

Heaven Is A Place for Maniacs

She hasn't stopped asking me what I remember since I arrived here. I could tell her what I know about Mr. Burke, but instead I tell her this; Mr. Burke was gone before I arrived at Redgrave circus, I just happened to arrive when they found him dead. I tell her that they believed me to be his killer, but that it wasn't me who did it.

It's a lie, but I don't tell her that it is. If she knew it was me who killed Burke, then they might do to me exactly what the Masters at Redgrave did.

I won't tell her. I didn't claw my way out of one hell just to fall right back into another.

I can't help but imagine that she thinks I'm lying, too. She wouldn't be wrong, of course, but I can't let her find that out. If they decide I'm crazy, maybe then they'll treat me with pity rather than punishment. That was something I learned from someone who used to exist, somebody who saw that first hand. He's gone now too, just like Burke – but I'd never compare the two; Emmet doesn't deserve that.

It wasn't long before her questions started to point towards the way I was dressed, and the card-suit makeup I wore. I don't think she needed any answer of mine to realize that I was one of the escapees from Redgrave circus.

The doctor's name is O; Doctor O. I wanted to know what the 'O' stood for, but she wouldn't tell me when I asked. She insisted - quite rudely, really - that 'Doctor O' is all I should call her.

I can't tell if she's kind, maybe I just don't know her well enough yet. After all, I haven't been here for that long. They've been keeping me all alone in this room. There aren't any clocks, no windows either; only silence when I'm left alone and questions when I'm not. The doctor hasn't hurt me, but she hasn't comforted me when I've cried, either. She gave me no reason to think of her as a kind person.

The people that work for her had taken my things when they found me, and they don't show any signs that they're going to give them back. They took Mina, too.

I imagine that it was morning when Doctor O arrived at the door on the first day. I hadn't seen her face before that moment, but her presence felt somehow familiar – though, it wasn't a friendly presence. She reminded me too much of the Sisters that took care of us kids back at St. Eden's.

She stepped in through the aluminum frame door into the room, a low bun resting against the back of her neck where it met the collar of her pink cotton dress. Her smile was empty as she sat down, pushing up her wireframe glasses and saying something that I didn't hear. With a raised eyebrow, she repeated whatever she had said to me. "Miss Edwards. You must be Miss Edwards."

Within a short time, I nodded in confirmation. I had been crying a moment before and my eyes felt soggy, but the doctor said nothing about it. It made me think she was used to seeing children cry.

“We found you out on your own. How did you end up all by yourself?”

I didn’t feel like responding. Something in the way she spoke made me afraid of speaking back to her, as if at the first word I speak she’ll stand to her feet and scream at me that I was guilty of something. I sat still with my clammy hands curled up in my lap, wordless and teary-eyed.

“I only want to help you, Miss Edwards. If you don’t want to talk about all that, then there’s no need to.”

Without giving her warning, I snapped up and shouted at her, “Where did you take Mina?”

Doctor O’s eyes widened, then gradually narrowed as her eyebrow cocked once again. I frowned.

“Who is Mina?” The doctor inquired politely.

“My friend. You took her from me!”

I was angry that she didn’t understand. She had taken my only friend away, and she had forgotten all about her so fast. If our places had been switched, I know Mina would have cut the doctor into pieces for forgetting about me.

The doctor stayed silent for another moment, trying hard to settle the confusion. “You were alone, Mona. We didn’t take any friend from you.”

I felt my body tense up as she said this, sensing my anger rising up in me. “You did! You stole her away from me!”

“What does she look like, then? Maybe if you tell me, I’ll be able to find her for you.”

I looked down at my hands, pinching at the sides of my palms. “She wears a ribbon.”

It looked as though the doctor were about to ask something else, but a look quickly passed over her face. “You’re referring to the knife, aren’t you? You called that name when they took it from you.”

“Where did you take her?”

The doctor sighed, and I noticed her scribble something down on the notepad in front of her. "You can't have it back, Miss Edwards."

"Where did you take her? If you don't give me her, then- then she's going to hurt you, just like she did to him!" I raised my voice louder, trying to stand before I once again became aware of the restraints they'd put me in. It felt as though I were giving myself a hug. At my defeat, I sunk down and started to cry once more.

