

Our beginning...

“It is loud. Almost deafening. Thunder hammers the skies, and lightning shoots across its depth like the sight of fireworks on a dark night. The rain is falling heavy, and the mood outside is damp and dense. The year, I believe, is two thousand. The month? I’m far less sure of. If the days of burning heat are anything to go by, I would hazard a guess and say it’s the summer months. As for the day of the week, I would say it’s a question most wasted; it would be far wiser to ask me some sort of ridiculous mathematical equation than it would be for me to answer what day of the week it should be, for it’s hard to know time when it’s purposely kept from you. We are only allowed to know when it’s day or when it’s night, from the rise and fall of the sun and moon.”

“My name is Althea, but I was once known by another name. I think I’m about twenty years old, and despite the clean exterior of my face and the precise way my long ginger hair is tied into the perfect ponytail, beneath the cleanliness of my yellow dress, bruises – scars of old and new – cover my pale skin. My room is concealed by a thick layer of gloom, an obscurity that is everywhere. A sadistic darkness that submerges everything in its sight. The solitude, I know with certainty, is meant to frighten us, to imprison us, to shelter us weak so they can break us and keep us compliant, as nothing more than obedient and dutiful slaves.”

“My seclusion is a small square room where a small square mirror hangs on the crisp white walls. My room is cold – always cold, even more so when the snow and ice lay upon the ground – then, well then, it can feel as if the ice has escaped within. A window, a solitary window designed so small as to prevent escape, sits tauntingly with promises it shall never give – on the back wall; without curtains to keep the approaching darkness at bay. Beneath the bitter draft of the window, is a small bed covered in what must have once been a sterile white sheet – with an itchy bed cover; a flimsy piece of discoloured material that lays on top and is given to us to keep us warm. An equally itchy pillow, filthy and stained with blood and tears, is simply put there to keep my head off the springs, that are now sticking up in the old mattress; threatening to slice my neck open, should I become careless and fall into a deep slumber.”

“A small, discoloured chair stands in the corner of the room, upon a floor that acts as an alarm for looming feet. Old, creaking, dark wood, where if you listen very gently, you can hear the soft movements of rats scurrying across the floor in the shadows. A bright bulb hangs carelessly, without the beauty of a lampshade, from the disfigurement that is the ceiling.”

“Twenty other rooms, identical to this, line the dingy, damp walls of an unilluminated tunnel. And one of these chambers has been my prison for many years. How, I hear you say, as you shake your head in disbelief? Well, I will tell you – I will take you all the way back to my beginning, and how I became another girl in a yellow dress.”

“I was born within the bitter cold of nineteen-eighty, to a mother named Sarah and a father named John, and through their union, they had three children. I was baptized Evelyn Clearwater, and I was the middle child, with an older brother named George and a younger sister called Marie. To anyone looking from the outside in, we seemed very much like the perfect white-collar family. For the first ten years of my life, I can say I had known nothing of suffering, hardship, pain, violence, torture, starvation, and depravity. These words had no meaning in my life – why would they? They meant absolutely nothing to me; they were nothing more than empty words other people spoke of, other people understood, not me. Well, they say life has one of the sickest senses-of-humour, because all that changed upon the rise of Drexel.”

“Drexel is a confederation – a fellowship, if you will; a union led by one man named Jaymus. Jaymus, a deeply devout man of faith, was born into high society, the sort of highbred that despised anyone unfortunate enough not to have their rank and status. This group of people believed unashamedly that the domestic divergence needed cleansing – thoroughly. That the separation, the subdivision, needed to be more radically defined and order returned under one law – his law. His recommendations – his proposal to close all our borders to those in need, and to keep those of certain lower class and below average education as mere domestics to those from an elite, more superior background – was met with scorn.”

“Nevertheless, despite the disdain Jaymus had been confronted with, a few influential and powerful people admired his uninhibited, undiplomatic, and plain-spoken manner. They followed his crude motions to form a political party of their own, and from it, the Brotherhood of Drexel was born. No one ever thought such a discriminatory party would ever enter parliament, yet, like a horrific car crash, that is exactly what had happened. When voting fever spread across our native soil, their numbers increased, and unavoidable uproar followed as they claimed seats in government. The same unfortunate analogy could be used to describe Drexel as they took predominance, and the fires of hell fell upon us in response. It was practically like the end of days, as violence, mayhem, and anarchy flooded all that we had once known, prompting Jaymus to assemble an aggressive militia group to restore civil order.”

“Many deaths came from their conception. Dressed in black from head to toe, they combed the streets, exterminating us like rats if any dared to oppose the new rules of society. As social divides were erected, those who remained – unable to escape before the borders closed – faced a choice: to serve or be condemned to death. That was the beginning of our new world, and the fundamental rules Drexel was built upon. The new world order split into five districts.”