

Breathe

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Erik was like a dream, warm and hazy. His presence would wrap around her like a blanket, until she could barely draw breath. It was a sweet suffocation. Oneshot.

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1 - Breathe

Standard Disclaimer: I do not pretend to own Phantom of the Opera, or any of its characters, and only write this because I am completely obsessed with this musical and I'm compelled to write about it.

Erik was like a dream, warm and hazy. Whenever she was around him lazy tendrils would envelop her mind, enslaving her thoughts and feelings in soft, tender shackles. Colors would blur, the world around her would blur, until there was nothing but Erik, and what he pointed out to her. His presence would wrap around her like a blanket, until she could barely draw breath. It was a sweet suffocation. She could pass from the living, pass from this earthly world and into the world in which he seemed to be from, and she would not notice. Not until his presence was gone anyway, and she would come to a realization slowly, as if she were actually in a dream and she was just reaching for consciousness, just shaking off the remnants of sleep.

But Raoul was like fresh air, sharp and clean. Not unlike the cold winter night he had professed his love for her on the roof of the Opera Populaire. When he was around things suddenly came into focus, as if a shroud had been lifted. She could think clearly again, and things that would not even come to her mind when she was around Erik, suddenly seemed, not only possible, but likely. It was like a breeze, lifting the hair off her neck, like so many nameless burdens, and filling her lungs with what she needed to live. She felt alive, and so much more aware than she had ever been. She was awake.

During the three months Erik had disappeared to write his opera, she had almost forgotten him, so used she was to breathing freely. But her clear, safe world was interrupted again by the phantom. And as he sang once again to her, sheathing the sword that he had just threatened her managers with, she felt the dream once again descend upon her. Fear and passion merged together until she was dizzy. It was all consuming, the look in his eyes. And he managed, once again, to make her forget everything but him. Managed, to blur the lines of reality into soft mists and dancing flames.

This time, the dream did not fade with the absence of his presence, but lingered, muffling the thoughts in her head, even as Raoul tried to clear them. He would not let her go. Even when he was no where near her, he possessed her. Enslaving her with memories of her father, dreams of her angel, and the fear of the passion he held, in his eyes, in his voice, in every word he whispered so hauntingly to her. The dream held, even as her fiancé and her angel fought at the base of her fathers grave, even as she sang the lyrics of his opera, knowing that if all went as Raoul planned, the opera ghost would never compose anything again. Even as she gazed at her childhood friend in box five, seeking the strength to not succumb completely.

But when she was forced to make a choice no one should have to ever face, when she looked into the lost eyes of Raoul, and into burning, passionate, hated gaze of her angel, her phantom, her *Erik*, her thoughts were clear. Things had never been sharper, and mouthing her love to her childhood friend, she made a decision. A decision which should have condemned her to a life of endless, smothering dreams, but instead saved them both. The dream had ended, and she was released.

Christine stared at her dresser. It had been months since the night of *Don Juan Triumphant*, when she indeed had passed the point of no return. Her life had gone on, in a new opera house, in her love for Raoul, and in the joy of their upcoming marriage. But now, lying on her dresser of her new dressing room, in her new opera house, seemingly innocent, was a single red, long stemmed rose with a black silk ribbon tied around it. With a trembling hand, she picked it up. Warm memories, like tendrils from a dream caressed her as she stroked the silken petals. She closed her eyes as the familiar sensation fell over her, her chest heaving with the effort it took to breathe.

When she opened her eyes, tears clung to her trembling lashes, and they fell freely when she picked up the note that had come with the rose. It was a simple cream card with only a single word written on it: *Brava*. She gasped in a breath and began to shake all the more. He was here. She wanted to look wildly around for secret passages opening behind mirrors and curtains, feared to breath too loudly in case it overwhelmed the soft whisper of her name that he just might sing. She was suffocating. The corset seemed too tight, the yards of fabric of her costume too smothering. He was here. And would he let her ago again?

The door to her dressing room opened. "Christine?" She didn't move. "Christine, are you ready? Christine?"

Slowly, she turned to the door, holding out the rose for Raoul, her fiancé, to see. His eyes went wide and he swiftly crossed the room and wrapped his arms around her. "Raoul," she whispered, "I cant breathe." He drew away, believing it to be his embrace that smothered her.

"Christine, is it...him?" He grasped her shaking hands in his own, nearly crushing the rose.

"He's here Raoul. I can feel him." Her eyes shifted in panic as she looked all around her. Her voice was hoarse, and as shaky as her hands.

"Christine," he gently placed his hand on her cheek and forced her to look at him. "He cannot harm you anymore. He has no influence over you. Come," He took the rose from her hands and placed it on her dresser. "lets go to supper."

As he lead her by the hand from the room, she felt the tendrils recede, felt the shroud being lifted and her mind clear. She looked at the face of her childhood friend, at his eyes, which shown with worry and love, and took a breath.