

*The
Hauntess
of
Moon Lake*

A Story for Ghosts

Written by

Jeff Nichols

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List of Characters

Eleanor Thorburn (*Female, mid to late 30s, any ethnicity*)

Beatrice Walker (*Female, mid to late 30s, any ethnicity*)

Edward Throburn (*Male, mid to late 30s, any ethnicity*)

The Mystic – known initially as 'Old Woman' (*Female or Non-binary, old presenting, any ethnicity*)

Henry (*Male, 50s – 60s, any ethnicity*)

Eli Hayes (*Male, 50s – 60s, any ethnicity*)

Mrs. Hayes (*Female, late 30s – early 40s, any ethnicity*)

Alise (*Female, 20s, any ethnicity*)

Father McLaggen (*Male, 50s – 60s, any ethnicity*)

The Sentry of Death (*Female, ageless, any ethnicity*)

Dollie (*Female, any age, any ethnicity*)

Mrs. Walker – Beatrice's mother (*Female, late 30s to 40s, any ethnicity*)

The script is written for a cast of nine, with Mrs. Walker, Dollie, The Sentry of Death, and any other ancillary character being played by the actors playing Mr. and Mrs. Hayes and Alise.

On style or 'feel'

The Hauntess of Moon Lake is a pagan-fantasy ghost story. The time is the late 19th century. In writing, it was envisioned with an old Celtic feel, drawing on the music and pagan-myths of ancient ages. However, any culture worldwide could adapt this play using the ancient music, aesthetic, and myths of their distant ancestors.

For the Dead.

*The Dead we mourn, the Dead we don't,
the Dead we've long forgotten.*

Death changes us all.

Prologue

Darkness. And in that darkness voices waft in from the distance...

VOICE 1

Welcome...

VOICE 2

Don't be afraid.

VOICE 3

I am here to help you.

VOICE 1

So that you may understand.

VOICE 2

You'll be alright.

VOICE 3

If you understand.

Dim lights glow in the surrounding forest, pulsing and whispering. The voices are soft and gentle; embracing. They repeat from everywhere, overlapping and clarifying.

VOICE 1

Welcome...

VOICE 2

Don't be afraid.

VOICE 3

I am here to help you.

VOICE 1

So that you may understand.

VOICE 2

You'll be alright.

VOICE 3

If you understand.

From the darkness, a figure approaches carrying a gas lantern before her. The voices fade with each repetition as she steps through the veils of clouded moonlight.

She settles and the voices disappear. She regards those before her, offering a comforting presence.

ELEANOR Welcome to my home.

She raises her hand and with the snap of her finger sends everything into darkness and silence.

The faint lapping of water on a peaceful shore drifts into earshot. Something disturbs the still water on another part of the shore. A flock of birds taking off from a clump of reeds perhaps. Just then –

Act 1

The Shore

BLINDING LIGHT as Eleanor shoots up from the ground with a massive gasp for breath! Her eyes open briefly before she shuts and shields them from the punishing light.

ELEANOR Oh God... God...

She forces herself to catch her breath and groans as the sharp hangover hits.

Oh God... Henry!

Nothing.

(desperately) Henry!

Just then Henry, an old but still upright valet appears seemingly from nowhere.

HENRY Yes, ma'am?

Eleanor continues to cover her eyes from the punishing light.

ELEANOR Bring me my smelling salts, would you? And please, shut the blinds?

HENRY He's busy at the moment, ma'am.

ELEANOR What? No, the blinds. *(uncovering her eyes and pointing)* Shut the bl –

Eleanor stops, she's not in her room. Where is she? Henry continues.

HENRY I'm afraid he'll be busy all afternoon until this evening.

ELEANOR What – Where –

HENRY If you insist, madam.

Henry leaves.

ELEANOR *(calling after him)* Where are you going? *(noticing her wet clothes now)* Oh God, not again... *(Calling to Henry)* Henry?

Eleanor struggles to her feet and heads in Henry's direction. Edward enters from behind.

ELEANOR Come help me back, I think I may faint.

Edward enters from behind.

EDWARD You wished to see me?

ELEANOR (*startled*) Oh God!.. Edward?... Where...?

EDWARD I'm quite busy preparing for our guests this evening, you *are* aware of that.

ELEANOR Our?... What are you talking about?

EDWARD You don't – We invited them days ago, we can't simply turn them away hours before.

ELEANOR No, I – What on earth are you talking about?

EDWARD Were you drinking last night?

ELEANOR I beg your pardon. I don't care for *that* tone at all. We just had a party last night, *everyone* was here drinking, yourself included.

EDWARD It's hardly beside the point. You've been increasingly overindulgent lately.

ELEANOR Well that's the most gentle way you've put it in some time.

EDWARD We can't abandon our social duties. You need to learn to control yourself.

ELEANOR Oh that old gem.

Edward turns to leave.

Wait. I'm sorry. Don't go. Please –

Edward stops.

EDWARD (*softens*) News... ? What sort of... (*allowing a smile*) Are you – certain?

Eleanor notices something strange about Edward. He seems to be looking through her. Deliberately she raises her hand and cautiously passes it in front of his gaze.

Well then, we shouldn't rush to cautions. We don't know what that night brought us yet. We shouldn't allow ourselves to indulge in fantasies again. Not yet.

Eleanor stops, she recognizes this conversation.

ELEANOR Oh...

EDWARD I have to finish readying myself. If we want to provide for *anything*, we'll need our relationships to keep the estate in order.

Edward moves to Eleanor, reaches toward her as if to touch her, and then stops himself just short, delicately, as if not wanting to hurt her.

ELEANOR Wait... *(Eleanor closes her eyes and thinks to herself)* I know, I know, I know...

EDWARD I'll send for the doctor in the morning.

ELEANOR Oh, what did I say, what did I say?

EDWARD What did he say?

ELEANOR *(suddenly remembering and blurting out)* He said it feels like a boy.

Edward smiles. Eleanor remembers, feeling as though she is there in this moment again.

Wouldn't you rather stay with me tonight and dream his name together?

Edwards brief softness subsides.

EDWARD You should dress for the evening.

He leaves.

ELEANOR Wait, don't –

Edward is gone.

Eleanor looks around, confused.

ELEANOR What is this? Why am I not waking up? It's over.

A sudden low, semi-distant rumble of thunder. It startles Eleanor but she regains composure quickly and curiously looks to it.

Edward burst in from behind putting on his coat and gloves, frightening Eleanor.

EDWARD I'll return in a few days.

ELEANOR Oh – Stop doing that!

EDWARD Henry will see to your daily care and the doctor will be available at all hours.

ELEANOR Edward, what is going on here? What is happening?

EDWARD The new mine in the north collapsed. I have to see it's reopen as soon as possible.

ELEANOR No, not the damn mines. This – this –

EDWARD I have to go. I won't know how many died until I arrive . *(He sighs, exasperated)*
Negligence...

Again Eleanor waves her hands before Edwards face but Edward does not respond.

ELEANOR Hey! Wake up! We're in a dream. Wake up!

Edward stops adjusting his clothing and looks at her. Serious.

EDWARD We need this one to work.

He softens and holds his hands before him, as if he's holding Eleanor's.

I'm sorry, dear. But, I have to be there to ensure everything starts again, as soon as possible.

Eleanor moves to touch his hands but there is an almost imperceptible barrier. She attempts again. Confused, she holds her hands out as close to the barrier as she can.

ELEANOR Where are you?...

EDWARD I shouldn't trouble you in your condition. You should just rest.

Edward holds his hands over Eleanor's belly, as if cradling a progressing pregnancy . Eleanor remembers this moment and naturally falls into it.

ELEANOR Stay. Don't go out into the night.

EDWARD I can't. I have to be there to set everything right. We can't afford to lose anymore. Not now.

He turns to leave but stops at the threshold and turns back.

EDWARD I'll return as soon as possible, I promise. I won't leave you alone.

Just as he leaves the light changes, the day is swept away and Eleanor's surroundings are no longer blank. Joyous music rolls in from the distance as a foyer unfolds around her and she arrives in her home, Moon Lake Manor.

The Wedding

Guests arrive with a burst of energy. Mr. and Mrs. Hayes enter with their young niece, Alise, new to town.

MR. H My God, I love a good wedding. Let's drink and eat all night.

MRS. H How is that different from any other night, dear?

Mr. Hayes glares at his wife and she returns a playful smile.

Besides, feasts are reserved for joyous first weddings, not desperate transactions.

MR. H Don't be cynical.

MRS. H It had all the pomp of a contract signing.

ALISE It did feel like a rather *efficient* ceremony.

MRS. H *(to Alise)* Second ceremonies are not to be doted upon, dear. *(to Mr. H)* I suspect that means we'll be dining on boiled chicken and carrots with a simple cup of cheap wine to wash it down.

Though I suspect that's all we'd get from her, were this the second ceremony or the first.

ALISE I've never seen anyone so rigid.

MRS. H Have the weight of your entire family history thrust upon your shoulders dear, and you'll be as rigid as any stone in the mountains, trust me.

Eleanor is lost and cannot recall this from her memory at all.

Henry enters.

HENRY Ladies and Gentlemen! *(claps twice)*

Edward and Beatrice step into the room, her arm draped through his, waving to their guests as they all clap. Then everyone goes silent as Edward and Beatrice take the center of the room.

ELEANOR Edward – Beatrice?..
(shouting in all directions) What's going on?! Wake up! Wake up, Eleanor, this isn't funny!

Waltz music gently wafts through the room. Soft, formal, romantic. Edward and Beatrice embrace formally and step in threes, circling, not breaking one another's gaze.

The music darkens with the room, and their embrace grows tighter.

The pace quickens and their turns take on an aggression. There's a tension between Edward and Beatrice, a struggle. They turn around and around, faster and faster, staring daggers into each others eyes.

The guests look on, smiling and lost in a trance. Eleanor is the only one seeing this clearly.

The music calms as light returns to the room, and Guests clap as if they've only witnessed a tender waltz.

HENRY Mr. and Mrs. Edward Thorburn, ladies and gentlemen!

ELEANOR WHAT?!

Edward and Beatrice bow and retreat to another room. Guests look on as they leave and then follow.

MR. H A smart match, indeed.

MRS. H She must be satisfied.

ALISE What do you mean?

MRS. H They should have been married years ago.

ALISE Really?

MR. H Oh, don't.

MRS. H *(to Mr. H)* What? *(to Alise)* They were “betrothed” when they were children. They were supposed to be at least. But he fell in love and married someone else instead.

MR. H And it worked out for the best... Bless her heart.

MRS. H It was her liver that was in need of blessing, dear. *(To Alise)* Woman could out drink a horse.

ELEANOR/ I beg your pardon?

MR. H Don't gossip.

ALISE But I heard The Lady of Moon Lake Manor was so – *elegant*.

MRS. H Was, dear. Til she drank herself to death.

MR. H Don't speak ill of the dead, it's not proper.

Eleanor freezes.

MRS. H It's been two months, dear. Move on.

Eleanor mouths to herself, “two months?”

HENRY Ladies and Gentlemen, if you'll please make your way to the dining room, dinner will be served.

Guests shuffle out.

Henry. Henry, you see me don't you? I'm not dead, right? *(Henry leaves)* Henry?!

It can't... *(looks at her hands)* I can't...

Eleanor runs out of the house as the last of the guests retreat to the dining room.

ALISE Perhaps it was a blessing, then.

MRS. H An inevitability, really.

MR. H *(to MRS. H)* Hush. *(to ALISE)* The poor dear was tortured, yes. That was not always the case, though. She wasn't given the title "The Lady of Moon Lake Manor" for nothing. Few are referred so regally anymore. Yet, it stuck...

MRS. H You fancied her.

MR. H *Everyone* fancied her, dear.

ALISE What happened?

MRS. H She –

MR. H *(to MRS. H)* Don't. Gossip. *(makes to move to dining room)* Now, let's join to rest before they –

MRS. H *(pulling him back)* It's not gossip if it's true, dear. *(to Alise)* "The Lady of Moon Lake Manor" filched her husband from the rigid bride today.

MR. H / That's not true.

ALISE No.

MRS. H Fine. She "wooded" him, however you'd like to say it. She was no one and he was to marry a proper lady of society, but he broke it off for her. A scandal for both families.

But she – and I'll give her this – she carried herself through the ordeal with such grace that not long after, society forgave her misstep. And soon she was looked up to by all. But, rumors grew over the years of trouble in the heavenly household.

Mr. Hayes scold his wife and stops them..

MR. H Enough. These types of conversations are not meant for a joyous day of celebration. May God rest her soul.

Eleanor enters the property cemetery and searches.

ALISE (following) May God rest her soul.

MRS. H (obliging) May God rest her soul.

Mr. Hayes marches into the dining room, leaving the others behind.

ALISE Who was she?

MRS. H The bastard daughter of Beatrice's father and the maid is how it's told.

From offstage, Mr. Hayes grumbles. Mrs. Hayes smirks.

Eleanor finds her grave.

MRS. H Like I said, boiled chicken and carrots.

They leave.

Eleanor's Grave

Eleanor kneels at her grave. Hesitantly she lays a hand on the grass that has begun to grow over it. Then both hands.

Nearby, an Old Woman pays her. Eleanor touches her tombstone.

ELEANOR "Here lies Eleanor Thorburn. Beloved wife and daughter." That's it... 'Beloved wife and daughter...'

Faintly, the Old Woman snickers.

OLD W. (under her breath) Always the same...

Eleanor startles and notices her for the first time.

ELEANOR What did you just say?

The Old Woman stares at the tombstone a moment and bows her head to pray.

ELEANOR Of course that wasn't for me. Poor old widow.

Eleanor watches her a moment. Then...

That grass beneath you is old and thick, and you're still here. (looking down) Mine is fresh. Two months old apparently and not a single lingering footprint. (looking back to the old woman) Maybe you could come pray for me...

Eleanor moves closer and inspects the Old Woman. Her clothes are tattered and she leans with both hands on an old, wooden cane, yet she appears to be sturdy.

Eleanor looks around, searching for some evidence, some answer.

This has to be a dream. Wake up! WAKE UP, YOU LUSH!

When it doesn't work...

Maybe I finally did drink the entire cellar this time.

The Old Woman snickers slightly and then stifles it. Eleanor watches her closely for a moment.

Did you just hear me? Hello?...

Eleanor cautiously moves her hands in front of the Old Woman's face and waves it. She doesn't react.

The Old Woman finishes her prayer, nods to the tombstone before her and then, ever-so-slightly, glances at Eleanor as she turns to leave.

I saw that!

The Old Woman shuffles away.

No wait wait.

OLD W. *(shuffling quicker)* Time to be on my way. Back home, alone.

ELEANOR *(chasing after her)* Please. What's going here? Why can you see me?

OLD W. Another quiet day.

Eleanor reaches to grab the Old Woman.

ELEANOR Hey!

Immediately the Old Woman lifts her cane and pushes Eleanor away.

OLD W. Stay back! Get away from me.

ELEANOR *(amazed)* You touched me.

OLD W. You stay back, spirit.

ELEANOR How did you...?

Eleanor attempts to step toward her but the Old Woman jabs forward with her cane; Eleanor stops. The Old Woman breathes heavily but calms herself and remains steady.

Is this a dream? Some terrible dream I can't wake up from. Why can't I wake up?

OLD W. This not in a dream. This is your world.

ELEANOR That can't be. I – There were no gates or fire, I'm just... here.

OLD W. It doesn't work like that.

ELEANOR I'm... ...

Eleanor is despondent. The Old Woman softens for a moment.

OLD W. I'm sorry, child. You have my condolences.

ELEANOR ... How?...

OLD W. I do not know. We never know at first.

ELEANOR 'We'. You're...

OLD W. No. I am not one of you.

ELEANOR Can you – help me? I'm not supposed to be here...

The Old Woman tightens her lips and the grip on her cane.

OLD W. No.

ELEANOR Please. *(going to her)* You have to help –

The Old Woman pushes Eleanor back again with her cane.

OLD W. You stay back!

ELEANOR How can you touch me?

OLD W. Listen to me, child. I reject any part in this transition. I am finished with my part in this world. I will no longer be a puppet of the dead. You leave me be.

The Old Woman begins to back away. Eleanor pleads.

ELEANOR Please. I don't – Don't leave me alone by my grave.

OLD W. You'll receive her message. Soon enough.

ELEANOR I don't –

OLD W. You will.

ELEANOR I won't. I'll be lost. Help me. You want to help me, I can see it.

OLD W. I weep for you, deary, truly I do. But I will not be compelled. I will unburden the dead no more. You are not the only Being here who suffers.

Eleanor moves to the Old Woman and slowly extends a hand to her.

ELEANOR You're alone, like me. We don't have to be alone.

The Old Woman reaches toward Eleanor.

We can help each –

The Old Woman presses her hand against the air between she and Eleanor. Eleanor freezes in place; unable to move or speak.

The Old Woman tightens her grip on the air and Eleanor feels a squeeze as the Old Woman's gaze hardens from compassion to conviction.

OLD W. Here me now. I will have no part in this transition. You will have to go it alone. I will not play my part in this world until I know why. And you can tell *her* I said so.

The Old Woman steps back with caution, and then swiftly turns and shuffles away. Her ability to hold Eleanor fades as well. Eleanor regains control of her outstretched hand and crumples into it, cupping her face in her hands as she weeps.

It's only a brief moment before Eleanor realizes that she can't feel the touch of her own skin. She pulls her hands away from her face and tries again; nothing. She inspects her hands, moves them, entwines her fingers, but the familiar sensation of touch is absent.

Eleanor raises her hands into the air and notes a soft breeze. The air moves so gently that it would be almost unnoticeable in life but now Eleanor is acutely aware that the air never lands on her skin. It washes unceremoniously through her, ignoring her existence.

She reaches for the horizon and there, far off in the distance, the wavering sunset shines through the back of her hand like a hazy painting.

She thinks of the old woman and looks back to where she disappeared.

What are you?...

A crash of dinnerware shatters the silence. Eleanor startles. The sounds of the wedding celebration

grow louder in the manor as the sun completely sets.

Eleanor sets off for the house and then stops. The stage goes dark, almost completely, until a faint light lands on her. The light grows bright as it lifts and fills, high in the night sky.

Moon Lake Manor

Standing there, in a brief moment, something inside Eleanor changes. She is no longer a fragile, cernuous ghost.

A confident wisdom raises her as she turns and looks directly at those before her.

ELEANOR You likely don't know this, but ghosts don't sleep. We never even come close.

(smiling) Hello. I apologize for not introducing myself earlier. I am known as Eleanor. I'm here to help you. So that you may understand.

You've probably never thought of it until now. Sleeping. I mean, death... eternal rest, right? *(She shakes her head.)* But not for us, for us it's the opposite. I mean, as far as I know. In all my time on earth I never met another ghost "in person". I was the only one of my kind I ever knew, until of course... Well, we'll get there. This is how it happened for me, your experience may be altogether different. I don't know. We never know.

Eleanor walks on and enters the party; guests burst in, laughing, drinking, chatting. Her calm demeanor contrasts the party happening around her.

It's a strange consciousness. Like the mornings you naturally wake too early, before anyone else. You're not sure why but you are ready to wake, and you wait peacefully for the rest of the world to join you. That moment, right before everything... Is the quietest, most clear moment.

Eleanor watches as Edward cheers guests, offers them hearty 'thanks' for attending, and modestly drinks. Here and there he looks around, unable to find his new wife.

