

DEEPLY ROOTED

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Entry 75.

The Patient of Maori Hill.

In all my years of service, I have never seen a case as odd as this. The patient was a girl of only 20 years with a mind so far beyond itself it was almost terrifying. Her psyche had outgrown her skull and clawed to escape.

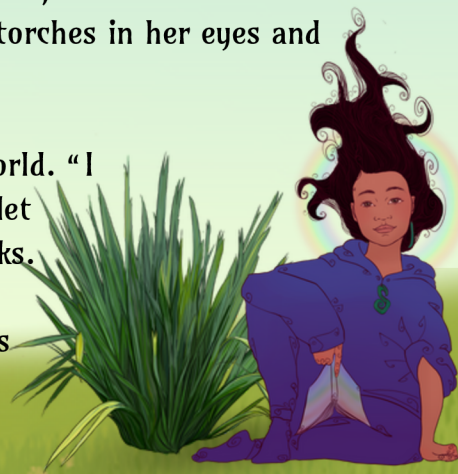
While in my care I learnt a great deal about her life. Her files say she had every privilege one could ask for. Her parents were both intellectuals, a historian and a scientist I believe. So naturally she was at the top of her class in the study of medicine at university. With a family of such esteem, they were plicated in a grand estate at the top of Maori Hill. Inside, the clouded coverings of light preserved walls adorned with awards and scholarships, testifying her brilliance. That is where they say she went mad.

I briefly met with her parents before they shipped themselves off to Bali for an extended sabbatical. Perfectly normal and well mannered in every degree, though I suspect they just wanted an escape from Dunedin's dreary weather. Or perhaps their daughter. I hoped for the former.

They said weeks before the event, she had been rummaging through the attic, sorting through old research journals for her mother. When they found her body locked inside, the contents of her life files were meticulously strewn across the room. Ultrasounds littered around the rocking horse in a pagan like symbol, certificates from birth to graduation tucked with other discarded sentiments of her childhood.

On night shifts I'd find her mumbling about her body harbouring hideous hard lumps, crawling and burrowing beneath her skin. In brief moments of coherence she told me ever since looking inside the box, she had been plagued with nightmares of foreign fingers grappling the inside of her throat or being trapped inside labyrinths of pulsating muscle. In between states of sleep and consciousness, she was left paralysed, unable to scream. In episodes like these, we'd watch her on rotation, shining our pen torches in her eyes and trying to conduct an estimation of when she'd return.

The patient said she did not blame Pandora for the evils in the world. "I understand now why she opened the box." Only wishing she had let hope escape. She was incapable of performing the simplest of tasks. I'd bathe her body in noxious soaps and lather thick creams over the hives that littered her legs. I found it best to think of these as



menial tasks, I won't feign embarrassment, as a medical practitioner nothing about the human body could stun me into silence.

But this child unnerved me. She was too aware of her state. I once asked her if the temperature of the tub was to her liking and with morbid sincerity, she stared at me, naked as the day she was born and told me "Death has forgotten to claim me, now I'm a husk of a human".

I shudder thinking of her now.

I've asked about her in medical circles. Most shake their head in pity or sigh at the wasted potential. It was only the students at her school that could tell me about her behaviour leading up to it. She avoided sleeping and threw herself into her work. Others say her grades dropped and that's what drove her to madness. Her perfect record was tarnished.

At the anatomy museum, she scrawled through the books, hoping to cure her unknown ailment by studying the slackened faces and diagrams of intricate organs. Her eyes were blackened and her hair was filmed with grease. Neglect left her body to rot. Some nights they had to drag her away from the desk as she pleaded for more time. It wasn't until she saw the ventricular vein diagrams turn into sprawling red vines did she leave for good. Apparently, she was inconsolable, screaming that they had fallen from the pages and grasped at her feet. She was banned, and that was the last time they saw her.

That is until they came to visit her here at the hospital. Most were awkward pleasantries, embarrassed almost friends that only stayed for a few minutes before turning on their tails to run. Others came for a sick macabre and joy from her distress. One of note, was a psych major who wanted to use her for their final assessment. I turned him away like I did the rest. She needed rest, that was my first mistake. The second was continuing in her care.

