

Seces Flesh (Toxic)

By C. Jade Wyton

Set in the mid-8,000s in the stretch of ocean between Esle and Spaypoy, this gory short details Kili Vina's escape from a black market organ harvester.

Contains descriptions of violence, death, gore, and torture.

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Kili couldn't bear to open her eyes to the dark room again. She couldn't bear another day. Not another day staring at the rusted boat's roof. She wished she hadn't woken up. That she'd slipped away in her sleep and her soul had slowly disappeared into peaceful nothingness.

She tugged on the bindings that held her in place, trying to tip the table over like on her first day— only this time she hoped it would break her neck, not her ankle. She just wanted it to end. She didn't care how. Death was better than one more day here.

She struggled, trying desperately to break her restraints or tip herself to the floor... but the table had been bolted down, now, and the only movement she felt was the swaying of the boat on the waves.

It was taunting her. Water was right there, beneath her feet, but she couldn't touch it. She could remember the last time she'd swum clearly; the feeling of the wasteland water as she'd clambered onto a nurlak's boat with traps full of crabs and mudskippers and swapped them for his store of too-old meat that would have otherwise been wasted. She wished she was back in the wasteland— the water was so close. If she could break the bindings on her wrists, maybe she could make a run for it. Jump in the water and swim far and fast.

The smell of salty brine washed over her and she subdued; she was above the ocean, not the brown mud-lake she'd grown up in. The strong salt would sting her sensitive skin; she might as well jump into a lake of needles.

'Good morning, muddy,' the voice was deep and rough. It sent shivers down Kili's spine. 'How are you feeling?'

'Kill me,' Kili rasped. 'Please.'

The door closed with the same horrible *click* it always did. The smell of salt hung in the air and quiet footsteps made their way across the floor.

'Only when you stop being useful,' the voice said plainly. 'Another year, maybe, before your body gives up. Though you're in better condition than my last secas was at this point.'

She heard metal scrape by her ear; the sensitive fin on her cheek trembled as it guided the sound to the small hole above her jaw.

She could picture the old knife. It's serrated edge. It's rusted blade. The blood that dripped off the tip after the first slice against skin... her skin.

She took a deep breath and readied herself as she felt the tip of the blade press against her thigh. There was hesitation, then her captor touched her leg and the knife clanged back onto the metal tray.

Terrified, knowing what came when the knife was put down, the secas struggled in her restraints again and opened her eyes. In front of her stood the tall human man who had dragged her out of her home in the wasteland.

‘Please, not again!’ she begged. ‘Please!’

It was no use; she knew he wouldn’t listen to her. He rubbed the back of his neck with a gloved hand and pulled his hair into a tie. A faint green glow filled the room and Kili shuddered; reminded of her captor’s unnatural strength and origin.

*He had the green spot.*

She struggled again. ‘Please! Just cut me open again! Please!’

He shook his head. ‘No point when you’re only half-toxic, muddy.’

He picked up a small, rusted syringe and filled it with liquid from a phial off the tray as the secas struggled to break free.

Kili remembered the last time she’d been injected; the searing pain and the sick feeling that had crept through her body as the potion forcibly hydrated her. The first time he’d used it, it had been a relief. She’d nearly thanked him for it. It was supposed to be a healing potion—an oral medicine to help hydrate the sickly—but the constant misuse had turned it into a torture worse than the knife.

She tried desperately to break free from the restraints. ‘PLEASE! NO!’ she shrieked, lifting herself up on her elbows and letting out a blood-curdling squeal from her gills. ‘NOT AGAIN!’

‘Stay still,’ the human hissed, pinning her chest down with his arm.

The pressure on her ribs forced her to let out a gasp and her screams were cut off as she struggled to breathe.

She felt the needle jab into her arm and tried to throw her captor off; he stumbled, but then put down more pressure and she was forced still as the syringe emptied painfully into her veins.

It was like he’d filled her arm with fire. She felt the burning liquid creep slowly through her; from her arm to her chest, and then slowly over the rest of her body. She heard herself screaming and barely noticed as her captor shut the door behind him. Everything was fading and her head felt like it was going to explode.

