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The Dreamer Deepe: A Two-Act Play in the Lovecraft Horror Mythos

Nicholas Mazzuca

Clemson University, ipsofacto2244@yahoo.com

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THE DREAMER DEEPE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Nicholas John Mazzuca
May 2009

Accepted by:
Mark Charney, Chair
Alma Bennett
Elizabeth Rivlin

ABSTRACT

One full-length, two-act play comprises this creative thesis, which has been submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in English literature. This manuscript showcases a creative work that fuses two separate genres: literary horror and dramatic theory. I take my vocabulary from a preexisting body of work so that I may generate something vital and new. May the words I write honor those who have gone before me and inspire as I have been inspired.

DEDICATION

To my parents: Steve and Mary Mazzuca. A writer's family is the genesis of his work. They are mine.

To my friends: John Grüber and Terrence M. Brennan. I cannot express how much I am grateful for these two men. We share a language through which I have learned to speak truth.

Most importantly, to Danielle: You are my North Star on whose light I fix my axis. No night is truly dark with you in my sky.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank the members of my committee. Their feedback has helped me be a better writer, both as an entertainer and as a scholar. Many, many thanks to Mark Charney, professor and colleague. He helped me remember that my first, best destiny was to be a playwright. Fellow playwright David Jacobi also deserves a nod for one sentence spoken over a pint of beer: “Wouldn’t it be cool to write a Lovecraft play?” Indeed, it was. Further thanks must be given to Philip Glass, Joshua Bell, and the Kronos String Quartet. Nary a single night’s worth of writing has passed without their music in my iTunes queue and a hot mug of chai in my hand. Terry Brennan and the Tribe of Fools taught me how to think with my body. The lifeguards at the McHugh Natatorium witnessed most of this play being written in Lane #8, and the miles traveled in their pool helped me reach this destination. My love, Danielle, helped me find the strength in the most trying of times. Finally, I must thank the late H.P. Lovecraft, the writer in whose sandbox I have played. *Cthulhu Fhtagn.*

THE DREAMER DEEPE

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INTRODUCTION

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.”

- H.P. Lovecraft
“Supernatural Horror in Literature”

Preface

Theatre is a truly multimodal art form, ephemeral in its execution yet concrete in its recording, a tangible transaction between author and audience at its most immediate. The potential of this immediacy--the direct effect that a writer may have on his or her audience--has been of prime fascination in my art. Despite the mediation/translation between the two by the performers, director, and designers, a playwright's words find no more honest critique than the reactions from those audience members experiencing the spectacle.

In selecting the focus of my creative thesis, I considered several different possibilities, from an archetype-based children's narrative to an avant-garde performance piece to a millennialist performance poem. After surveying several different genres and writers, I was drawn to the weird tales and horror writings of Howard Philips Lovecraft. After reviewing his work and major themes, I found a rich tableau upon which to experiment, ideas ripe for adaptation. The primal emotion of fear is the most immediate--one with vast potential to explore the playwright's power to affect an audience.

In this creative thesis, I have created a work of dramatic literature inspired by the horror genre. Though an original work, my play both acknowledges and inhabits the mythos that Lovecraft created, yielding a piece of dramatic literature that is both original and adapted. For this piece, the themes that I explore (the menace of a vast expanse as applied to

the Nebraska Plains, fear via uncertainty and isolation, and the tension between masculine and feminine notions of creation and fertility) speak to my desires to create a play that embodies the Lovecraft mythos.

Lovecraft and His Influence

Howard Philips Lovecraft and his legacy of short stories and novellas gained him entry into the pantheon of American horror fiction alongside Edgar Allen Poe, another focal point of American literature noted for “weird tales” (as Lovecraft and his contemporaries labeled the genre). Lovecraft himself wrote a seminal exploration of the horror genre with his “Supernatural Horror in Literature” (published in 1927) wherein he surveyed the great masters of the form with a particular focus on Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Lovecraft’s horror fiction depicts an omnipresent atmosphere of dread. All works are set in Lovecraft’s contemporaneous present day, but each narrative has roots in a past haunted by great forces older and more powerful than man. Likewise, Lovecraft portrays two worlds: one of human perception, the other of “truth” that lies just beyond the human ken. Most succinctly, Lovecraft illustrates this concept with the opening lines of his most famous short story, “The Call of Cthulhu”:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity; and it was not meant that we should voyage far. (Lovecraft, *Tales* 167)

In “The Call of Cthulhu,” Lovecraft ushered in his most-noted creation: the Cthulhu Mythos. This mythos, later expanded to comprise most, if not all of Lovecraft’s writing,

describes supernatural and extraterrestrial creatures of immense destructive power that lack any regard for the concerns of humanity. These beings, the most famous being the eponymous Cthulhu, rarely appear physically in Lovecraft's stories. Instead, he keeps them as background elements, only allowing their influence to be made manifest at moments of great revelation and horror. Often, Lovecraft favored describing the effects that these indescribable horrors had upon the humans observing them. The climactic escape scene of his novella "At the Mountains of Madness" features an Antarctic explorer, Danforth, going insane at the sight of one of these leviathans:

All that Danforth has ever hinted is that the final horror was a mirage. It was not, he declares, anything connected with the cubes and caves of those echoing, vaporous, wormily-honeycombed mountains of madness which we crossed; but a single fantastic, demoniac glimpse, among the churning zenith clouds, of what lay back of those other violet westward mountains [...]. It is very probable that the thing was a sheer delusion born of the previous stresses we had passed through, [...] but it was so real to Danforth that he suffers from it still. (Lovecraft *Tales* 586)

Another key feature of Lovecraft's oeuvre is his sense of space and place. To amplify the atmospheric nature of his horror, Lovecraft demonstrates his keen grasp of location by setting most of his stories in New England, or, at least, having his characters hail from there. Lovecraft harnessed the sense of history inherent in that part of the country to lend to the withered mysticism of his stories. For example, Lovecraft's 1937 short story "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," portrays a decayed seaport that had once been a vital hub of colonial fishing. Through the narrator's odyssey through the town and his own family tree, it is

revealed that the pall hanging over Innsmouth is not only a function of the weather but also a metaphor for the evil that has infected the townsfolk.