"Hurt who, Mona?"

Only then did I realize my grave mistake. I resolved to keep quiet - maybe then she'd move past that question like she had the other times I deprived her of an answer.

"You seem to believe that it has a will of its own?" She didn't seem phased by the threat Mina posed to her, which only made me angrier. I didn't care to respond.

"When we found you, it looked like you'd been through a lot, Miss Edwards," Doctor O began, "and seeing that, I do understand that you have a difficult time opening up to us. Still, I have to ask that you—"

"—Tell you what I know about..." I stopped, realizing that I'd give everything away if I'd have continued with what I'd wanted to say. I wasn't even really sure why I spoke when I did.

Doctor O smiled a little. Only for a moment. "What do you mean, 'tell me what you know?' That makes me think something happened that I should be concerned about."

It didn't matter how much she claimed she understood me; I knew that she didn't really, and that I never wanted her to. I was only scared that she would make me tell her what happened to the ringmaster the night I left Redgrave.

She looked up at me through her narrow spectacles, giving me a look that told me she was beginning to lose her patience with me, "You've been with us for several days, Mona, and we still don't have a clue about you. I just want you to cooperate with me."

I froze. Suddenly, I could hear the sound of a man's voice begin to seep into my head as I sat motionless, terrified; words ringing in my ears that seemed to reignite memories I thought I'd lost.

It was Burke again, calling to me from somewhere in front of my face that I couldn't see. I felt the ground beneath me, trembling as the footsteps came to an enormous halt at my tent's door, signaling the same request I remembered hearing almost every night before.

There was a snapping sound as I broke from the illusion, again finding myself pitted before Doctor O's stern face. "Are you dreaming again?"

Without a response, I simply nodded to agree with her. When she said nothing, I came to the assumption that she wanted me to share what I saw with her.

When my silence continued on, Doctor O shook her head at me; "Well?" I escaped my daze and turned back to her; eyes droopy as I tried focusing on her round face.

"You already know that I came from the circus."

"Yes, I do." She replied flatly. "How did you get there?"

"I was on a bus..." I began in a hesitant, miniscule voice. "The men in masks stopped it on the road. They had guns, and they..."

I stopped myself. I felt a surge of fear, as if I was back on that bus and the clownish-faced men were slowly making their way up the steps and into the aisle. If I kept myself from blinking, I could peer across the seats to see Emmet with me there, just as frightened as I was.

"They took you to Redgrave?"

I felt sad that I hadn't known Emmet the way he was before Redgrave broke us. I can see his smile so clearly, but I remember that it never lasted for longer than a minute. There was always something that would break his smile.

"What did they do to you? What made you want to run away?"

I could hear the sound of a boy's screams somewhere nearby, tucked away in a cold, stone room. I was crying, because I knew who it was that was being hurt; and I knew who it was that was hurting him.

"Burke," I spoke it plainly, spitting it out as if to get its taste off of my tongue.

"You kept saying that name, Miss Edwards. You haven't told me who he is. Is he your father?"

I couldn't stop myself from shaking my head even after she'd acknowledged my answer. I could hear a new voice now; the same one I heard after the footsteps would stop at my door. He was telling me to go with him, but I didn't want to. I couldn't get the screaming out of my mind.

He kept telling me that I would find heaven if I went with him; but no matter how many times I agreed to go, I never could. I began believing that the pain I felt by his hand was reminiscent of

this heaven he kept talking about; and if that was the case, heaven wasn't a place I ever wanted to find.

"Mona, look at me." The doctor's tone was calming, but at the sound of brakes screeching to a halt, I began to struggle, panicking and trying to free my hands from the invisible hug to reach for Mina. Before I knew it, I was the one screaming.

"Nurse? Nurse, call it in, she's having another attack. Restrain her."

I couldn't find Mina. She wasn't within reach. I called her name before the doctor spoke something else close to me. My ears wouldn't let me listen; they were too focused on the sounds of my screaming from miles away.

All I need is Mina – if she was with me, I could save us all over again. Maybe this time Emmet could get out with us, too.