He was always the first up. Through our life and after, he was always up before anyone else. Edward was such an ambitious young man. Not so serious as he is here, but kind and optimistic. When we were young he had this magnetic electricity to him that seemed to spark in the chest of everyone who found themselves in his company.

Edward excuses himself and leaves. The guests trickle out.

Eleanor looks around and breaths deep, taking it all in.

This is my *home!* Moon Lake Manor. Built and occupied solely for one of the wealthiest families in the country. In our time, of course. I wasn't born here, however. *(she laughs)*

No, Moon Lake Manor belonged to Edward's family. My family was – well, my mother died when I was twelve and I continued on living with her employers until...

And not far from here, soon to be glimmering with the light of the night sky, is Moon Lake. Known for its near perfect reflections of the full moon. It's waters rest so calmly on some nights that you'd swear the sky were painted on the ground before you. (*wryly*) Trust me, I've seen it many times, it's very transfixing.

Moon Lake Manor got its name not only because of its proximity to the lake, but also for its family's striking resemblance to it. Years before I was even born a then *semi*-famous writer traveled through here and noted, “The water freezes to the stillness of a mirror as the night settles into silence. One wonders if the lake is still the entire way through, or if chaos ensues beneath its dark, crystal, shining cover.” Well, such was the case in the personalities of the Thorburn family of Moon Lake Manor. Revered for their success in various business ventures over multiple generations, the entire family were known as a stoic, hard, and very secretive people. Except for my Edward, of course.

My husband broke the family mould, so to speak. Marrying a poor, orphaned maid's daughter for love instead of some spoiled heiress. A *scandal* for such a revered family. (*pleased with herself*) That was *me*.

Moon Lake Manor is where I spent my adult years. Joyous and miserable in nearly every conceivable way. By now you've heard I was referred to as 'The Lady of Moon Lake Manor'. I loved that. I mean, it has a ring to it, right?? Especially for a girl who'd grown up being known as 'the help's *bastard*' or, on less cordial occasions, 'that *filth* the maid left behind'... 'The Lady of Moon Lake Manor' was much better. For a time, at least...

Our first years of marriage were absolute bliss! Especially since his parents died not long after our wedding. (*If the audience groans or reacts to this*) Oh they were horrible people! - And we were free to live our lives! Finally allowed to be in love and celebrate joy!

And the parties, oh the parties! I don't think a truly *joyous* celebration had ever been held in this house until I moved in.

Beatrice saunters into her bedroom. She brushes her hair and prepares for bed.

For a time...

I'll see you again.

Eleanor leaves.

Beatrice's Nightmares

Edward appears at the door, unnoticed.

EDWARD I knew I'd find you here.

Beatrice quickly turns, frightened.

BEATRICE Oh!... *(quickly catching her breath)* Don't sneak up on me like that.

EDWARD *(he smiles)* Sorry. You left the party unannounced.

BEATRICE Yes. I have a terrible headache.

EDWARD I understand. I just – thought my new wife might bid her husband 'good night' before retiring.

BEATRICE Of course.

Beatrice goes to Edward and kisses him on the cheek.

Good night, my dear husband.

EDWARD Good night.

Edward starts to leave and then stops and turns back.

Did you enjoy yourself today?

BEATRICE ... It was perfectly suitable, dear. Thank you.

Enjoy the party. I really must rest.

EDWARD Of course. I hope you feel better in the morning.

Edward leaves.

Beatrice places her brush neatly on a table, dims the lights to darkness, and goes to bed.

After a time the lights glow weakly. Eleanor steps from darkness into their dim light and watches Beatrice sleep... After a while...

ELEANOR You bitch... This must be hell. This *has* to be hell. No great awakening, just – watch my husband love another woman. A friend, no less. Or a friend long gone if you ever were one.

(looking out into the void) Is this it? Is this how you assign punishment and reward, just perpetual semi-existence? Leave us to watch our lives fade away into nothing.

Or I don't know, maybe heaven is different. Maybe it *is* golden gates and warm sun, because this surely must be Hell!

Beatrice suddenly awakens, shooting up, momentarily shrieking and then immediately stifling it!

She closes her eyes a moment while she catches her breath.

BEATRICE *(realizing, sighing relief)* Oh thank god... A dream.

She gets up and goes to the mirror. She stares at her reflection a moment, touching her face to make sure this is real.

BEATRICE Just a dream...

The clock strikes midnight with a ring, frightening a sudden yelp out of Beatrice and startling Eleanor.

Oh! God....

Beatrice looks back to the mirror and touches her face one more time.

A dream...

She goes back to bed. Eleanor watches her for a moment.

The forest glows dimly in the distance. Eleanor hears faint voices calling to her.

Flecks of light distinguish themselves from others, pulsing and growing, drifting closer and closer. They enchant Eleanor and she wanders off into the distance, allowing them consume her.

Absence

Edward's boots clack into the room.

EDWARD Henry said it was urgent, what is it?

Eleanor?... I'm very busy today, I don't have time for distractions. What's so urgent that you *needed* to see me?

Eleanor drifts into the room, gently stroking an invisible belly and smelling her fresh hot tea; enjoying the butterflies and pinpricks dancing around inside her. She sips from her tea occasionally.

This time, Eleanor is completely involved in the moments as if it were really happening at this very moment.

ELEANOR Shhh, you'll scare him. What on earth are you talking about?

EDWARD The reason that you demanded I come see you at once. Is it urgent?

ELEANOR (*kindly*) I didn't demand anything of you. I asked nicely, dear.

Edward catches himself. Eleanor cradles her invisible belly.

And if you're going to be in a rotten mood and scare him away then you can return to your work.

EDWARD I'm sorry. I – (*sighing*) There's a lot on my mind.

ELEANOR Well, perhaps you could spare a corner for us? He was just kicking and I thought maybe you'd like to finally say 'hello'.

Edward softens and goes to Eleanor, steady and controlled but excitement welling up inside him. He holds his hand out in the space before Eleanor and cradles her womb.

He's been so quiet lately, I knew you wouldn't want to miss it.

He drops on one knee, listening closely.

EDWARD Hello? Are you still there?... You know you it's rude to run from your father. I'll have to punish you right out of the womb, we don't want that.

Nothing...

I think we may have a shy son. He'll probably sit in the garden and write poetry every day.

ELEANOR And what's so bad about that? I remember your fondness for prose when you were a boy.

EDWARD And then I became a man... Anything?...

ELEANOR No, I'm sorry love. He's settled down.

Before Edward stands up.

EDWARD (*to his son*) One day I'll catch you.

ELEANOR Stay with us a moment, perhaps he's just resting.

EDWARD I have to much work to do.

ELEANOR Just a moment.

EDWARD I have to see to the mine re-opening in the morning.

ELEANOR Then let it wait until morning.

EDWARD It's important that I be there.

ELEANOR It's important that you be *here* too.

Edward wants to stay. He grabs Eleanor's hand, just about to agree, but then stops with a sigh and shakes his head.

EDWARD I have to leave tonight. Everything needs to work this time.

Eleanor looks down but then nods her head.

And I promise, when he comes into this world and we finally meet, I will spend every moment I have with the both of you.

ELEANOR Edward what's wr –

Eleanor grasps at her stomach and steps away.

Oh, there he is... *(catching her breath)* Here, he's certainly up now. *(grabbing his hand)*
He found a rib that time.

Edward quickly drops to one knee and then the other.

EDWARD Hey, hey. Settle down a little. Don't hurt her, your mother hears you. We hear you... *(he searches for movement)* Where are you? What's happening in there?

The child kicks and Edward feels it, elated. He fills with joy at feeling his first kick. It causes less pain but still discomfort in Eleanor, she sips her tea to comfort herself.

Well, hello there young man. Pleasure to finally meet you.

The baby kicks again. A sharp pain for Eleanor but Edward is alight.

I told you, you can't hide from me forever. I'm here, little lucky one...

The baby settles and Eleanor releases a breath. Then...

ELEANOR Edward...

EDWARD Hm?..

ELEANOR What's wrong?

EDWARD What do you mean?

ELEANOR Why did you say everything needs to work this time? What's happening?

Edward pauses, he strokes Eleanor's belly and then stands.

EDWARD Nothing. Genuinely nothing. Just a few debts to pay and I've had a bit of trouble keeping up with them, that's all. But it's nothing that can't be absolved with the sale of a small piece of the estate.

ELEANOR Then sell it. Why don't you sell the small bit and let it go? It's killing you, I can feel it. We don't need all of this.

EDWARD No. This is my family's home. Our family, and I won't let us slide into obscurity. We belong where we are, with everything we have.

A look from Eleanor.

What?

ELEANOR I... Sometimes I still see your father in this house.

Edward deflates.

I'm sorry... I didn't mean –

EDWARD That's not –

ELEANOR I know, I know. I didn't –

EDWARD I only want to provide what I ought to. How could I be the first person in the history of my family to lose any of this? He should have everything I did.

ELEANOR I would happily raise our child in a hut. With nothing but wild grass and stream water to feed us, as long as we're with you.

Edward laughs and Eleanor smiles.

EDWARD Well... hopefully it won't come to all that.

ELEANOR Stay with us. Ride out in the morning, the mine will keep for a night.

Eleanor gestures for Edward to embrace her for a slow dance. Edward smiles and moves toward her, stopping just short.

EDWARD I can't.

Eleanor smiles at him with all the love she can give and nods.

ELEANOR You can.

As Edward relents, the light fades and he disappears into the wind.

The faintest glow hovers around Eleanor as she embraces an invisible figure and begins to sway to absent music.

Voices whisper in unidentifiable languages. Some sound curious, others alluring, and some are nefarious.

A sliver of pale moonlight slices through the forest trees. Eleanor gently rocks back and forth, embracing an absent Edward, and quietly humming.

The Spirits glimmer around Eleanor, floating like jelly fish through the forest mist.

ELEANOR Let's name him. Can we?

The Spirits whisper to her:

Then just say names. We don't have to decide anything. Just to see how they feel.

Eleanor continues to dance, lost in a trance.

Again the Spirits respond. Eleanor shakes her head.

No. Too boring. Everyone knows a 'John'.

Whispers. Eleanor cocks her head, looking at the invisible Edward.

Would you truly jinx him with your father's name?

Whispers. Eleanor smiles.

I like that.

She lays her head on the absent Edward's shoulder.

That's a strong name.

She sways back and forth, completely content.

We're going to meet him. I can feel it. We're finally going to meet one of our beautiful darlings.

Again, the Spirits whisper back, pulsing with life and moving to consume her.

The Mystic and the Sentry of Death

From the darkness another voice chants through the whispers. The Old Woman enters, her eyes intent. She continues to chant in an unknown language, raising her staff. The Spirits' shimmer struggles.

OLD W. Back. Away. All of you. Or you'll be sent to a fate far more dark and cold than this.

The Spirits hiss.

You were all given your time, let her go.

They linger.

Back! Or I will send Her to collect each and every one of you.

The Old Woman chants again, directing her voice to the ether. The Spirits relent and their light subdues.

Eleanor's dancing slows until she is left swaying in place, the trance still holding her. The Old Woman approaches Eleanor and the Spirits retreat, hanging in the air around them.

She's only just arrived.

The Old Woman approaches Eleanor. She places a gentle hand on her shoulder.

Deary –

Eleanor awakens sharply and screams.

ELEANOR OH GOD!...

She looks around, frightened, swatting at the twinkling Spirits.

What... What are y – Get away. Get away!

The Old Woman tries to grasp Eleanor's shoulder but Eleanor jumps back and slaps her hand away.

Get away from me!

She stops, recognizing the Old Woman.

You...

OLD W Sh, sh. You're safe, deary. It's alright.

ELEANOR What happened?

OLD W You wandered off.

ELEANOR Oh God... What's happening to me?

The Old Woman approaches Eleanor and reaches out, brushing the hair from her shoulder. Eleanor traces the slow movement of the Old Woman's hand as it rests on her shoulder. It lands. She sees it land, but still nothing on her skin. Not single sensation of touch.

OLD W God can't hear you, deary. Not here. So, best to let that go now.

The Old Woman moves to embrace her and Eleanor sags into her arms.

Eleanor looks again at the lingering Spirits and tenses.

Don't worry, they won't take you.

Eleanor looks back to the Spirits.

ELEANOR Are they – demons or...?

OLD W They're imperfect, like us. They crave what they've lost.

Eleanor looks on, growing curious, as the Spirits linger.

(touching her shoulder again) Come. You deserve to know where you are.

The Old Woman wanders off and Eleanor watches the Spirits drift away.

She turns to follow the Old Woman but loses her in the growing darkness.

ELEANOR Hello?... Where did you go? *(calling out)* Old woman who touches ghosts?

After a time the forest falls into silence and soon complete darkness. It is frigid and empty all around.

Hello? Hello?!!

Nothing. Eleanor is lost in a vacuum of silence. Infinity hangs in the frozen air. Eleanor's voice echoes around her.

Come back... *Please* come back. *(becoming desperate)* Please don't do this to me!

CRACK! *Eleanor jumps. Across from her a warm glow materializes along with the sounds of a crackling fire.*

(recovering) Oh God...

Before the fire the Old Woman materializes. She lifts a thick, tattered cloak over her shoulders and drapes the large hood over her head. Only her long, coarse hair peaks out. Her limbs fortify as she places her hands on a table and her back straightens with the formidable strength and wisdom of a demigod.

In this realm she is a Mystic; tasked with assisting the remains of the dead on their journeys.

The Mystic sits at the table, a deck of cards stacked to the side. The only thing that seems to age about her is her voice. She speaks in creaks and rasps, crackles and snarls, as if her voice were worn from a thousand years of arid desert. She's wry and has a penchant for riddles and tricks.

MYSTIC Still can't hear you. I told you, let that go.

ELEANOR I'm sorry I –

Eleanor looks over the Mystic, searching for the strange old woman from before.

Are you – ?

MYSTIC Don't bother searching, deary. You'll find nothing familiar here. I am who you found at your grave.

ELEANOR But you're – you're not her.

MYSTIC Death changes us all, deary. You, too, are not what you once were.

Sit.

ELEANOR There's no chair.

MYSTIC Then sit where your feet lie.

Eleanor shivers and checks around her.

Don't worry. They're back in your world.

Eleanor doesn't sit.

ELEANOR Do you have a blanket? It's cold here.

MYSTIC One or a thousand blankets would not help you. You'll be cold for some time, I'm afraid.

The Mystic grabs the deck of cards from the corner of the table, places the deck with purpose, and fans them before her.

Sit. We'll examine your place so that you can proceed.. But mark me, child. This is all I will offer you. No more. Do you understand?

Eleanor stares at the cards.

Look at me. (*Eleanor looks*) Do you hear me clearly? This is *your* journey. I will not be compelled.

ELEANOR I understand.

MYSTIC Draw.

Eleanor reaches out, her hand hovers over a card.

ELEANOR It's a trick.

MYSTIC A trick? You're at my mercy here, I have no need to trick you.

ELEANOR You're going to – 'take me' like them. You control them.

MYSTIC I saved you from “them”.

Eleanor shakes her head, scared.

ELEANOR No, it's – some kind of magic...

MYSTIC If you wish, you may return the way you came. As you're aware, the Spirits in your world would be pleased to host you.

ELEANOR ... I... I don't... I can't...

MYSTIC If you want my help, do as I say. I'll not offer it again.

Eleanor is held by fear, unable to choose. The Mystic slams her palm on the table.

This is not a *trick*. It is not “magic” either. This is beyond anything your mortal wits have ever grasped. You are no longer mortal, so you may either leave and wither with your kind or you can cease with your stubborn beliefs and *draw-your-first-card*.

Eleanor makes her decision and sits.

She holds a finger briefly over a card before laying it down and drawing it toward her. The Mystic flips it. The Two of Cups, reversed.

MYSTIC Hm. Don't you all. Tell me about your lover, child.

ELEANOR He's not –

MYSTIC There's no point in hiding. The Two of Cups always comes with a lover.

ELEANOR My husband. Edward.

MYSTIC And at your grave. You believe he doesn't mourn you?

ELEANOR I've been gone two months and it's his wedding night, so...

MYSTIC You may be surprised yet. Many of your kind hide themselves.

However...

The Mystic taps the card.

Reversed. What went wrong, child?

ELEANOR I died, that much is clear.

MYSTIC The cards do not present themselves to tell you what is clear.

ELEANOR And where should I start then? From the beginning? Fifteen years, let me see, hm – Well he was born to one of the richest families for a thousand miles and I was –

MYSTIC Child –

ELEANOR – one step above dirty dishwater. Then there was his father who –

MYSTIC Stop child.

ELEANOR I'm a grown woman, stop calling me a child!

MYSTIC You *are* a child! Every living Being in this universe begins as a *child* –

ELEANOR I –

MYSTIC You humans live as a child in the universe until you're born into –

ELEANOR Just please stop saying “child”!

Eleanor stares sharply at the Mystic. After a moment...

MYSTIC I see... Apologies.

ELEANOR At least now I'll get to see them.

MYSTIC They're not here.

Eleanor scoffs. 'Of course they're not....'

Rest assure, deary. They found peace. We between the Dead and Thereafter see to that without compromise.

Draw.

Eleanor chooses another card. The Three of Swords.

ELEANOR Another bad one.

MYSTIC (*chuckles*) Why do you say that?

ELEANOR Being stabbed three times doesn't bode very well.

MYSTIC The Three of Swords brings sorrow, and betrayal, true. But much more must be told before the truth is found. (*to the cards*) Again.

Eleanor draws another card and the Mystic flips it. The Tower.

MYSTIC A change.

ELEANOR A change?

MYSTIC The Tower was struck by a great force and never the same again.

ELEANOR Change, love, sorrow. Is there anything you're going to tell me that I don't already know?

MYSTIC Careful, deary. You know not the forces you mock.

These events occurred in your mortal life, true, but you do not know which cards are your past and which are your future. The Tower tells you to abandon that which you hold true in order to find the change you seek.

ELEANOR And the sorrow? What more can life do to me in death that it hasn't already?

MYSTIC You may be surprised. (*Then*) Draw two more.

Eleanor looks at the Mystic, beginning to doubt. She pulls two more cards forward, which The Mystic flips. The Queen of Swords and the Seven of Swords.

Hm. Just as I said, you are burdened.

ELEANOR Burdened?

MYSTIC “Unfinished business,” I’ve heard many of your kind say. Something earthly weighs on you.

Somewhere The Queen of Swords has lied to you. The Seven of Swords betrays her deceit.

Stunned, Eleanor looks up at her.

Hm. Someone you know?

The Mystic moves The Queen of Swords and the Seven of Swords together, underneath the Three of Swords.

Two more.

Eleanor carefully pulls two more cards forward. The Mystic flips the first one. The King of Cups.

(smiles) Your Edward, I presume.

ELEANOR Is it?

MYSTIC The King of Cups. Master of his emotions.

ELEANOR Yes.

MYSTIC Tell me.

ELEANOR ...When... When our children... I fell apart, he maintained control. Or froze, I suppose. The gentle boy I had grown up with, the sensitive young man I fell in love with, the kind husband I lived with. All of it vanished beneath a stoic veneer...

Eleanor drifts off, then gestures to the last card.

And that?

The Mystic flips the last card. The Moon. She looks up at Eleanor for a moment, then back at the card.

What? What is it?

MYSTIC La Luna.

ELEANOR What does it mean?

MYSTIC You have a long path before you, deary. I do not envy you.

ELEANOR What – What do I have to do?

MYSTICS That has yet to be discovered. You've been brought back here to complete earthly business, the myths you've heard are true. To some degree. (*chuckling*) It's all true to some degree or another, and yet humanity has missed so much.