As a writer from a region with a discernable culture, I was attracted to Lovecraft's writing, especially his use of space and place with regards to the New England of his birth. How, then, might this same sensibility be applied to the plains of my native Nebraska? Lovecraft's New England towns and wooded communities all sat upon the bourns of sea or wilderness as constant reminders of the untamed "other" that threatened to consume society. The Great Plains and their seas of corn and wheat provide a different sense of isolation, but one just as vast and potentially destructive. Stephen Crane, in his short story "The Blue Hotel," remarked at this very same idea--that the endless, pitiless prairie was not a homeland but a force from which one sought shelter. In my play, I wished to explore how to make the environment of the Great Plains a place of foreboding, one that becomes almost a "character" in its depiction.

Beyond the atmospheric dread in Lovecraft's fiction, I remarked at the sense of isolation present in many of his works. This is due in part to the location, but also to the separation that occurs when one of his characters begins to realize the greater powers at work. With the aforementioned "At the Mountains of Madness," the comrades of the Antarctic expedition who encountered the Old Ones have scattered, and Danforth, who had seen an Old One directly, refuses to reveal his knowledge to the world. The story inspires the question, "If one is isolated within a hostile milieu, does that isolation circle in upon itself, creating a Moebius strip of self-directed hostility?" Such an idea warrants exploration within a dramatic venue. Moreover, I am eager to see it work within the Great Plains.

Another key feature of Lovecraft's work is the de-emphasis of the feminine. Female characters are relatively rare throughout his tales, and his narrators speak with a detached, masculine voice. How, then, might the masculine and feminine interact if the two were made equal characters in the narrative? If the horrors of the Lovecraftian world are eternal (at least, on a human timescale), how does one bring a child into a world where evil exists and seeps into all it touches?

Playwriting and Dramatic Theory

Playwriting must take into account how the structure and genre (as it pertains to style, rather than subject matter) will affect the final presentation. Likewise, as I am to draw from a literary vocabulary (in this case, Lovecraftian horror), I must acknowledge the forms therein and translate them to stage. Prose may describe performance, but it can never be truly immediate. Performance may evoke prose, but the audience is always at a remove rather than serving as an active participant. As in the case of a play inspired by a preexisting work (or body of work), there is a compromise between the two that honors the original while venturing into new territory. Thus, the development of a new play becomes a matter of working both from the outside in and the inside out.

In choosing a format for a supernatural horror play, I acknowledge two competing instincts. On the one hand, the supernatural elements encourage discarding naturalism. However, the inherent strangeness almost begs a realistic presentation to serve as the conduit through which I may convey the fantastic. While considering the format of the play, I decided to utilize the format of "the well-made play" whereby the plot builds sequentially

over the course of the narrative. Any digressions into the past are told not via flashback but as personal accounts. The narrative then culminates with a climax and quick denouement.

This format, that of the well-made, traditionally structured play, is a departure from my previous plays, *Through the Blue Door* and *Mermaids of Parys*. Both of them exhibited a movement-based avant-garde aesthetic with fluid transitions in time, space, and perceived reality. For this challenge, I decided to adhere to the strictures of the form, not only to translate the Lovecraft aesthetic of dread to the stage, but also my own kinesthetic sense.

In speaking of Lovecraft's aesthetic, I grant the highly literary conventions of his style, seeking to incorporate them within a theatrical context. When viewed through this lens, Lovecraft's narrative construction aligns effectively with the notion of the well-made play. His stories tend to progress in a linear fashion with a final horrific revelation at the end. In addition, while the subtext of his work examines the surreal, the actions, descriptions, and matter usually remain firmly within the confines of the "normal." For example, the primary action of "The Whisperer in Darkness" centers around a rural cabin in Vermont with contemporaneous technology: phonographs, wood cabins, and kerosene lamps. Further in, though, Lovecraft reveals menacing winged extraterrestrials, disembodied brains, and stolen bodies. Lovecraft's stories establish verisimilitude as a means of justifying the incredible.

The one element of Lovecraft's style that seems most difficult to translate is his use of language. Lovecraft frequently uses archaic spellings and long, winding descriptions that coil within themselves. At first, this would seemingly undermine any attempts at a realistic translation. I, however, view the inherently unnatural rhythms of those passages potentially as either signals of the unnatural or as pieces of a spoken-word soundscape. I experiment with the use of monologue as a counterpoint to the inhuman sounds. Additionally, the

constant patter of human speech creates its own dramatic effect. This is used to create different moods throughout the play.

Departing from the matters of adaptation, I was also interested in experimenting with a few key narrative elements. For one, I was curious how I can illustrate the milieu in text via stage direction and general mood. While set on the Nebraska Plains, the action will take place within the house and in a netherworld beneath. I focused on creating a practical, believable *mise-en-scene* that depicts and amplifies the action. Likewise, I was interested in refining my depictions of female characters. While the female characters in my previous plays were convincing, I sought to refine my female characterizations between old, young, aggressive, and passive, especially in light of the exploration of masculine and feminine in the horror genre. My two female characters, Jenny and Rebecca, demonstrate two very different senses of maternal femininity. They are products of their circumstances.

