



Cirque de la Mimique

CIRQUE DE LA MIMIQUE TRILOGY, PART I

"The fact that I'm silent doesn't mean I have nothing to say."

-Jonathan Carroll

Consider this. If it hadn't been for her daughter pointing animatedly at the poster, Lacie wouldn't have noticed it. She had been so trapped inside her mind as they stepped onto the old elevator that nothing had registered other than her daughter Vi's hand clutched tightly with her own.

Their trip to France had been her husband's idea, and the hotel had been booked for almost a year. Each event of the trip was carefully scheduled, both to fit into their one-week holiday and to ease Vi's anxieties around public spaces that had plagued her entire life. The moment Vi began to speak sparsely at home but never in public, Selective Mutism began to fall from the doctor's lips. Clinicians and family alike were optimistic that

one day she would speak more frequently outside the home, and gave them exercises to help aid her. Adair started to practice visualization with his daughter. He walked her through the steps to positively imagine in her mind's eye new outcomes for factors that triggered her anxiety. Then, they would find ways to work through those fears. The method allowed Vi to face anxieties in a safe space while also teaching her patience. He signed the family up for American Sign Language (ASL) classes, too. While she could hear, she communicated mainly in ASL and other related actions that signaled what she was saying and feeling. Lacie had been a dancer before Vi was born, and Vi seemed to find comfort in movement the same way her mother did. She would tap her foot when she felt successful and fidget her fingers when scared. Adair was prepared to give his daughter the best life, and for now, that included a trip to France. When he suddenly died three months before they boarded, Lacie had been left alone, with a daughter she could barely manage. Now, every event they went to without him was either a mockery or a celebration, depending on Lacie's mood.

Vi, now nine years old, had tightly gripped Lacie's hand the minute the heavy hotel elevator doors had screeched open in front of them to take them to their room. Lacie needed a break from the outside world, and Vi was craving playtime with her Nintendo Switch. The grinding sound of metal on metal had Vi grasping her mother even tighter than usual, her other hand trembling. Vi's doll's eyes were vigilant, peeking from the open zipper of her fanny pack, watching for danger. Fortunately, there was nothing to see — yet. Once they both stepped into the ancient lift, Lacie tucked Vi's hand between both of her own, bent down to her level, and hugged her. Since they had arrived, the barely lit elevator had scared the young girl. She shivered each time they boarded it, but the rotting wooden stairs seemed even less safe. The formerly gold-plated car had long since lost its luster. Now, the gold flecked off the walls and railings

and littered the faded marble floor with glitter spots of shine. Even with the shine, it was dark as day turned to dusk. Randomly alternating busted bulbs streaked the elevator in black, and the ones that did work barely lit the space. When the elevator raised or lowered, the shadows danced. While the darkness made Vi uncomfortable, Lacie reveled in it. Standing there in a cold and bleak space, the environment reflected her grief. With her widow's guilt, Lacie felt she belonged in a void, hovering up and down in isolation.

The elevator continued to tremble as it did when they first entered, and with their combined weight it was terrifying. When Lacie stepped toward the glowing floor buttons on the side, the elevator moved like someone was jumping up and down on the roof. It creaked like the cords holding it up in the elevator shaft would snap at any moment. The owners had previously assured them it was up to code, and Lacie was so emotionally exhausted she took their word for it. None of their promises, or Lacie's reassurances, made Vi any less anxious. While Vi fidgeted, Lacie remained distant. Even when they were alone in the elevator, Vi never felt safe enough to speak and kept her head down.

It wasn't until Vi had tugged hard on Lacie's hand twice that she turned to see what captured her attention. She was gesturing aggressively to the tattered playbill taped on the back wall of the elevator. It hung above one portion of the paint-chipped gold handrail. Lacie turned her back on the doors, moving to see why Vi was so enraptured. It hung crooked, having been tacked on the wall haphazardly with yellowed tape. Lacie wondered why she hadn't seen it before. The poster was almost entirely black and white; the only color on it was a name displayed in deep red across the top. *Cirque de la Mimique*. The text was the color of dried blood. Vi pulled her attention from it briefly, poking her mother until she turned

her head. She signed at Lacie, asking if they could go. Lacie signed back, asking her to be patient until she knew more about it.

