

Welcome to the Show

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*In a place where she can hear him, her master speaks to her. “**You hate her, don’t you? It’s okay to hate her. It’s okay to kill her. Do it. Do it!**”*

And in a world where she can see her and barely hear her, her sister pleads with her. “No... No, please don’t do this! Stay with me, sister!”

*“**Give in. Give into the darkness of your own heart and strike!**”*

“Kristie, look at me. Look at me! I’m right here. Come back to me, please!”

His voice is getting louder and louder in her head, and her voice is getting softer and softer. No matter how desperate her sister looks or how many tears that are shed, the Ringmaster’s voice is stronger and more persuasive.

*“**Kill her! KILL HER!!**”*

“KRISTIE!!”

—Spluch—

Then all but the sound of splatters becomes silenced. No words are spoken, and there are no sounds in reaction to what just happened. Just absolute silence. For one caring sister, her eyes are wide —enormously wide. Her dark brown pupils look like tiny pencil dots in the whites of her eyes. The ghastly look is frozen on her face, and all of her pain is expressed in the eyes. Her fair skin becomes paler, her small mouth slightly open, and no breath enters or escapes her.

For the longest moment of her life, she does not move. She is completely still.

Reflecting in her eyes are the bright golden ones that belong to her killer. Vertical eyes staring right into hers as they stand face to face. Those monstrous eyes that had first narrowed in determination, desire, and bloodlust have now widened in victory, satisfaction, and pleasure. A toothy grin extends to reveal huge razor-sharp teeth.

—Drip, drip, drip—

Her sister looks down to what disturbs this absolutely silent and breathless space. Right through her chest is an arm where the hand has pierced right where her heart should be. Unseen to her sister, her heart is held up high like a trophy in a cage of sharp talons. It’s still beating, and the veins are still attached, but it won’t take long till it ceases. For now, that hand holds her life in its firm grip with the claws just slightly pressed



against the flesh without causing any more damage. There are skinny streams of blood traveling from the hand to the girl's back and bigger rivers flowing down her body or just gushing out from her chest onto the floor—creating a deep red pool at the monster's feet. Not too far away are blood splatters in a curved pattern from where she struck. Droplets of all sizes decorate the floor in beautiful red that glisten in the dim light so very nicely.

Unable to hold it back, her sister coughs and gags out the blood that rises up to her throat. She vomits blood past her lips to the floor as her long, messy, sweaty hair dangles past her shoulders and shields her face like brown curtains. More tears flow from her eyes as they drip or roll down her face like the blood.

Her life is draining away. Her shock intensifies when she sees the cause of her pain—a pain so great it numbs her entire body. With every bit of strength she has left, she moves. Her hand rises up slowly and shakily to reach for something. What she wishes she could touch is so far away from her. She tries desperately to touch her sister just one more time before the final breath escapes her.

Just once more... please...

“Kri...stie—”

Right at that exact moment, Kristie's eyes open wide, and her mouth inhales a great big breath. Her heart races, her skin damp with sweat, and her entire body is tense from the realistic and vivid emotions created by the nightmare. Under the warmth of her comforter, shielded from the cool temperatures of the autumn night, Kristie lies on her twin sized bed and waits to realize she is no longer in her dream. As seconds tick by on the grandfather clock in her shared bedroom, she's assured that she's safe in this familiar darkness.

“Sister?”

Sharply turning her head to the side, the fifteen-year-old brunette would be lying if she said she wasn't surprised to sense her twin sister lying in bed beside her. From the moonlight peeking through the curtain barriers of the room, Kristie can see the small glare of light reflecting in Catherin's eyes staring at her.

“Did you have a bad dream again?” Catherin asks in that annoyingly concerned, perfect voice of hers. It really makes Kristie sick just from hearing it. She acts like she gives a damn when she's only pretending to make herself feel better and retain the image of the loving, responsible, favorite child.



That's the one thing Kristie never understood. They're identical twins, yet they're treated differently just because of a few minor variations. Catherin likes to stay indoors and read books all day, while Kristie enjoys running around feeling the grass under her bare feet. Catherin can sit up straight with her head held high as she drinks tea, while Catherin can barely breathe in a corset. And today, Catherin had been proposed to by the most eligible bachelor in town while Kristie was lectured by their parents to start behaving like a lady, or she'll be doomed to become an old maid. Catherin is always praised and adored as Kristie is lectured and criticized—and she has the gall to plead with Kristie not to leave her in that nightmare when she is about to do the same in reality?

Trying to calm her nerves first, the older twin asks, "Catherin, what are you doing in my bed?" But the bitterness of the earlier day is still obvious in her voice.