Finally, there is one element that will be most challenging. I hoped to establish a tone/mood that acknowledges the Nebraskan setting and explores all of said setting's potential for fear. As someone who has relocated to multiple disparate places, I am often asked the question, "What is it like to be from Nebraska?" I hope that this adaptation at least partially answers that question.

I intended *The Dreamer Deepe* to be an exercise that blends my love of intellectual fear with visceral theatricality. H.P. Lovecraft's mythos taps into primal fears. Those fears and the oppression inherent in the milieu create a potent mix, which my characters will inhabit and from which, I hope, great drama will emerge.

THE DREAMER DEEPE

A Two-Act Play in the Lovecraft Horror Mythos

SETTING

A farmhouse on the Nebraska plains

STAGING NOTES

The set is separated into four quadrants, each distinct from the others. They may be made concrete as a practical space or merely suggested and stripped down to their vital elements depending on the demands of individual theatres and productions. While each of these quadrants are arranged in relation to each other, they must all give a sense of isolation from one another.

A Salon – stairs, couch, a chair, and a gramophone

A Parlor – a table, chairs

A Bedroom – bed, desk, chair

A Cellar – light, shadow, stone, dirt, and wood

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Jonathan – A professor in his thirties

Rebecca – A woman in her late fifties

Ian - A writer in his later twenties

Jenny – A sixth grade teacher in her twenties

Act I: Scene One

(A farmhouse on the Great Plains – late into the night. Wind howls across the tall grass and against the aged walls.)

Darkness. Wind. A creak of timbers. From somewhere distant yet immediate, a great, pained gurgling like the juices of a vast stomach waiting hungrily to digest a morsel. An infant cries.

The Salon: REBECCA sits in a chair next to the bell of a gramophone, elegant in her repose and striking in her features. Around her, the sparse, rustic décor of Depression-era wood furniture carries the weight of years – or decades.)

REBECCA: *(Speaking into the gramophone)* It's dark out here at night. Turn out the lights, and you can see all of the stars.

(The Salon fades from view.)

The Cellar: JONATHAN enters, candle in one hand, swaddling in the other. The flickering light betrays the heavy labor in his steps. The baby continues its colicky squeal as JONATHAN kneels and sets it down. From off, the sound of a car. JONATHAN places his hand over the swaddling and presses, smothering the cries. A fierce banging sounds from off. JONATHAN shudders with a start, and then continues pressing the infant until its cries fade. A beat. The gurgling subsides, and JONATHAN blows out the candle as the banging grows louder and more insistent. The barest illumination reveals the empty Salon.)

JENNY: *(o/s)* Try the door.

(The Salon: The door opens, and JENNY and IAN enter, bundled up in winter attire, the cold air having bitten them harshly. IAN scans the dark interior with a cheap flashlight. They press the door shut, quieting the relentless howl of the plains wind.)

IAN: It's empty.

JENNY: Are you sure?

IAN: *(Calling out)* Hello!

(A beat)

JENNY: Is there even any power here?

IAN: Might be – it's not as cold in here.

JENNY: I'm cold.

IAN: You're always cold. Look for a telephone – we'll call for a tow in the morning.

JENNY: I can't believe we left the car charger back at the house.

IAN: We didn't. It's in my car.

JENNY: We should have taken *your* car.

IAN: *We* shouldn't have been talking so long.

JENNY: What do you want me to do? There's nothing to look at – just grass and more grass and a cow every so often. (*A beat*) Anything?

IAN: No.

JENNY: You can't find the light switch?

IAN: It's an old farmhouse. Who knows if this place ever had power?

JENNY: The Rural Electrification Act was one of the most successful programs of the New Deal, resulting in the illumination of thousands of farmhouses that had only known candlelight.

(IAN turns the flashlight toward her and stares.)

IAN: Ok.

JENNY: Their reports on the New Deal were due before break.

IAN: What kind of sixth grader uses “illumination?”

JENNY: Sienna's smart.

IAN: Sienna's going to grow up to be a pretentious bitch.

JENNY: You told me you used “illumination” when you were in sixth grade.

IAN: I grew up to be a writer.

JENNY: What's the difference?

IAN: Sienna will probably get paid more than I do.

JENNY: (*Quietly*) Yeah.

(They exchange glances. IAN turns away and fumbles around, the floor creaking beneath him. He bangs against furniture and lets out a curse.)

IAN: Hey babe, can you see anything?

(A beat)

JENNY: You have the light, Ian.

(A beat)

IAN: What?

JENNY: Nothing.

IAN: No, what?

JENNY: What are we doing here?

IAN: We're looking for help.

JENNY: Here?

IAN: Your car isn't going anywhere. And your phone's dead. We're lucky we saw this place.

JENNY: Hmm. Lucky.

IAN: It's better than the wind.

(IAN pans the light around. JENNY looks down at the gramophone and glides her finger over it.)

JENNY: Somebody's here. *(Presenting her fingertip)* No dust.

(In the distance, creaking wood. JENNY and IAN huddle together, holding the darkness at bay with their flashlight.)

JONATHAN: *(o/s)* Becca! Is that you?

(The creaking gets nearer until a door at the top of some stairs opens, and another flashlight pierces the darkness. JONATHAN enters, light in one hand, a large piece of timber in the other.)

JONATHAN: Becca!

(JENNY and IAN's flashlight darts to JONATHAN, and he turns toward them.)