I cannot say for sure what your business is, though hints are present. Something is not as it seems.

ELEANOR That's it? That's all you can tell me? I thought you were here to help –

MYSTIC I am merely a shepherd of wayward spirits, I am not here to undertake your journey for you.

ELEANOR I want another card.

Eleanor reaches for the deck and the Mystic slaps her hand.

MYSTIC *Do not* touch the cards unless you are invited.

ELEANOR (*annoyed*) Why can you touch me?!

MYSTIC You touched my cards, why shouldn't I be able to touch *you*? It's the living you're separated from, and *I* am not the living.

ELEANOR I want another.

Again Eleanor reaches for the cards. When The Mystic goes to slap her hand again Eleanor draws it back and quickly reaches with her other hand, drawing and flipping a single card in one motion. Death.

ELEANOR ... Death? Seriously?! I already know that part! I'm dead! Is this just supposed to waste my time while I whither –

A loud KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK echos. It frightens Eleanor but The Mystic is still.

MYSTIC I told you deary, do not mock the cards, you'll anger her. And those who have yet to reach their destination are wise not to lose her favor.

ELEANOR Who?

MYSTIC The Goddess herself.

ELEANOR Death... ?

MYSTIC Death is merely an action. *She* is the keeper between your world and what lies beyond. She is the *Sentry* of Death.

The Mystic holds up the card.

This is not meant as a part of your message, it's her seal.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

(smiles) She would speak with you.

Eleanor looks around.

ELEANOR There's no door.

MYSTIC Not that you're able to see yet.

ELEANOR Are – are you going to let her in?

MYSTIC If she wished to be seen, she'd be seen. There are no barriers for her here. Go.

Eleanor cautiously steps around. Searching for the source.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

ELEANOR H – Hello?

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Can you – Will you please tell me why I'm here?

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

I'm listening.

SLAM. Eleanor jumps and then shouts back in defense.

Why are you doing this to me?! Can't you just let me die? Why all of this?

The Mystic's head is hung, she groans and creaks. The Sentry of Death has taken her. The Mystic lifts her head, eyes gleaming hollow. Her voice fumes and burns like an open volcano as the Sentry of Death speaks through her.

MYSTIC *(as S.O.D.)* Vengeance...

ELEANOR I don't know what I've done. I'm sorry. I –

MYSTIC (as S.O.D.) No...

ELEANOR I'll do anything, I swear. Just tell me, please!

MYSTIC (as S.O.D.) No. Vengeance. On. You...

ELEANOR What?

MYSTIC (as S.O.D.) Vengeance. For. You...

The Mystics head falls limp.

ELEANOR For – for what? ... (silence)... For what?? What do I have to do??

The Mystic shakes her head, the Sentry of Death is gone.

MYSTIC Oh. She likes you, deary, she rarely clarifies herself.

ELEANOR What? She didn't – What did she mean? Vengeance for me?

MYSTIC Just what she said.

ELEANOR What does that mean?

MYSTIC It means you know more than you did this morning. Few ever hear directly from her.

ELEANOR If she likes me so much, why does she just tell me what I have to do?

MYSTIC It's never that simple, child.

ELEANOR So I'm her toy until then? Her little dead toy to play with until I figure it out?

MYSTIC Careful. She is the only barrier left between you and beyond.

ELEANOR She's sounds like a demon. A demon that plays with the dead. Who is she to decide who crosses and who gets left behind?

MYSTIC She doesn't decide, that's not her part.

ELEANOR Then why can't I pass?!

The Mystic gives Eleanor a moment to calm down.

MYSTIC Burdened souls don't cross into peace. She would see you unburdened.

ELEANOR I'm sorry, I...

MYSTIC It could be far worse. Some only receive glimpses. Those who must unburden their *evil deeds*, she doesn't make it easy for them. Most fail and remain. Lost and cold until your world parishes.

She is speaking to you. That is a gift.

ELANOR Where do the lost ones go?

MYSTIC You met them in the forest. They wander, aimless and feeding when they can.

ELEANOR Is that... what they were doing to me?

MYSTIC Your memories are fresh, theirs are long forgotten. They have nothing else left in the world but the memories of the departed. Should you fail, they will feed until you join them.

Eleanor deflates as fear fills her.

Do not lose hope, child. She will help you. You moved her.

ELEANOR Moved Her? Moved Death?

MYSTIC You think she doesn't feel? You think she was always as she is? I told you, every living Being in the universe begins as a child.

ELEANOR How do you know she'll help?

MYSTIC We've transitioned many souls together. I've known many of her counterparts. I interpret their messages.

ELEANOR Then why won't you help me?

MYSTIC I have helped you.

ELEANOR You said, "once."

MYSTIC You have not seen –

ELEANOR She spoke through you.

MYSTIC And she's unlikely to do it again.

ELEANOR How do you know?

MYSTIC Because she bears great pains to do so. You think her entirely omnipotent? She experiences pain. Joy, suffering, sorrow, just as you. She will find other ways to speak to you. She's on your side, you do not need me.

ELEANOR But you know how to interpret her –

MYSTIC She's making herself quite clear with you.

ELEANOR Help me!

MYSTIC You have not seen the things I have! The deeds I've helped do. The death and devastation I've reigned on the living to help the dead.

You can't fathom what it feels like to exist for millenia without transition. Your death is only your first, I have been through several but none this long.

I cannot bear to watch another soul fade into oblivion while I remain.

ELEANOR Why did you keep helping them if it hurt so much?

The Mystic releases a long held sigh.

MYSTIC I am compelled. It is my part.

She will help you understand. She will not see you fail, you don't need me.

I will offer you one last insight. Then please leave me.

From her robe the Mystic produces a smooth innocuous stone and holds it in her palm.

Take this stone, we'll see what gifts she has bestowed upon you.

Eleanor moves to grab the stone from the Mystic's hand.

I did not say grasp it. Take it. Reach out and surround it with your being, then bring it to you.

Eleanor slowly turns her palm to face The Mystic.

See your being fall upon it. Cradle it.

The stone begins to quiver as Eleanor focuses all of her concentration on it.

BLINDING LIGHT. Eleanor's neck twists and jerks, her body seized by possession. Screeching chaos pierces through Eleanor as she writhes and the bright light persists.

The Seeds of Doubt

The screeching subsides and gives way to the sound of groans and whimpers. They pulse in from every direction as everything falls black.

Amidst the groans, a delicate piano chimes. The sounds unify into one droning melody as Eleanor awakens in a dim pool of light. Edward strides toward her, drawn by the music and holding an undone wedding dress. He glides to Eleanor and intimately dresses her. When he ties the last string he kisses her, his hands passionately grasping her arms.

The music swells into a lively waltz and Eleanor jolts Edward into a passionate that seems to begin with the crescendo. They spin in sync, sewn together at the heart as Eleanor leads him.

She turns Edward around and around, slowing their pace with each turn until they relax in a gentle sway. Eleanor lays her head down on Edwards chest before she sets him down by the hand. She watches him as his gaze fixates on something in the distance.

The music stops when Eleanor speaks.

ELEANOR I wondered if I'd find you here.

Edward draws a sharp breath, turning to the sound that frightened him out of his thought. He lets a sigh relief, smiling at the sight of Eleanor.

EDWARD Ellie. God, you frightened me. I was just –

ELEANOR Thinking. I know. You always come here when you're troubled.

EDWARD Why did you think I'd be troubled?

ELEANOR I didn't. I just wondered.

For a moment, Edward's at a loss for explanation and then shades his eyes.

EDWARD We're not supposed to see each other yet. It's bad luck.

ELEANOR Are you worried about bad luck?

He lowers his hand.

EDWARD No.

ELEANOR Then what is it?

Eleanor sits beside Edward as he thinks.

Do you want to call it off?

EDWARD *(immediately)* No.

She waits for him to answer.

This will be difficult.

ELEANOR Just say it.

EDWARD No, I mean *this*. Our life, my family, the world. They will never make it easy. They'll try to kill it every moment they can.

ELEANOR I'm accustomed to life being difficult. I'll help you adjust.

Edward chuckles. Eleanor stands and offers her hand to him.

Dance with me.

EDWARD We're not supposed to do that either.

ELEANOR Why should we share our first dance with anyone but each other?

Edward smiles and takes her hand. He stands and wraps his arm around her waist, cradling it as a newborn child. They embrace, swaying, smiling and enjoying their secret dance. Eleanor lays her head on Edwards chest.

ELEANOR It'll begin soon. Tell me you'll be there.

Only the briefest pause goes by before Edward says.

EDWARD I will.

Eleanor looks up into his eyes and Edward reassures her.

I will. I promise.

The dance slows to a halt and their hands drop, still holding.

Just a moment more.

Edward moves to kiss her and Eleanor backs away.

ELEANOR Ah ah. That's the one tradition I'll keep. Kiss me when you say 'I do.'

See you soon. My husband.

EDWARD My wife.

They share a soft smile. She turns to leave and Edward sits.

Before Eleanor can leave the stage, she comes out of her trance; a ghost again. She turns to see Edward still sitting there.

ELEANOR Wait, that's it I – I left. I –

Suddenly Eleanor's voice is cut off. She tries to talk and shouts 'Hey. Hey!' into the ether but no sound escapes her.

Methodical footsteps thump. Eleanor looks to them to see Beatrice, finding exactly what she was looking for.

BEATRICE I knew I'd find you here.

Edward, startled again.

EDWARD God – I – What are you doing here?

BEATRICE You always come here when you're avoiding something.

EDWARD I'm not avoiding anything.

BEATRICE You think she's the only one that knows you?

When my mother used to bring me to your house, hoping for me to see you while your mother and she gossiped, you'd run off to hide right here in this forest when you didn't want to see me.

EDWARD If you knew I was here then why didn't you come.

BEATRICE Why should I give my time to someone who doesn't want to give me theirs?

But, the question I have today is, why are you here now?

EDWARD I like it here, the air is fresh.

BEATRICE And you're having second thoughts.

EDWARD I'm clearing my head.

BEATRICE That sounds like second thoughts.

EDWARD It was more a gentle request to be left alone.

BEATRICE It's bad luck to see your bride on the wedding day.

EDWARD We'll take our chances.

Edward gets up and turns to walk away.

BEATRICE She won't last, you know that.

He stops and turns back to Beatrice.

EDWARD She's endured more than you'll ever know.

BEATRICE Do you truly believe I don't know what she's endured?

Marriage is not meant for love. Not for us.

EDWARD Why would you want to give your life to someone who doesn't want to give you theirs?

BEATRICE I've grown.

EDWARD You should find your seat for the ceremony.

Again, Edward tries to leave.

BEATRICE Last chance, Edward. I know her as well as you. This will break her.

Again Edward stops.

She's not like us. She is a different breed. A mutt and I'm a purebred. She will never be accepted and eventually it will crush her. And it will be all your fault. What will you do then?

Edward goes to her.

EDWARD You're right. She's not like you. And you're not like *us*.

BEATRICE I did, you know. Love you. Once. For quite some time, in fact. Did you know that?

Edward doesn't answer.

Even as we grew up I had hoped that one day you would see it. See me like I saw you.

You were kind, at least I had that. All the other boys secretly spat at me for having a strong will, at least you offered the mercy of running away.

But, when you came to my home, and met her, I saw a little boy who was much different. The only time you'd run off was with her, and I knew. I knew before anyone

else. My mother would say, “One day, he'll marry you. And you'll be by his side always, no matter what.” I held onto that for a long time. Hoping that someday you could learn to love me back. But in my heart I knew that you would only ever love her.

You were kind to me, but you broke my heart; year after year until the shards were ground into sand. If I prayed in earnest, I would pray that you never know what that feels like.

Beatrice moves to Edward.

Eleanor mouths 'Stop. Stop, don't you –' and steps in to obstruct her. Just before she can wedge herself between the two, Edward sweeps her away and spins her romantically in a firm embrace. The music plays again, faster, a deeper pulse resonating.

Edward whirls Eleanor in circles, leading her this time. Beatrice huffs and storms off.

Faster and faster Edward waltzes Eleanor in circles until he suddenly stops. He grabs her face, kissing her passionately as he undresses her. With one swift pull, Edward removes Eleanor's dress and is gone.

Eleanor stands alone, surrounded by darkness and silence until the faint sounds of water lapping on the shore can be heard.

The sun rises.

Eleanor looks around. Moon Lake appears much the same as when she woke up here, in this exact same spot. She sighs, and walks home. Her head hung heavy with questions.

Edward and Beatrice

Henry enters.

HENRY Will there be anything else, sir?

Edward enters, mulling over a document. Eleanor follows not far behind, trying to read the document Edward is holding.

EDWARD No. No, thank you, Henry. Good night.

HENRY Good night, sir.

Henry goes to leave.

EDWARD Actually, Henry?

Henry turns back.

HENRY Yes, sir?

EDWARD Would you send for my wife? Tell her to bring me a drink, would you?

HENRY Yes, sir.

ELEANOR That's new.

Henry leaves. Edward considers the document a brief moment longer and then refolds it hastily, shoving into his coat pocket as he releases a heavy sigh. His hand stops a moment before he settles the document in his pocket.

Inside his pocket he's found a letter he'd forgotten about. He pulls it out and slowly opens it. Eleanor moves closer to read it but just then Beatrice enters. In her hands are two drinks.

BEATRICE You sent for me, love?

Edward quickly folds the letter and stuffs it back in his coat pocket.

EDWARD Yes I – *(seeing two glasses)* I wanted you to bring me a drink.

BEATRICE *(bringing him his drink)* Naturally, I assumed you wanted to have a drink with your wife after a long day.

He takes the glass and she clinks hers against his.

EDWARD Of course.

They sip. She laughs.

BEATRICE Don't be silly. I can leave you be, you clearly want to be alone.

EDWARD No, it's okay. Stay. I have something I need to speak to you about.

BEATRICE Oh?

EDWARD Will you close the door, please?

BEATRICE *(going to the door)* Darling, are you going to try to seduce me?

ELEANOR God, I hope not...

EDWARD One of my foremen said he saw you at the processing plant yesterday.

She stops.

BEATRICE Oh?

EDWARD He said you wished to be directed to my personal office.

Beatrice turns and charmingly strides back toward him.

BEATRICE I was looking for you, love. I wanted to see your handsome face.

She tries to reach for Edwards face but he grabs her wrist.

EDWARD You knew I'd be seeing to the development of the new mine yesterday.

BEATRICE I'd forgotten.

Suddenly Edward slaps her across the face. Eleanor yelps but Beatrice is only briefly shocked. Edward releases her wrist. Beatrice gathers herself and sips her drink.

BEATRICE Well, you're certainly not as feeble a boy as you once were.

EDWARD What is in my office is none of your concern.

BEATRICE Is that what you were looking over when I came in? Another lender come to collect?

Beatrice meanders around the room, like a predator toying with its prey.

BEATRICE ... I found where you plan to place my money –

EDWARD My money.

BEATRICE Yes, your money by law, now that we're married. Congratulations on your accomplishment.

EDWARD You're never to visit any of my places of business ever again, do you understand?

BEATRICE I was curious to see how you planned to invest my wealth. Rather, I wanted to be assured that I'd bought something worthwhile.

Edward steps in front of her.

EDWARD Do you understand?

BEATRICE To be honest, I wish I had been surprised but –

Again Edward swings his open palm at Beatrice's cheek, but this time she swiftly ducks.

BEATRICE You may be stronger, but you're no faster than before. I used beat you at foot races when we were children, and I wasn't in boots..

EDWARD You have no right –

BEATRICE I have every right to make sure you don't waste my fortune, like you did yours! Imagine my surprise at the letters I found packing your desk drawers. A mewling draft begging for time and a promise of payment soon after your wedding.

Tell me, dear, how is the new mine coming?

Beatrice plants herself firm. Edward stares daggers at her.

That wasn't rhetorical. This marriage can be annulled and all can be returned to it's rightful place.

EDWARD You're married old as it is. Who will want you once I throw you back?

BEATRICE I don't need a husband. I didn't marry for a husband, I married a partner. Without him, I'll still have my wealth, to use how I see fit. What will you have? A mountain of debt and another worthless hole in the ground.

EDWARD You'll never have the resources I do.

BEATRICE Imagine if I could have both. Clearly your mind alone isn't sufficient for either estate.

EDWARD Why would I ever hand over my family fortune to you?

BEATRICE It's the “if” you should be concerned about, dear. *If* I decide to take it from you.

But, as I said, I married a partner. If you can put aside your pride.

EDWARD And what sort of partnership are you bargaining for?

BEATRICE Use some of my money to pay down your debts, keep them at bay. And let us find an investor.

EDWARD *(scoffs)* You think I haven't searched for investors? No one will contribute another penny until they see the mine will produce.

BEATRICE I'm not talking about the mine.

EDWARD Then what?

BEATRICE *(scoffs)* Look around you. Generations of wealth surround us, all we have to do is cut it down.

EDWARD I'm don't –

BEATRICE Why not? Are you more attached to a few trees than you are to your own survival?

EDWARD This land has –

BEATRICE Has been the cradle of your family's power for generations. Are you too weak to realize its potential?

EDWARD Careful.

BEATRICE You know, perhaps there's still a little more of that mewling boy left than I thou–

Edward goes to Beatrice and grabs her by the throat with one hand, then the other. She fights briefly but he shakes her into silence.

EDWARD *(calmly)* I said enough... I will not skin my home to satisfy your ambition.

Beatrice stares straight at Edward, unwilling to let go of his hands and submit. Edward squeezes her throat as he stares back.

Remember, dear. For all your clever ruthlessness, I can still hurt you beyond repair.

A tense beat.

Beatrice slowly peels his fingers from her throat; he lets her. She coughs and catches her breath.

BEATRICE You know... Perhaps you aren't that same boy as before. For a moment there, I actually believed you have it in you.

Henry hurriedly enters and blurts.

HENRY Sir, the mines –

He stops himself, seeing Beatrice.

Apologies.

BEATRICE No apologies necessary, Henry. *(looking to Edward)* None at all.

(leaving) Do let me know your decision soon, dear. There's only so much time.

Beatrice leaves.

EDWARD Never make that mistake again.

Henry nods.

What of the mines?

HENRY They've...

Henry pauses.

EDWARD What? What had you running in here like a madman?

HENRY The workers are planning to strike tomorrow, sir. The men we hired to watch them said they will not begin in the morning, and will not start work again until their demands are met.

Edwards takes this in and then hardens. He walks away from Henry and drinks.

Shall I –

EDWARD I'll have a solution by morning. Just... Tell our men to strike with the workers until they hear otherwise.

HENRY Yes, sir.

EDWARD That'll be all.

Henry exits.

ELEANOR What's happened to you?

Eleanor turns to the door.

And what are you up to? (*shouting to Beatrice*) Do you hear me? I saw you try to steal my husband! I won't let you steal our home too!

In another room Beatrice suddenly shrieks and glass shatters.

EDWARD (*calling out*) Is everything alright?

Nothing.

Hello? What happened?

Beatrice interjects. Shaken.

BEATRICE (*offstage*) Nothing. It was nothing. I just – knocked my glass off the table.

Eleanor's interest is piqued.

EDWARD Are you alright? You sound – upset.

Eleanor leaves.

BEATRICE *(offstage)* Yes. I'm fine. Don't worry. I'll have it cleaned up. Go back to work.

Lights dim on Edward as he wanders off.

A Night of Souls

Beatrice marches into her room, tying a linen bandage around her hand.

