

Trapped

Casp ran as hard as he could. The rain beat down hard, clinging to his lashes and blinding him. He could sense them behind him, steadily catching up. Terror gripped him like a vise. Suddenly, he lost his balance and slipped. "Get up! Get up! GET UP!"

Casp awoke with a start to see Will's blurry, blue eyed face peering down at him.

"Get up you lousy--"

"I'm up, I'm up, calm down," Casp croaked. He blinked a few times to adjust to the dim lighting. "C'mon get up, I don't want to get whipped by one of Ursula's Intermediaries." He put two fingers in the air, air quoting the word "Intermediaries". Casp knew what he meant. Nothing they did was ever balanced or fair. They were more like gigantic men Ursula had brainwashed to do her bidding. Yet that's was what Ursula had named them.

"Alright, I'm getting up, happy?" Casp announced. His body seared with pain as he heaved himself off the floor. Although he only had a shirt to use as a pillow and otherwise slept on hard concrete, the thought of laying back down seemed heavenly. Yet, before he could fully ponder this thought, Will was yanking him off the ground. With a groan, Casp finally gave in. As they walked to the training hall, Will eyed him knowingly.

"Another nightmare, wasn't it?" he asked, though Casp had a suspicion that he already new the answer.

"They just don't stop," Casp complained, his mind returning to his dream. It had felt so real- the pounding rain, the thundering footsteps behind him, the comprehension that he would no longer be an orphan, but something much less likable. If only he could go back to that night...

"Casp...Casp! Earth to Casper!" Will waved a hand in front of Casp's face, breaking him out of his trance.

"Wha-what?" he asked, annoyed. Yet that annoyance quickly faded when he saw the expression on Will's face. His complexion had become paler than it already was, and for the first time in a long time, he looked truly afraid. Mouth trembling, he pointed at the huge poster on the wall. It listed the names of performers and their training activity each day.

"What?" repeated Casp, now fully confounded.

"Those are the last activities for the training term," said a feminine voice behind him. He turned to see a girl with short cropped black hair and light brown eyes that looked almost yellow when the light hit them just right. She regarded him with an expression that bordered on pity.

"Whatever you practice today will be the part you perform for the show." She explained. Casp gulped. The "Circus of Wonders" took place biannually, but the last time it took place Casp had been too inexperienced to participate. Nor would he ever want to. Ursula already made sure their training was deadly, but the real shows were on a whole new level. There was no safety under the tightrope, broken unicycles, chipped ladders for the ladder act, unstable trapezes, and, well you pretty much got the idea. If a performer was injured, they would have to go on pretending it was part of the act. Many performers didn't survive.

Casp turned back to the poster and began scanning the rows of names. He spotted his name next to the tightrope. Now very long after arriving here, Casp had discovered he had quite a talent for the tightrope. Not that this was the way he would have wanted to discover it. Still, at least he didn't have to worry about that. Then he saw the name next to his and finally understood. Will was second tightrope. Unlike Casp, Will would turn a sickly shade of green if he was anything more than fifteen feet in the air. Walking on a tightrope fifty feet in the air for him was certain death.

Anger boiled in Casp's chest. Pure rage flowed through his veins. He knew Ursula had planned this. She called it "weeding out the weak". Casp knew Will was not weak. In fact, he was quite amazing at everything that didn't include heights.

"The shows tomorrow." Will whispered beside him. Casp was silent. He had no idea what to say. There was nothing to say. Silently, they both headed to their task. The rest of the day passed in a sweaty and painful blur. Still, all the while, Casp was thinking.

When the time came for them to have their only meal in the day, which consisted of stale bread and mysterious soup, Casp dragged Will off to one of the empty training sections and told him the plan. Once he was done, Will finally looked at him. To Casp's surprise, his eyes were fierce and full of willpower.

"I'm ashamed Casp," said Will. "I'm ashamed it took something like this to get us to do the right thing." Casp smiled. That was what he liked best about Will. He wasn't ever afraid to admit the truth.

"Well, at least we're doing it," he answered softly, thinking of all the people before them who had withered under Ursula's hold. That night, Casp slept without any nightmares for the first time.

The next morning he awoke without any help, his body tingling with nerves. As they dressed in the appropriate clothing for their act (clothing that had been worn by a number of anonymous people before them), Casp began the first part of their plan. Knowing that Ursula would not be there at this time, Casp snuck off to her office and quickly switched the only working microphone for a broken one. Heart threatening to jump out of his chest, he quickly ran to the back of the building where the other performers would be, getting ready to leave.

Casp had never seen the building in which they actually performed, and he wasn't sure what to expect. Turns out there wasn't much to expect. It was a sizable, red brick building with the name written on a faded banner hanging above the entrance. The inside was already set up for the circus.

"The audience will be arriving in minutes," boomed an intermediary. He smirked. "Good luck." Soon enough people began rushing in. Just in case someone recognized them, the performers were required to wear masks. Finally, the lights dimmed and the show began.

Before the acts began, Ursula always gave an introduction speech. Obviously, when the time came, her mic did not work. Casp knew this was his moment.

"My name is Casper, and I was kidnapped by Ursula to work in this circus about a year ago. Yes, I'm saying that this circus is illegal. The police were bribed into ignoring it," Casp blundered into the working mic. For two whole seconds, the circus grew silent. Pin drop silent. Then slowly, a murmur ran through the crowd. Then a few questioning yells. He could see many people taking out their cellphones. Will ran

to Casp's side and enveloped him in a rib-crushing hug. Casp smiled. He did not know what was to come next, but he did know that he had at least made a difference.