IAN: Please! Don't!

JONATHAN: What? Bec – who the hell are you? What are you doing here?

(JONATHAN raises the club at them menacingly. IAN and JENNY raise their hands reflexively and huddle next to each other. They freeze, dumbstruck.)

JONATHAN: Answer me!

IAN: We broke down!

JONATHAN: Why are you here?

JENNY: My phone is dead. We need to call for a tow.

(A beat. JONATHAN scans both of them back and forth with his flashlight.)

JONATHAN: You had a breakdown? What happened?

IAN: The engine just... I... I don't know – I'm not a mechanic.

JENNY: It just sputtered and died.

(A beat)

JONATHAN: So. You two had a breakdown. On a dark, stormy night.

JENNY: Yes.

JONATHAN: And you found this place so you could call for help?

IAN: I swear.

(A beat. Jonathan's uncertainty drops away.)

JONATHAN: *(Smirking)* All right. Wait here. *(Imitating Dr. Frank N. Furter from The Rocky Horror Picture Show)* I need to get my garters and stockings. I haven't shaved my legs in weeks.

(JENNY, then IAN, realizes the joke and giggles. JONATHAN lowers the club.)

JONATHAN: You two are lucky – the nearest neighbor is twenty miles away. The wind'd kill you with cold before you got there.

(As if on command, the house eases against the wind.)

JENNY: We didn't know if anyone was here.

IAN: There weren't any lights on. We didn't even know if this place got power.

JONATHAN: Heh. Of course it does – Rural Electrification Act of 1939.

JENNY: *(to LAN)* Hmm!

IAN: We couldn't find the light switch.

JONATHAN: The far wall.

(JONATHAN points his flashlight to the switch. LAN goes over, tripping over some furniture in the process.)

JENNY: Careful, Ian.

JONATHAN: Mind your step – this place is a death trap.

IAN: Yeah, I feel sorry for any burglars who get in here.

(LAN finds the light switch and turns it on. A few dull lights fill the house with a dirty yellow glow.)

JONATHAN: The old wiring doesn't do much these days.

IAN: How about the phone lines?

JONATHAN: Don't bother. They went down earlier.

(A beat – consternation from JENNY)

JENNY: So we're stuck here with no phone and no way to get out?

JONATHAN: You have a cell phone?

IAN: She does...

JENNY: It's dead.

JONATHAN: *(Reassuringly)* Then plug it in. You should get service out here – at least I did before I gave my leash the old heave-ho.

(JONATHAN motions to the location of a plug. JENNY pulls out her phone. JENNY grimaces.)

IAN: *(to JENNY)* Baby...

JENNY: *(Cutting him off)* Not right now.

JONATHAN: *(Interjecting)* You two look like you could use something warm.

IAN: Yeah.

JONATHAN: How about you to make your way to the parlor over there. *(Motioning with the club)* Give me a minute to put this away. You like tea? Cocoa?

JENNY: Sure.

IAN: Tea'd be good.

JENNY: Tea would be great.

JONATHAN: Go on in – I'll be there in a second.

(JENNY and IAN head toward the parlor. JONATHAN stops them.)

JONATHAN: Wait. *(Apologetic)* There's a lot of clutter. Please... ignore it. I didn't expect company, or I would have...

IAN: Don't worry about it.

JONATHAN: Thanks. It's a bit scary. *(A beat, extending his hand.)* By the way: Jonathan.

IAN: Ian.

JENNY: Jenny.

(They exit toward the Parlor. Blackout. In the darkness, a great, hungry grumble rises, then falls.)

Scene Two

(The lights return, illuminating both the Salon and the Parlor.)

The Parlor: JENNY and IAN survey the vast stacks of papers and manila folders strewn about the antique wooden table. There is a feverish, careful order to the mountain of pulp. JENNY pokes at a pile, grimaces, then sits in one of the wooden chairs. IAN takes a folder and thumbs through it carelessly. A kettle whistles offstage.)

JENNY: What time is it?

IAN: Late.

JENNY: How late?

IAN: After midnight. I think.

JENNY: Is my phone charged yet?

IAN: You just plugged it in.

JENNY: So let's try calling.

IAN: Babe, chill. Get some tea in you first.

(A tense pause)

JENNY: I want to get out of here.

IAN: Me too, baby. Soon.

(JONATHAN enters with tea.)

JONATHAN: Here you go: a little tea to make you feel better.

JENNY: Thanks.

(They take tea. JONATHAN looks to IAN who hands him the manila folder, which JONATHAN takes.)

IAN: Weird stuff you got there.

JENNY: Hon, that's rude.

JONATHAN: Not so much as you'd think – excuse me – Jenny, was it?

JENNY: Yes.

JONATHAN: *(Guarded)* Believe me, if anyone is conscious of just how peculiar this all seems, it's me.

IAN: What is all that?

JONATHAN: Not much. My research.

IAN: Oh?

JONATHAN: (*Hesitant*) Like this. Surveys of underwater phenomena.

IAN: (*Quizzical*) Underwater phenomena?

(*A beat. JONATHAN opens up.*)

JONATHAN: Things that shouldn't exist.

JENNY: Shouldn't exist?

JONATHAN: Several years back, the Navy picked up an ultra-low frequency sound on its sonar nets – the ones they use to find submarines. In this case, they picked up what sounds like an animal... but much, much larger than a blue whale.

JENNY: (*Reciting*) The blue whale is the largest organism on the planet – a giant to dwarf even the mighty dinosaurs that went extinct before it.

IAN: Sienna?