BEATRICE *(muttering to herself)* You're so stupid. Stupid. It's nothing. You fear *nothing*. Pull yourself together.

Blood is already soaking through the palm of the bandage when Beatrice finishes tying it with her teeth and uncut hand. Eleanor follows her in and watches closely.

Beatrice goes to her vanity and stares herself down.

Pull yourself together. Do not undue years of work. Do you hear me? Straighten up, little girl.

Eleanor's mouth moves but she doesn't speak. "Years?"

Beatrice searches through her drawers, finding a small jar of pills. She opens it and quickly swallows one.

Go to bed.

She hastily removes her dress, down to her slip. She dims the lights, gets into bed, and closes her eyes with a curt breath.

Eleanor moves to her bedside, looking down at her.

ELEANOR What are you hiding?

Eleanor continues to watch her as time passes. The lights gently pulse with Eleanor's breathing as she watches.

Out of the darkness, a whisper...

MYSTIC Deary...

Eleanor jumps.

ELEANOR Oh, God!

The lights in the room briefly glow bright and Beatrice stirs in bed. Eleanor is completely still and silent. Beatrice rolls over and pushes her face deeper into her pillow.

Shhhh...

Again, from the darkenss...

MYSTIC Don't worry, she can't hear you. Not clearly yet, anyway.

ELEANOR *(whispering)* But she can hear you!

The Mystic steps into the room, one soft step at a time. She wears a wry smile and holds an open bottle of wine.

Are you drunk?

The Mystic gestures. A little.

But you're not human. You're – mystic.

The Mystic gestures all around her.

MYSTIC Out there.

To the ground.

But here... *(shrugs)*

She takes a drink and snickers before waving Eleanor toward her.

Come. Come with me.

ELEANOR I can't, I have to stay here.

MYSTIC For what? Watching her sleep isn't going to help you.

ELEANOR She has nightmares.

The Mystic doesn't follow.

The Goddess – Sentry. She... She showed me my wedding day. And *she* was there. She tried to convince my husband not to marry me. She's guilty of something, I know it.

MYSTIC The good thing about that is she still be guilty tomorrow.

Come. She has a gift for you. Well, both of us, really. And due, if you ask me –

ELEANOR I thought you didn't want to help.

MYSTIC I said I no longer wish to see souls suffer.

ELEANOR I'm suffering now.

MYSTIC And so I am here to help. Despite my protests. Come.

ELEANOR Where?

MYSTIC To the forest.

ELEANOR With those, things? I don't want to –

MYSTIC They won't take you tonight, there'd be no point. We have something far better to look forward to. Come.

Eleanor is hesitant.

Deary, such a night will not occur again for a long. I've been alive a great deal longer than you can fathom. So when I say a long time... She rarely bestows such a night. A reprieve for the lost and forgotten.

Come...

Eleanor follows the Mystic, leaving Beatrice behind.

Soon the surroundings are dark as Eleanor and the Mystic walk.

ELEANOR Why can't we go to your home? (*gesturing*) Out there.

MYSTIC This is a phenomenon of earth. Only for souls who are left behind.

ELEANOR The failed ones.

MYSTIC Indeed, deary. Tonight they will live again.

ELEANOR Do you know all of them?

MYSTIC Some of them.

ELEANOR You helped them.

MYSTIC I tried.

They begin to enter the forest. Around them in the dark the sounds of water flowing, frogs croaking, insects wings flying by, owls hooting and coyotes yipping. Gradually, here and here, small lights glow

in the distance, wafting through the air like lighting bugs.

ELEANOR How did they – How did they fail?

MYSTIC I supposed you'd be wanting to know that eventually.

You were brought here for a purpose, you know that already. Your burden. Souls who are burdened at their crossing, they carry that with them into eternity. Only the unburdened find complete peace in their journey.

ELEANOR How do we unburden ourselves?

The Mystic continues walking.

MYSTIC For some it only comes through many transitions and existences. But for a few, such as you, there's a time. A moment. You may fully manifest into your earthly visage only once in your time here. You must learn to fill your living form as best you can before then. When your moment comes, you will need to fully manifest yourself and complete your task. Only then will you have the chance to become unburdened.

Some cannot bring themselves to do it, some lack the will to manifest fully, others never discover their burden at all, their moment comes and goes without the slightest realization. And when that time comes, if it passes...

Arriving at their destination.

There is nothing left I can offer you.

The lights approach and flicker around Eleanor and the Mystic. The creatures of the forest have quieted down; the earthly ones. Strange cackles, obscure wings dart around, and rustling in the trees unnerve Eleanor. Occasionally, far off human-like yips and hollers ride through the air.

Seeing Eleanor's face.

Don't look so glum, deary! *(looking around)* This is a time of celebration!

ELEANOR It doesn't feel like a celebration.

MYSTIC *(sitting)* It will soon enough. Sit.

The Mystic produces another bottle of wine from her robes.

ELEANOR Where are you getting these?

MYSTIC *(opening and preparing to drink)* From your cellar.

Eleanor raises her eyebrows at the Mystic.

What? You've no use for it any longer. Also, your Edward has lovely taste.

ELEANOR My taste.

The Mystic stops.

MYSTIC Apologies, deary. *(raising the bottle)* Well done. I would offer you some but, well...

She shrugs and drinks.

ELEANOR It's alright, I think I've had more than enough for one life

The Mystic gives Eleanor a long look. She stands, leans in towards Eleanor and speaks earnestly.

MYSTIC Find the light, deary. Be it abundant or sparse you must always seek it out. The universe has only just birthed you, there is still much more before you. Joy and pain alike. Find the light.

The Mystic sits and drinks again.

ELEANOR You still experience joy?

The Mystic laughs, nearly spitting out a mouthful.

What? You said you've been here for a thousand years dealing with death.

MYSTIC A thousand years of misery? Can you imagine what kind of Being you would've found if I'd been in pain all this time?

The Mystic continues to laugh.

ELEANOR I didn't –

MYSTIC It's alright, deary. It's alright. *(calming herself)* I haven't transitioned one of you in some time. I miss the strange questions you ask.

Death isn't only misery. Death carries many things. Come! Sit, sit.

Eleanor sits next to the Mystic as she takes a long drink. Finally refreshed, she sets down the bottle and claps her hands together.

Tonight you will see. No. You will *feel*. You will commune with the undeparted souls of this world – the ancestors of your humanity.

ELEANOR Will there be any souls from my life?

The Mystic shrugs.

MYSTIC Perhaps... Existence has shown me many surprises, you'll have them as well.

Eleanor lays her hand on the Mystic's.

ELEANOR Thank you.

MYSTIC For what, deary?

ELEANOR You didn't want to help me. I don't know how to help you with your suffering. But thank you for helping me.

MYSTIC I want to help you, child. It's a compulsion. As impossible to ignore as the livings need for air – or a tree the light.

ELEANOR Why are you compelled?

MYSTIC I don't know what brought me here. Misdeeds in a former existence? To amuse another sentience? There's still so much we don't know, and for all my wisdom, I am as ignorant of my future as you are of yours.

A voice whispers to me; beckoning. I don't know how many of you I've transitioned. All I know is that each time I anticipate that I too will be called to move on, but so far I am forsaken.

ELEANOR Perhaps we're searching for the same place.

The Mystic softens and smiles.

MYSTIC I wish that were true, deary.

Close your eyes.

Eleanor closes her eyes. Then the Mystic. She takes a long, deep breath.

Reach out with your Being. Let the air fill you. Breath in the Beings around you. Let their voices hum through you.

Eleanor hums weakly and the Mystic hums with confidence.

Eleanor continues to breath deep and hum. She begins to sway. In the distance, the faint sounds of music whisper. Eleanor hums deeper, longer. The music wafts in like a warm breeze. The Mystic hums with strength and clarity. They sway together, like limp bodies being thrown through crashing waves.

Shouts and hollers roll in like breaking surf on the shore. The music swells. Drums, woodwinds, sitars, drawn strings, flutes, squeeze boxes, a vast expression of revelry and joy.

Spirits glow bright around Eleanor until she rises to her feet, lifted by their presence. Her fingers, her arms, her whole Being is stretched to the night sky. She twists and turns, awash in glow of lost Spirits.

ELEANOR What's happening??? I can... I can feel them. I feel my skin.

MYSTIC They're showing you the way. Follow them, deary.

ELEANOR It hurts! It... It's amazing!...

Eleanor spins out of control, contorting to the rhythmic sounds of the reckless chant.

Abruptly, she stops. Shaking. Eleanor feels a rush of warmth crawl through her body. Her skin pricks and tingles. She lifts her shaking hands as they to materialize before her.

It's so warm... I can breathe...

MYSTIC Manifest with them! Let them show you the way!

Eleanor lifts her shaking hands before her and grasps them together. Her eyes glisten with pure bliss. The overwhelming sensation continues up her arms and Eleanor melts into her body.

The Mystic raises to her feet and dances. Eleanor moves freely, swaying her hips. She stomps her feet, turns her chest, and swings her hair in unbound euphoria.

*The music crashes and the lights that fill the forest **explode**. Beings manifest from every direction; Human Beings. Each one a soul parted from heaven and earth for untold ages.*

They dance and revel with no regard for space, bending and stretching for one another in unnatural ways. Melding into one another from one partner to the next.

In their folly they wash over Eleanor, whirling her in their tide. Eleanor touches every Soul she passes until she is awash in an feeling of synchronal longing and fulfillment never felt in life.

Brimming with the indescribable feeling, she breaks away and howls into the endless night sky like a lone wolf who's found her pack.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Everything freezes, the music stops. Even The Mystic is frozen. Silence.

ELEANOR Wha – No! What happened? Come back! Come back!

Another omnipotent KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK as The Sentry of Death appears. Adorned in an elegant black dress with a black laced bodice, she advances with a regal glide that encases all the power she wields. A long black hooded cloak drapes across the Sentry of Death's shoulders, hanging down her back. Only a lantern is held by her side to light the way.

ELEANOR Who... Who are...

Are you... “Her”?...

The Sentry of Death lifts her lantern KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK. The light casts across her face, revealing wild hair and eyes that bear no hint of light, only absolute darkness.

Eleanor tries to hide a shudder but the Sentry of Death catches it. A broad, toothy grin crawls across the her face revealing rotten teeth. She beckons Eleanor to follow her, turns away, and leaves darkness in her wake as she leaves. Eleanor follows.

Ellie & Bea Bea

The Sentry of Death enters alone, lighting the way, and settling her lamp on the ground before her. She looks back and waits patiently.

After a moment Eleanor stumbles in drunkenly, passing The Sentry of Death on her way. She fights with her dress and drinks from a bottle as she talks.

ELEANOR *(calling back)* Fine! If you're all afraid of a little swim then I'll just go by myself! *(she drinks)* And tell Mrs. Hayes to stop sniveling! I'm hardly the first to notice the pinched face she makes when she gossips!

Eleanor finally removes her dress and whips around to face Moon Lake. She becomes dizzy in the process. She sits on the shore, stifling the bile churning in her stomach. She lets go of a breath, perhaps a burp, and then breathes in deep, collecting herself.

Bores. All of you. *(Mocking)* “Well, I heard her husband has an eye for more than just the help.” “Yes well, an estate such as his could blind any lady.”

From out in the distance...

BEATRICE *(off stage)* Eleanor?... Eleanor?...

ELEANOR Bunch of pecking hens. Pecking away at each other. Peck peck peck...

BEATRICE *(closer)* Eleanor?...

ELEANOR Oh, someone with a sense of fun?

Eleanor sways herself upward to her feet. Beatrice enters, holding a lamp before her, and passing the Sentry of Death as she steps toward Eleanor.

BEATRICE Eleanor?... There you are.

ELEANOR Or not...

BEATRICE I beg your pardon.

ELEANOR (*turning back to the lake*) May I help you, m'lady?

BEATRICE You stumbled past me outside, I wanted to make sure you're okay.

Eleanor wheels back around.

ELEANOR (*sarcastically*) Well thank you, m'lady, I'm quite fine. Feel free to return to your friends, I'm sure the group will miss your pecks and clucks.

Eleanor mockingly bows then turns and sits again.

BEATRICE (*playing along*) Well surely The Lady of Moon Lake Manor is wise enough to know that none of us have any *true* friends. We've only society.

Eleanor laughs.

ELEANOR That's the closest I've heard to truth all night.

BEATRICE (*sitting beside her*) Besides, I was alone; needed a moment away from all the empty chatter.

ELEANOR It's drowning, isn't it? As if just having fun weren't enough. We have to pick one another apart for gossip fodder to feed on.

BEATRICE For the life of me, I can't decide if the world has always been this shallow and vapid or if it's just our time.

Eleanor smiles. Agreed.

ELEANOR (*not unkind*) I can't believe you're the one who followed me out here.

BEATRICE I just wanted to make sure you're okay. Is that so strange?

ELEANOR I'm fine. I just – wanted to swim and everyone refused to join. They gawked at me like I as some sort of loon. I thought it might bring some entertainment to a dull evening.

Now they'll all just gossip about *me*, so I suppose I got my wish.

BEATRICE They won't gossip about you.

ELEANOR Don't play dumb.

BEATRICE I'm not playing dumb.

ELEANOR I'm still unsure as to which one you started yourself.

BEATRICE I beg your pardon?

ELEANOR Was it the rumor that we're both having affairs? That seems to be everyone's favorite...
And the least truthful of them all...

BEATRICE Ellie –

ELEANOR Or perhaps it's that I sleep away days and spend nights roaming through the cellar like some cave monster. Mindlessly drinking until I pass out on the floor and Edward has to carry me to bed.

Eleanor leans in toward Beatrice and looks straight in her eyes, threatening.

Or were you the beast who first said I went mad and killed all my children before they could see life...

A tense beat.

BEATRICE The affair is the least true of those?

ELEANOR *(drinks)* ... I don't know...

BEATRICE I would never say that about you, Ellie...

After a moment Beatrice takes the bottle from Eleanor. She drinks as she stands and then plunges the bottle into the sand next to Eleanor. Beatrice removes her dress.

ELEANOR What are you doing?

BEATRICE Going for a swim. Isn't that why you came out here?

She lays her dress neatly to the side.

ELEANOR No, I just –

BEATRICE Come on.

ELEANOR No –

BEATRICE You came all this way and drug me with you, worried that you might hurt yourself.

ELEANOR No, Bea Bea –

BEATRICE (*trying to grab her arm*) You'll feel better.

ELEANOR (*pulling her arm away*) No, Bea Bea just – It's too cold. Sit down. We'll put our feet in.

Beatrice acquiesces and sits, delicately placing her feet in the water. Eleanor moves next to her and lays her feet in as well.

BEATRICE I haven't heard you call me Bea Bea in a long time.

ELEANOR We haven't been children for a long time.

BEATRICE (*gesturing to the bottle*) May I?

ELEANOR (*handing it to her*) You didn't bother asking before.

Beatrice looks at Eleanor as she drinks. She comes to a conclusion by the time the bottle leaves her lips.

BEATRICE Do you remember Sweet Pea?

ELEANOR (*snickering*) Yes, why?

BEATRICE I just thought of her in that moment. Just popped in my head. That was the most *unfriendly* cat I'd ever met. She never wanted to play. I'd chase her around, desperately trying to catch her, but she almost always got away... She rarely ever granted me permission to pet her. And God forbid I ever try to bring her into my room to sleep at night! She'd howl and howl until I let her out, and then in the morning I could never figure out where she went or what she did. She'd just randomly appear the next day... Sometimes I would hear her howl far away at night, somewhere in the house, for just a few moments and then she'd stop. As if she had been searching for something and found it.

Eleanor chuckles.

BEATRICE What?

ELEANOR Nothing I – Nothing.

BEATRICE (*handing her back the bottle*) Your turn.

Eleanor takes it and drinks. After a moment.

Go on then.

ELEANOR I just drank.

BEATRICE No, a story.

ELEANOR A story?

BEATRICE Yes, from our childhood. I contributed Sweet Pea, now it's your turn.

ELEANOR *Our* childhood?

BEATRICE You know what I mean.

ELEANOR We grew up in the same house, we did not have the same childhood.

BEATRICE You're right, I'm sorry. You're right. Okay?

A pause. Eleanor drinks and Beatrice reaches back for the bottle.

We had some good year's though, right?

ELEANOR We had some good *days*.

BEATRICE Days. Fine... What about one of those, then?

ELEANOR Days?

BEATRICE Yes.

ELEANOR Why?

BEATRICE Because. We're having fun.

ELEANOR Does it make you feel less guilty about the bad ones?

BEATRICE You know, believe it or not Eleanor, I was just trying to have a nice conversation with you.

Beatrice gets up to leave.

But clearly I'm too boring for you as well, so I'll just –

ELEANOR No. Stop. Bea Bea just – sit!

Eleanor drinks and Beatrice sits.

... Oh god, a good day. Okay....

Eleanor cycles through memories until she arrives at something specific.

Ok. I do remember a good day. Or... It wasn't good per se, I just remember it... I think

about it every once in a while. The day my mother died...

Obvioulsy, that's not good but.. That night... When I was in bed, alone... And after your mother tucked you in, you snuck into my room... crawled into bed with me. You put your arm around me and when I asked what you were doing... Do you remember what you said to me?

Beatrice nods.

ELEANOR “Sisters take care of each other.” And you held me while I cried, until I fell asleep...

Beatrice forces a chuckle at the memory, recalling what happened next.

BEATRICE My mother found out about that. Did I tell you? She was waiting in my room when I got back the next morning... She didn't say a word, she just slapped me hard across the face. For months after that, she checked on me every night. I can only imagine what she would've done if she'd heard what I said.

ELEANOR Is that why you stopped taking care of your sister?

Eleanor goes to take another drink but the bottles empty. She sighs and moves to get up.

Out of a hidden pocket, Beatrice produces a flask and begins to unscrew it.

BEATRICE Here. *(offering it to her)* Don't go trouncing back in there to grab another bottle, they'll gossip even more.

Eleanor takes the flask and smells it, reacting to it's strength.

It's just whiskey. Far better than what your husband's pouring, I can tell you that.

Eleanor drinks and a cough escapes.

I told you.

Eleanor goes to hand the flask back to Beatrice but she waves it away.

Go ahead, I need a breather. My head is going to spin soon, I can feel it.

Eleanor drinks again.

(after a beat) Do you know what happened to her at night?

ELEANOR To who?

BEATRICE Sweet Pea; where she went. I got curious. I got so curious about her night time adventures that one morning I woke up just before the sun rise. I searched the hallways,

the rooms, closets, everywhere I thought she could return from, but she was nowhere to be found.

Until, just as the light started trickling in, I heard a door creak open and shut. I headed towards the sound and just as I'm crossing the kitchen I see her outside the basement door, your room, stretching her neck and reaching her paws outward, yawning. She looked right at me, and then perched herself down in front of your bedroom door and started licking herself.

When I told my father he said, "Dear, Eleanor has so little and you have so much. Perhaps you can let Sweet Pea be hers. Be a good girl and let her have Sweet Pea, dear." I said, "fine." It's only a cat, right? And one that doesn't even like me, so... *(she shrugs)*

But neither of us knew that it was just the beginning. A toy here, a dress I never wore there. I didn't care much. They're just things. But I didn't know how far you would go. You just kept taking little bits of my life for your own. Until you took my future too. Ruined the legacy I would create and all my family had worked for.

Eleanor has begun to sway, hanging and lifting her head.

ELEANOR Bea bea, I don't...

BEATRICE I tried to kill you once, you know that? Well, hurt you anyway – as much as possible. I was furious with you for years. I hated you. Together, our families could've heralded the wealth and power of this country for the next century.