I recorded our sessions together, and while I'm not a psychiatrist, I thought that in case of any future assaults, I need to keep track of her mental deterioration. I've pieced them together for a continuous flow of events, trying to recount what happened the night she was admitted. She struggled against sleep medication, afraid of what waited there. She tried all sorts of methods to stay awake. Her fingernails were bitten till they bled and her lips were ravaged from ragged teeth. In a state of drowsiness she could describe to me in perfect detail, the horror of the red vines. Now I preface by saying, I don't do this out of pity or satisfaction, but if another godless tragedy happens as this patient claims it did. And though it is a small town, and the rumour mill has most likely made its way to you already, I must protect patient confidentiality. I am no longer sure of this world, but I must uphold the fundamental ethics I've sworn to. I will simply refer to her as 'Patient Zero'.



SESSION 12

Patient Zero: I found solace at St Joseph's Cathedral, and threw myself at the feet of god. Yes, I've strayed from him, but he promised to protect his children. I was so sure he'd keep me safe.

Her nose twitched as though a muscle spasm was let loose at these words. I gently prompted her to continue. Her eyes went glossy and distant.

Patient Zero: It was late. The congregation had finished Benediction. They were so enraptured with the prayer that they didn't see me slip behind the curtains. I waited. After years of accumulating must and stale smoke, the dense velvet emanated a shroud of stank. The smell of a church isn't foreign to me, a Catholic upbringing has attuned me to incense and aged books. But this moment? It was unbearable. A swelling of fluid behind my ears drummed a dull pain through my head. My mind was being choked. I wretched and gagged, my skin grew hot and a sludge fluctuated in my throat.

Reverend Father John tended the last flame with the metallic candle snuffer. I was not left in darkness, for the saints in their glass frames lent me their night light. And so the ornate pillars were illuminated by an eldritch lustre, giving way to bending shadows and arches that curved so far they tickled the small of your back.

The sludge burnt holes in my neck as I tried to contain my dry heaves. Father John ran his finger across the keys of the pipe organ, its trill of notes licking the sealing. He shut the lid and left. So I slinked out from behind the curtain and let the dust declump from my hair.

Her hand lifted to the top of her scalp, picking at the imaginary fluff. She kept picking till the skin broke and her fingertips were stained with an angry red.

SESSION END



SESSION 8

Patient Zero: I slept inside the confession box. It'd been the first time in days. I don't think I'd have been comfortable otherwise. The seat was hard and cold. It's like Catholics want to punish you even when you repent. But I didn't have any nightmares. Not even a dream.

SESSION END

SESSION 42

Patient Zero: It was later that night. Or maybe morning? I don't know. I woke up to the sliding of wood, and through the latticed opening, I saw Father John.

Interviewer: Why was he there?

Patient Zero: Honestly! I don't know the habits of a reverend.

Interviewer: Sorry. That was a silly question, please go on.

Patient Zero: He asked me why I had come. I told him how I had angered god. I must have done a malicious deed to incur his wrath. He'd never act like this otherwise. The Bible says he flooded the earth and brought the plagues to Egypt because of the horrors man created. Why else would he do this to me?

Interviewer: REDACTED. I'm sure that's not true.

Patient Zero: You don't know anything. Until you can face god with what I've seen, don't you dare say it's not true. God sent me those red vines. Not because he's just or cruel.

She stared at her wrist just then, tracing something with her eyes.

Patient Zero: He asked me what I had done. I racked my brain but I couldn't think of anything. You see, is the sinner worse when they're aware? Or does ignorance harshen their crime? I asked him this and you know what he said? He told me this reminded him of a poem he heard, two lines that particularly struck him.

"The dog that weeps after it kills is no better than the dog that doesn't. My guilt will not purify me."

Interviewer: Do you know what he meant by that?



She met my gaze at that.

Patient Zero: No.

Her face resembled a worn coat ferried in the Dunedin weather. Crumpled with holes leaking salty water.

Patient Zero: The conversation turned sour and when I tried to leave he laughed. At first, I didn't know why but then I saw no amount of rattling released the latch on the door. Though it was stone I banged my fists against the wall dividing us. I demanded he let me out. Only a horrible inhuman laugh drummed through the church.

Interviewer: Was it Father John?

Patient Zero: All I know is that when I looked through the opening, you know the little window? There was nobody there. And while I was trying to find him in the darkened box, the lattice was unfurling itself, creating a tangle of red vines that leapt at my face. It held me there clutching at any flesh its violent stems could grab.

