

Behind the curtains

Written by

The StoryTeller

INT. MICHAEL'S LOCKER - NIGHT

We pan through a dim room. Some clothes and theatre equipments here and there

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I have this returning nightmare. Every single night I step on a big, bright and heroic stage, performing arts of the history, while they are watching me. Surrounding me like predators its prey. Waiting for my flaws to attack me. I see them, ripping off my limbs, pulling out my guts and swimming in my blood.

The view stops right in front of an illuminated mirror.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

(continues)

But different to other people, is my nightmare true.

Suddenly MICHAEL BOWLY, 46, raises his head and appears in the mirror. Dark-skinned. His face tense and covered in blood. Hectically gasping for air.

INT. THEATRE, MANAGER OFFICE - EVENING

LOGAN REESE, 40, the manager of the theatre, sits behind his desk and scans thoughtfully through some documents.

LOGAN

It's like I said. The references are astonishing and the testimonials more than acceptable, but I'm still wondering if you really understood the extent of the efforts that are needed in this job.

A lovely, young woman, EVA SCHILLER, 30s, glances at him with a convinced look on her face.

EVA

I'm totally aware of the efforts this position requires and I'm more than glad to assist and perform where I can, as good as I can. Please Mr. Reese, don't make the mistake to underestimate a person by her or his appearance or even just by some common prejudices. I'm the right one for this job.

Not quite convinced, Logan lets his eyes wander through the room as searching for an excuse, as --

EVA

Just one day, if I fail. I leave immediately and pay you for the day.

Finally, Logan breaths and opens his mouth to confess:

LOGAN

It's not about you, I'm fearing of.

EVA

Is it Mr. Bowly?

LOGAN

See, Mr. Schiller. Michael has an illness. I'm afraid that you didn't understand what effects it has on people that try to surround themselves with him.

EVA

I've heard something about a problem with the accompany of other people. Is it true?

Logan chuckles a little and leans back in his seat.

LOGAN

A problem is a sweet, sweet understatement. He hates it! I mean not like someone hates the opposing team or the spinach on one's plate. I mean: he really abominates people. The mere thought about the existence of other people makes him sick.

EVA

But why?

LOGAN

(on-screen)

The doctor called it Anthropophobia. The fear of people. They say it can be linked to his past.

(off-screen)

Unfortunately does Michael prefer to not talk about it.

(on-screen)

(MORE)

LOGAN (cont'd)  
Well, actually, did he never said anything to me.

EVA  
You both never spoke, although you've been working together for more than one decade.

LOGAN  
Never. Not one word. Michael and I only exchange letters, like he does with every other person too. Helps him to deal with his fear.

Eva thinks for a moment, then looks back at Logan.

EVA  
How is it possible that this man steps every single night in front of thousands of people and perform with other actors?

LOGAN  
We don't know. The specialist can't explain it. No one can. Some profs said it could be a hebephrenic schizophrenia. Some colleagues guess he throws one or two friendly pills in before hitting the stage. Whatever it is, the stage is the only place where people can actually see Mike. Hm. Sometimes I'm wondering if he can really see them or just look at empty seats.

Eva frowns.

EVA  
What is it, that you really want me to do here?

LOGAN  
Do a miracle. Cure him. Make him a human being, cause the other actors and actresses don't accept to work with him further under this conditions.

EVA  
And if I fail.

LOGAN

Then I'm afraid. The theatre loses  
a great actor and you the salary of  
a day.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

A dark stage. Suddenly a spotlight goes on revealing Michael  
in his costume sitting on a chair.

Behind him lies an ACTRESS on the ground, who played  
Desdemona from the play "Othello".

MICHAEL/OTHELLO

Oh, Lord. What fool have I been.  
Bare and meek I throw myself in  
front of your judgement, begging  
your mercy and the gift of not  
being remembered as the monster I'd  
created, but just as the man I  
really am. A man of honour, a man  
of honesty - a man of love. Oh,  
Lord. I wandered into the fog of  
insanity without hearing your  
commands, without hearing  
your admonishment. Oh, Lord ...  
please. Remember me as the fool who  
unvalued your love, your kindness.  
A fool that once saw a Turk beat a  
Venetian. So I grabbed the Turk at  
his throat and hit him - like this!

