

## 15. A Moment, If I May?

I wondered for a while if my writings could be used as incriminating evidence, if my art would lend any clue to my darker desires. Some nights, I was secure in my safety, others my eyes would cover the walls for hours analyzing the most damning of my pieces. I didn't go as far as harming any of them just yet, but the potential was there. I needed to make sure my motives were clear, lest I be discovered. I didn't want anyone corrupting my greater goal with some subliminal message, some meaning besides which I intended.

I decided to write things down as lucidly as I could from my own mind's perspective, though it might seem a bit vague to the passerby. The best way to keep a secret between three people is if two of them are dead? Though death seemed a bit of an extreme stance on things, the point was there. The other voices of reason needed to be silenced at the source, and I would maintain control at all times. My words would be logical at best to me; my closest associates perhaps, but that would be stretching it. I had high expectations for my new mission, and a sudden urgency to get things underway.

Days were bleeding together as I kept myself locked away in my quarters, content in my solitude as I derived new methods for my madness. I almost didn't hear the steps echoing in the empty apartment, the scrape of the chair as it slid across the floor. Looking up abruptly from my paper, I found a face I had heard much about, though never witnessed myself.

"Miss Ransom, I presume?" I extended one hand immediately, in an abrupt and very necessary gesture of friendliness. She shook it, betraying nothing with her reaction. She had prepared for all manner of comebacks on my behalf, everything from fear to rage, and she would take everything in stride.

She nodded slowly, clearing her throat. "Only if you are

Mister Edward Dorrance. Your friends, or acquaintances rather, call you Hyde. Your parents, the Doctors Dorrance, recently passed, correct?"

I nodded a bit too excitedly, shuffling my papers into an orderly pile and stuffing them under one of my sketchbooks. I started to rise from my chair, but halfway to my feet I found myself with no plan besides that motion. She stayed where she was, comfortable in my chaos, completely at ease with my restlessness. I shook my head just as randomly and returned to my seat across from her, realizing there was no need for me to go anywhere. If she'd wanted to hurt me, she would have by now, so there was no use hoping to find an implement of protection. And getting up to find one, with her hawkish eyes watching, wouldn't have gotten me much further.

"I'd like to speak to you briefly, about the unfortunate business of your parents' deaths, if you don't mind. Not that you have much choice, Mister Dorrance."

I smiled slowly, realizing her game was simple. She thought she had control. She assumed I was afraid of her, or respected her, that I would feed her whatever answers she required for one of these two reasons. But no, my reactions to her were based on something altogether different. Allow me to explain.

Miss Dacien Ransom was a long time patient of my parents, and one with which they were continuously frustrated. She only allowed out certain parts of her character, so you never knew if what she said was the whole truth, or some minute fraction of something bigger. All the same, they kept allowing her to return, almost challenged by her mystery. Little by little they made some semblance of progress, and then they'd be pushed back all the same. Until there was a landslide one day – Dacien had admitted to murder. She had given my parents the weapon she'd used to kill a very important community member long ago.

Angyl Hunter.

I recognized the name, though I had no face to put with the equation. She had murdered a number of people herself in her time, the memories frozen in black and white for all to see. Dacien had shot her, ridding the community of the murderer's rage, and thus performed a great public service. However, the law is still the law, and her guilt was genuine. She confessed her crime to my family, pleading that they keep the wretched gun safe, lest it remind her of the deed itself. Doctors are sworn by confidentiality, so they were powerless to announce Dacien's crime to any authority. Theoretically anyway. Doctors will commonly forfeit their patient's rights in respect of those of the victim, thinking that their betrayal is an even more worthwhile public service. My parents disagreed.

Dacien had confessed to them intentionally. She was testing their limits, what they would and wouldn't tolerate. Yes, she had shot a woman with that handgun, and yes, her prints were all over it. But the woman she confessed to killing had not died, or so the whispers in the darkest corners of the community went. We were all convinced that a murderer as ruthless and cruel as Angyl Hunter couldn't just die from a simple shot, wouldn't just lie down and take things as they were. No, there had to be more to it, a greater plan at work, one we were completely oblivious to. Or so it seemed to me. I was content with the lie, to a degree; if there were a psychotic killer loose in my town, I would have hoped to learn of her sooner or later. We might have a few things in common before long.