And now look. The whole of society talks about the twilight age of the Thorburn family's star. Edward's outrageous spending and the wife that drinks away his fortune.

ELEANOR No... Go...

Eleanor tries to stand but can't get her balance.

Let me go...

BEATRICE Tansy, it's called. A dainty name for such a pernicious herb.

(referencing Eleanor's physical state) Not this, you did most of this on your own, I just offered you help.

Eleanor takes deep breaths and attempts to steady her swaying.

I didn't know what I was doing at the time really. Just a little in your herbal tea. I wasn't sure why at the time but you'd suddenly began drinking herbal tea incessantly. It wasn't until the the second time that I realized you swapped booze for tea whenever you thought you were pregnant. Fate.

I noticed a change in Edward after the first time. Something felt different between the two of you. And I realized that I had everything wrong. I couldn't let hate drive me; that wouldn't get me what I deserve. You dying would leave nothing but a broken widower, clinging to the memory of his belated love. What good would he be as a husband then? As long as the love between you lived, I would never get back what you took from me. I knew what I had to kill.

Eleanor's head is slumped. Beatrice reaches over and lifts it.

Are you still here?

Eleanor waves her hands, trying to slap away Beatrice's grasp. Beatrice clutches her cheeks in one firm hand as Eleanor struggles to gain control of her body.

Every time you were with child, booze became tea. And with each tea, a tragedy. And with every tragedy, booze. And on and on into a dark hole where he could no longer love you.

We're even now, Ellie. And you're no longer needed here.

Eleanor free herself of Beatrice's grasp and forces her feet under her and begins to stumble upward. Beatrice yanks Eleanor back down by the neck of her slip and plunges her face into the shallows of Moon Lake.

Eleanor fights, she tears at Beatrice's arms and face. She frees herself just enough to break the surface of the water and manages a single desperate gasp for breath.

Beatrice crawls onto Eleanor's back, holding down a flailing arm with one hand and gripping the back of Eleanor's neck with the other, shoving her face back into the water. Eleanor kicks and screams underwater but Beatrice pins her down with all her strength.

Eleanor's body hushes. A few tremors escape. And then silence...

Beatrice stands. She brushes herself off, puts her dress back on, and looks around. No one. She leaves, triumphant.

For a quiet moment Eleanor lays face down in the lake.

The Sentry of Death approaches Eleanor and extends her rawboned hand and suddenly, as if yanked up by a rope lashed to her torso, Eleanor rises onto all fours, her head the last out of the water as she gulps a slow, steady, visceral breath.

ELEANOR *(Through her desperate breaths)* I knew... I knew it...

She looks up at The Sentry of Death.

I knew it!! This is my cause.

Without a word The Sentry of Death turns to leave. Eleanor clambers to her feet, calling after her.

Thank you. Thank you, Goddess. I'll find a way. I swear.

The Sentry of Death stops and looks at at Eleanor, her black eyes betray no hint of feeling.

I will be unburdened...

The Sentry of Death turns and disappears into the void.

In the distance behind Eleanor Beatrice tosses in bed, a pale candle light coming to life with her. Beatrice shoots up, a shriek escaping before she stifles it and closes her eyes.

BEATRICE Oh God...

Beatrice tries to rub the images from her eyes.

Oh God, get out, get out...

She opens them again, unable to see anything but her vivid nightmares.

Again she comes forward to her mirror and looks into it, desperate to regain control of her reality.

BEATRICE It's just you... She's gone... *(hardening)* She. Is. Gone. Pull yourself together.

Beatrice closes her eyes, trying to breath steady and calm herself. Eleanor turns to Beatrice and circles her like a meal in the wild.

ELEANOR And now I know what business I was sent here to finish... *You*. You who looked down on me my whole life. Who called me friend; sister. While your mother tortured me every day of my life and raised you to snuff out the lives of my children. And you believe you are unbreakable? That you can escape the cold, unfeeling hands of revenge? You are flesh and bone and can be shattered into thousands of helpless pieces.

Look at me. You see me, don't you? You know deep down I'm here. Look me in the eye, I am going to torture you to the edge of your sanity. Blacken every thought that sparks in your brain, this will not be quick. I will rain the torment that you and your *wretched mother* bestowed upon me!... And I will not release you until you see no future but pain, and anguish, and suffering.

And I will dispatch you with the cruelest intent. *Consume* you, *devour* you from your toes to your neck, and when none but your mortal head is left, I shall wear it through Heaven as my *holy veil*. Your blood will drip fresh down my neck as I stroll through eternity, and when wayfaring souls look to my *crown* and ask me, I will *smile* and tell them with forethought, 'This. Was. **MY BUSINESS!!!**'

Beatrice's eyes shoot open to find the visage of a spectre in the mirror, it's eyes shouting at her with raw hatred.

BLACK OUT

END OF ACT 1

Act 2

Eleanor's Lullaby

Dim lights glow in the forest. Eleanor is heard before she is seen. She approaches and settles in a pool of pale moonlight.

ELEANOR I remember only a few songs and nursery rhymes from my childhood. My mother only knew a few and she rarely sang. Beatrice's mother sang to her every night before bed.

The sound of heels clack, followed by the creak of a bedroom door and the heels gently stepping inside before the door shuts.

Some nights, I'd sneak out of my room and listen outside her door.

Beatrice's mother can be heard humming a comforting lullaby.

Her mother had such a sweet voice. Not at all like the stern tone she normally used, and very different from the sounds of disdain she spat when talking to or about me. This voice was gentle, kind, even angelic at times. When I felt lonely it comforted me, like there was someone there to love and hold me too.

Birds chirp outside in the afternoon sun.

One afternoon, when I was 9 years old, I was playing with Beatrice's Dollie. Not the most imaginative child, she named her doll, Dollie.

The sounds of Beatrice singing scales as a little girl, reciting poetry, and laughing and playing freely echo in the distance from different vantage points.

Beatrice was away at her singing lessons, or literature classes, or one of the many things well-to-do young lady was allowed to do instead of scrubbing floors and dishes.

She had left Dollie discarded in the hallway near her room – add 'spoiled' to her list of attributes – and I thought it wouldn't hurt to say a few words to her. No one around me was interested in listening to the thoughts of an ill-born little girl.

I'd barely introduced myself before her mother found me and snatched her out of my hand. “How dare you!”, she said.

The words boom in the surrounding ether.

“How dare you, you – feral creature! Didn't that slut of a mother teach you any manners? I gave this to *my daughter*, not you! Don't ever touch it again you – *mutt!*” And she

slapped me so hard that I saw lights, blinking in the hallway as she left. It was the first time she ever hit me, but it was far from the last.

Beatrice's mother's heels hastily retreat into the distance.

That night, I lay in my bed, my cheek still burning, my pillow was wet with tears, and full of fear that she was going to have me sent out on the street.

The heels of Beatrice's mother, Mrs. Walker, methodically clack from down the hall until she arrives in a pool of light.

Instead, after singing to Beatrice, she came to my room that night to sing to me. She sat beside me and said –

MRS. W I'm sorry – dear child.

ELEANOR She sounded as if she might vomit when she said it. But she softened -

MRS. W I apologize for what happened earlier today. My temper gets away from me at times. A lady should always mind her temper.

Let me make it up to you. Would you like me to sing you a song before you sleep? Like I do for Beatrice?

ELEANOR A warm light ignited inside me. *(meekly)* “Yes please, ma'am.”

MRS. W You know, there are many many lullaby's for children. Each special little girl and boy, every type of child. But there is one that's rarely sung. In fact, so few have heard it that I think it can just be ours. We can call it *your* lullaby. Would you like that, “Eleanor's Lullaby”?

ELEANOR “Yes, ma'am.”

Beatrice's mother begins to hum a gentle lullaby.

She took my hand in hers and sang to me in her beautiful voice, a song that doused every hint of light and warmth in my body. I felt the blood drain from my face as her voice timbred with violence. I saw hate in her eyes.

She gently lifts Eleanor's hand and grasps her wrist.

She clutched my forearm, dug her nails into my skin, and by the time it was over my blood escaped her nails and trickled down her fingers to her wrist.

Mrs. Walker sings a lullaby about Gryla, the Icelandic giantess.

*Hush now, dear child, lay down your head.
And I'll sing you a lullaby of winter and dread.*

*Each year comes Christmas to spread mid-winter cheer
to all of the children who've been so good all year.*

*But what of the children who forgot to be nice?
Who've not done as told and tell dirty lies.*

*She lives in the mountains, throughout most of the year
but Gryla the giant doesn't come to bring cheer.*

*She stalks through the forest searching to feast
On the flesh of the children behaving like beasts.*

*They beg and they wail with tears in their eyes
But Gryla she hears none of their cries.*

*Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy
Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy*

*Their limbs and their entrails, their eyes she will eat.
She crunches their bones with a snap of her teeth*

*She fills up her stuff sack with bad children at night
Then boils them living, her favorite delight.*

*Now children behave throughout all of the year
For fear Gryla's song will be the last that they hear.*

*Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy
Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy*

MRS. W Good night. Dear child.

Mrs. Walker leaves, smirking to herself. Eleanor is alone.

Beatrice's Madness

Edward bursts with pomp through the doors of the Moon Lake Manor dining room, leading Mr. Hayes and Alise, drinks in hand.

After a moment Eleanor retreats.

EDWARD No, no, honest to God, it's a circus that just pops up out of nowhere. Well, they call it a circus. A *magic* circus. Out of nowhere it shows up one day completely closed off, it's

only open at night. And they employ the worlds foremost magicians I'm told. And then one day... Poof, it disappears. No one's ever seen it arrive or leave; some say it's a circus of ghosts. That, my dear, is where you must go if you adore magic.

ALISE That sounds incredible!

EDWARD Well, I assure you that I've been on the hunt for this spectacle for months, and when I find it I will take you. We'll all go.

Beatrice and Mrs. Hayes enter together, speaking in hushed tones. The guests make their way to their seats. Edward stands at the head of the table.

Friends, thank you for being here tonight to continue celebrating with us. A wedding is a very – consuming affair. And sometimes we don't get to enjoy the company of those we love the most as much as we'd like. But Mr. and Mrs. Hayes not only is it a pleasure to have you as one of my family's –

A knock at the door. Everyone turns. Edwards feigns a laugh and goes to the door.

Clearly my valet wasn't listening when I instructed him *not* to interrupt my speech.

Everyone chuckles. Edward opens the door, there's no one there.

A valet with a sense of humor. *(to Mr. Hayes)* Are you in the market? *(calling out the door)* Henry, get back here at once!

Henry enters from the other side of the room.

HENRY Yes, sir?

Everyone turns.

EDWARD Were you not just knocking on the other side of this door?

HENRY No sir, I was in the kitchen. Is the party ready to be served?

EDWARD No. Return. *(a beat)* Apologies. Either one of my servants forgot the layout of the house or fancies themselves a trickster.

Where was I? Yes! Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, it's not only been a pleasure to have you as one of my family's closest and longest standing business partners, but also as cherished friends.

MR. H Here here.

They cheers and drink before sitting. Edward rings a bell and Henry enters, setting plates first before Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, then Alise and Beatrice, and finally Edward.

EDWARD Perhaps even one day we can find a suitable cousin of mine to match with the beautiful Alise here and officially call each other 'family'.

MR. H If only you had a younger brother, we could be even closer.

All laugh. Alise is embarrassed.

MRS. H Yes, it is so unfortunate that you're both only-children. Who will carry on the family name?

EDWARD Well, we're looking forward to starting a family and carrying on the Thorburn name.

BEATRICE The Thorburn and Walker names.

Edward looks at Beatrice. Beat.

MRS. H How – progressive.

Edward smiles.

BEATRICE We're hoping to progress in many ways, now that we're married. We're planning a new business venture.

MR. H Yes, Edward assures me the new mine is making considerable progress.

EDWARD Yes. Though, perhaps business can be saved for another occasion.

BEATRICE Not the mine. Something that should've been done long ago. And is guaranteed to produce. In fact, you could look out a window and see the product right now.

EDWARD Well it's not officially set –

BEATRICE Of course not. We haven't decided who we'll approach to invest yet.

Mr. Haynes wipes his mouth, uncomfortable.

MR. H I see, well... I'm sure whoever Edward approaches, they'll count themselves among the fortunate.

BEATRICE We'd consider –

EDWARD But why we would discuss such things when we can talk about love and art, or the wonderful meal we're eating or – magic ghosts even?

Edward laughs, hoping the others will follow along. They do, eager to change the subject. Beatrice hides her irritation and recovers with a smile and forces out a brief laugh.

MR. H Stories of otherworldly things are not to my taste. A circus of trained magicians, ok, but the supernatural? *(shaking his head)* This young generations' fascination with the macabre toes the line of blasphemy, if you ask me.

ALISE But uncle, it's such delightful fun! The spooky unknown of another world.

Mr H laughs.

MR. H There, you see! You'd better tell that cousin of yours to get here soon or she'll likely run off with a fortune teller or circus clown.

Laughs. Alise is embarrassed.

EDWARD Well, whatever will make her happiest I'm sure will be for the best.

MRS. H Well, to a point. My dear niece does seem to forget her status in society at times. She neglects her responsibilities.

ALISE Evie...

MRS. H Aunt Evelyn, dear. We're in company.

BEATRICE It's alright. We're all friends here.

EDWARD That's right. And marrying for love can reap all the benefits of smart matches, even more sometimes!

Edward laughs but the others do not. He clears his throat.

BEATRICE *(raising her glass)* To love.

Edward looks at her, surprised. He raises his glass.

EDWARD To love.

ALL To love.

A loud, thunderous SLAM rattles the door and echoes through the room. Guests yelp and drinks are spilt.

MRS. H My God, the servants here! –

SLAM! The room quakes and lights flicker. Everyone goes silent, frightened stiff, until Edward attempts to diffuse the tension...

EDWARD My God, that is some thunder.... Apparently these “meteorologists” aren't as smart as they claim when they say it will be a clear night.

The sound of massive, ragged nails grate across the door.

SLAM! The dinnerware on the table rattles. Everyone screams, then stifles themselves.

Lights dim.

A Voice whispers into the room; fang sharp and venomous. Beatrice's heart drops. The others don't seem to notice.

VOICE Bea Bea.... Bea Bea...

Silence. Lights illuminate then dim to almost black.

EDWARD These new inventions really aren't as reliable as they claim to be. I'm sure we have some candles around...

Edward searches for candles and matches.

MR. H You know, that does sound like frightful weather. Perhaps we should call it a night and head home before the roads flood.

MRS. H Yes, agreed.

They spring from the table in unison and prepare to leave just as Edward finds a candle and lights it.

VOICE Bea Bea...

EDWARD Here we are.

The door creaks open and the blood drains from Beatrice's face.

VOICE I see you...

EDWARD Ah Henry, our savior. Would you escort the Haynes to their carriage?

Beatrice SCREAMS VIOLENTLY! Everyone turns, Edward runs to her.

EDWARD What? What happened?

Beatrice points out the door, into the hall way.

BEATRICE It's her. I told you...

EDWARD It's wh –

BEATRICE Shh! Listen...

Silence again as everyone listens, but only Beatrice hears. The lights illuminate slowly.

VOICE I see where you go... I watch you sleep...

BEATRICE Are you all deaf?! Do you not hear her? It's her. They're *all* her! She thinks I don't know but I *know*. The hideous beast.

Show your face! Go on! Show everyone how you're still mewling about!

MRS. H Who?..

Beatrice's eyes lock dead onto Edward's.

BEATRICE I told you. That *whore* is in this house.

MR. H Edward, what on earth –

VOICE 1 You are so stupid...

BEATRICE Listen!...

Voices flood into the room, whispering around Beatrice. They approach and grow louder, ricocheting off every corner in the room as Beatrice speaks.

VOICE 1
Stupid.

VOICE 2
Dirty.

VOICE 3
Bea Bea... Get it.

VOICE 1
So stupid.

VOICE 2
Filthy.

VOICE 3
Grab the knife. There on the table.

VOICE 1
Stupid.

VOICE 2
Pointless.

VOICE 3
Get it. Grab it.

VOICE 6
*(singing
softly)*
Don't you ever

VOICE 1
Stupid. Stupid

VOICE 3
Stab yourself.

		VOICE 4	VOICE 5
		A lady performs her	She knows!.
	VOICE 2	duties to her husband	VOICE 6
	Disgusting.	without question. None	<i>Ever...</i>
VOICE 1		but the word of a husband	
So stupid!		matters to a wife.	
		VOICE 3	VOICE 5
VOICE 1		No wait, don't!	She knows!
Stupid...			
			VOICE 6
			<i>Ever trust my</i>
			<i>mercy.</i>

One by one the voices coalesce like oil droplets in water.

BEATRICE Don't you hear her? They're all *her*. She talks and talks.

EDWARD Darling, calm yourself? You're frightening our guests –

BEATRICE And listen! Singing. Singing, no less. She never sang before.

The Voices unite as Eleanor steps through the door, her neck bruised with hand prints, eyes bloodshot, skin pale, and her hair hanging wildly; an uncanny terror. She stares Beatrice in the eye, singing "Eleanor's Lullaby".

BEATRICE/ There you are.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

BEATRICE What is that you're singing, is that supposed to scare me? Is that all you can do, talk and sing and whine?

SLAM! Eleanor mimics striking her fist violently against the wall and the room shakes.

Everyone hears the slam and feels the house quiver, but only Beatrice has any sense of Eleanor's voice or presence.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

BEATRICE Get out! This is no longer your home! Get out, you don't belong here and you never did! You stole him by opening your legs, don't pout and whine that I took him back!

Guests recoil and gasp at Beatrice's vile behavior.

EDWARD Beatrice! Mr. and Mrs. Hayes I apologize – Henry! Get in here at once!

Eleanor takes control of Beatrice's mind and she crooks her neck and sings along; her voice coarse

and demonic.

BEATRICE/ ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy (turning to the Hayes)* You foul creatures of money. How many of your servants have you fucked this year?! How many did you kill!

EDWARD I'm sorry. Please, everyone, my deepest apologies, clearly my wife is not well. Henry!
Henry enters. Beatrice resumes singing, lost in a trance.

BEATRICE *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

HENRY Sir –

Henry stops dead in his tracks at the sight of Beatrice.

Sir, what –

EDWARD Take the Lady of the house to her room! Now! Gentleman and ladies please, I'll see you out!

Edward hurriedly rushes the Haynes out of the room.

Eleanor continues to sing, Beatrice snaps out of it and faces off with her.

ELEANOR *Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...*

BEATRICE No. No! You will not shatter my life a second time!

Eleanor SLAMS the wall again, glassware falls and shatters.

I will live as my *status* intends. You're nothing but the dead bastard offspring of a servant! Leave! And go back to your place in Hell!!

Henry stands in awe of the spectacle.

Beatrice's strength falters and she fights to stay standing.

You cannot take him from me!

Edward runs back into the room. The lights blaze. Beatrice screams violently in desperation and attempts to grab a knife from the table.

BEATRICE I will cut you down if I have have to! This is mine!! This is all MINE!

Beatrice falters and the strength drains from her body. Edward runs to catch her as she faints.

The lights dim and slow, resetting to normal as Eleanor calms her haunting.

HENRY I'll go for the doctor.

Henry goes to leave.

EDWARD Henry. Fetch a priest as well...

Henry nods and goes. Edward picks up Beatrice and carries her out of the room.

As Eleanor catches her breath she paces the room, triumphantly stalking the remnants like a predator circling its slain prey.

