Unseen

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by ShameWithoutSin

Summary

Erik was a man of some sort and he simply couldn't be a voice, or a ghost, or even an angel. He couldn't be because he was flesh and blood and simmering madness himself.

Every time she closed her eyes the scene replayed in her head. The ranting, raving, spitting, lunatic of a man drawing closer and closer, his once elegant fingers transformed into violent, shredding claws. The terrible moan that escaped his lipless mouth the moment she laid eyes on him.

Horror. Horror! Oh, she would never forget it, never get the images out of her head.

But when he spoke, when he sang, when he was unseen and gentle…

If only he could remain a voice, she could love him. She was sure of it. If only she couldn't see him.

It began as a vague sort of thought, something that flitted away just as suddenly as it came. It was madness, surely. What was done simply couldn't be undone. Erik was a man of some sort and he simply couldn't be a voice, or a ghost, or even an angel. He couldn't be because he was flesh and blood and simmering madness himself.

Still, some nights she would press her blue eyes closed tightly, making meandering passes around her bedchambers, hands trailing against the walls and steps tentative.

If only she couldn't see him. If only she couldn't… see.

It was surely madness to think such things.

But still, the very next time she took the long trip deep into the bowels of the opera, she couldn't shake the thought from her head. She would not be afraid, she thought, if she couldn't see the large spiders crouched in the stone corners, nor would she miss the light of the sun if she simply couldn't see it. It was an unshakable thought lodged deep in her mind and try as she might, it never fully went away.

And surely Erik wouldn't mind it too terribly either. It was her sight, her vision, after all, that instilled such a fearful anger in him. If she couldn't see him then surely he wouldn't mind it. Perhaps he would even prefer it, she reasoned, as it couldn't be terribly comfortable to stalk about in the masks that he always sported for her comfort.

The simple fact was, the longer she thought about it, the less mad it seemed. Sheltered away in the darkness five stories beneath the end of the world, it seemed madness simply didn't exist at all.

She did not discuss the absurd thought with him, of course. How would one go about even beginning to approach such an admittedly morbid topic? But she sang for him, as was expected, and she closed her eyes tightly, and she reaffirmed for herself that it was her voice that he loved so deeply and certainly not her vision.

She extinguished every candle in her bedchamber, in her washroom, and found her way by touch into the large washtub, filled to the brim with steaming water. She scrubbed her skin in the encompassing darkness and had the strangest realization that she didn't have to look to know that it was pink.

It was not so very difficult, finding her way without the aid of her eyes, so long as she moved slowly. She only nudged against the vanity in her bedchamber and it struck the wall. She was quite unharmed but it made a terrible racket and, just as expected, she heard footsteps approaching quickly.

There was a knock at her door and she did not need to see to know that she blushed furiously.

"Are you quite alright?" his anxious voice asked from the hallway.

She could only pull her dressing gown tighter to be sure she was covered. "My candles have burned out," she lied.

It was only a moment before the door was pushed open, and she squinted at the spill of light from the hallway.

He lit the one nearest the door and stared at it for a long moment. "It went out?" he asked eventually.

She stared at the candle, too. It was a new candle. Hardly any wax clung to the side of it; the wick was not even completely blackened yet. "Perhaps there was a draft," she offered weakly.

"Yes," he answered, and she could hear the frown in his voice. "Perhaps there was."

Christine may have been mad but she certainly wasn't stupid; she knew that the concern lining his voice was because he was full well aware that there was no draft, as was she. The air was still and the remarkably unique design of his home simply didn't allow for drafts. Chills, certainly, the air was sometimes absolutely frigid, but she had never felt any sort of draft before. There was simply nowhere for a draft to come from.

"Will you light the rest, then?" he asked after a long moment.

"Of course," she answered, crossing her arms tightly. He began to move and before she could stop herself she whispered, "Erik?"