All the same, my parents never betrayed Dacien, and thus she never betrayed them. They were the only people she was ever entirely honest with, or so it seemed. She told them horrible, treacherous things that you could only ever hope to encounter in your nightmares. And they seemed to help her, keep the pain at bay, keeping her as sane and level as possible for a person in her position. I had heard my parents rave proudly of their

progress with the most prized, as well as dangerous, pupil.

“I left a specific artifact in your parents possession, I’m sure you know what I’m speaking of.”

I nodded slowly, returning to her suddenly, realizing that I had almost entirely forgotten she was there as I traveled through hearsay and memories.

“The police have found my fingerprints on it, as expected. But they’re trying to connect me to a series of murders I did not commit. Would you happen to know anything about that Edward?”

I shook my head slowly, unsure of what voice would erupt if I attempted to use it. Would it be as cool and level as her own, or would be laced with madness, hysterical and high pitched? I decided it was safer with silence, allowing her to lie out her playbook so that I could carefully tip toe around her defenses.

She nodded slowly, getting up from her chair slowly. I watched her rise up with my eyes locked on her wicked smile as she reached out and slammed my head down into the table. The shock widened my eyes momentarily, but I laughed about it soon after.

“I’m not here to waste time, I’d just like to know what makes the cops think I killed your parents. They’re making doing business rather difficult. Nobody wants to be seen associating with criminals with cops on the prowl. Now, we both know I had nothing to do with it, right?”

I wanted to pull out my most convincing tone and tell her that I had no idea what she was talking about. I wanted to tell her that I hoped she caught the guilty party. I wanted to tell her that I knew she loved my parents, in her own ruffian sort of way, and would never cause them any harm. But what I actually said was something very different.

“Your deeds are coming full circle, Dacien. How long did you think you could carry on before you were caught? How many innocent lives lost?”

She seemed pleased with my change of pace, the challenge obvious. She was accustomed to having her own way, getting things managed as planned, every time. My streak of madness wasn't part of her overall plan, but she was glad.

“Dear, dear Edward. Do you not remember who murdered your parents?”

She got up now from the table, moving to my side, where I got up to meet her. I kept my feet planted in place, refusing to step back. I tried to match her sinister smile with my own, keeping up with the dance. She crept closer until she was mere inches of me, completely without fear. I could have spit on her, she was so close, but such a decision would have been suicide. She put a finger on my lips, slipping it down to the center of my chest. It rested there for a few seconds, while my eyes continued to remain locked on hers. She mouthed one word to me, barely allowing the sound to escape her lips.

“You.”

I laughed, taking a slight step back to escape her clutches, secure in my defenses. If I could make her believe that she had done the deed, all incrimination would stay away from me. Besides, the killer was still out there, walking free, enjoying the light of salvation. He could have been anywhere, could have been anyone, could have been...

Me?

She kept her ground, arms folded as I stared back at her. There was no way that was right, no way it was true...right? The smile spread across her lips all the wider as she watched me battle with her accusation. Where had I been when they died? I had an alibi didn't I? And the murder weapon, the firearm, it

was found on the scene, with fingerprints belonging to Dacien Ransom. It should have been an open and shut case, right – or at least theoretically straightforward. No. I'd been at work, I was always at work, Irish could vouch for me. I laughed again, long and loud, entirely unafraid of the wild claims before me. Dacien just stood there, her ever curious eyes twinkling in my midst, waiting for a breakdown or a revelation of sorts to conspire. It never did.

“You can lie all you want, but only truth shall set you free, Miss Ransom.” My voice was shaky and erratic, entirely out of my control. I cursed myself for not being able to keep it more level, but at the same time, marveled that I could speak at all.

“Lie? Edward, why would I lie? What have I to gain from your parents' unfortunate passing? If anything, I had everything to lose. They knew countless tidbits of precious information that could have locked me away for a very long time. Their patience kept me that tiny bit stable, that tiny bit sane, and I appreciated their work very much. Though I may possess the means, I don't possess the motive.”

I kept smiling, trying to poke holes in her plot, trying to shoot down her theory. She was trying to frame me for what I was trying to frame her for; the irony of it was slightly hysterical.

“Now that information is secure.”

She took another step closer. “Is it? Or was it passed on to their executioner before they died? That's the only detail that worries me, the point that would keep me up at night...if I wasn't sure there was nothing to be concerned with.”

“You don't know as much as you think, Miss Ransom.”