Edward enters, shaken, trying to stifle his rattled nerves as he looks over the strewn articles in the room.

EDWARD What have we done?..

Eleanor softens.

Henry rushes in.

HENRY I've sent Celia for the doctor. I'll go for the Priest myself...

EDWARD ... Do you believe in ghosts, Henry? Spectres?...

Beat. Eleanor moves closer to Edward. She reaches out a comforting hand to touch him, then pulls it back.

HENRY I believe in many things I cannot explain.

EDWARD I fear the explanation for this...

Quickly Edward goes to grab his coat.

I'll go to the priest. See to the lady of the house.

HENRY But sir –

EDWARD Stay here, Henry. That's what I need you to do now. I'll return as soon as possible.

HENRY What should I do if – if she awakes.

EDWARD ... Stay back...

Eleanor watches Edward leave. After a moment Henry goes to the bedroom.

ELEANOR I'm sorry, love... I don't mean to hurt you.

Eleanor looks above her, into the ether.

Am I ready yet?

Silence. Eleanor follows Henry and the lights dim to darkness.

Dollie's Prayer

Edward, Henry, and Father McLaggen wipe their faces and hands with damp rags blotched with blood, exhausted.

Beatrice lies asleep in bed, pale and damp with sweat.

F. Mc You've told no one of this?

EDWARD No. But we had guests.

F. Mc They'll need to be dealt with.

EDWARD Dealt with?

F. Mc No harm, but rumors of this evenings' events cannot spread. *(to Henry)* Go back to the church, tell Sister Margaret what you've seen here tonight and the names of your guests. She'll keep them quiet.

Henry leaves.

EDWARD You believe others could become possessed as well?

F. Mc *(gravely)* Your wife is not possessed.

EDWARD But... No, she spoke in a voice that was not her own, you heard her. You heard her singing. I've never heard her sing that song in my life. Something has to have her.

F. Mc Something is manipulates her, yes. But it is not a demon. It's not trying to incarnate itself in her body, that's what a demon does. She sees something clearly, it speaks to her and she replies and, yes, it manipulated her voice. But it is only antagonizing her.

A pause.

How long has this been happening?

EDWARD She started experiencing disturbances in her sleep shortly after we were married a few months ago.

F. Mc And what was the nature of these disturbances?

EDWARD She just said they were nightmares. But then she started sleep walking, waking up in strange places... She said she heard voices in her sleep telling her to do things. Where to go...

F. Mc And – the haunting?.. The knocks on doors where no one was, the misplaced items, the thunderous crashes on the walls of your house?

EDWARD Tonight was the worst it's been so far. She started hearing the voices while she was awake about a month ago. But the strange... things. I first noticed those only recently. But it was... it was just... coincidence.

F. Mc And what about the manipulation?

EDWARD I'd never seen that before tonight.

F. Mc Has she named this Being?

Edward thinks a moment before he decides to answer.

EDWARD She believes her to be my late wife...

F. Mc Can you think of any possibilities of why your late wife would torment her?

EDWARD *(A small beat)* No.

Beatrice stirs in bed and then returns to silence.

F. Mc We should rest while she sleeps. And I have to find out what this spirit is capable of before I can banish it.

EDWARD But you *can* banish it?

F. Mc I don't know.

Beatrice stirs again. They look to her, waiting for her to settle, then Edward leads Father McLaggen out.

Beatrice sleeps for a moment. Then a whisper, kind and gentle.

VOICE Bea Bea...

Beatrice stirs in bed.

Bea Bea...

She shoots upright in bed, on guard.

BEATRICE No –

VOICE Shhh, shh...

BEATRICE No!

VOICE Shh, she'll hear us!

BEATRICE Get out!

VOICE I'm not her! Shh!

BEATRICE Get out!

VOICE Shhhh!... They'll hear you and come and I won't be able to protect you!

Pause.

BEATRICE ... Protect me?

VOICE Yes, child.

BEATRICE Protect me from what?

VOICE From *her*.

Beatrice breaths, calming down.

BEATRICE It is her.

VOICE Yes.

BEATRICE It is...

VOICE Yes. And I can't keep her back if you don't stay quiet and listen.

BEATRICE She's not here?

VOICE No, Bea bea.

BEATRICE ... And you're not her?...

VOICE No. I'm here to protect you.

BEATRICE She calls me Bea bea.

VOICE And so did your mother and father.

BEATRICE How did you know that?

VOICE Because I've known you since you were a little girl.

I have watched over you ever since you were a baby. I've seen over your well being and inspired your intuition to lead you safely as you grew into a woman. ... Do you remember the prayer you and your mother said together each night before bed? Do you remember speaking to me?

*Watch me now as I sleep,
the safety of my life you keep.*

*You hold my soul in your embrace,
and lead me to the safest place.*

BEATRICE/ *Watch me, oh watch me, my own little Guardian Angel*

VOICE *Grow with me, and keep me safe, my own little Guardian Angel*

Beatrice's mouth falls agape.

BEATRICE You... It can't be. You're not real. It was... just a prayer.

VOICE We are real, Bea bea. It may have been just a prayer to you but I listened every time you spoke to me.

BEATRICE Where have you been?

VOICE When our children grow to adults we leave them from time to time, helping them to learn to care for themselves. But sometimes we come back to check on you. And until you pass into our realm we watch, and protect you when you need it. And sometimes, very rarely, we reveal ourselves.

BEATRICE It can't...

VOICE It can. It is.. And I am so sorry she hurt you this long. I'm here now. And I will not leave you until she's gone forever.

Beatrice welts up with tears.

BEATRICE Thank you... She won't leave me alone. She's...

VOICE Sh sh, it's okay. Nothing will hurt you while I'm here.

BEATRICE I knew you were there... I could feel you...

VOICE I was. Every night as you held me.

BEATRICE Held you?

VOICE We place ourselves in totems. A point of contact between you and the heavenly realm. Something our children love to strengthen the bond between us and the protection we give you from the spirit world.

I heard that prayer every single night because you held me as you said it. You need to find me again. We must be together at all times for me to protect you.

BEATRICE Dollie?...

Beatrice bolts out of bed and to the closet. She pulls out dresses, looking in the back. She pulls down shoes and accessories from the shelves. Then she pulls out a wooden box.

Beatrice lays the box on the floor. From it she pulls a diary and lays it on the ground. Next a music box, which she opens and it plays a sweet lullaby. And finally, an old, ragged doll with long hair, bright eyes, and a white dress with a flower pin.

BEATRICE It's you...

DOLLIE It is... I'm here...

Beatrice hugs Dollie tightly.

BEATRICE It's you..

DOLLIE I have missed you, sweet child.

Beatrice sobs into Dollie.

Shh, shh... Before they come back, there's more you need to know.

Beatrice composes herself and nods.

You must keep me with you at all times. I will have to leave to seek her out and drive her away, but our bond is strongest when you hold onto me. I'll be able to find you faster if she comes for you. Alright?

She nods.

You'll need your strength Bea Bea. Rest, eat, hold onto as much as you can. She is

possessed by some burning HATE and when she comes again, you will need to be strong.

Scared, Beatrice nods again and hugs her, gentle but firm.

BEATRICE *(whispers)* Thank you...

DOLLIE I love you, dear child.

BEATRICE I love you...

Beatrice cradles Dollie as she gets up and walks to her bed.

Watch me now as I sleep,
the safety of my life you keep.

She curls her legs beneath the covers.

You hold my soul in your embrace,
and lead me to the safest place.

She embraces Dollie tightly between her knees and chest, pulling the covers over her body. The lights fade.

Watch me, oh watch me, my own little Guardian Angel
Grow with me, and keep me safe, my own little Guardian Angel

Black...

Edward

The sun rises through the curtains of Edwards library, revealing Father MaLaggen hunched over, asleep in Edwards reading chair. Edward is curled in a ball on his sofa, clutching a blanket over him. He twitches, at first almost unnoticeable, then more pronounced.

EDWARD *(in his sleep)* Shh.. Sh.. Sh..

Edward shushes something unknown in his dreams, as if he's trying to comfort an agitated animal. He tries and tries, shivering as he does.

Shh.. Shhhh.. Sh.....

Edward shoots up with a brief shout, eyes wide.

Father McLaggen grumbles a "Mmm?" unintelligibly.

Edward's eyes dart around the room, searching for the wild creature. As he comes back to reality Henry shuffles on with a tray of coffee and toast.

HENRY Sir?

EDWARD *(startled)* Huh – What?

HENRY Are you alright?

EDWARD Yes. Yes, yes I'm fine Henry. *(seeing the tray)* Sit down, you were up all night too.

HENRY *(sitting with a groan on the couch next to Edward)* Oh I intend to sir, but old habits...

Henry pours coffee into three cups as Edward distances himself from his dreams and Father McLaggen awakens to the fresh smell. Henry hands Edward the first cup.

HENRY Here.

EDWARD Thank you.

HENRY Would you –

EDWARD *(interrupting)* No. Black will be fine.

HENRY Do you drink coffee father?

F. Mc Hm?.. Yes, on occasion I do...

HENRY How do you take it?

F. Mc Black will be fine.

Henry hands the Priest his cup.

HENRY There's some toast and butter. Cheese and fruit if you like.

F. Mc Just coffee, thank you.

Henry sits with his cup. Black as well.

For a brief moment the air is calm, peaceful, devoid of memory. The men sip their coffee as they search for thoughts of anything but the events of the previous night.

After a moment Edward's ears prick up as if he suddenly heard a distance noise. Henry and Father McLaggen listen. They listen with razor sharp precision. Nothing...

Edward exhales a sigh of relief and slumps back into the couch.

F. Mc Someone should check on her.

EDWARD I don't think I'm ready for that...

HENRY I've never seen –

EDWARD Don't Henry. Please. Not yet... Let us at least finish one cup...

Henry looks at Father McLaggen, who nods solemnly.

F. Mc Son, you –

EDWARD Father...

F. Mc I'm here to help you –

Edward slams the heel of his hand and the arm rest and shoots to his feet.

EDWARD I said 'please', Father! Please don't force me to remind you where the door is.

Edward sits and slouches into his coffee. Father McLaggen clenches his jaw and rises before Edward.

PRIEST Edward Thorburn Jr., I have known you since you were a child... Your father came to me for guidance when he felt he was failing you, and I know the strength he found to raise you right. You stand up and face what's before you, boy!

Edward stares up at the Priest for a tense moment. He stands and walks to Father McLaggen.

EDWARD Which strength did you help him find? His hands or –

Knock. Knock. Knock. Sudden, but not violent.

Henry bolts up, grabbing the knife from the tray. Edward and Father McLaggen turn, on guard facing the door. After a moment...

EDWARD *(noticing the knife)* Put that down, Henry.

Henry returns the knife to the tray. Knock. Knock. Knock.

EDWARD Yes?

BEATRICE *(from offstage)* Hello?

Edward instinctively moves forward but Father McLaggen reaches an arm out to stop him.

Hello? It's me, dear. Are you all in there? I'd have thought you were all having breakfast in the dining room. I'm famished, may I join you? I'm feeling much better.

Father McLaggen withdraws his arm and Edward creeps toward the door. He opens it to find Beatrice standing there, upright and smiling, clutching Dollie at her chest. Except for the bags under her eyes she seems rested and cheerful.

BEATRICE Good morning gentlemen.

She gives Edward a joyful kiss and strolls into the room, light as air.

(almost singing) I hope you all rested well last night.

She sits with Dollie in her lap and starts buttering a piece of toast. The men regard her carefully for a moment.

EDWARD How are you feeling, dear?

BEATRICE Oh, much better, darling. Thank you.

She takes a bite.

Mm.. I apologize for the – mess last night. Thank you all for your assistance in seeing me to bed.

F. Mc Are you sure you're alright, child?

BEATRICE Oh, wonderful, Father. I apologize for some of things I may have said, I wasn't feeling quite myself last night. I hope you and God can forgive me.

Beatrice continues to eat, finishing off the toast. And cutting some cheese.

(through the chewing) Also, pardon my manners, I'm simply famished. *(grabbing more)* You've all eaten already, I hope.

F. Mc *(gesturing to the tray)* We're fine, dear. Please...

Beatrice smiles and begins buttering another piece of toast.

Child, do you recall the events last night?

Beatrice stops, sighs, and sets down her toast and knife, and places her hands in her lap over Dollie.

BEATRICE *(not unkindly)* As I said, I wasn't feeling at all myself. I haven't had a fever that bad in – well I can't recall, I must've been a child. But I'm feeling much better now.

F. Mc Did you – rest soundly? Without nightmares?

Beatrice gently squeezes Dollie.

BEATRICE Yes, Father. Not a single vision. I was cradled by heavenly light.

EDWARD Father, you must be tired...

BEATRICE *(standing)* Oh, yes Father! I'm so sorry to have kept you so long. You must be exhausted.

PRIEST I go where God is needed.

Again Beatrice gives a subtle squeeze to Dollie.

BEATRICE God is here, Father. Always. We shouldn't keep you any longer.

EDWARD Father please, let me see you out personally. And send you with a donation to the church.

Beatrice sits down and politely returns to her toast, buttering and finishing it off in barely more than a single motion. She washes it down with one of the men's coffees, Dollie seated upright in her lap and the knife still in her hand.

The Priest stops Edward, grabbing him by the arm.

PRIEST *(sotto voce)* Keep an eye on her state. When it gets worse, you know where I'll be.

Father McLaggen leaves as Beatrice continues to consume heartily; fruit, cheese, toast, anything on the tray. Edward turns and watches her for a brief moment.

EDWARD Dear...

BEATRICE Mhm....?

Chews a large bite, followed by a gulp of coffee to wash it down.

EDWARD Are you sure you're alright?

BEATRICE Yes dear. I'm fine.

EDWARD And – *God* visited you last night?

Beatrice laughs.

BEATRICE Oh darling, that was just for the Father; so he'd leave. Why did you invite him anyway? You know what this is. I told you she was here. And now I'm going to take care of it.

Suddenly Beatrice stands.

Henry, would you please have a full breakfast sent to my room? I have a lot of work to do and need my strength.

Beatrice goes to leave.

EDWARD Beatrice...

She turns back.

BEATRICE I assure you, I'm fine. I know what has to be done now. See to it that our plans are moving forward, dear. I don't intend to beat the Devil just to end up poor and titleless.

Beatrice leaves. After a moment.

HENRY Shall I run after the Father?

EDWARD No.

HENRY But you heard her, she –

EDWARD She what?

HENRY Have you gone deaf?

EDWARD She said she's fine.

HENRY She still sees your wife.

EDWARD *She* is my wife.

HENRY Your *late* wife. There's something in this house and we cannot deny what we saw last night.

EDWARD We saw my wife with a terrible fever.

HENRY We saw your wife being *haunted*!

EDWARD Do you really believe in ghosts, Henry? Is that the kind of man I have serving me, an imbecile?

HENRY I believe what I see with my own eyes, do not insult me, young man! Is that the kind of *boy* I raised, the kind who blinds himself to the truth out of fear? Or is that what your father beat into you? Blind submission to convenient lies!

Silence. Edward stares back at Henry.

You knew to fetch Father McLaggen last night, how can you deny it now?

Edward tries to remain still as a stone, trying not to break. Henry goes to him.

I have known you since you were a glimmer in your mother's eyes. I've known both your wives since they were girls. I watched your parents raise you to be strong. You cannot run from this.

EDWARD ... If the truth is as you say... As Beatrice says.... Then my wife.... Could you face the truth of why she's returned?

HENRY To care for those we love, we *must* face difficult truths.

EDWARD And what if I failed?.. What if..

HENRY You were raised a caring boy. Your father may have been cruel but he raised you to be strong and he did not kill the kindness in you. I know you, you cannot sit by while someone you love suffers.

EDWARD My wife suffered... We all suffer, Henry...

HENRY She may still suffer.

After a moment Edward draws a sharp breath with a sudden decision.

EDWARD Alright. Ok.

He paces. Perhaps he pours a drink or some fresh coffee.

Go to Father McLaggen again, tell him I'll prepare and send word when we're ready.

Henry nods.

Then go to town. Go out in the country, wherever you can, and send out word to healers, mediums, anyone who can help.

HENRY Are you certain – ?

EDWARD Yes. Whoever knows anything about sending away a... Helping apparitions. The Father will be there just in case.

Henry turns to leave.

And Henry. Before you return, check with our men at work. Make sure we have grateful labor this time.

Henry nods and leaves.

Into the Darkness

Late that night. Beatrice lies in bed, peacefully sleeping with Dollie in her arms.

Suddenly her music box flips open and plays its tune. Beatrice shoots up, wide awake and clutching Dollie. She looks to the music box, watching it a moment, waiting to see what happens. Beatrice crawls out of bed, checking under the bed and searching the dark corners of the room as she goes to the music box and shuts it. She crawls back into bed, holding Dollie close.

BEATRICE Dollie? Are you here?

No answer. Beatrice's countenance furrows and she glares into the distance.

I know you're out there. I hear you hovering around me. I can feel you. I know your dreams. Your hands wrapped around my neck. Your hateful stare and your cold hands squeezing so tight the veins in your eyes burst.

I am not alone in this world. You stay out.

The door knob rattles and Beatrice wields Dollie before her as a weapon. There is a gentle knock knock knock at the door.

BEATRICE Stay out!

SLAM on the door. Beatrice jumps out of bed and grabs the knife from her bedside table, extending it Dollie before her.

Your hands will never touch me.

Laughter creeps into the room and surrounds Beatrice.

VOICE What do you think you can do with that...

DOLLIE Stay strong, Bea bea. I see her.

BEATRICE I will not be so easy to kill.

SLAM, one wall. SLAM, another. SLAM SLAM SLAM echos from every corner in the room, threatening to crumble the walls around her.

BEATRICE You stay out! Get out of here!! I am not alone in here, do you hear me? You go back to your Hell.

The walls calm and the room slowly returns to silence.

Is she gone?... Dollie?..

DOLLIE Stay here. Don't open the door.

BEATRICE Watch me, oh watch me...

Beatrice closes her eyes and squeezes Dollie in her arms, still holding the knife.

Take my strength. Send her away...

Beatrice jolts to her bedside table and snatches out a small box from the back of the drawer. She considers it briefly before snapping it open and inhaling several pinches of snuff through her nose. She shuts the box, drops it on the table and sits on her bed.

No more of your vicious nightmares. I will see you no more.

A gentle knock on the door and Beatrice points Dollie and the knife at the door, ready to fight.

Stay back!

Edward calls from the other side.

EDWARD Are you alright, dear?

BEATRICE Yes. I'm fine.

EDWARD I thought I heard screaming.

BEATRICE Just a nightmare. I'm fine now.

EDWARD Who were you talking to just now?

BEATRICE It was a prayer.

EDWARD Are you sure you wouldn't like to see a doctor or the priest again?

BEATRICE *(becoming impatient)* Yes. I'm fine dear, thank you.

EDWARD Can I – Should I stay with you tonight?

BEATRICE No, you – you have our work to focus on. See to that.

EDWARD I'll have dinner sent.

BEATRICE Thank you. I'm going to rest now.

A beat. Beatrice releases a sigh when she hears Edward walking away down the hall. She retrieves the snuff box from her beside table and sniffs a pinch into each nostril, settling into bed and ready for a fight.

Your Father Would Be Proud

Edward enters the library followed by Mr. Haynes, their boots dirty, returning from an early morning ride.

EDWARD I don't know what you're going on about, Eli. You've certainly still got it.