He paused, waiting, and all she could do was stare at him. It wasn't so frightening to look at him in that moment. When he was so very near *normal*. If only it weren't for the mask, she could nearly convince herself that he was the same as anyone else. "Christine?" he prodded, sounding just as concerned as he had moments before.

She swallowed, pushing down the question that had been bubbling in her mind for weeks. "Thank you," she said instead.

Would you still love me if I were blind? It seemed such a silly question to ask. Of course he would, she thought. So long as she could sing, he would love her. Dumb, deaf or blind it seemed incredibly unlikely that he would turn his back on her. Surely a man with a face such as his would be capable of seeing past such things.

"Of course," he answered softly. "I will be in the library should you need anything more."

She didn't dare to extinguish her candles again on that visit. It would be impossible to explain it away as an unexplainable phenomenon again; he simply wouldn't accept such an explanation twice.

When she returned above, it was with an entirely new view. Christine knew fully what had to be done - had to be - but she hadn't the slightest idea how she would go about it. It wasn't something that she could simply ask people about. They already thought her mad and she would certainly be taken away, locked up in some institute where she would never even hear his voice again.

It was an odd thing, knowing that she was consumed by madness yet finding no desire to fight against it.

Her answer was found in an old apothecary, the shopkeeper an elderly woman that was nearly blind herself.

There was a bend in her spine that seemed permanent and she peered at Christine through squinted eyes. Christine was instilled with a bravado; this woman would surely be unable to identify her in any meaningful way.

"I am seeking something to alter my vision," she said, speaking the words bluntly for the first time. It didn't sound quite as mad, she thought, spoken aloud with confidence.

The woman squinted at her just a bit harder. "In what way?" she asked, her voice ashy and trembling.

"Permanently," Christine answered simply. "I do not wish to see."

The woman smacked her dry lips, turning to peer over the shelves. "For what purpose?"

"For love," Christine answered softly, a smile forming that she was certain would land her in an asylum.

There were no further questions. The woman's fingers shook with age as they passed along the shelf of little glass bottles and, seeming to find the one she was looking for, she slid it onto the counter top in front of Christine. "Do be a dear and read the label for me," she instructed.

"Belladonna," Christine answered, squinting at the fancy script on the small glass bottle.

"Belladonna," the woman echoed. "It'll do the job just fine. Use at least four drops in both eyes. I'm obligated, of course, to remind you that the alteration is entirely permanent if done correctly."

With the promise, Christine took up the little glass bottle, leaving a handful of francs in its place.

That little bottle accompanied her from that day forward. Sometimes, when she would close her eyes and make a pass around her small bedchambers, she would run her fingers over the

smooth, cool glass. She would wait, of course. Sometimes she couldn't find her way to Erik even with the help of her vision.

No, the job would certainly have to be done when she was where she was meant to be.

She would mourn, at times, what the loss of her vision would mean. There would be no more sunsets, no more treading upon the stage, no more novels or pretty, bright dresses to fawn over. All unnecessary trivialities, she thought. Certainly, even with her vision, she would never return to the stage should she remain with him. Sunlight would be a rare treat, at best, and she supposed it would be terribly difficult to miss when she could no longer see it anyway.

Erik was right in one thing that night that she pulled his mask from him. She would die without the music. The music, his music, it was her lifeblood, her pulse, her breath. Christine could live without her eyes, but the music? She would certainly die a thousand deaths without it.

Erik didn't suspect a thing when she rejoined him in his already dark home. She sang, she sat with him while he read, she remained chipper and kind, and when she slipped away with the excuse of exhaustion, she slipped into her washroom, lighting a single candle.

She stared at herself closely in the mirror. Her eyes were a very pretty blue. She had never really paid much mind to their exact color. She had never noted the shape of her nose or the way that her lips seemed to have a natural upward curve, resulting in the illusion of a smile even when she was simply still or even serious. She touched her bottom lip gently, trying her hardest to memorize every tiny detail, every little line in her skin.