“Edward...I saw you shoot them.” She paused suddenly, her eyes narrow and severe. She was judging me with her tone, eager to

carry out judgment herself – to decide my fate. Fate for a crime I did not commit; I was a victim here. Right? I thought back to the night in question, to the blank spots in my memory that I couldn't remember. I had taken a nap perhaps? There were a few hours left unanswered for in my memory, but they had to be hours spent at rest or work. What could I possibly gain from murdering my parents? Almost in answer to my question, Dacien responded again.

“Money, Edward. Relief from pressure; you were free without them, weren't you? And as the victim, you could always play the pity card, get whatever you needed, friendship, comfort, it was always readily available as soon as you explained that the big bad world had stolen Mommy and Daddy from you. Without them, you had the means, and the madness, to whatever you pleased, without scrutiny. Convenient, wasn't it?”

“You don't know what you're talking about, Dacien. I saw you there.”

“Ah, now you're starting to remember, we were both there, weren't we, Edward? I was leaving my appointment; you came in a few minutes too soon. My gun had been lying on the table as a therapeutic tool for the session. You picked it up, and without a shred of conscience, opened fire. You wiped it off, dropped it on the floor, and walked right past me. Like a robot carrying out an order, you never thought twice about me standing there.”

“That's not true. I saw you. I remember...”

“Do you? What do you remember Ed? How much do you think you remember?”

And she was right. I found myself questioning every detail of that night. I had only barely remembered going over there at all. I had no reason to head over; I'd been unable to sleep, so I went over to see how my parents were carrying on, if they'd had any interesting sessions. Halfway there, I knew

they'd be disappointed in me, and I knew they wouldn't give me any more drugs to help me sleep. I had to do something, I had to make a decision, or I'd forever be their lab rat. It was a Ransom night, I remembered that Dacien came the same day and time every week, her nights completely empty of other appointments. Sometimes her sessions ran longer than expected – my parents always gave her as much space as possible to vent. I had gone over there, and the session was running long, wasn't it?

And then what happened? I went in, as Dacien was leaving, finding the gun on the coffee table. They were all talking about nothing, setting up time for the next discussion, things to work on until next week. I barely remembered it; I was lost in such a daze. Everything after that seemed foreign and unfamiliar, like memories that I was retrieving from someone else's mind. They were clear at parts, but mostly blurred around the edges. I saw Dacien's eyes flash as she went for the gun, turning and aiming at each of my parents in turn, pulling the trigger without a shred of conscience. But the harder I focused on the scene, the more Dacien's outline blurred and shook in my memory. The less consistent it seemed. I started replacing her with everyone I'd ever met in my life, soon I saw Deacon, Brie, and Irish all as potential murderers, holding the handgun loosely in one hand. They took shock and staggered though, unfamiliar aspects of the scene.

When I'd exhausted all resources, I sat down at the table again. As I substituted myself into the scenario, and my mind didn't immediately dismiss the idea, the truth came crashing down like a house of cards. I kept shaking it off, hoping that things would disintegrate as before, but they seemed sturdier now, more lucid. Dacien was pleased with herself, as she took the seat she'd taken before.

“The cops keep coming for me. You can tell them what really happened, or I can. Either way, I will not bleed for you or your madness.”

I shook my head, ignoring her, tuning her out, doing everything in my power to return to the scenario as I remembered it the first time with a blood drenched Dacien Ransom holding the smoking gun. But no matter how many times I repeated the scene, it still seemed off and foreign. I could hear Dacien's voice, her real voice from the now speaking to me, but she seemed far away and miniscule as I kept repeating what I knew. What I thought I knew.

After another few minutes, frustrated with being ignored, she got up from the table abruptly, slamming her palms down on the surface. The noise brought my attention back immediately, staring from her hands up to her face, more confused than when I started.

"You want to know what's true, Edward Dorrance, then you find the stories. There's about nine of them now; if you find them, you may find peace. Or the closest thing that creatures such as ourselves do find. I wish you luck either way. But listen close...the cops will be coming for you, and I hope you prepare well for them. Good day, Mister Hyde."

And she left, just as quietly as she'd come. I was left to my chair, quiet and confused, unaware of all that had come to pass. Their murderer was still out there, loose and alive, biding his time until he could get away with more heinous acts. Right?

More monster than man, he would be a brutish creature with a severe flaw of conscience and an overriding tendency to believe things not as they were, but as he wished them to be. A creative sort, but still one powerless to stop the sway of truth, fighting an uphill war against what was obvious.

Tell me something true?

Show me something real.