"You looked like you were having a nightmare so I came to comfort you," says the younger twin, probably choosing not to hear it. "Do you remember how you always used to crawl into my bed when you were scared? We would stay up all night just talking about the silliest things, too." She lets out a lighthearted laugh. "They feel so long ago, now. I miss those days."

Reminiscing about the past is not helping Kristie's mood. She remembers those days as well, but they're gone and they're never coming back. Releasing an exhausted sigh, Kristie groans, "Go back to sleep in your own bed. We're not little kids anymore, and I can scare away the Boogeyman myself, thanks." She turns her back to her sister and prays that she'll drop it.

Unfortunately, no.

"Kristie, please talk to me. We used to be so close when we were little, but now—now you won't even talk to me outside this room. Was there something I did wrong, perhaps? Sister, why do you hate me so much?"

"You wouldn't understand. How could you? Just leave me alone already."

"But—"

"I said leave me alone!" *Just shut up already! Don't make me tell you,* she thinks.

Kristie can still see her dream so vividly in her head. She can still hear that man's voice talking in her head and easily bending her will to make her do what he commands. She can still smell that strong metallic scent of Catherin's blood. It's like a huge speck of dust that snuck up her nose and won't get out no matter how hard she blows: like a bad memory that



won't leave and will nag her for as long as it exists.

After a while, Kristie feels the weight of her bed shift, indicating that Catherin is going to her own bed on the opposite side of the counter between them. Kristie knew she would, eventually. But Catherin only sits up.

“Did you dream about my death again, Kristie?”

Feeling the weight shift again, Catherin looms over her sister's body to reach for the lamp on the counter. Kristie holds her breath at the question, wondering how her sister could know that; she has never told her about her dream.

When the light turns on, one of the first things Kristie notices is the untouched bed beside the counter. There should be no confusion since her sister is in bed beside her, but she remembers clearly that Catherin got into her own bed before they slept, and there is a strange layer of dust on that bed—as if it hasn't been touched in a very long time. The other things that catch Kristie's eye are two really old tickets on top of the counter. Like how she knew her sister got into bed, those tickets were not there before. Both are a faded midnight purple color with one saying in neon green letters, “Red Moon Circus” and the other in neon blue letters, “Backstage Pass.” If Kristie weren't already concerned with Catherin, she would investigate those tickets more—questioning where they'd come from or how they got into the room.

Instead, Kristie dares to look up, and staring her in the face are the wide rotten eyes of a corpse.

Kristie screams as loud as her lungs allow and hastily moves as far away as she can from her sister. Her back presses against the wall, and her legs kick away the comforter and the sheets that kept her warm and safe. *This isn't real! I'm still dreaming. I'm still dreaming!* She denies what she's seeing for there is no way this is her twin sister. Skin as white as death, dull hair dirtied and tangled with specks of dirt and dead leaves, dark circles under yellow pale eyes, bloodied lips crusted and chapped, body and clothes drenched in red, and an obvious hole in Catherin's chest where her heart is meant to be – she is the very image of a body that crawled out of a grave and she crawls closer to her retreating sister.

Kristie just barely squeaks, “N-No...” *Stay away! STAY AWAY!!*

“My poor, frightened sister...” Catherin reaches her hand towards Kristie's face and the living twin barely lets out a cry from how cold the hand feels on her cheek, like ice caressing her skin. “You still have my heart.”

Then her hand points down, and Kristie could only look down as if on



command. True to her sister's words, there is a slow-beating organ with its veins still attached to Catherin's body in Kristie's hand. Immediately, she wants to drop it. Throw it away and still declare that this isn't real, but she finds herself unable to move. She can't move, and she can barely breathe.

Catherin still moves closer. Despite her sister's obviously shaking form, she points her finger against Kristie's racing heart and says to her face, "They're coming for you. No one escapes us."

"W....w-who...?"

"Don't you remember, silly Kristie? The people you ran away from home for and then left me instead to take your place."

A rush of memories come flooding to Kristie's mind; she thought she was going mad. A young girl as adorable and beautiful as a life-sized porcelain doll who approached her with free tickets to a show, the creepy but wonderful performance the Ringmaster presented under the top tent of his unusual festival, and then the backstage tour of acrobats, clowns, beasts, and the like for others who received the free backstage passes—all a trap staged by the Three Masters who choose them and her. Another memory also comes to mind. The one where Catherin had followed her sister into that nightmare and did everything she could to help Kristie escape—and it resulted in her death.

"*Kri...stie...r...run...away!*" And then her heart was crushed right after that.

Leaning to her sister's ear, Catherin whispers through bloodstained lips, "The Circus, sister. The Circus is coming."