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Slowly, she blinked her eyes open. She was glad to have lost consciousness, but she wished she didn’t have to wake up. She wondered if there was any way to force herself to sleep again.

She wished her body would give up. She shuddered at the thought of how long she may be here. She could barely handle the idea of another day in this room; let alone the human’s estimated year.

Kili couldn’t bear it anymore. She was sick. She was tired. And, when she had the energy to lift her head and look at herself, she was always greeted by a scarred pale torso that was so thin and boney she could never have picked it out as her own.

Her head dropped back down onto the table with a loud *clunk* and she sighed. All those years of being teased for being overweight... only to become this? She

was so thin that her restraints —once tight enough to cut off circulation— felt like loose ribbons around her wrists.

Not loose enough to break, Kili thought with a hiss. She stared at her wrist for a long while. *But maybe I could...*

All this time, she'd been trying to break the restraints. But she'd lost so much weight, and her hands were so thin now... maybe she could pull her wrist out?

She gave it a tug; her hand didn't come free. She frowned and tried again. The binding didn't come loose, but she could swear it moved up the tiniest bit.

Maybe she was imagining it? It *felt* like it was working. She gave another tug and felt the binding pinch her skin. Another tug, and the pinching feeling moved onto the base of her thumb.

A feverish mix of excitement and dread flowed through her.

Could she pull her hand out?

She gave another tug and felt the pinching feeling get tighter, but higher. She tried to crane her neck to see her hand on the next tug; she could see the restraint shift again and felt her heart beating hard in her chest in her desperate struggle against the leather strap.

Another tug; a hard one that used all the strength she could muster. Her hand came free with a sharp sting and a spurt of blood.

It took all of Kili's strength not to scream as the delicate webbing between her thumb and forefinger snagged in the buckle and tore.

Droplets of blood spattered onto Kili's face as she shook out her hand and brought it against her chest in an attempt to numb the pain. She took a deep breath as the stinging subsided and lifted her hand to examine it. The delicate membrane had been completely torn off and had taken the top layer of skin with it. Blood oozed from her thumb and over her palm where the skin had been pulled away.

She swallowed the pain as the thought of freedom jumped back into her mind.

Her hand was free.

It wasn't hard to undo her other arm— not compared to getting her first one free. She fumbled because of the pain in her thumb, but a few tugs on the buckle and she was able to sit up. Sort of.

It was difficult. Her back was so stiff she had trouble reaching down to undo her ankles. The strips around her legs peeled back painfully; she had to ease them off slowly to avoid pulling off the skin they'd partially fused with.

Once free, Kili leapt off the table and tried to get to the door. After all her time on the table, however, her muscles had weakened and her legs gave way. She ended up in a pained heap on the floor and struggled to get back on her feet. She had to lean against the wall as she stretched out her legs, slowly getting feeling back. It was a strange, numb feeling that hurt as blood began to flow and the stiff muscles moved for the first time since she'd been captured. It was both awful and fantastic at the same time.

After a while of stretching she was able to walk, though not very well. Awkwardly she limped her way to the door and lent against it to catch her breath. Then, just as she was ready to stand again, the door opened and she stumbled out.

She collided with her captor, who let out a surprised shout.

‘What are you—’

Panicking, Kili lashed out. She slapped the human; her filthy untrimmed nails leaving long scratches down his cheek.

He let out a shriek and gripped his face as Kili stumbled around him and tried to escape down the hall. She only got a few steps before she felt his hand close around her wrist and he pulled her back.

‘You’re going to regret that!’ the human snapped.

He held her wrist so tight she thought he might snap the bone. Pain shot up her arm and she instinctively flared the fin along her back.

The fin tore. Having been pressed against her back for so long as she’d been bound to the table it had almost fused into her. She let out a shriek when the sensitive skin ripped and blood splattered around the room as her captor twisted her arm and forcefully turned her.

The pain was unbearable. She dropped to her knees and squealed so loudly through her gills she felt her throat strip and tasted blood.

‘I’m sorry! I’ll be good! I’ll behave!’

Still he squeezed. Tighter and tighter.

