
Cruel Sacrifice

Aphrodite Jones

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For my Mother and Father

“I'VE DONE SOMETHING BAD.”

The girls drove over to River Falls Mall in Clarksville to pick up Amanda. Melinda was crying for most of the ride.

"I've done something bad," she cried to Amanda as soon as she saw her.

Amanda waited silently for an explanation.

"Everybody just wait until we get back to Melinda's house," Laurie told them.

Back in Melinda's living room, they sat Amanda down and Cruel Sacrifice told her the story. About the kidnapping of Shanda. About holding her prisoner in the trunk of the car. About the beatings. About the final terrible act of murder.

Melinda was crying hysterically. Amanda gave her a hug. She didn't really believe that any part of the story Cruel Sacrifice was true.

Until she let them show her the bloodstains in the trunk of the car.

Author's Note

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Cruel Sacrifice is not a fictionalized version of the Shanda Sharer murder case. The narrative is based on more than five thousand pages of documents and hundreds of hours of taped interviews. Documentation includes police transcripts, the defendants' psychiatric records, and other *Cruel Sacrifice* proven sources of journalistic research.

Some of the names of people mentioned have been changed to protect their privacy.

Acknowledgments

Nonfiction is the result of a collective energy. This book could not have been researched without the cooperation of Judge Ted Todd and his staff; without Detective Steve Henry and Sheriff Buck Shippley and other members of the Indiana State Police whose names already appear in the main text, and who were equally important in the development of *Cruel Sacrifice*.

I would like to thank Donna Norton, my transcriber and proofreading assistant, whose efforts were an immeasurable help; Paul Dinas, my editor at Pinnacle, for his belief in my writing; Peter Miller, my agent, for his timely and essential input into this project; author Mike McGrady, for his positive criticism; and attorney Hughes Walker, for his legal expertise and continuing support.

Above all, I would like to thank my friends and family for their love and patience; especially my sister, Janet Jones, who is the one person in the world that I have been able to depend on.

And finally, I express my gratitude to all of the people who cooperated with me on this book, from members of the media to Steve Brock, who was largely responsible for getting the Loveless girls to publicly admit the abuse they suffered, and of course to the countless people who took the time to talk to me about this horrible tragedy in the hopes that somehow, we can learn from it and make this place a safer world.

Prologue

It was a freezing cold day in the Cruel Sacrifice dead of January when the three girls got to New

Albany. They left Madison right after school let out that afternoon, and had lied to their parents about their plans for the night. No one knew they were on their way to Louisville, more than fifty miles away from their quaint Indiana hometown.

All Toni knew was that they were going to a punk rock concert, but first they had to make a quick stop in New Albany. Soon they'd be crossing the Ohio River Cruel Sacrifice and the state line, and they'd be on their way.

"Did you tell her yet?" Laurie asked Hope on the ride down.

"Tell her what?" Hope asked, playing dumb.

When they pulled up to Melinda's house on Charlestown Road, everyone was silent. Melinda opened the door, she already had her trench coat on, but the three stepped inside for a few minutes just to warm up. Of the four teenagers, Laurie was the oldest, the only one with a car and a driver's license. Although she was just seventeen, she seemed to be in control of things. Anyone who knew her for even a short time knew that Laurie had an attitude problem, that she tried very hard to be different, to be daring, that she desperately wanted to be accepted, and that she wanted her friends to follow her example.

Melinda was a very different type of person. While Laurie's demeanor was quiet and mysterious, Melinda Cruel Sacrifice was hyper and seemed excited to see them. Even physically, Melinda was the opposite of Laurie in every way. In contrast to Laurie's hard square jaw, chunky body, and cropped head of bleached hair, sixteen-year-old Melinda had a seductive smile, a perfect figure, and a thick head of flowing light brown curls. Melinda wore more conventional teen clothes; Laurie was a "punker," usually dressed in solid black clothing. Hope and Toni asked if they could borrow some of Melinda's clothes to wear for the night, and the four girls followed each other upstairs.

No one else seemed to be home so they made themselves comfortable in Melinda's bedroom, sorting through her array of shoes and jeans, admiring her closetful of jackets, and eyeballing her purses on the inside door. They looked over some of her T-shirts, Cruel Sacrifice piled neatly in a stack of milk crates, and inspected her collection of tapes, mostly bubblegum music like New Kids On The Block, Paula Abdul, and George Michael. There was the usual teenage paraphernalia hanging on Melinda's walls: family photos, stuffed Cruel Sacrifice animals in various nets, posters of idols, including a Cruel Sacrifice few of Elvis in *Jailhouse Rock*.

Toni picked out a pair of shoes and slipped them on. Hope found a pair of Melinda's jeans to wear and some shoes to match.

"This is the knife I'm going Cruel Sacrifice to use," Melinda said gleefully as she reached in her purse and pulled out a big old kitchen knife.

Melinda said she was going to scare Shanda with it. She had Shanda's number and address written down on a piece of paper and she decided to call there one last time before they took off, just to be sure Shanda was home.

Nobody said a word. They stayed there giggling and primping for about a half hour, Cruel Sacrifice carefully appraising themselves in front of Melinda's mirror.

Even though Laurie had never met Shanda, Laurie knew all about Melinda's plan to scare Shanda, to beat her up, to "teach her a lesson."

Melinda kept trying Shanda's number and hanging up on the machine. All the while, she was busy filling the other two girls in. Hope and Toni were both age fifteen. They were impressed with Melinda's cool talk, her cursing, her bravado, and her story. It didn't take long for Melinda to conjure up an image of Shanda, the cute little girl she hated with such a passion. Shanda was a blond; she had a nice butt; she wore tight jeans and too much makeup. Shanda was a copycat, she was trying to look like Melinda. She was wearing the same kind of shoes, the same hairstyle. She was, Melinda told them with disgust, a slut.

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