared to believe that this was the work of a deranged stalker- killing every suitor to have Briony to himself. The princesses were put on round-the-clock protection, everyone living in fear that they would soon become a target.

She was unfazed. She was getting what she wanted- it was looking like Briony would rule alone, an iconic, unprecedented method of leadership. The real emotion was invoked when a plucky boy from overseas travelled to meet the princess, despite everything he'd heard, despite every warning.

Briony was infatuated with him- they spent every moment together. Perhaps it was relief of finally finding someone whose life wouldn't be cruelly ripped from them just hours after their meeting. Surely it couldn't be love- surely Briony could not have given into this system!

After she'd relieved Briony of the burden of the new suitor, she made her way toward the house, feeling rather proud of herself.

This feeling was burst by the sound of a snapping twig.

She dismissed it. A fox had walked over a branch, that was all it was.

What raised alarm bells was when the 'fox' called her name. She turned around at an instant.

The blood drained from her face. "Briony..." she gasped.

"I saw... everything."