SESSION END

SESSION 17

Patient Zero: I can feel it now. The tickle against my clavicle. Right here.

With her pointed finger, she drew a shaky line over the slender s shaped bone. Leaving a faint trail that faded back into the slick skin.

Patient Zero: And she curled her stems into my ears.

A great gasp from her chest broke the air.

Patient Zero: *Incoherent screaming*

Interviewer: REDACTED? Can you hear me?

CLICK

SESSION END



SESSION 2

Patient Zero: No listen. Please. Just listen. It thrust my face into stone and forced its thin sprawling stems down my throat. I bit down. Hard. And though it left a scorch on my tongue

I broke free. I lunged, throwing my weight at the door, and the old hinges finally screeched open. I burst open into the church pews. I crawled my way out. My fingernails caught on the carpet, friction burns flamed my thighs.

Interviewer: You need to rest.

Patient Zero: You can't let me go back there. Please don't make me go back there.

SESSION END

SESSION 9

Interviewer: REDACTED.

Patient Zero: I escaped. I went home.

SESSION END

SESSION 11

Interviewer: They say you locked yourself in the attic.

Patient Zero: The walls were throbbing bounds of flesh. Veins became gyrating vines. I found my way to the heart of the maze.



Interviewer: So you armed yourself with a pair of fabric shears? Against who? Your parents?

Patient Zero: They pounded against the door, but I couldn't let them in. I had to solve it.

Interviewer: What were you solving?

Patient Zero: My diseased mind.

Her shaky hands stretched out, graphing an invisible space.

Patient Zero: You see the files, they had ultrasounds. In them, there was a small hand. Shadowed against my body. She was my twin, and I killed her.

SESSION END

SESSION 37

Patient Zero: I'd eaten her

Interviewer: No REDACTED. You absorbed her. It happens with twins in the womb more frequently than you may think.

Patient Zero: Don't talk to me like I'm stupid. I know about twin resorption. I'm telling you, I ate her. Teeth and all. She's still here. Inside.

Worst of all? When I found out I felt guilty, and still she let me know how angry she was.

Searing pain ached through my thighs.

I rolled up my pants and she'd pricked me with hives.

I tried to massage them but I saw the faint traces of red vines connecting the splotches on my skin.

So I took the scissors and pruned out the stems.

There were no more traces of life. I limped across the room and tore the cloth from the mirror, wrapping it around my leg.

Interviewer: To stop the bleeding?

Patient Zero: Yes. I blacked out after that.

Interviewer: And that's how your parents found your body? Bloodied and smiling?



Patient Zero: Is that the official report? I remember being so happy it was over.

Interviewer: REDACTED, you almost killed yourself.

Patient Zero: I didn't care if I died. I still don't. I found her and I'm free.

SESSION END

March 4th, 2025.

The room she occupied now lies dormant. No new patients will take it. I have since destroyed the other tapes. I only have these select entries to show for our time together. The hospital scrubbed her case from any and all official records. No address. No phone number. No next of kin. I now have other patients that need my attention. But let it be known the Patient of Māori Hill was here.

The most horrifying thing about all this is that I believe her. For as she died, I too saw the red vines.

The skin on her lids, yellow and flaking, creased open. And a hum sounded deep from inside her body, I can't hardly explain it. Unknown to me. Inhuman. The heart monitor shrieked in delight as the insidious line bounced across the screen. Shackled to the bed she animalistically threw her head around, as though she knew she was up for slaughter.

She begged me to take the IV drip out. I knew when I saw it, suspiciously red and thick, seeping into her blood.

What I saw that day is almost impossible to describe. I looked into her eyes, and while the horror that pulsated her pupils terrified me, it was the red vines. As they absconded from her veins in the corner of the eyeballs. Etching their tangled stems into the fleshy white of her face, before finally latticing its bine over the black cornea.

In my dreams, I hear the dragging of vines across the linoleum and the snick of the wood lattice sliding close. Roots burrowing beneath my fingernails. My throat is raw and I taste a copper tang of blood on my tongue. Worst of all I see myself lying in the bathtub. Dead. Threads of red pooling out of my mouth and around my naked body. The wetted walls breathing. The vines don't grow, they only remember.

In both awe at the medical revelation and terror of all unknown to me, I wait in fear for the day I must meet with the red vines.