Looking for event information, Lacie studied the poster. Trying to see it from Vi's perspective, she understood what had attracted her daughter. There was a mime plastered front and center. It was clothed in the stereotypical t-shirt with horizontal black and white stripes, and suspenders hooked into a knee-length black skirt with white stripes near the hem. Tall socks covered the length of its legs, only a strip of skin whiter than snow visible at the peak of its thighs. Its suspenders and bow were the same crimson red as the name on the poster. A ring of children watched it perform.

Mimes had been one of the biggest reasons Adair loved France. Adair had always associated them with happiness and magic, able to turn the image into the physical. They could cut a rope with imaginary scissors, or trap themselves in boxes that didn't exist. Magic had always been alluring to children, an opportunity to manipulate the impossible. Vi probably saw a person capable of such wonders. Though Lacie didn't know French, she surmised that there would be a lot of mimes at this event. Of course, Vi wanted to go — like father, like daughter. To Lacie, the mime just looked tormented.

Its high arching brows were thick, *black*, as if drawn on with a marker. Its black eyes were sunken, set deeply into pale skin pulled tightly over its skull. White gloves stretched closely across its hands, and its lips were glossy with black lipstick as dark as its eyebrows. For the past three months, Lacie had seen the same gaunt expression and sunken eyes on her own face every time she looked in the mirror. Looking at the mime, Lacie saw her grief reflected back at herself, masked behind a satiric face of comical surprise.

The children surrounding the mime gazed up at it with such intense desire, that it looked more like angst. These kids were of varying ages, ranging from as young as two years old to preteens. There was even an empty crib tucked halfway behind the platform the mime stood on, blankets undisturbed inside. Excitement had lit up in Vi's eyes, the gleam physically hurting Lacie. While Vi saw something fun, Lacie just saw another person trapped. The longer she stared at the mime, its lithe frame poised to entertain the children, the more she imagined movement. At first, she noticed its eyes. They followed Lacie, deep black irises sizing her up before flickering over to Vi. The shadows of the elevator made it look like the mime was shifting, its head tilting.

An unbearable sensation rippled across Lacie's skin, and the temperature dropped to ice cold. Her skin prickled as a shiver crawled up her spine. Goosebumps pimpled Vi's skin. She signed for her mother, asking what was happening. Lacie replied she didn't know but opened her arms to warm Vi. The little girl shook her head no, opting to stay near the poster, entranced by the mime. Lacie turned quickly toward the elevator doors. She wanted to be anywhere but there. As the temperature continued to drop, the feeling of being watched heightened. The mime's stare burned into the back of her neck. Eager to get away from the poster, she repeatedly pressed the button to their floor again, then glanced back at her daughter. Vi stood directly in front of the poster, a few inches behind Lacie, hands rubbing her arms in an attempt to warm herself. She saw her daughter pace slowly closer to the poster, coming to a stop directly in front of it, cocking her head in confusion. The girl lifted her palms before her, then mimicked being trapped in a box, performing like the mime was watching her. Lacie guessed it was something she had seen her father do when he told her stories about mimes. Vi waved at the mime next, a simple gesture they often practiced while first working to make her more comfortable around strangers. She invited the mime

closer by pointing at it, then waved her hand close to her body. Horror pressed Lacie's heart into her throat as it granted Vi's request. Vi inched closer in curiosity. The mime's head slowly breached the poster's surface. The mime's lips stretched into a wicked grin that showed its teeth filed into sharp points. Its right arm followed, bony and pale as snow. Slender fingers outstretched as the mime reached for Vi's throat.

TO BE CONTINUED



See the end of the book for elevator etiquette rules followed or broken.
Elevator Etiquette Codes: 1C, 2A, 2F, 9B, 9H