JENNY: MmmmmmmHmm.

JONATHAN: Come again?

JENNY: I have a very precocious student.

JONATHAN: You're a teacher?

JENNY: I teach sixth grade in Omaha.

JONATHAN: Ha. I taught back east. Miskatonic U.

JENNY: Isn't that an all-men's college?

JONATHAN: Not since the '60s.

IAN: I applied there. Didn't get in.

JONATHAN: (*Veiled bitterness*) No great loss. The rest of the university is like the archaeology department: stodgy, hidebound, and drowning in its own tradition.

JENNY: What are you doing all the way out here?

JONATHAN: I decided to take a year off to focus on some research.

IAN: On mysterious undersea “bloops?”

JONATHAN: Other things.

IAN: Such as?

(A beat)

JONATHAN: Things that shouldn’t be. *(Motioning to the table)* Things that have no explanation... or no good one.

(At that moment, the wind howls fiercely, causing JENNY and IAN to start. JONATHAN starts rearranging the papers on the table.)

JENNY: That’s just...

JONATHAN: Crazy? Creepy? Disturbing?

IAN: All of the above. *(Looking around)* This entire place feels like it’s out of the *Twilight Zone* or *X Files*.

(JONATHAN snickers.)

JONATHAN: Funny you should say that.

IAN: Why?

JONATHAN: I only say that to myself five times a day.

JENNY: Really? Then why are you here?

JONATHAN: I chose to. This house is part of my research. It’s haunted.

JENNY: Haunted?

JONATHAN: Yes.

JENNY: Wow. *(A beat)* Are you fooling with us?

JONATHAN: Nope.

(JENNY stands.)

JENNY: I’m going to check the charge on my phone.

IAN: You sure, babe?

JENNY: Yes.

(JENNY exits abruptly into the Salon and looks for her cell phone. IAN and JONATHAN share glances, acknowledging the awkwardness of the moment. IAN breaks the silence.)

IAN: Haunted?

JONATHAN: As I said.

IAN: *(Eager)* Like, how haunted?

JONATHAN: What do you mean?

IAN: Will we get to fight demons with a chainsaw?

(JONATHAN takes on a very formal tone. IAN mistakes it for offense.)

JONATHAN: Listen up... *(Grinning, imitating Bruce Campbell in Army of Darkness)* You primitive screwheads...

(IAN raises his right hand high holding an invisible shotgun.)

IAN: THIS IS MY BOOMSTICK!

(They chuckle.)

The Salon: JENNY fiddles with her unresponsive cell phone. Upon hearing the cry from the Parlor, she rolls her eyes at the boys sharing a laugh.)

JONATHAN: No. Nothing like that.

IAN: Damn.

JONATHAN: I know.

IAN: What, then?

JONATHAN: Sounds. Cold breezes. Feelings of dread.

(The wind picks up outside. JENNY hears footsteps from offstage.)

IAN: Ghosts? Apparitions?

(The footsteps get closer. JENNY turns to face them.)

JONATHAN: Depends.

(REBECCA enters at the top of the stairs. She approaches JENNY, regal yet withered.)

REBECCA: I heard voices. Who are you?

JENNY: I'm Jenny. I'm... *(Uncomfortable)* trying to get out.

REBECCA: Are you alone?

JENNY: No. Ian's in the next room with...

REBECCA: Jonathan. *(Calling out)* Jonathan?

(IAN and JONATHAN hear her. JONATHAN calls back.)

JONATHAN: I'll be right out, Rebecca.

(JONATHAN motions to IAN. IAN exits the Parlor and proceeds into the Salon. JONATHAN fusses with the papers a moment, then follows him.)

JONATHAN: We have guests. *(Motioning to REBECCA)* Ian, Jenny, this is Rebecca, my wife's mother.

IAN: I didn't realize you were married.

JONATHAN: Yes. My wife's taking a trip this week. She needed to get out of the house.

REBECCA: The house has a way of aggravating the nerves.

JONATHAN: While she's gone, Rebecca is staying here to make sure I don't take an axe to the bathroom door or anything.

IAN: *(To REBECCA)* We had car trouble. We just need to call Triple A. We'll be gone by morning.

(JENNY looks to IAN, gesturing with her cell phone.)

JENNY: No, we won't. No signal.

IAN: None?

JONATHAN: The tower must have gone down.

(A beat)

JENNY: We're stuck here.

REBECCA: No need to worry. This house is plenty big. You could sleep here tonight, and I'll make you a nice breakfast tomorrow morning.

JONATHAN: If the tower's down, they'll probably dispatch someone first thing.

(A beat. JENNY and IAN share looks.)

JENNY: Are you sure?

REBECCA: We'd be glad to have you. It's nice to speak to someone who doesn't have their nose buried in a book all day.

JENNY: Heh. He's a writer.

REBECCA: Really?

IAN: It's true.

REBECCA: Perhaps I've read something you're written.

IAN: Probably not. *(Changing the subject)* So, should we go get our stuff from the car?

REBECCA: *(Interjecting)* Jonathan, is the bed made?

(A beat)

JONATHAN: *(Caught off guard)* Yes.

REBECCA: You should let them take the master bedroom tonight. *(To JENNY and IAN)* It's the best room in the house.

JENNY: You don't need to.

IAN: We'll be glad to crash on the couch.

REBECCA: No. I insist. It's the least we could do. Besides, after a night like you've had, you deserve a rest.

(A beat. JONATHAN looks to REBECCA.)

IAN: It's no trouble?

JONATHAN: No. No trouble at all. I usually stay up at nights and work anyway.

IAN: Ok.