Michael stabs himself with a fake dagger and goes to the  
ground.

There he crawls over to the actress, looks at her lovingly  
and strokes over her lips as trying to feel the softness of  
her kisses.

MICHAEL/OTHELLO

A kiss as I took your life and a  
kiss as I take mine.

Softly, he KISSES her.

A loud and deafening applause as the lights goes off for a  
moment.

The spotlights goes on, revealing a full crowded theatre  
with a standing and cheering audience.

Some close-ups of emotionally touched persons, stopping by  
the face of Eva, who seems very impressed and somehow  
fascinated as she claps her hands loudly.

INT. MICHAELS LOCKER, BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michael VOMITS heavily into the toilet. His face is almost red as he leans back against the wall.

Fighting for breath, he moves his hands frantically over his body like trying to rip off his skin.

Slapping his sweaty face multiple times, forcing himself to stifle his urge to scream.

A KNOCK at the door is audible, His eyes widen.

Another KNOCK.

Panically, he embraces himself. Shaking his head, whispering words.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Michael closes his eyes and presses his palms against his ears. Still shaking his head. (Just make it stop.)

Knock. Knock. Knock.

As he opens his eyes, he sees himself, sitting in front of him with a weird grimace. A reflection. An ILLUSION.

The Illusion looks at the door. Michaels eyes follow.

INT. MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michael exits the bathroom and steps slowly towards the door. Knocks are audible.

Barefooted, he moves over costumes. Scattered on the ground. Suddenly, he steps on SHARDS and freezes by the sound of breaking glass.

EVA (O.S.)

Mr. Bowly?

Michael gazes panicky at the door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Eva stands right in front of the door to Michael.

EVA

Mr. Bowly, my name is Eva Schiller.  
I'm a big admirer of your  
performance.

Silence.

Eva thinks.

EVA  
I'm not going to leave until we  
both had the pleasure to meet each  
other personally.

Silence.

Eva sighs. But something changed in her look, as if she approves to accept a challenge.

MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michael moves slowly back to his bathroom, when suddenly--

EVA (O.S.)  
Hear me, my Lord. Poisoned thoughts  
and dirty mouths lead me into the  
darkness. Innocent my body,  
innocent my soul. Murdered by  
shallow mights...

HALLWAY

Eva leans with closed eyes against the door and acts.

EVA  
(continuous)  
...In full responsibility I deliver  
myself to you. Spare my husband,  
spare my love.  
(opening eyes)  
Oh, farewell, farewell my sweet  
little sin.

Curiously, she looks at the door.

MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM

Michael leans against the door. Impressed and Touched.

HALLWAY

Eva bits her lips, breaths and says:

EVA  
Look, I know that you could find  
ten thousand reasons not to speak  
to me, but all I beg is to pull out  
the one the speaks for it.

Paper crumples are audible.

Eva looks down: a small NOTE gets pushed under the door.  
 She picks it up and unfolds it. The note reads: Which is?  
 Eva smiles and shakes her head.

EVA

No. I'm not going to do this, Mr.  
 Bowly. I'm not going to write you  
 back.

(kneeling down)

I'm here to speak with you and this  
 is what we're going to do. We  
 speak.

She pushes the note back under the door.

A beat and the note appears again.

EVA

No notes.

Eva pushes it back and the note appears again.

EVA

We can do this the whole night. Mr.  
 Bowly. I've got time, how about  
 you?

MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM

Michael moves angrily around.

Besides him: the Illusion.

ILLUSION

Get rid of her.

MICHAEL

How? She is not going.

ILLUSION

Then let us make her go.

MICHAEL

No ... no. She is a good person.

The Illusion chuckles.

ILLUSION

How do you know?



MICHAEL

I can feel it.

ILLUSION

Feel it? You have no feelings and without me you wouldn't have a life. Look at you. You not more than a miserable and pathetic friction of me. She will hurt you. They all will.

MICHEAL

(pushing hands against his ears)

No, stop!

HALLWAY

Eva presses her ears against the door, then she bows down a little and looks through the door lock: Michael moves wildly around the room, talking to himself.

Shocked, she moves back and breaths.

MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM

Michael shivers, moves nervously around, whispers words.

EVA (O.S.)

You're stronger than him.

He stops moving immediately and turns **shocked** to the door.

HALLWAY

Eva leans against the door.

EVA

Whatever it is that tries to hold you back and poison your mind, it isn't real. It won't win. The people love you, the theatre loves you. You breath art and art breaths you. You bring joy into life of so many people.

(swallows)

Whatever is in there with you. It got no power over you.

MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM

Michael looks up into the face of the Illusion, who shakes his head with an ugly grimace.

HALLWAY

Eva breaths.

EVA

Let it go. Don't let it ruin what you built over all this years. It has no place in your future. Give it an end.

MICHAELS LOCKER, ROOM

Michael moves in front of a mirror. A face like seeing himself for the first time ever.

The illusion steps right behind him. Both look into the mirror.

ILLUSION

I will never leave you.

Michael looks down: a white-red coloured Venetian MASK.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eva sits on the floor and leans against the wall. Gazing at the ground.

Suddenly, the door opens and her face freezes: Michael looks at her.

A moment of deep silence<sup>s</sup>, then:

MICHAEL

Thank you, Ms. Schiller.

INT. MANAGER OFFICE - LATER

Logan checks out a Magazin as the door opens and Michael steps in.

Logan looks like witnessing a ghost.

MICHAEL

Do me a favour and set up another show for tomorrow evening. Make it big. I will give you a helluva performance.

Still shocked, Logan nods automatically.

MICHAEL  
Thank you, Logan.

Michael leaves and Logan falls back into his chair.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NEXT NIGHT

Workers and co-workers do the last changes before Othellos next performance.

Eva stands next to Michael. We see both from behind. A make-up ARTIST prepares him.

EVA  
I just wanted to say how proud I am  
of you. You're doing a fantastic  
job tonight.

The make-up artist leaves.

MICHAEL  
I always wondered...

Eva looks at him curiously.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
...Lives the artist from the  
theatre or the theatre from the  
artist.

Eva seems puzzled.

Michael gets his cue, looks at her and says:

MICHAEL  
Farewell, Ms. Schiller. The only  
true artist I ever met.

Before she can answer, Michael leaves and steps through the curtain in front of the audience.

Leaving a nervous and helpless Eva.

Logan steps besides her.

LOGAN  
I don't know what you did, but I  
really need to --

EVA  
-- Stop this!

LOGAN

What?

EVA

You need to stop this. Something isn't right here!

LOGAN

What you're talking about? You healed him and he's giving the best performance of his life tonight. The house is full, we can't stop the show.

Eva turns sternly at him.

EVA

If you not want this to be a bad headline tomorrow, I rather would choose to end this. Right now!

Logan looks puzzled as a CO-WORKER, 30s, approaches from behind.

CO-WORKER

Sir, it seems like Mr. Bowly forgot his prop.

LOGAN

Whatcha talking about? He's already on stage.

CO-WORKER

(holding up the fake dagger)  
Yeah, but he forgot his dagger.

Eva looks shocked.

EVA

(whispering)  
He didn't

LOGAN

What happened?

Eva runs to the curtains and looks through it.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Michael stands in front of the audience. Behind him the actress on the ground.

MICHAEL

Oh, Lord ... please. Remember me as  
... please remember me as a man of  
the art. A man ... a man of the ...  
t-t-the people.

Eva cries.

Michael pulls out a big SHARD.

MICHAEL

(shivering)

A fool that once saw a Turk beat a  
Venetian.

He presses the shard against his throat.

BACKSTAGE

Logan stands next to Eva.

LOGAN

What is he doing? That's the wrong  
text?

Eva kneels down crying.

STAGE

MICHAEL

(shivering; convinced)

So I grabbed the Turk at his throat  
and hit him - like this!

A breath and everything turns for a moment into slo-mo. From  
Michaels POV we see many excited, happy but also shocked  
faces.

MICHAEL

(voice-over; smiles)

I step on a big, bright and heroic  
stage, performing arts of the  
history, while they are watching  
me.

(on screen)

Rest in peace, sweet little sin.

BLACKNESS

The sound of a cut and SCREAMS from the audience.

**THE END.**