‘PLEASE!’ Kili screamed. ‘PLEASE! I’LL GO BACK TO THE ROOM!’

He tugged her arm up awkwardly; she was forced to her feet and shoved forward. Her face slammed against cold metal as her captor leant on her, crushing her against the wall with all his weight and making it impossible for her to breathe.

She couldn’t even scream as he twisted her arm further and she felt the muscles tear from the force. Her mouth hung open and her gills flared up, but the only sound she made was an unnatural gurgle as her lungs tried desperately to fill with air.

After a moment the pressure on her chest was released and she dropped to the floor in an exhausted heap. She gasped desperately, her blurred vision returning with each painful breath.

The human watched her pant on the floor, his expression unreadable as he wiped his bleeding cheek with his sleeve.

‘Get up,’ he ordered. ‘And go back to your room.’

Slowly, Kili rose to her feet. She was trembling and she wasn’t sure her knees would hold as she stumbled obediently back towards the room.

‘What a waste of blood,’ her captor commented; looking at the stains in his clothes. ‘At least I know you’re toxic again.’

Kili stopped at the door.

Toxic.

‘Get inside,’ he ordered.

She didn’t move.

A thought had sparked in her mind. *She was toxic again.*

She turned to the human and raised her injured arm to him.

‘You want me to squeeze it again or something?’ he snapped. ‘Get back to your room!’

Kili held her ground as her captor advanced on her.

‘If you don’t get back in there right now I’ll—’ he was cut off mid-sentence as Kili lunged forward.

She slammed into him and jammed her forearm into his mouth. She felt his teeth sink into her arm as he bit down in his shock.

She barely felt the pain as she pulled away. Her arm was numb from the way he'd twisted it and she was almost surprised when she saw the missing chunk that had been gouged into it.

Her captor choked, and went to spit, but Kili leapt onto his back and forced her arm in his mouth again. There was a struggle as he tried to pull away. He slammed backwards into the wall, crushing Kili— but in the force of the collision, he swallowed.

Kili landed on the floor, winded, as the human began to choke. He stumbled and swore at Kili, turning to kick her, but then he fell on top of her and began to convulse.

Blood sprayed out his nose and mouth as he gasped and shook until, with a sickening belch, he emptied his stomach and collapsed.

Trapped, Kili tried desperately to throw off the man, but his dead weight was almost impossible to move in her weakened state. She began to sob as she slid herself free, an inch at a time along the cold, hard floor of the boat. The textured grip of the metal tugged on her already shredded fin and she felt her skin peeling off her back.

She was already covered in blood and vomit and worse —she had felt the chunk of flesh he'd bitten off hit her in the face when he'd thrown up— but the feeling of her own torn skin sticking against her back made her feel sicker than before.

Finally, after what felt like hours of struggling, she freed herself from her captor. She touched his cold cheek and let out a breath. He was dead.

She'd escaped. She was free.

Free, she closed her eyes and let the word sink in. *Finally free.*

Exhausted but hopeful, Kili forced herself up. She could go home to Jangle and her family and forget any of this ever happened. All she needed to do was endure the ocean. After all this, she was sure the prick of the salt would be nothing.

She stumbled down the hall, desperate to find a way outside. She tread past almost a hundred doors and turned too many corners before she saw stairs and light ahead. A sigh of relief escaped her as she staggered forward, almost running in her excitement. She put her hand on the stair's railing and stopped.

To her side was a large door. She could barely make out the scratched writing, but she felt a chill roll down her spine as she stared at the thick lettering.

“STORAGE”

Kili felt a lump rise in her throat. She didn't want to look, but she felt herself step back from the stairs and move towards to door. Slowly, she turned the handle and pushed forward.

The smell of rotting flesh washed over her like nothing she'd ever smelt before. Even for a mud seces, who's diet was rotten and spoilt, the smell of this room turned her gut.... She knew. She knew this wasn't food she smelt; but *people*.

Her brain was screaming for her to stop but her body wouldn't listen. She pushed the door open fully and stepped inside.

She was greeted by the mouldy faces of severed heads on the far wall. Their mouths hung open and their eyeless sockets stared at her with expressions almost pleading.