There was a certain nervousness that she hadn't expected. Perhaps it was because there was no going back; it was an irreversible change. She hoped that it wouldn't alter the pretty color of her eyes but she supposed she would never know for herself whether it did or not.

She checked her appearance one last time in the large mirror, being sure that her blonde curls were held smartly in place, pulling at her bodice and checking to be sure each button was fastened evenly and then, with trembling fingers, she reached for the little glass bottle. It uncorked easily.

She tilted her head back.

And then she screamed.

She hadn't meant to. It burned. It burned terribly, intolerably, and almost immediately her vision was blurred. The problem was that she couldn't tell if it was because it was working or because of the terrible way her burning eyes had begun to water.

With fear, she ran her palms against her cheeks to collect the running liquid and pressed them tightly against her eyes, suddenly afraid that it wouldn't work at all. It burned so terribly that she had to press her hands there or she would simply blink it away.

One step, two, she stumbled and her back found the wall. There was no grace in the way she slid to the floor.

Somewhere in her mind, she heard the door slam against the wall, she heard shouting, but it was drowned out by the searing pain, by the sound of her heartbeat in her ears.

Cold fingers grasped at her wrists, tearing them from her eyes, and when she blinked the only thing she could see was a blackened silhouette, a shadow of a shadow, and she nearly sobbed in relief.

"What have you done?" Erik's usually controlled voice shook on the words. "Christine - what is it? What have you done?"

She blinked wildly, trying her hardest to extinguish the fire burning in her skull. "It burns," she complained, reaching nervously for his wrist. "I didn't know it would hurt."

The faintest, darkest shadow she had ever seen shifted in her vision. As he leaned closer, she found that she couldn't see anything at all. "What burns, Christine?" he asked seriously. "What did you do?"

Tentatively she reached out, her hand pressing nervously against his chest. His shirt was soft, the skin under it cool. "My eyes," she murmured. "Erik, I can't see."

"You can't see," he echoed slowly. "What can't you see?"

"Anything," she answered, feeling her shaky smile despite the burning sensation that still lingered. "I can't see anything."

The tips of his fingers were gentle against her jaw as he tilted her head up. He had never touched her in such a gentle way and she shivered. "What did you do?" he asked gently, his thumb brushing away the tears running down her cheeks. "Why - why would you…" he trailed off, almost like he wasn't even sure what to accuse her of.

She blinked again. Blinking had suddenly become an entirely new sensation. She knew, of course, that her eyes were open, but when he leaned so close to her, when his body blocked out the flickering light of the candle, there was no change between the flutter of her eyelids. It was just as dark behind them as it was when they were open. "Flower of a belladonna," she mumbled, her hand still holding his wrist just a bit too tightly, even as his hands lingered against her cheeks. "Are my eyes still blue?"

"They're still blue," he answered, his voice impossibly gentle. "A very beautiful blue, Christine."

She felt her own soft smile. "I'm glad," she breathed. "Erik, will you still love me? Still, even though I'm blind?"

His thumbs moved carefully, brushing away the tears that still lingered despite the fact that the burn had slowly abated. "Of course I do," he answered eventually, his words soft and gentle. "Of course I will. Christine… Oh, Christine, why have you done this?"

"Because I can love you, too," she answered simply. "If you still have your mask on you can take it off. I can't see a thing, Erik."

The sound that he made was terrible but one of his hands left her cheek and something cold pressed against her forehead. It took her a long moment to realize that it was his forehead, bare and cold. "Christine," he breathed, and she felt the drip of his warm tears against her own cheek.

"I'll need help," she murmured slowly. "To dress, to read new music… Erik, will you really still love me?"

He gave no verbal confirmation. Instead, his hand slid around the back of her neck, his fingers tangled in her curls and he pulled her forward against himself, resting his chin atop her head as he rocked nervously with her on the washroom floor.

It was answer enough, she supposed.

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