JENNY: Thank you.

JONATHAN: Come along, I'll show you the way.

(JENNY and LAN follow him out, leaving REBECCA to look after them. As they leave, REBECCA sits down in the chair next to the gramophone. She smiles to herself. Blackout.)

Scene Three

(The Bedroom: The wind blows. Lights up on the master bedroom. A large four-poster dominates the room. A wooden desk and chair sit to the side. The door creaks open as JONATHAN enters, leading JENNY and LAN in.)

JONATHAN: Here we go.

IAN: This is yours?

JONATHAN: Actually, all of this was here before.

IAN: Looks like it all just walked in from out of the past.

JONATHAN: Sometimes it feels that way.

JENNY: Are you sure you're ok with this?

JONATHAN: Of course.

IAN: Thank you, once again.

JONATHAN: Not at all. Enjoy your sleep. We'll – I'll see you in the morning.

IAN: Night.

JENNY: Night.

(JONATHAN exits, the door closing solidly behind him. JENNY and LAN look to each other.)

IAN: So...

JENNY: So.

IAN: What's wrong?

JENNY: What do you mean, "what's wrong?"

IAN: You're tense.

JENNY: Of course I'm tense.

IAN: Babe, don't be...

JENNY: Don't be? Look at this place. Look around. This is where we're sleeping tonight.

IAN: We were lucky.

JENNY: Lucky? What are we going to do about my car?

IAN: Get it towed?

JENNY: You know what I mean.

IAN: Yeah, I do. But that can wait until morning.

JENNY: Sure, if we can even call for a tow.

IAN: Jonathan said that...

JENNY: If you believe that...

IAN: He said that the tower would probably be back up in the morning.

JENNY: Of course it will. Just perfect. So creepy.

IAN: Jonathan?

JENNY: You don't think it's creepy? How all of this is creepy? Him, this house, that woman? All of it just "happening" to be here with those two playing *Ghostbusters*?

IAN: You're making a big deal of this.

JENNY: No, I'm not.

IAN: We don't have to worry about anything.

JENNY: No, WE don't.

IAN: *WE* don't?

JENNY: You don't.

IAN: Hmm?

JENNY: Nothing.

IAN: Bullshit.

JENNY: You aren't worried?

IAN: Why?

JENNY: Well, why would you? It's not your car.

IAN: Is this about the car?

JENNY: We could have taken yours.

IAN: It never would have made it.

JENNY: Well, we'll never know now.

IAN: It wouldn't.

JENNY: And who kept on saying that we needed to go RIGHT THIS MINUTE?

IAN: We were running late.

JENNY: Denver will still be there tomorrow.

IAN: Did you want to drive all night?

JENNY: I didn't want to drive at all.

IAN: Well, since we didn't have the money for tickets, that means we drive. But if I have to drive, then I don't want to do it at night.

JENNY: If you were so big on being the one in control, you could have remembered the car charger.

IAN: Or you could have not talked to your sister the whole time and killed your battery.

JENNY: It was better than talking to you.

IAN: Fuck you.

JENNY: Go to hell.

IAN: I'm with you, aren't I?

JENNY: *(Muttering)* Hmm. Just like your father.

IAN: No. Bullshit. Not like my father. That's crap and you know it.

JENNY: Hard to tell right now.

IAN: What? What are you saying?

JENNY: Nothing.

IAN: Bullshit nothing.

JENNY: You're not listening to me anyway.

IAN: Fuck. You. *(Pause)* Fuck. You.

JENNY: Right.

(A beat)

IAN: *(Erupting)* Tell me the fucking truth!

(Lost and spent, IAN sits on the bed.)

IAN: This is stupid. Why are we fighting?

(A long pause)

IAN: Just... talk to me, babe.

JENNY: Because we're tired. Because we're stressed.

IAN: Because we just entered *The Shining*? Old house, middle of nowhere.

(JENNY goes to him and rubs his shoulders.)

JENNY: And you've got your deadline coming up, and we've been ignoring each other.

IAN: And I've got nothin'. *(A beat)* Hey, think this old place has a typewriter somewhere?

JENNY: Why? So you can type "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" for six hundred pages?

IAN: Hah! Yeah. We just need a kid. Call him Danny.

JENNY: It's not like we couldn't.

IAN: *(Feigning ignorance)* Couldn't?

JENNY: Have a kid.

IAN: We've been over this before.

JENNY: Yeah.

IAN: And we're still not ready.

JENNY: I know.

IAN: We can't aff...

JENNY: I know.

IAN: And... *(A beat)* I've got nothing.

JENNY: If you're going to have nothing, then you could have it with me.

(They hold each other for a long moment.)

IAN: Thanks.

JENNY: You're right. We're not starting a family right now. *(Nuzzling him)* But it's not like we can't make a fruitless effort.

(They kiss.)

IAN: Haven't in a while...

(Another kiss, more playful.)

JENNY: Haven't had time...

IAN: All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

(They kiss passionately and begin fumbling with clothes.)

JENNY: Mmm. Wait. You sure?

IAN: Of course. Why?

JENNY: You know... *(Motioning to the room)* It's not our...

IAN: I have a feeling that the last time the lights were on here...

JENNY: Was back in 1939?

IAN: Mmmhmmm.

JENNY: In that case... we're just warming up the bed.

(They return to their kissing. The lights fade out. Sounds of lovemaking.

The Parlor: A spotlight appears on JONATHAN madly sorting through papers.

The Salon: Another illuminates REBECCA, sitting at the gramophone.

