

Jonas walked through the woods, the leftover mud from a midday rain sticking to the soles of his shoes. The gun was sticking out of his waistband, shifting with each step he took. The air was sticky and hot, as it usually was after Alabama rainfall. He looked at his feet, listening to the bird's chirping. He felt better than he had in a long time. The same feeling one got after coming out of some kind of horrible sickness, knowing the experience was over. He heaved his breath and looked up into the night, deep and speckled with the marks of planets and life, like a blanket smothering him.

Jonas spoke up to it, like he was yelling across eternity. Sending out a plea to the stars and nebulae, "One last chance to help me. Just gotta do something..." Jonas waited a second, staring at the nearly pristine sky before sighing and pushing on. There wasn't any burning bush, no sign in the tea leaves, not for him. When it came to prayer Jonas never had much of a chance. A cool wind blew through the trees, rustling them together. He exhaled, some people were just ground to be trodden upon, that's what he believed at least. For some people, they got to have everything given to them on a silver platter. Good parents, friends, a job and decent education. Even people he knew who had bad home lives at least had friends, just somebody to talk to. He could talk to Uncle Shaw. Although, he wasn't likely to remember the conversation the next time Jonas visited him.

Uncle Shaw

He hadn't thought about Uncle Shaw. This would break his heart. If he was still lucid enough to understand what was being said. Jonas stopped, sitting down on a tree stump adjacent to the trail, not caring about the damp wood on his bottom. Shaw had died a while ago. Jonas hadn't been visiting his Uncle, he had been visiting a phantom. A dismal simulacrum of the man who'd raised him. A man whose mind was being held by a ball and chain inside of his head. He would see Shaw eventually, the real man. The man who'd raised him, the man who'd always had an answer to his every problem, always a solution. But Uncle Shaw didn't know what to do then, he certainly didn't when the two of them had woken up one morning to find no remnant of Aunt Opal's existence. No clothes, no personal items or jewelry. Even the pictures she had been present in were removed from the house. Shaw had stood in the kitchen for five minutes, before he grabbed his jacket and demanded that they go search the woods for her. An hour had passed before they had realized the futility of it. Jonas knew from the beginning, but Shaw fell onto the ground, sobbing like a child. Shaw had died that day, in the woods. Fitting that the same would happen to Jonas. Shaw wouldn't be sad, he'd see Jonas soon enough. Maybe this was what God had intended for him? Yes. Yes! This was God's fantastic purpose for him! To make a sacrifice in blood. Just like his son had done years earlier, Jonas would suffer for years in the world of men. Having every facet of his life being torn from him. Only to be brought back to his Father's domain! What was Joseph to Jesus other than a vessel? What was Mary other than a symbol, a figurehead of pureness and goodness? He would ascend, just like the good Lord, joining his true father in paradise. Yes, he could see it, it was beautiful. Jonas looked up at the sky once more, "I won... I did it... Maybe this was the point wasn't it? To prepare me for what you wanted..?" He closed his eyes, more tears streaming down his face, "I beat it... I did everything you wanted me to do..." He picked himself up, crying and sniffing. Jonas walked down the trail, he cried intermittently. Jonas eventually reached a clearing. The whole area had once been the sight of a lake. With dry, cracked ground that had been made muddy by the recent rain. In the center of it stood a large cement tube, for the purpose of

draining the water out of the lake. Jonas didn't want them to find his body, he wanted it to be returned to the Earth. Encased and preserved. The idea of having a funeral nobody showed up to sickened him. Even more so the idea of people he barely knew showing up to the service, droning on about how, "Handsome," he was, or how, "Enjoyable to be around," he was.

Because people want to avoid guilt, more than they want to experience discomfort. They wanted to be able to say that they, "tried," without ever having to put any of the effort in. It was all nothing, their vain compliments turning into a gray, shapeless blob of putty. Jonas shrugged, he jumped up onto the top of the pipe, barely able to pull himself up, scratching his shirt on the concrete surface. He sat on the edge of the pipe, staring up once again at the night sky. It spoke of a woe older than anything Jonas had experienced. Jonas sighed, he pulled the gun out of his back waistband and ejected the clip.

SIG Sauer P365, 10 round magazine, 9x19 mm Parabellum rounds, manufactured in 2018

Jonas flipped the magazine over and looked at the bullets on the inside of it

The world's deadliest candy bar

Jonas took a deep breath. He felt serene, an eerie calm. He couldn't hear the crickets chirping or the Cicadas crying into the endless black. The woods were still muggy, and the air made his clothes cling to his body in sweat.

Jonas put the polymer magazine back into the gun, it clicked into place smoothly. He held it in his hand, looking up at the stars and enjoying the night. Heaven was different for everyone, that had to be the case. Children were taken to an endless playground where cake grew on the hedges and their knees never scraped, and their friends never had to go home. Women who were abused left for a world in which nobody would ever hurt them again, where all they knew was comfort and solidarity in their communities. Men who had never found love would have just that, acceptance and ecstasy in their communities. Able to support and be needed.

Jonas would be asleep.

He didn't dream of a place where he had a beautiful wife and loving kids, that was childish. Desire of the flesh all turned to dust eventually. And what does passion do with eternity? Surely if he finds a woman who would always love him, and kids who adored him while never aging. Something had to give. Neither of them would stop cherishing him. How could they? They weren't real, pleasant mirages that were conjured up by God as a feeble consolation prize for a life devoid of achievement. No, Jonas wanted sleep. To descend into the endless dark and feel nothing except vague comfort and warmth, that was his heaven. Jonas closed his eyes and imagined sinking into the dark. He opened his mouth and stuck the gun, feeling its smooth synthetic framing against the roof of his mouth. He could feel it, God's reward for his lifetime.

His finger started closing around the trigger.

Jonas was smiling.

The woods were quiet. Untouched by the day to day minutia of large cities

