

## Mother

Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday; I can't be sure. I ate yesterday. Or maybe a week ago; I can't be sure of that either. Monty informed me that Mother passed because she couldn't handle so much stress. She killed herself; this I know.

Three weeks have come and gone, and I still sit in my windowsill, staring at the weeping willow on the back lawn. It hasn't changed in the year I've spent looking at it. Neither have I, I suppose.

Mother and Father used to send in a new person each week. Sometimes a doctor and sometimes a psychic. Each decided within the hour that I was surely insane from some illness they could not fathom. Once Father decided to run off with a young and beautiful dancer, the visits and false diagnoses ceased nearly instantly. Mother soon ran out of money, for she was only a simple homemaker. Our staff here at Rosen Hollow Estate packed their bags one by one until we were left with just Monty.

I am not insane, nor have I ever experienced insanity. Yet I believe my last nurse was. When she sat next to me on my window seat, she sat right atop Silas. And the woman had the audacity to call me insane when I screamed, as if she couldn't hear the piercing wails of poor Silas underneath her. She left abruptly, and I had to sing lullabies softly in Silas' ear for the rest of the dreary autumn afternoon.

I told Father of Silas once, as I told him of Gertrude and her ant farm that she continuously spilled on my bed, causing me to thrash about as I always did. I told him of Remington, who fired his gun late into the night to scare me and make me scream as if a banshee was trapped in my chest. I even told him of dear old Margorie, who left her sewing needles

around my room, which were the cause of the frequent blood splatter the maids found on my furniture and dresses. He nodded his head then, as if he believed me. Father was gone-off to France with Celine- within a month. Monty told me not to bring up my tormentors again.

Mother refused to see me after so many diagnoses, and I was never bothered by her sudden change in mannerisms. She wept and drank her sorrows away with absinthe while I watched the weeping willow. The more I looked, the more I imagined Mother's weeping to simply be the tree's struggle to stay upright.

Monty never cared for my reverie and preferred to remain in the kitchen or library until night, when he would bring me a small plate of food that I would not eat. He retrieved it every morning at precisely eight o'clock with the same inward sigh of disappointment. Silas informed that eating was for the weak at heart, and I knew that I would survive on the small morsel I consumed every Wednesday afternoon.

With Mother dead and Father gone with no intent to return, Monty has become my official caretaker, considering that I have no remaining family. Gertrude told me when I was younger that everyone in my family died because they could not handle the truth that laid within the walls of Rosen Hollow. Yet I know nothing of this "truth" she always mentioned.

The weeping willow looks different today. I've been watching it for four hundred and eighty-seven days, yet something has changed. Silas is soft around the edges, as if he's fading before my very eyes. Gertrude and Remington have not disturbed my sleep. I've slept soundly. Marjorie hasn't been in my room in days; the rugs remain stain-free.

Monty's screams can be heard from my resting place. He says the estate has caught fire and we must leave immediately. Silas smiles against my cheek, delicately tracing the box of matches clenched between my fingers. Monty beats on the door that Gertrude locked long ago.

Silas is nearly gone as we ascend onto the roof. I feel his pale fingers encircle my wrist and his promises of life after this one sound inviting. The weeping willow is swaying with an unknown wind. I feel the air around me stiffening, becoming hot despite the cold fingers tugging on my arm. I turn back to the weeping willow to see flames begin to consume the lower branches.

And as I watch the subject of my daily viewing burst into flames, I hear nothing but shallow gasping and Mother's cries.

Silas' fingers remained latched around my limp wrist, and Gertrude stands next to me, her edges blurred and her eyes teary in the evening light.

The housefire rages below as we balance ourselves on the edge of the roof. The sky is a hazy mix of grays and reds as the sun sets. Officers dressed in yellow scream from their places on the lawn, begging me to stay where I am.

A large cart is rolled from the front door with three officers on each side. A hand falls from beneath the thin sheet, charred beyond repair but bearing a ring that I've seen many times before.

Monty.

I stumble from the edge, my hand finding a place against my mouth to muffle the strangled sobs and stop the bile rising in my burning throat. Silas falls with me and my palms

become bloody as they scrape the rough shingles beneath us. My screams are drowned by the raging flames and the worried yells of the officers.

The fire is out, the water evaporating from my resting place on the roof. I can't move in fear of seeing Monty's body again, although Silas tells me that he deserved it. A ladder appears next to my legs that dangle from the edge of the roof, reaching towards the blackened grass below.

I stand abruptly, enraptured, as a burly man easily scales the ladder and reached for my shaking frame. I yank my hand free of Silas' grip and reach for him, suddenly fearing Silas and Gertrude and everyone else crowding around me.

A jerk.

A sudden jolt.

Silas' fingers remained around me as I descended, falling towards the earth as Mother's screams rang in my ears.

### **Six Months Later:**

The room is too bright, my thoughts too dark. Tears cascade down my cheeks, dipping into the hollows of my cheekbones before dripping soundlessly onto the wooden table.

Dr. Weston clears his throat, pen tapping out an obnoxious and offbeat rhythm on the worn legal pad he always carries around.

My hands find refuge on the wheels at my sides and begin the learned process of backing up and returning to my room.

Silas is waiting atop my bed, his mouth turned up into a sneer. I face the window, the steady tears ceasing to stop, as if his presence is causing my distress.

I suppose Silas really is the reason for my situations. I've seen nothing but these four walls for months. There isn't a weeping willow here, it died along with everything else I truly loved that fateful day.

The doctors here say I'm insane, too. Though I'm still not sure if they are lying to me. Silas continuously mutters to himself.

I'm a disgrace because I lived.

The corridor smells of cleaning supplies and disinfectant, a medley I've grown accustomed to in my time here. My wheels make a soft clicking sound as I glide across the pristine white floor, my muscles screaming with the simple effort.

The bathroom remains brightly lit even at night, the stall doors standing open and empty. I roll myself into the nearest one, rummaging in the garbage can until my fingers find the comforting feel of the knife against my skin.

The metal glints in the fluorescent lights, leaving metallic patches on the dark blue door.

The first cut does not hurt. Neither does the second, nor the third. By the fourth cut, the blood is dripping onto the floor. It slides into every crack. Every single crevice.

The door slams open just as my vision begins to blur; just as Silas appears next to me with his signature sinister grin on his pale lips.

Doctors yell among themselves as fluids leak into my veins to replace the blood leaking out. My body hits the hard floor beneath me. Mother finally has something else to cry about.