

Pantomime

by

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1. Summer: Audition

“They say magic left the world with the Chimeras and the Alder. Whether they perished or abandoned us for the stars, the magic has leached from the earth and left us only its scattered remnants. Its Vestige. They say perhaps if the Chimera and the Alder ever return, magic and the knowledge behind it will as well.

“I do not hold with such frivolity.”

*- A History of Ellada and its Colonies, Professor Caed Cedar, Royal
Snakewood University*

“Well, *boy*,” the ringmaster said. “What can you *do*?”

I swallowed. “Pardon?”

He chuckled. “Don’t tell me you’re simple. What can you do? Are you a fire-eater? An acrobat? A freak?”

I was a freak, but I could not tell him so. I took a breath, the smell of hay and sand hitting the back of my throat. “I—I’m good at climbing, sir. Like a squirrel.”

He raised his eyebrows and gave an amused look to the mirthful circus folk. “The boy can *climb*. Well, I’ve never come across someone with so rare and useful a skill. I’m afraid we already got someone to take the glass globes up and down.” He waved a hand toward the top of the tent and my eyes rested on the tightrope and the trapeze.

“It wouldn’t take much time to turn me into an acrobat that can walk the rope and swing from the...swing.” I pointed up at the trapeze, for I did not know what it was called.

“What’s your name, boy?” the ringmaster asked, eyeing me up and down. What he thought of me was clear on his face: *scrawny runt*.

“Micah Grey, sir.”

“Did Riley and Batheo’s Circus of Mundanities send you?” He must have meant Riley & Batheo’s Circus of Curiosities, the largest circus in Ellada.

“No, I have never seen Riley and Batheo.” I took another breath, which was difficult with the white clown still holding onto the scruff of my neck. “I want to join your circus.”

Everyone around me erupted into laughter. The greasepaint on the clowns’ faces creased, looking cruel, almost goblin-like. The dwarf tapped the giant on the shin and asked to be put on his shoulder so he had a better view.

“Well, little Micah. I’m sure you climb very well and all, but I think it’s best you run along back to your parents.”

I glanced at the two trapeze artists I had seen perform that night. The older man was grinning outright and the girl pressed four fingertips of her hand against her lips. When she saw me looking, she gave me a wink. It was enough.

“I’ll prove it to you, sir,” I said, and broke away from the clown and dashed toward the ladder to the tightrope. The circus folk jeered and catcalled. Their cries spurred me on. I clambered onto the small wooden platform and felt a bit of vertigo, though I had climbed much higher than this in the past. I looked up at the trapeze and began to judge the distance.

“Hey, boy, come on, you’ve had your laugh, now come down!” the ringmaster called. “I don’t feel like peeling your corpse from the ground and having to give your parents a pancake for a son!”

I ignored him and bent my legs.

“Ariel! Aenea! Go bring him down before he kills himself.” Far below, I saw the female aerialist, Aenea, run toward the rope and begin to climb.

As soon as I had seen the circus, I had known it would come to this. I had nowhere else to run to. The Policiers of the Constabulary were after me. There was no going back now.

I jumped.