MR. H *(chuckles)* Well I can still stay on the damn beast, Thank God for that. It's been ages since I've enjoyed a true ride. Victoria always insists on a leisurely stroll. If I even approach so much as a trot she turns into my mother. "Be careful, darling!"

They laugh. Edward offers Mr. Hayes a seat and sits across from him.

EDWARD Would you like anything? Henry is out for the day, but I can have one of the other servants make coffee.

MR. H No, no, I'm fine for now. I can only stay for a bit. Business to attend to, as you well know.

EDWARD Of course.

MR. H But, before we begin I wanted to ask about your wife. How is she?

EDWARD Oh, that's very kind of you, but nothing to worry about any longer. A severe fever it turns out. The doctor saw to her and she's resting now.

MR. H That's a relief. It must have been some wretched demon that gave her that fever.

Edward feigns a laugh.

EDWARD No, no demon. Nothing modern medicine couldn't cure. And I do apologize for it ruining the evening. We'll plan something again soon.

MR. H One of the Sisters from Father McLaggen's parish came to see me recently. That evening, in fact.

EDWARD Oh?

MR. H She was concerned about some – other-world entity? She refused to use the words "Devil" or "Demon" but... She was very insistent on knowing what we saw.

EDWARD We had the Father over to comfort Beatrice. All of us, really. The comfort of God in troubling times. But, you know the Sisters and their bias for – hyperbole. Conjuring up God in places where – Well, I don't mean to blaspheme, but I think her imagination may have got the better of her.

MR. H Of course. They are a hysterical bunch at times. I myself prefer to hear only from the Father himself.

It was quite disturbing that night, however. Your wife, the things we heard.

EDWARD It was a terrible storm, I agree. And an even worse fever. But I assure you Eli, Beatrice's condition is nothing more than an ailment. I promise you that.

Mr. Hayes regards Edward for a moment and then breaks the tension.

MR. H So, what is it that you wanted to speak to me about?

EDWARD Well, speaking of my wife, she broached the matter that very evening, perhaps that should've been the first hint at her condition. But, now we can speak to it properly as men.

MR. H I see. Yes, that was a bit of a surprise. I believe it was a new venture, she spoke of.

EDWARD Yes, we sealed the mine and all the men were dismissed.

MR. H I see. I assume you'll be looking for more loyal men for this venture then?

EDWARD I hired most of them back. Once they saw their family's bread disappear it wasn't long before they were willing to take what I was offering.

MR. H Your father raised a smart man. Will you reopen it?

EDWARD No. Not now, anyway. My family's mines have done wonders for my family and our investors. But, I've accepted that I've spent my life surrounded by a mine that you only need to look in the distance to see its and know for it's there for certain?

MR. H And what is it you see?

EDWARD I'm going into logging, Eli. The mill is already under construction, all I need is a partner to finish acquiring the new equipment.

A chuckle creeps out of Mr. Hayes before he gives into full on laughter.

What is so funny?

MR. H *(still laughing)* Logging. I don't believe that for a second.

EDWARD And why not?

Mr. Hayes calms himself.

MR. H Forgive me, it's just... I approached your father about that ages ago. And he said that if

he cut down the forest, he would have to bury you in it's place you were so attached. Son, I've known you since you were a little boy. He used to lose you to that forest for hours. I just can't believe you'll be able to bear watching it be cut down.

EDWARD The surrounding estate will remain. We've built the mill on the outskirts, but beyond that lies a gold mine, Eli.

My father taught me that a man's most important duty is to secure his estate. And eventually the boy had to grow up. The coal in these mountains has dried up, or I can't seem to find it. But the forest...

Now, I could sell a fraction of this land and completely fund the new equipment for this new future, but you're a longtime family friend, Eli. Our families have always taken great care of one another's interests.

Mr. Hayes thinks for a moment.

I don't expect an investment by the end of the day. You're a prudent man, I've always respected that. But let me be frank in saying that I believe you to be a man wise enough to pick up a pile of money when he sees it laying in front of him.

Edward stands and extends a hand.

Thank you for hearing my proposal. And for the enjoyable ride this morning, you must join me more often.

Mr. Hayes smirks.

MR. H The boy truly has left this house. And a proper man finally stands in his place.

He stands and accepts Edward's hand.

Have the details sent to me and I'll look them over.

He grips Edwards shake with his other hand.

Your father would be proud.

Edward responds with a stoic nod and Mr. Hayes leaves. Edward sits and slumps in his chair, drifting into his thoughts.

Judgment Comes

In the foyer, the sun sets through the windows, Henry rushes in. As he removes his hat, gloves and coat...

HENRY *(calling out)* Sir?... Edward?!...

Edward startles from his worries and sits up in his chair.

EDWARD *(from his library)* Yes? Yes? Coming!

Edward collects himself and rushes to the foyer.

(entering) Is the Father here?

HENRY He's not far behind. He's bringing the Hayes.

EDWARD Thank you, Henry. Wait, what? Why on Earth –

HENRY He said they were here when the “Being” visited so they could – it could find them as well.

EDWARD What “Being” did he mean? Does he know it's...

HENRY I don't know, he didn't explain. He –

EDWARD Did you find anyone else?

Henry solemnly shakes his head.

HENRY No one would come. When I explained they only said it was no place for them. That no one could do anything.

EDWARD Did you offer them money?

HENRY Of course.

EDWARD And?

HENRY They refused. The woman at the apothecary who reads cards said there was only one price to be paid, and we couldn't pay it.

Outside the sounds of horse hooves approach.

EDWARD What did she mean by that?

HENRY I don't know.

The sounds of hooves arrive.

EDWARD I suppose we'll have to rely on God then.

Father McLaggen knocks. Edward gestures for Henry to open the door.

HENRY Thank you for coming, Father.

F. Mc *(entering)* Where is she?

HENRY In her room.

F. Mc Fetch her, please.

Henry leaves.

EDWARD *(offering his hand)* Thank you for coming, Father.

Father McLaggen solemnly accepts.

F. Mc Have faith. The Lord will guide us back to the light. *(turning out the door)* Please, come in.

EDWARD Father, is this really necessary?

Mr. Hayes, Mrs. Hayes, and Alise step in.

MR. H *(stern)* Edward, what is the meaning of this?

MRS. H Is this some sort of sick jest?

EDWARD Eli, I apologize. Mrs. Hayes, young Alise, I'm terribly sorry.

MR. H You assured me everything was fine. That your wife was only ill.

EDWARD It is. She is.

MR. H Then why is the Father ripping us from our homes, speaking of.. of...

ALISE *(quoting Father McLaggen)* Beasts and hellfire.

MR. H Beasts and hellfire! What sort of witchcraft have you and your wife –

EDWARD No! We don't – We're not involved in anything Eli, I assure – *(to Father McLaggen)* Father, surely it's unnecessary to involve innocent people.

F. Mc These innocent people were in the presence of a Being I've never encountered before. If we are going to banish it we must ensure it has no place with any of you.

(to the Hayes) The Devil works without permission. They did not have to invite this beast into their home. They are every bit as unfortunate as you to be involved. But we must, together, to be rid of this evil.

(to everyone) I've read of a Being so foul, it has no pronounceable name. Nothing this world would know. Spawned immaculately by the Devil, it requires no host, but roams freely, tormenting all in its path. God has shown me this Being, it's foul abyss, and it is our duty to return it to the Hellish realm.

The Father illustrates a cross in front of him.

In his name.

The Hayes follow suit with the cross motion. Edward follows after.

Henry brings in Beatrice by the arm, firm but not unkind. Beatrice resists.

BEATRICE No, no, you don't understand. I have to stay in my room. I'm safe there! She can't – Dollie's protecting me.

The Priest goes to Beatrice.

F. Mc Sh sh sh, dear... We're protecting you. God is here again.

BEATRICE No, it's not God, it's her!

Father McLaggen reaches out to grab Beatrice's shoulders.

F. Mc Be calm, child.

Beatrice slaps Father McLaggen's hands away.

BEATRICE Don't touch me! You don't understand. I have to stay in my room, she's looking for me. You don't understand any of this. It's almost night and she'll come.

The Haynes recoil in pity for Beatrice.

Don't look at me like that, none of you understand!

Father McLaggen helps Henry and takes one of her arms. They turn to enter the main room as Beatrice continues to struggle. Everyone follows and Beatrice protests and struggles; "No. No, let me go."

F. Mc My dear, do not fear the ways of God. He's here to protect you and bring you back to the light.

The Mystic's voice cuts through the chaos and struggle.

MYSTIC *(offstage)* Sorry I'm late!

Everyone stops. Outside is the sound of shoes thumping on the front porch. The Mystic opens the door and shuffles in.

Sorry. Sorry. Old feet and mud are a wretched combination.

For a moment no one knows what to say. Then...

MRS. H Are you lost?

Edward approaches.

EDWARD I'm sorry, I believe you have the wrong house.

MYSTIC Is this the house in need of cleansing?

EDWARD I...

MYSTIC I heard a spirit occupied this house. One who's overstayed its welcome.

F. Mc Nothing your witchcraft could resolve.

MYSTIC *(turning to leave)* Oh. Well, if you're all hunky dory then I suppose I'll be on my way.

EDWARD Wait!

A moment.

We... do seek help with an apparition.

F. Mc Son this is the work of the Devil's realm.

MR. H Edward...

EDWARD A tortured soul lives here.

MRS. H I've seen this hag collecting weeds and talking to herself in the woods.

F. Mc She speaks to forest spirits that do not exist, Edward. It's blasphemy.

MYSTIC I've seen this man speak for an ethos he does not know.

EDWARD Father, you said yourself you have never seen this. That you don't know what it is. Who's to say it's God?

F. Mc All things are God, child.

MYSTIC How convenient for those in the business of "God".

MR. H This – witch will invite evil into your home, Edward; on all of us. I will not stand for it. *(to her)* You will rot in hell for –

The Mystic smiles back at Mr. H.

F. Mc. Sh shh. No need to invoke Hell in front of those who don't know its fury.
(to Edward) Son, she has no place here.

Father McLaggen nods to Henry and they start to take Beatrice in the room.

BEATRICE Wait! Wait! Wait!

Beatrice breaks free and runs to the Mystic, plunging into her eyesight.

BEATRICE *(to the Mystic)* Look at me. Look me in the eyes.

MYSTIC *(touching Dollie)* That's a lovely totem you have there.

Beatrice steps back, lifting Dollie to her chest.

BEATRICE She's here to protect me.

MYSTIC I know.

BEATRICE You know her? Who comes to me?

MYSTIC I do.

BEATRICE You've seen her.

MYSTIC I have.

BEATRICE And you're here to send her away.

The Mystic gently places a hand on her and comforts her.

MYSTIC I am here to help one who suffers.

Beatrice softens. She holds the Mystic's face in her hands gently and looks deep into her eyes.

BEATRICE *(softly)* I trust you. I trust you. *(turning to everyone)* I trust her. I want her.

Before anyone can protest...

Fathers. Everyone. You may say your prayers and be with me if you wish. Lend me your strength. But I will follow her word and hers alone. If you wish to be present you must follow her as well.

F. Mc Child you cannot –

Edward interrupts the Priest.

EDWARD Are you sure?

BEATRICE Yes.

MYSTIC It looks like the weeds and trees prevail under tonight's moon.

BEATRICE Will you all lend me your strength tonight?

Edward nods first then Henry. One by one the all agree.

F Mc I will be there for you when then Devil reveals himself and you needs God's blessing.

They all step forward, Beatrice first. Father McLaggen pulls in Mr. Hayes.

When it happens, take care of the old hag, I'll protect the women.

Mr. Hayes nods as they enter the room. The Mystic stops Edward, Henry behind him.

MYSTIC Not you. You must stay here.

EDWARD But I was there too, she needs me.

MYSTIC *They* will be her strength.

Trust me, child. If ever you truly loved your wife, you must not enter this room.

Edward checks with Henry then yields. Henry moves to enter and the Mystic stops him.

MYSTIC No, no. Not you either.

The Mystic enters the room, closes the door, and locks it. Henry and Edward stand on the other side.

HENRY Sir, the men at the mill –

EDWARD Tomorrow, Henry.

Henry presses on.

HENRY There are still agitators. Some whispers of revenge.

Edward looks at Henry, then hangs his head and walks away.

Departure

Beatrice enters the room first, followed by Father McLaggen, Mr. Hayes, Alise, and Mrs. Hayes. In the center of the room is a generous dining table. The door shuts behind them and locks. The Mystic enters.

MR. H Where's Edward?

MYSTIC They are no help here, they've been too close to the Spirit for too long. They'll only strengthen her.

As everyone finds a seat.

F. Mc Will we chant in tongues and drink cats blood before we begin?

MYSTIC Many who claim to follow your faith speak in tongues. And personally, I enjoy cats; not for their blood.

Everyone sits around the table. Beatrice sits directly across from The Mystic, flanked by the others.

The Mystic removes a small glass goblet and a skin of water from her livery. She pours into the goblet and sets it at the center of the table.

F. Mc Are you going to turn it into blood and claim drinking it will heal her?

MYSTIC Again. Your people.

Join hands.

They do.

F Mc *(grumbling)* This is an abomination...

MYSTIC This is the way of this world.

F Mc This is the way of the – !

The Mystic snaps her finger and immediately Father McLaggen is silent, sitting upright and rigid, his

eyes wide, face expressionless, and hands folded neatly in his lap.

MYSTIC Close your eyes.

Father McLaggen obeys.

Place your scripture on the table.

He obeys.

Turn to your favorite verse.

He obeys.

Speak.

F Mc “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

The Mystic smiles at Alise and the Hayes.

MYSTIC Sleep.

Their eyes roll back in their head and they all lay their faces and hands on the table. Beatrice watches this, frightened. She moves to close her eyes and lay her face on the table.

Not you, deary.

Beatrice sits up.

This is *your* fight.

Beatrice nods.

Are you certain you wish to undertake this? Many learn to live with their ghosts.

BEATRICE I will never live with her.

The Mystic fans out her Tarot on the table.

MYSTIC Then draw one, deary. Only one.

Beatrice reaches out and pauses for a brief moment before choosing her card. She draws and flips it over.

BEATRICE (*reading*) La Morte...

MYSTIC Are you ready to face what torments you, child?

BEATRICE I am ready to be free of her.

The Mystic smirks.

MYSTIC You may very well get your wish. And come tomorrow I may find you knocking at my door.

(gesturing toward the goblet) Make your offering.

BEATRICE ... Offering?

MYSTIC Prick your finger and offer yourself.

Beatrice nods and pricks her finger. Gently she drops blood into the glass goblet.

The Mystic hums.

Spirit who afflicts this woman, come to us.

Silence. And then a distant noise. They listen closely.

Come to us spirit. Follow my voice and tell us why you're here.

Whispers...

BEATRICE I hear her.

MYSTIC Spirit! Speak! Make us understand! What do you wish to say?

The whispers grow louder but unclear.

Why do you torment this child? What must she do for you to leave?

Mrs. H grumbles, twitching, and then cranes her neck toward Beatrice, her eyes sharp and hollow. Possessed.

MRS. H No matter what you do...

Mr. H cranes his neck. Possessed.

MR. H No matter who protects you...

Alise cranes her neck. Possessed.

ALISE No matter where you hide...

Father McLaggen cranes his neck. Possessed.

F. Mc I will find you....

They lay their faces back on the table..

Beatrice clutches Dollie.

MYSTIC Spirit. Let this child alone. She will be free of your torment.

Mrs. H cranes her neck, slithering like a serpent and twitching.

MRS. H No matter what you do...

They each slither and hiss, overlapping one another.

MR. H No matter who protects you...

ALISE No matter where you hide...

F. Mc I will find you...

They spew a vicious chanting at Beatrice as they bend unnaturally in their seats.

ALL I will find you... I will find you... I will find you...

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. They go silent and lay back down on the table.

MYSTIC She seeks to enter...

Beatrice looks up and around, afraid.

Make no mistake child, once you let her in there is no going back.

Beatrice clutches Dollie and strengthens her resolve.

BEATRICE Let her come.

Suddenly, Father McLaggen, Alsie, and the Hayes pound their fists on the table. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Out of sync.

They methodically rise in their seats, eyes rolled back in their heads. As their pounding begins to find one another they slam their their fists and palms on the table, drumming in fours.

Beatrice wields Dollie before her, They hiss...

BEATRICE Stay back!!

The Mystic chants in demonic tongues.

They cease their hissing and pound on the table harder, faster, tightening their beat into a thunderous rhythm.

Edward raps on the door.

EDWARD What's going on in there?

Whispers... First indistinct, then...

VOICE 1

No matter where you hide...

VOICE 2

No matter where you hide..

VOICE 3

No matter where you hide...

Overlapping...

VOICE 1

I will find you...

VOICE 2

I will find you...

VOICE 3

I will find you...

BEATRICE Stop your whining and go back to Hell.

The group simultaneously SLAMS a hard fist on the table. Beatrice frightens but fights back quick, wielding Dollie before her.

Pound, pound, pound. Faster. Edward raps on the door again.

EDWARD Are you alright?

The Voices return. Overlapping...

VOICE 1

You bitch...

VOICE 2
You demon...

VOICE 3
You beast...

VOICE 1
How could you?

VOICE 2
How do you live with yourself?

VOICE 3
You called me sister...

The voices overlap, swirling and echoing from every direction, closing in on Beatrice.

VOICE 1
Look at you.

VOICE 2
So weak.

VOICE 3
Pathetic.

VOICE 1
Die now.

VOICE 2
Die now.

VOICE 3
Die now.

GROUP *(chanting)* Die now! Die now! Die now! Die now! Die now! Die now!...

The pounding resounds through the room. The group at the table, Edward at the door.

BEATRICE *(over them)* Dollie!! Dollie where are you?!

DOLLIE They have me. They have me Bea Bea! Fight them!

BEATRICE How?!

The group bares their teeth, oozing blood from their mouths. Beatrice shakes Dollie at them.

BEATRICE RELEASE HER!! RELEASE HER OR I WILL TEAR YOU ALL APART IF I HAVE TO!!

RELEASE US!!!!

One by one Mrs. Hayes, Alise, Mr. Hayes, and Father McLaggen stop drumming and spit a mouthful of blood at Beatrice and Dollie, spattering them both. The doors shakes as Edward rams his shoulder into it.

Silence...

BEATRICE Dollie.... Dollie.....?

DOLLIE Bea Bea... I'm sorry...

BEATRICE *(broken)* Dollie?.....

No answer.

EDWARD *(off stage)* Get a pick hammer, anything. Go. We're coming in!

The group stands from the table, blocking the way between Beatrice and the door. Beatrice leaps out of her seat and backs away, crippled in fear but ready to fight as they stalk toward her. She rips a knife from Dollie's body and clutches it before her.

BEATRICE Stay back! Stay back or I will cut you all down!!

The group closes in on Beatrice until...

DOLLIE *(mocking)* Ow Beatrice I'm dead... I'm dying... They spit their blood at me and I'm dead... I'm dying... I'm dead... I'm dying...

From across the room Eleanor appears, speaking in Dollie's voice.

ELEANOR I'm dead... I'm dying....

Beatrice's heart falls through the floor.

BEATRICE No... no...

ELEANOR A Guardian Angel come to life in your Dollie to protect you...You always had a weak imagination. *(gesturing to the room)* I, on the other hand...

There is nothing that will save you from me. I am your fate and you are nothing more than a sacrifice. A helpless little lamb to slaughter.

The Mystic digs into the ground beneath her, strengthening her stance, and readying herself.

MYSTIC Focus, deary...

