

# The Hidden Consequences

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“All Cadets, report to the chamber for the Summoning,” a loud voice boomed through the megaphones placed at the head of every street and hallway. The Summoning was the most awaited event every year, taking place in the chamber atop the highest hill in Avalon on the darkest and foggiest morning of the year. It was broadcasted for all of Avalon to see the graduating class of Cadets prove themselves with one final test, the test of taking a life. All final year Cadets, now adults, would be presented with the option of two people, and had to choose between them to determine who would be sentenced to death. All the Cadets had known this was coming and had been preparing their whole lives.

The Summoning was originally designed to control the overpopulation in Avalon. Over the years, it had slowly shifted to a public spectacle, everyone waiting to see the Cadet's faces stumbling out of the room. All the citizens at home threw a party, full of all their loved ones, because they did not know who they might be saying goodbye to in a few days. Everyone in Avalon had lost a loved one to the Summoning at one point or another.

Becky was one of the youngest in her class, having just turned eighteen a week before the Summoning. She had dreaded this day since her first day at the Academy. She never wanted to have someone's life in her hands, that was not her job.

She went to the Academy to become a Commander, not a Fighter. That was part of the purpose of the Summoning, she supposed. To make sure even the Commanders could make ruthless decisions for the best for Avalon. She would be giving orders to others to kill, so it makes sense for her to understand the magnitude of those decisions.

On the walk up the hill, everyone kept to themselves, mentally preparing for what they were about to do. Some had been counting down the days until the Summoning, bounding up the hill with wide smiles and bright eyes. They were destined to be Fighters. Most of the Commanders on the other hand mirrored Becky, anxious and nauseous.

As they entered the chamber with their bright white uniforms, freshly ironed, they were identified with a retina scan and directed to their seats. Once everyone got settled, the lights dimmed. "Let the Summoning begin." the booming voice said. At home, there were cheers, toasts, and clinks as the excitement began. People hugged their loved ones; they didn't know if it would be the last time.

As the choices began appearing in front of their eyes, Becky knew something was wrong. The choices were supposed to be just two full names, appearing at random. That was what it had been like in every simulation, every practice test she had ever taken. Instead, Becky saw vivid images right in front of her, as if they were her memories. She saw her mother collapsed on the bathroom floor collapse with an open and empty bottle of pills beside her, clearly having overdosed. On the other side, she saw her boyfriend, crushed behind an airbag in a T-boned car, blood streaming down his face as his breaths became increasingly labored.

“If you notice or see any abnormalities, report them immediately. Otherwise, there will be consequences,” the booming voice reminded her over the loudspeaker. She froze. Her whole life, she has been told to be loyal and truthful to the Academy. She can recite all the rules and has heard numerous stories and consequences about those who disobeyed them. She knows what her future could hold, but a little part of her can’t help but wonder, “ *What if I just don’t get caught? I can’t report this, I need to take the chance,*” she tells herself. “ *I’ll be fine... right?*” She knows what she’s doing is wrong, but she cannot bring herself to report it. Not this time, not with something so great at stake.

Becky knows that despite how much she loves Nate, her boyfriend, she needs her mom more. She couldn’t fathom the thought of having to go through life without her mom at her side, so she painfully makes the choice to kill Nate. The second she makes the choice there’s an immediate pit drop in her stomach. She rises from her seat to leave the Summoning incredibly pale and shaky. Her mom is watching from home with a smile on her face as she says, “I’m so proud of you lovebug.” Becky immediately texts Nate. “Can we meet up at the park later? Come over to my house and we’ll walk together.” She wants to avoid him getting in a car for as long as possible and to enjoy his company while she can. “ *It’ll be so hard to watch him so happy knowing what I’ve done to him, but at least I get to enjoy his company one last time,*” s he thinks to herself. “ *The park is within walking distance, and he lives right across the street, so there’s no reason for him to get in a car yet.*” Nate’s reply to her message is quick. “Yeah of course! I’ll be there around 2.” She breathes a sigh of relief, knowing he will be safe for at least the next few hours.

When she arrives home, she realizes the house is silent. This is abnormal since usually her mom would be watching TV, but Becky concluded that she might be napping and thought nothing of it. She notices her hands begin to shake as the anxiety from earlier finally creeps in. “What did I just do? I disobeyed the Academy. What does this mean for me, for my family, for my life?” She spirals further and further down the rabbit hole as her breathing picks up and her pacing quickens.

As the clock slowly approached 2:00, Becky decided to check on her mom and let her know about her plans, so she didn’t wake up to an empty house and freak out. When she approached the bed, she saw it was empty. Her heart started beating faster, but she kept calm and started calling for her mom. She wandered into the bathroom and saw her mother lying on the floor, exactly as it was in the image. An open and empty pill bottle beside her, her mother pale and clammy.

She gasps just as Nate rings the doorbell. She runs down the stairs and flings open the door in a panic. “Nate help me! My mom’s unconscious, come upstairs now!” she yells through her tears. He wastes no time sprinting up the stairs and scooping up her mom. “I’ll drive her to the hospital. Get in the car.” he says, trying to keep his composure. In her state of panic, she completely forgets about his destiny. All her focus is on her mom and trying to save her, even though something inside her knows it’s already too late.

Nate lays down her mom in the backseat, Becky takes the passenger, and he’s driving. He’s doing everything in his power, racing down streets, all while keeping one hand on Becky’s leg to try and soothe her.

“NATE SLOW D-” she screamed but was cut off by a screech and crash. As car T-boned into them, again like the image exactly, the world went dark. The last thing she remembers seeing is Nate slumped over the airbag, blood dripping from his mouth.

She wakes up to a beeping noise but is still in a haze. Bright white, fluorescent lights blinded her vision. As she comes to, she sees doctors surrounding her with concerned and pitiful looks on their faces. They speak to her and deliver the news, but she is too numb to hear or understand them. All she can hear is the booming voice again as it says, “This is what happens to liars. Liars must pay.” Becky feels sick and starts to sob. “I tried to save them, but instead I killed them both. What have I done?” As if hearing her, the booming voice seems to respond, “You have failed the final test of truthfulness. You are a disappointment to the Academy, and you must be disposed of. You are no longer a Cadet but failed the test to become a Commander and are now useless to the Academy and to Avalon.” The voice gained a spark of humanity for a second and said, “So much potential, wasted on love.”