

In My Mind

A pair of cold hands grasp the sides of my face, “Shhh... everything is going to be okay, Desdemona.” At the sound of my name my consciousness reverts back to my eyes and the woman standing in front of me becomes clear. She is gaunt looking with black matted hair and green eyes which look as though they have been strained through many years of pain. I stand in the middle of the alleyway thoughtlessly looking at the woman, but I can tell from her gaze that she is seeing me just as I do: lost, scared, confused, and vulnerable. I begin to process the woman's touch, and while she, herself, appears hollow, her embrace is familiar which welcomes my hot sticky tears to rise.

I crack. Before I can stop myself, I lean into the woman and tumble onto her chest. Gently, she catches me and places me down as she uses her arms like a shield to cover me from reality. Tears swarm my eyes, and burn as they flood down my face. Drawing breath is painful, and any means of obtaining fresh air is sealed. I whip the drool and snot from my face in hopes that the pain will go with it, but I am dreadfully mistaken. I am surrounded by darkness and shadow.

“You don't have to cry... I'm here,” the woman says as she pats my black hair. I open my mouth to reply but hiccups of air force their way down my throat. I can't breathe- so I scream. I run my hands through my hair and scratch down my face.

“Please,” I look up at the woman whose figure has become hazed, “Make it stop, just make it go away.” My heart clenches at the sound of my own plea. The woman looks down at me and locks eyes with mine. She smirks and carefully whips my tears away with her thumb, “I can make it all go away.” *All.*

“No...” I once again clean my face from stringy snot and dripping spit, “I don’t want it all to go away. I just want-,”

“-Oh, my dear, Desdemona, that’s not how it works,” her voice is chillingly cold and I can feel her nails dig into my skin as a means to cling onto me tighter. Forcibly, I untwine myself from her and begin crawling away.

“Don’t you want my help?” The woman calls but does not chase after me. I shake my head in response as a trail of tears splatter the floor. I make my way to one of the alley walls and hoist myself upright. I cradle my head as I start to hear voices in my head, “They don’t want you, they don’t want you, they don’t want you, they don’t want you.”

“No, they do want me,” I reply to combat my own words, but it doesn’t sound true.

“I need you,” the woman's words ring in my head and hang in the air. I turn around and see her once more standing in front of me with her arms outstretched for a hug.

“I don’t want your help,” I wave the woman away and start to pace only a few steps up and down the alley. My heart still burns but the need for a solution is more pressing.

“They don’t want you, Desdemona. They want you to go away and never come back. You heard them... they think you are a burden,” the woman says as she rests the right side of her shoulder on the brick wall. Her demeanor is no longer submissive, and timid- she knows what she wants.

“What are you talking about?” I laugh demonically and pretend that I have never heard such slanders, “My family wants me. I am family.” My voice cracks and tears start to cloud my vision. I stop pacing, the weight of the lie pushes me down and I collapse again. I feel the woman move to my side, I want to distance myself from her, but the strength to move has left me.

“Just, let me help you. I don't want to see you hurt. I want to protect you... Let me protect you.” Her offer was more of a command. With my left hand, I knock the side of my head as I imagine all the negative thoughts disappearing. I knock on it, and knock on it, and knock on it. Until a firm grasp on my wrist prevents me from committing any more harm.

“See... you need me just as I need you.”

I eye the woman as she defaults back to her warm and comforting state. Goosebumps travel up and down my legs as I look into her green eyes. “I do need you, Desdemona. Unlike those people you call your family. You’ve heard them talk about you as you hide in the shadows. Listening when you shouldn't be.” Strings begin to tug at my heart and my breath becomes rapidly shorter as voices in my head echo louder.

“No, no, no, no, no,” I cry out, “I don’t want another one. Please.” I beg my body to not betray me. As I sit on the floor counting my breaths, the woman kneels down in front of me, smiling with judgment.

“Look at yourself,” she says with a twinge of malice, “You don’t have to be this way. I can help you. I can make all the bad thoughts go away. You could be strong and powerful... not open and wounded.” I close my eyes as a means to drown the woman’s words out of my mind, but flashes of broken images replace the darkness. I rock back and forth. I need to be strong. Carefully, I place my hands on the concrete floor to push myself up, but before I can stand the woman slams me back down.

“Don’t you see, you are a disappointment if you go back and beg for forgiveness. Even if they do forgive you, you will never, truly, be welcomed back like how you once were. Things can never go back to the way they were. You will have to live, breathe, and eat with your pain and guilt. Because everyone knows- you did it.”

“No, you’re lying. You are a liar!” I push the woman's hands off me.

“Oh, Desdemona, but you know that I am not,” the woman’s white teeth shine in my eyes. I shake my head erratically.

“No, no, I... I didn’t do it. I didn’t do it!” I scream as bits of spit fly from my mouth.

“Yes, you did!” The woman screams even louder.

I cover my ears with my hands and close my eyes hoping that when I open them she will be gone. I continue to shake my head in disagreement with her and all the voices in my head.

“Desdemona,” the woman's muffled voice breaks through my barrier, “You are alone. No one fully understands you. But I am here, trying to help you. I am all that you have left. I promise I will never forsake you.” At the sound of her promise, I remove my hands from my ears. Everything is quiet, and it is only me and her.

“I’ve been trying,” I mumble as I slowly come to terms with my fate.

“And you have done a beautiful job fighting. Now, let me help you.” The woman stands up with her arm outstretched. I look up and down the alleyway to see if any last minute solutions appear, but it is just darkness. I am truly alone.

I look up at the woman, her green eyes are now gleaming with life. I can feel my heartbeat echoing throughout my body, for it does not know when I shall return again. My emotions start to overwhelm me and like an unstable dam, I break. I close my eyes, hold my breath, and take the woman’s hand. With both strength and power, she lifts me onto my feet.

When I open my dark green eyes, the woman is gone, and I am looking at the floor where I once laid helpless and broken. There is no pain. There are no emotions. I have awoken comfortably numb.