They look. They listen. The sounds of love give way to an unearthly moaning – in hunger rather than heat. REBECCA smiles. JONATHAN cringes. The spotlights JONATHAN and REBECCA fade out as the Bedroom lights come up on JENNY and IAN holding each other.)

IAN: Hey.

JENNY: Hey.

IAN: By the way, I'm sorry for earlier.

JENNY: It's ok. You made it up to me. *(Playfully)* You're not like your father.

IAN: Hey! That's just dirty!

JENNY: Shhhh! That got a bit loud.

IAN: Maybe. Most of that was you, babe. One of us is good at staying quiet.

JENNY: He said that the guest bedroom is on a different floor, right? On the other side of the house?

IAN: No. *(A beat)* Yeah, we're busted.

JENNY: Tomorrow morning's going to be awkward.

IAN: Tomorrow? I need to pee right now.

JENNY: Already?

IAN: Just the way I am, babe.

JENNY: Then, go. Just try not to run into Mr. Spooky. He can't kick us out into the cold if he doesn't see you.

IAN: I'll try.

(IAN kisses her on the cheek. He gets his pants on and goes to leave. He tries to ease the door open slowly, but the hinges creak loudly. He shares a pained, comic look with JENNY. He exits, the door closing louder than he intended. JENNY lays on the bed, tired.)

The Salon: A spotlight comes up on REBECCA sitting next to the gramophone. She caresses the bell. A bizarrely ornate hourglass sits on an end table next to her.

The Bedroom: JENNY, bored, glances about the room. She waits for a moment, expectantly. When nothing happens, she turns over under the covers and goes to sleep.

The Salon: REBECCA sets the gramophone to record. She places the needle on the record, turns it on, and begins speaking into the bell.)

REBECCA: *(With great effort)* To my dear Emily: You and your brothers and sisters are together, I hope. Your father says that you are in heaven, but I know when he lies to me. He lied to me. But I still pray for you. I do not know if that is enough, but it is all I can do. Even if you will never hear this, I must say it all the same. *(Crossing herself)* In the name of the father, and the son, and holy spirit. Amen.

(The Salon: As REBECCA records her message, she turns the hourglass over, letting the sand drain.)

The Bedroom: The lights in the bedroom shift with the passing of time. JENNY begins to moan. At first, quietly, then louder and pained. Moans turn to grunts, and JENNY turns on her back. Her belly begins to grow. Her belly grows until it becomes quite apparent that she is pregnant. JENNY wakes up and screams. Her screams become cries of anguish as she goes into labor. She

starts breathing heavily as the pain gets worse. JENNY births a baby with equal parts pain and shock. She holds her newborn child, then collapses from exhaustion.

The Salon: JONATHAN enters. He stares angrily at REBECCA. REBECCA returns his glare. She clicks the gramophone off. Blackout. A beat. A door creaks open in the dark.)

Scene Four

(The Salon: The wind howls. Lights fade into a dull night time glow. JONATHAN sits on the couch, eyes closed. The wind gives way to the sound of skittering footsteps. A beat. JONATHAN writes into a journal. IAN enters. He notices JONATHAN and tries to creep away unnoticed. JONATHAN turns and looks at him.)

JONATHAN: Hello, Ian. Does the bed agree with you?

IAN: Yeah. Sure. *(A beat)* I was just looking for the bathroom. What are you doing?

JONATHAN: Listening.

IAN: Oh. *(A beat)* I'm sorry if...

JONATHAN: Sorry? For what?

IAN: Making... noise.

JONATHAN: Not at all. You can't help it.

IAN: Did we – did I break your concentration?

JONATHAN: You don't need much concentration to hear what the house has to say. It will tell you.

(From off, the sound of tiny feet scampering across the floor.)

IAN: What the hell was that?

JONATHAN: Children.

IAN: Here?

JONATHAN: That's usually where I hear them.

IAN: Ever see them?

JONATHAN: Never. That's not how this house works.

IAN: What do you mean?

JONATHAN: Everything you see is as it is. What you hear is another matter. Every room in this house is different, but in all of them, there is sound. Sound is like light here - where just beyond the realm of your perception lies something that you know but cannot grasp... like the edge of a shadow where light relinquishes its strength and fades into nothingness.

IAN: So, here, you can hear children playing?

JONATHAN: Children playing. Or the creak of floorboards. Or the meaty thud of a small child's head hitting stair after stair as the child tumbles down.

IAN: Jesus.

(Again, the patter of young feet)

JONATHAN: It mostly happens at night. Or maybe it happens in the day, but the light blinds us, and our vision makes us deaf to what's around us. At night, though, the sounds are like a constant companion, one that never leaves but never stays close. It merely hovers, lurking about you. Warning you. It's here.

(The sound of a small body tumbling down stairs.)

IAN: How the fuck do you sleep around here?

JONATHAN: There is the room.

IAN: The room?

JONATHAN: The master bedroom. There, things are quiet.

IAN: Oh?

JONATHAN: Yes. Quiet. The only sounds in that room are those made by the people within.

IAN: Really.

JONATHAN: Yes.

IAN: So... we kicked you out of your bedroom? And it's the only place in this house that isn't a creep show? I'm sorry, Jonathan.

JONATHAN: Not at all.

IAN: We can still crash on your couch.

JONATHAN: Please, no. You're our guests. Besides, I do my best work at night.

IAN: Okay.

(Patter of feet. They stare at each other for a moment.)

IAN: Hey, Jonathan? Where's the bathroom?

JONATHAN: *(Pointing)* Just over there.

IAN: Thanks. Have... fun...