The freshest head was of another species, though she almost didn't recognise it as one of her own kind. Washed-out dry blue skin was clinging tightly to the gaunt, toothless face, and all their fins had been cleanly sliced off. Kili turned away from the face, only to find the fins in a jar beside her.

She felt her gut tighten— she would have thrown up if she hadn't been so hungry. Instead she retched and stumbled backwards into another shelf.

Jars fell around her, smashing on the ground with horrible, wet splatters that sent teeth, eyes, and tongues sliding around the room in the liquid they'd been stored in.

Kili screamed and ran out to the stairs. She felt piercing pain in her feet and collapsed, panting, on the step below the door. When she lifted a foot she saw shards of glass stuck in the sensitive flesh, and shuddered and held back a sob before reaching down and carefully picking out as much as she could bear. Then she closed her eyes and let herself fall asleep.

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Kili ached more than she ever had before. She couldn't stand to wake up again. She wished she would have died in her sleep. At least then maybe she'd stop hurting so much.

She turned over and sighed— and then gasped and sat up when she realised her bindings were undone.

The room was lighter than she remembered. It took her a moment to figure out she was on the stairs in the boat's hall. She actually laughed when she discovered where she was.

*She was free.*

She'd almost forgotten.

With a great effort, she managed to get to her feet— only to feel stabbing pain and drop back down. She pulled up her leg to examine her heel. There wasn't much glass left, and it wasn't too deep. It was easy to pick out.

As she pulled the last of the glass out she wondered if there were others.

She doubted there were other captors; she was still in the stairwell, and it was obvious by her scabbed-over wounds she'd been there a long time. Nobody had taken her back and bound her again, and nobody had cleaned the mess spilling out of the storeroom.

*The storeroom*, Kili closed her eyes. It was obvious there were others on the boat. Other prisoners like her. *She couldn't leave them, could she?*

She looked up at the door and the promising light that spilt through the gap underneath. She reached out, letting her hand touch the warm sunbeam, and nearly cried out loud.

It was wonderful. She'd forgotten sunlight. She'd been so desperate for water and mud that she'd forgotten the kiss of warmth the sun brought.

But she pulled back her hand. Though she didn't want to. No. As desperate as she was to get up and go outside and fall into the ocean and sink and swim and

escape, she couldn't leave knowing there were others trapped here. *She couldn't leave them to die.*

She forced herself to walk down the steps. Back into the dark metal hall lined with doors. She took a long look at the storeroom before she turned, head spinning, to the door opposite. It took her a while to find the courage to open it; but she sighed in relief when she saw it was empty. There was nothing besides a soft-looking bed and collection of books. It must have been the human's room.

She frowned and closed the door, taking a deep breath to compose herself before opening the next one.

It looked like the room she'd been kept in, though it was empty now. The rusted table hadn't been washed and there were rotting scales stuck to the tools on the tray beside it.

She carefully picked off one of the scales and examined it. It looked like it had been a bright pink or red, once. But now it was faded and worn; the smooth, reflective layer was almost completely gone and the colour underneath was turning white.

She remembered travelling to the edge of the wasteland as a child and meeting a maren by the ocean.... It was a memory she couldn't bear now. She ran her thumb across the scale and inhaled sharply. She wondered who this poor soul was. Their name. Their face. Their family. Who had they been? How long had they been here and how much did they suffer?

Gently, she raised the scale to her lips and kissed it.

*'I'm sorry,'* she whispered.

The room was overwhelming; she couldn't bear it any longer and hurried out. She didn't dare enter the next empty room. She wasn't sure she would be able to handle it.

She continued opening doors for what felt like hours, until she opened a door and heard a shout.

'LEAVE ME ALONE!' a voice hissed. 'I'll bite you again, don't you think I won't!'

Kili swallowed and peered into the room.

On the table was a naga; strapped down by their arms, chest, and tail. They looked like they hadn't been here long. Their skin was bright, and they still had a thickness to them that almost surprised Kili. She stared at the gaunt, faded skin that clung to her own bones and shuddered.