Eleanor gestures with her hand and the group obediently returns to their seated positions, hands on the table. Eleanor slams a fist on the air beside her and they resume pounding the table in rhythm.

Edward pounds on the door.

EDWARD Beatrice! Eli! What's going on in there? Stop this!

The Mystic prays in guttural, demonic tongues. Eleanor steps toward Beatrice as she sings, savoring the moment.

ELEANOR Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...

The lights in the room glow.

Don't you ever, ever, ever trust my mercy...

Brighter. Brighter. The rhythmic pounding vibrates in every corner as Eleanor approaches. The Mystic chants louder.

BEATRICE You stay back.

Beatrice backs away, holding the knife up and the lights waver briefly. The Mystic takes note immediately.

MYSTIC Focus deary.

Eleanor raises her hands and reaches out into the beyond, drawing the surrounding matter into her Being as she approaches Beatrice.

ELEANOR Spirits. Help me!

The pounding thumps through the floor and up the walls. The lights radiate with Eleanor's strength and Beatrice throws herself against the back wall.

BEATRICE Stay back!

Brighter. Brighter. Eleanor clenches her eyes closed as she stretches beyond her reach.

ELEANOR Goddess! Help me!

BEATRICE Your hands will have no vengeance on me!

MYSTIC Focus now! And take this woman's life!!!

Eleanor fills every fragment of her Being she can but the lights falter.

EDWARD Beatrice! Get out of there!

BEATRICE Do you hear me?!!!

ELEANOR Help me!

BEATRICE I will depart at my own will.

Eleanor screams out through the heavens and beyond with every ounce of life she can summon! The lights flare and quake.

AND YOU CAN ROT FOREVER IN HELL!!!

Beatrice turns the knife on herself and in one hateful motion rips open her own throat. Her last words curdle in the spewing blood that erupts from her neck and she falls stone dead to the floor.

ELEANOR No!!!

The lights fall to a dim glow and the Group falls to the floor. Eleanor rushes to Beatrice and tries to catch her but fails. Eleanor's hands rush to grab Beatrice's neck but she cannot touch her. She desperately searches for a sense of touch anywhere on Beatrice's body and, in one last effort, attempts to squeeze her neck but makes no connection with her skin. She has failed.

ELEANOR No, no, no. You were supposed to die by my hands. By my hands!!

Eleanor relents and slumps on her knees, swaying like leaf in a soft breeze. The Group writhes on the floor, still unconscious. As if their souls were trying to squeeze back into their bodies. Silence...

Suddenly, Eleanor's eyes dart around and shoots up, searching and calling out.

She's dead. She's dead, I've had my vengeance. Take me. Take me, please. Take me!

Eleanor closes her eyes and raises her hands. She desperately reaches her fingertips to Heaven.

Please... Goddess?... Please let me go...

Edward breaks open the door and runs to the dead Beatrice lying on the floor. He picks her up and holds her, in shock as her blood soaks his shirt. Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, Father McLaggen, and Alise slowly awake as if from a long night of heavy drinking.

Edward looks to them as they barely become aware of what they're seeing.

EDWARD What happened?

The Mystic looks to Eleanor as she opens her eyes.

MYSTIC I have nothing left to offer you... I am so sorry child...

Lights fade to black....

Mourning

Edward sits in his library, still wearing Beatrice's blood on his shirt and drinking. Staring into a far-off nowhere.

Eleanor appears. She looks at Edward a moment and then to those before her – the Dead.

ELEANOR Not all stories have a happy ending. You need to understand that. Death is never pleasant.

Eleanor goes to Edward and lays her hand hovering on his shoulder, unable to touch him. She tries to lay her head on his, but no touch lands.

(to Edward) I remember the first time we touched. We were so young. Your family came to her home for dinner... I was told to eat in my bedroom and not to come out until you were all gone. But suddenly you burst through the door and crept gently down the stairs into my room. We must have only been 10 or 11 years old at the time. You were tall and bright eyed then! You saw me and put your finger to your, “shh, I'm hiding”. You asked why I wasn't playing upstairs and before I could answer, Beatrice's mother swung open the door and stampeded down the steps. “What are you doing here, young man? You shouldn't be playing with *her*.” You held my hands behind our backs and stood before that vile woman. It was the *first kind touch* I'd felt in so long. She took you but from then on my heart lit up every time I saw you.

I'm so sorry, love. I'm sorry to leave you lost... Like me... Like our darlings...

Like Rose... 'Our first little Rosebud' we would call her... The first, and then – a garden!..

She would have curly, burnt umber hair. You would teach to ride a horse, and I would teach her how to fish. None of those traditionally 'girly' things for our first Rosebud. The first of our children would bloom *strong*. She would protect her siblings and grow as tall as any tree in the forest. She would flourish in the skyline and look upward at no one...

...But our first flower never blossomed. Not even a leaf... A sprout, frozen in time... Her life vanished into the soil... and poisoned the whole garden...

...

Then there was Luke. Our second. Rather, I called him 'Luke' to myself in private. You didn't want to name our second child until he was born... I was certain he'd be a boy. A cheerful little boy, like you were, to bring the joy we'd lost back into our lives... He was

with us a few months...

(playful) Adelia. Who would have bright, diamond-blue eyes, I'd decided. And a very mischievous but fun and playful personality... We knew her only a few weeks...

Then came Ben. Our strapping young Benjamin. Who would stand tall and proud, the perfect counterpart to his oldest sister... *(resolute)* He was strong. He would be just. A kind, compassionate young man, with a steady hand. Not like the men before his time; better. A scrupulous man of morals.

I remember the flood of joy when we held him. His blinking eyes barely catching a glimpse of us before he fell into a deep sleep. I touched his soft, dark umber hair and I plead to him. "Stay with me. Stay with your mother. She will be kind to you, and gentle. She will sing you sweet songs. She will cherish you as you grow, and you will never want for love."... But for all our strength combined, life refused to reside in him...

I felt it when it happened. I never told you that. I felt him *leave*. I *knew* because I could feel a part of my own flesh and soul leave with him... Shrouding him as he crossed...

...

I never saw you cry again after that.... Nor smile... And that was the last time you ever touched me...

The light flickers and a cold, gentle wind blows through the room. Edward is frozen.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

ELEANOR *(softly)* Knock, knock, knock... knock, knock, knock...

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK from the other side of the room. She looks to it.

The Sentry of Death enters.

ELEANOR Knock, knock, knock...

What business do you have here? I'm finished.

No answer.

She said you wanted me to succeed.

The Sentry of Death gestures for Eleanor to follow as she leaves.

No.

The Sentry of Death stops and turns. She gestures again.

No. I am no longer yours to torment.

The Sentry of Death regards Eleanor a moment and then speaks for the first time. Her voice burns and crackles like charcoal embers.

S.O.D. *Come with meeee child of Earth. You willl not sssee me againnn...*

The Sentry of Death wanders off, leaving darkness behind her. Eleanor follows.

Betrayal

Eleanor follows the Sentry of Death in to see Beatrice brushing herself off and leaving Eleanor's body on the shore again.

ELEANOR Is this my punishment for failing? Am I to watch her murder me over and over again?
Question everything forever? Live in a perpetual state of dying?

The Sentry of Death raises her lantern as Edward edges in, looking around. He goes to Eleanor's lifeless body. He checks to ensure Beatrice is gone. Edward kneels and turns over Eleanor's body, wincing, then covering her face and closing her eyes.

Eleanor, standing next to The Sentry of Death, closes her eyes with Edward's movement and is silent. Listening carefully.

Edward brings himself to look at her and then...

EDWARD I didn't know you'd be here too. I came to – ... It seems you arrived before me...

I thought you were still at the party, finishing off what's left of the wine. (*stopping himself*)... I'm sorry. That was unkind...

I always imagined we would go together. We'd been attached to one another as long as I can remember, how could either of us go on without the other?... I guess that changed with time...

Edward looks in the direction Beatrice went. And then to Eleanor.

I'm sorry to say that I wished to be free. Of us... Of all our pain...But I couldn't bring myself to be free of you... So I came here to free you from me... Thinking perhaps without me you might be able to go on and leave everything behind...

Edward pulls a letter from his pocket.

I meant to leave this in your room before I left. When I got here I found I'd forgotten.

And then – on my way back...

He glances in Beatrice's direction again. He opens the envelope and unfolds the letter.

You weren't supposed to find this until tomorrow...

“My Dearest Ellie. No words that surround you at this moment will bring you comfort, I imagine. I hope my words are the exception. I am sorry that it has come to this.

It's clear that our marriage has rotted, and with it, our love for one another. Long enduring, though it may be, it seems as though it's life has run out and I cannot bare to be with you anymore. We have endured pain enough at the hands of life and each other, how could we ever continue? I know I cannot.

I wish you to go on and live a happy life. Whatever joy you may find, however you may find it. Leave everything that shattered us behind, take what money we have left, sell everything, and go. Leave me behind. Leave our home of sorrow and do anything you must to rid yourself of this pain. And let me rest. Painless.

I will always love you.

Edward”

You were meant to live on, not me. *(looking around for an answer)* I feel strange, I feel – relief.

Is this right? Would you have wished that for me? That I should live on... ?

I wish I could mourn you in the way you deserve. I've already mourned for far too long. I have nothing left... *(breathes deeply looking out)* I feel...

Edward rests his hand on Eleanor's chest, and closes his eyes.

I will bring you with me, everywhere I go...

He goes to press his forehead to hers when suddenly Eleanor's eyes shoot open and she GASPS, desperate for breath! Edward jumps back.

Eleanor chokes and gasp's, barely clinging to life. She sees Edward and weakly reaches for him.

ELEANOR Edward... Help...

Edward is frozen.

I can't – *(she chokes)*

Eleanor reaches but is too weak to grasp him. Edward goes to Eleanor and kneels before her. He grabs

her hand and strokes her cheek, wiping the lake and tears from her face.

EDWARD Shhh sh sh... It's okay, I'm here.

ELEANOR *(still gasping for breath)* I can't...

EDWARD I know, I know. Sh, it's alright I'm here.

ELEANOR Help –

EDWARD It's ok. Go to sleep. Everything will be fine.

Edward lays his hands on Eleanor's cheeks, cradling her head as she fights to keep it off the ground.

Everything will be fine. Just close your eyes.

Edwards hands drain with the water cascading from Eleanor's face to her neck.

We'll be alright.

Every muscle in Edward's body tenses before he can squeeze his hands.

ELEANOR Edwa... *(choking)* Ed – ...

EDWARD Shhhh shh... Just go to sleep... Shh...

Tighter. Tighter. Eleanor struggles until her eyes go blank, her breath leaves, her head collapses, and she stands limp beside the Sentry of Death.

EDWARD Rest. Painless...

Edward opens his eyes to the lifeless Eleanor before him, eyes open, gazing out into nothing. He stares, blank; an empty shell.

Almost without control he reaches forward to close Eleanor's eyes and lays a hand on her chest. He closes his eyes in a brief moment of silence, trembling.

When his eyes open he snaps back into the present, finds the letter on the ground and stuffs it in his coat pocket. Forcing himself to look away, he stands, adjusts himself, and hurries off into the distance.

Vengeance

Consciousness snaps back into Eleanor as she sucks in a deep breath, returning with the Sentry of Death to Edward's library.

ELEANOR Why?! Why did you have to show me this?

(sobbing) Why?.....

Are you so envious of the living that you must tear apart our lives before we die! Why couldn't you just leave me in peace!

Eleanor's head falls in defeat as she sobs. The Sentry of Death lifts Eleanor's head with a ragged hand.

SOD Nooo peeeaaace...

Edward returns to the library and pours another drink.

Claiim. Yourrr. Peeaacce...

The Sentry of Death turns and disappears into the shadows. Eleanor calls after her.

ELEANOR No! No, you can't! Don't make me. You can't!

The lights flicker in the library and Edward pivots, listening again for the voice he just heard. Eleanor sobs and the lights quiver with her. Henry runs in.

HENRY Sir, the –

EDWARD Sh! Did you hear that just now?

HENRY What?

EDWARD That cry.

The lights continue to sob with Eleanor.

Look, the lights.

HENRY Sir. The men have set fire to the mill. Everything is burning.

EDWARD *(snapping out of it)* Get every loyal man we can down there! Now!

Edward storms out. Henry turns to follow him but stops to see the pulsing lights before leaving.

Eleanor releases her face and clenches her hands to fists.

ELEANOR How could you? ... You have become as *cold* and *loveless* as your entire family!

How can you live? How can you selfishly live? How could you thief my life in favor of your own.

You loved me as I loved you, and I loved you my whole life! If you cannot bear your own life then go on and take it, you had no right to mine! I could have lived! *We* could have lived...

Adjusting her gaze to those before her, Eleanor speaks to the Ghosts in waiting.

We shoulder burdens from our lives. Great stones mounted atop our backs. That's why we're here. Releasing them in death is akin to no pain you ever felt in your life. Such is the price for peace.

Who among you can stand when the distant call comes? When your soul is heavy and it beckons you to put your feet forward, speak your final vow, and go on.

Thunder rolls in and Eleanor turns her gaze to the Ethers.

Can you still hear me?...

Eleanor listens for an answer but only the storm rolls on.

Let there be no witness but *you* and *me*... If you led me here to torment me... If there is to be no recompense for my pain. I will **haunt** you. I will find a way, and I will spend my existence to bring you pain.

A beat of silence. Faint and distant thunder.

Be with me. Grant me your darkness. Bleed my soul dry, and fill me with the hate to go on.

Grant me cruel hands, snatch out my heart and let me rise as a towering vessel of Death crying, 'Vengeance!!'

Thunder cracks and rolls.

Do you hear me? Do you hear me?! Tonight I rage with you!!

Crack, CRACK! She faces down the departed Edward.

And tonight I will claim my vengeance. And then I will rest.

She follows him out.

The Hauntess of Moon Lake

Edward stumbles in, coughing into his handkerchief, Henry follows. Their eyes are red and dripping, their faces and clothes are blotched with ash. In the distance a great fire grows. They fall to the shore of Moon Lake and wash the smoke out of their eyes.

Edward blinks as he regains his vision. He stops when he realizes, and then rests his hand on the ground.

Henry stands and pulls at the back of Edward's shirt.

HENRY Come on. We have to –

Edward slaps his hands away.

EDWARD Go.

HENRY We've got to –

Henry goes to grab him and again Edward slaps away his hands.

EDWARD Go back to the house and get everyone out!

HENRY No –

Edward stands and goes to Henry.

EDWARD Get everything you need. Take the horses and don't look back. I'll be right behind you.

HENRY Edw –

EDWARD *(pushing him away)* Go Henry! People will die. I'll be right behind you. Go!

Henry runs off.

... Thank you...

Edward turns back to the lake and kneels at the shore; on the ground where Eleanor died. He rests his hand on the ground, closes his eyes, and breathes a deep breath. Thunder rolls.

I didn't know you'd be here too... You're here for me?

Thunder rumbles.

Then you know... No apology could grant forgiveness, so I won't say it. Call me murderer. Call me coward. I owed you more.

Thunder rolls and Edward stands, calling out.

Go on, strike me down! Seize my heart and collect my soul! I can't be saved. I don't deserve it.

(snaps) “I cannot love you anymore!” “I cannot bear *us* anymore!” “I wish to be free of one another and live my life away!” Are these such impossible words to say?!

You haunted me before your death. Each day I looked into your eyes and I saw the woman I love decaying alive. And I stole away what life you had left because I could not help you or mend you, and my heart broke into smaller pieces every time I looked into your eyes and saw another piece had fallen away.... I still see you in my mind. You still haunt me.

Lightning flashes and the sound of thunder rumbles closer.

I'm here. Take me where you will. *(closing his eyes)* Shatter me and let me leave this world.

Whispers. Faint and distant.

A sudden CRACK of thunder and lighting overhead, Edward clenches his eyes.

And then whispers again. Faint. Friendly, joyous. Children's laughter. Edward opens his eyes and searches.

Rose?... Ben?... Go to your Mother... Your father's path leads elsewhere I'm afraid...

Another set of Voices overtakes the others. More aggressive. They grow closer and clearer.

VOICE 1

Betrayer...

VOICE 2

Coward...

VOICE 3

What kind of
man are you?

VOICE 1

You betrayed me...

VOICE 2

Gutless coward..

VOICE 3

How could you?!

VOICE 4

A young man ought not
to show any signs of
weakness, lest he betray
the very essence of manhood.

VOICE 5

You weakling!

VOICE 2

Murderer...

VOICE 3

You coward!

VOICE 4

What are you doing, boy?

VOICE 5

Look at little
Edward. Like

VOICE 1
Betrayer...

Stand up for yourself!

a little girl.

VOICE 2
You filthy snake...

The Voices swell and repeat, surrounding him in deafening chaos as the surrounding storm swirls. Edward paces as he calls out. The Voices poke and prod violently in the chaos.

EDWARD (over the voices) I'm sorry!! Forgive me!! Please!! Take my life and forgive me!!

The Voices repeat, loudly until everything falls black and silent. Behind Edward the forest glows with mystic light and distant fire.

VOICE 1
Why?...

VOICE 2
I loved you so much...

VOICE 3
I don't want it
to end like this...

VOICE 1
How?...

VOICE 2
And you loved me...

VOICE 3
But it must...

The trees and moon glow bright, blinding, as Eleanor fully manifests behind Edward. He turns to see her, agape at the glory of her resurrection.

EDWARD (whispers) Ellie...

The Voices whisper together.

VOICE 1
Goodbye...

VOICE 2
Goodbye...

VOICE 3
Goodbye...

EDWARD Good bye...

Eleanor lunges onto Edward, gripping his neck, forcing him to the ground, and choking him violently. She cries out in agony as lightning flashes and thunder rolls. Edward is dead.

Eleanor lifts her face from his lifeless body as the storm breaks. She closes his eyes and, for a moment, rests her palm on his chest and bids him a loving farewell.

Darkness consumes everything except for a beam of light from the full moon shining only on her: The Hauntess of Moon Lake.

Epilogue

To the Dead.

ELEANOR I'm here now. In the place beyond all life as we know it... *(smiling to herself)* Well, as you know it... Don't ask me to explain, I couldn't possibly... It's not something that can be understood through language.... It's a feeling. A "Being" state. *(she finds it)* A profoundly joyous understanding. Existing. But not... *(she looks down at Edward)* I don't know where he is... We've drifted far apart from one another... I hold no hate for him. Nor love. I have let him go. I hope he unburdens himself. Death changes us all.

The forest illuminates around Eleanor with the cool glow of new growth as she rises. She looks around at the wonder of a life she once knew, changing with time before her eyes.

The forest returned. Moon Lake remained. Death gives way to life.

In many of your books of faith it says, "No one will know the hour or day of their death." When we die... after... we don't get to know why, we don't get to know how, and we don't get to know when. But, before we leave, some of us get to know a little more than others... Soon you will wake up. You may wake to dark times. But now that you understand... Should you prevail...

A dim light shines through a distant threshold. Eleanor notices it, but does not look. In the vast surrounding distance, stars whisper and pulse, calling.

I imagine where I am is not where all who have transcended mortal life end up. But, neither am I alone... You'll be there. In your own place, in your own time... I don't know how you'll get there. We never know. That's not my part.

Faint sounds of children's laughter peak through the threshold. It catches Eleanor's attention and she smiles as she looks to it. She returns her attention to the Dead.

Dying once was enough for me.

Eleanor turns and glides to the light. She halts before the threshold a moment and then, with a single unburdened breath, steps through and disappears into the void.

BLACK OUT

END OF PLAY