Kili tried to speak, but no matter how hard she tried she wasn't able to make a noise as the naga stared at the wall opposite from her. She wished he'd look her way, so she might find the courage to speak, but he just stared at the wall and tugged his restraints defiantly.

'No taunts today, green spot?' he hissed. 'I'm surprised. You're usually *quite* the chatterbox.'

Kili felt a twitch at the side of her mouth and half-laughed.

The naga turned to look at her with shock. 'Who... are you? Are you alright? *What happened to you?*'

Kili flinched at his exclamation, and looked herself over. She was covered in blood and vomit and... things she couldn't describe. She looked back to him and gave a weak smile. 'I got out.'

‘Untie me!’ the naga began to flail in his restraints. ‘Get me out! Please! Don’t leave me here!’

Kili shook her head and stumbled towards him, practically falling into the table as she scrabbled at the naga’s bindings.

The naga stopped struggling as she undid his wrist. He just stared at her—and the chunk missing from her arm—in a mix of horror and awe. ‘What happened to green spot?’ he asked. ‘What if he finds us? He’s way too strong to fight!’

‘He’s dead,’ Kili replied, finally undoing the strap on his arm. She tugged it off and began to undo the binding on the naga’s chest as he reached across to untie his other arm. ‘He bit me.’

The naga freed his arm at the same moment Kili unbound his chest. He sat up and stared as Kili began to unbind his tail.

‘You’re a mud secas!’ realisation washed over him. ‘What kind of idiot bites a mud secas?’

‘He didn’t have a choice,’ Kili said. She held out her arm for the naga to see. ‘I made him swallow it.’

The naga slid off the table and pulled Kili into a painful hug. ‘Thank you! Thank you so much for coming to get me!’

‘There are others,’ Kili felt her legs give way and she collapsed into the naga. He heaved her into his arms like a child and cradled her as she continued, ‘I don’t know where. But I saw... the storeroom. There are so many others.... We can’t leave them. They’ll die if we don’t get them out!’

‘I’ll check for them,’ the naga told her, giving her a comforting squeeze as he slithered out the door. Kili felt him sway side to side as he made his way up the hall and gently placed her onto the stairs.

He turned to the storeroom, but Kili stopped him. ‘You don’t want to see it.’

‘I’ll make sure everyone gets out,’ the naga told her. ‘You just rest.’

Kili reached her hand into the warm sun. ‘I want the water.’

The naga looked sympathetic. ‘It’s salt water. It’ll sting—’

‘I don’t care,’ Kili sobbed. ‘I want water!’

He nodded and helped her to her feet. ‘If you’re sure....’

Kili couldn’t bring herself to speak as he took her outside.

The sun was so bright it made her head spin. She had to close her eyes, but when she did she saw the room again. She felt herself trembling as the naga slithered beside her, supporting her weight as she slowly stumbled towards the railing.

‘What’s your name?’ the naga asked as he lifted her onto the metal bar along the edge of the boat.

‘My name?’ she swallowed. It had been so long since she’d heard it; she’d nearly forgotten it. ‘I’m Kili Vina.’

‘I’ll tell everyone it was you, Kili Vina,’ the naga promised. ‘That you fought to save us.’

‘I fought to save myself,’ Kili admitted. ‘I didn’t even think that he had anyone else here until I saw... the storeroom.’

‘But you came back for us,’ the naga gave her a tired smile. ‘You’re a hero.’

Kili didn’t reply as she leant back on the railing and dropped into the ocean.



She saw the naga watching her from above as she turned over in the water. Red and brown and black washed off her and misted the water, surrounding her like a cloud of bad memories.

She let herself sink to the ocean floor where the sun was less harsh and released a stream of bubbles from her mouth as she emptied her land-lungs. She watched them float to the not-so-distant surface with a sadness she didn't expect to have after escaping.

The soft seaweed felt like hands running over her sides and she had to push herself away from the reef into a sandy clearing nearby before she was able to shake the feeling. She swore she tasted blood on her tongue and felt the sting of the syringe that had pricked her skin over and over. She tried to remind herself that it was just the salt of the ocean that was making her skin ache; that she was in water again. But it didn't help. No matter how much blood washed away in the waves, she knew she would never be free of the memories.

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