(The floorboards creak painedly as IAN exits, leaving JONATHAN to sit alone. JONATHAN touches the gramophone, his face registering regret. He places the needle back on the rest, then looks up. Blackout.)

Scene Five

(The Bedroom: Lights up on JENNY. She sits, gasping and holding her stomach. There is no swell to her belly, but she feels the weight she thought was there. The room has been rearranged slightly.)

JENNY: God, someone, Ian, help me...

(She collapses. IAN enters, and, seeing her condition, runs to help her.)

IAN: Babe, what's wrong?

JENNY: *(Laboring)* My stomach... my... womb... a baby...

IAN: What?

JENNY: A baby... I had a baby...

(IAN hugs her tightly.)

IAN: No, babe. It's okay. It's all okay. Just a dream. Just a dream.

JENNY: No, it wasn't just a dream. I felt it.

IAN: Babe, that's impossible.

JENNY: You don't believe me?

IAN: No, babe, it's not that...

JENNY: You don't believe me.

IAN: Jen, listen to yourself: you can't have had a baby. We barely got finished having sex.

(JENNY sits there and stares at him.)

IAN: Babe. Step back. Take a look.

JENNY: *(Coldly)* Yes?

IAN: If it's true...

JENNY: IF!

IAN: No, calm down. Think. If it's true... then where is it?

(IAN motions to the room. JENNY plants her feet and stands her ground.)

JENNY: I don't know.

IAN: Was it a boy or a girl?

(Pause)

JENNY: I... can't remember.

(A beat)

IAN: There's no baby here. It was just a dream. It wasn't real.

JENNY: I know it was.

IAN: Babies take months.

JENNY: I know.

IAN: Then why do you think you had one?

JENNY: Because I felt it grow. I felt it be born. And now, I still feel it. It's like a little piece of me is somewhere else. I don't know where, but I can sense it in the distance.

IAN: The house is getting to you, babe. That's all. All that wind blowing, shutters slamming – it's just getting to you.

JENNY: Ian.

IAN: Yes, babe?

JENNY: There's no wind blowing right now. It's quiet.

IAN: Yeah, that's what Jonathan said.

JENNY: It's all quiet?

IAN: No. Just this room. Out there – Jesus...

JENNY: You talked to Jonathan.

IAN: He wasn't that far.

JENNY: Then bring him back here so he can tell me what happened here. I want to know.

IAN: All right – I'll get him. He'll say the same thing – that it's just the house. *(A beat)* What makes you so sure...

JENNY: I just know.

(IAN exits the bedroom. JENNY slumps against the bed and feels her belly. Blackout.)

Scene Six

(The Salon: Lights up as IAN enters, searching for JONATHAN. He progresses toward the Parlor when REBECCA enters unbeknownst to him.)

IAN: *(Calling out)* Jonathan?

REBECCA: Jonathan's not here.

(IAN jumps.)

IAN: I didn't see you there.

REBECCA: No. I suppose you didn't.

IAN: I'm looking for Jonathan.

REBECCA: He can't be far. He rarely leaves the house.

IAN: Do you know where he is?

REBECCA: Why? Is there something wrong?

IAN: No. Yes. Jenny had a bad dream, and she thinks...

REBECCA: A bad dream. So bad she sends you out into the night... You don't think this dream means anything, do you?

IAN: Why... no...

REBECCA: You argue, you and she.

IAN: What?

REBECCA: All couples argue. You two argue, don't you?

IAN: I'm not seeing...

REBECCA: Don't you?

IAN: Of course.

REBECCA: My husband and I argued all the time. We fought like you wouldn't believe. You yell. So does she.

(IAN stands dumbstruck. REBECCA sits in the chair next to the gramophone.)

REBECCA: There were times when I wondered why I ever married him. He could be proud. He had a certainty to when he believed he was right. Unwavering, like the tide. When a man thinks he's doing the right thing, he refuses to stop, no matter what he's doing. Even if he regrets it. Even if it's wrong.

IAN: How did you stand it?

REBECCA: *(Coldly)* I endured, and in enduring, I grew strong. And hard. And frail. And old. *(A beat)* I remember myself back in those days. I had the most lovely hair – chestnut brown, long, flowing. Now, look at my hair.

IAN: It's still nice.

REBECCA: Nice?

IAN: Yes.

REBECCA: Nice is a word you use when you don't want to use the word that says what you're feeling.

IAN: No, I meant that...

REBECCA: Tell me – can you see where I used to be young?

IAN: Yes.

REBECCA: It is the one thing men will never know. For them, a child is no great thing to father. We women, though – a child takes its toll. And yet, you accept it and love it. You look into its eyes, and all is forgiven. I knew you two had never had children. You don't have the look.

IAN: No, we... *(A beat)* Mrs... Ms...

REBECCA: Rebecca.

IAN: Rebecca, I need to find Jonathan.

REBECCA: As I said before: He can't be far. Finding him in this house, though...

IAN: I'll give it a shot.

(IAN exits.)

REBECCA: Gone. He's gone.

(Blackout.)

Scene Seven

(The Bedroom: Lights up. JENNY lays on the floor of the bedroom in the fetal position. Twitchily, she looks around.)

JENNY: Ian?

(A beat. Nothing. JENNY stands up and begins pacing.)

JENNY: Where are you, Ian? Where the fuck are you? Shouldn't you have brought that creepy bastard back here by now?

(The Parlor: Lights fade in slowly as IAN stumbles in. IAN looks about the room.)

The Bedroom: JENNY stays her jitters and collects herself.)

IAN: Jonathan? Are you there?

JENNY: No. Not gonna worry. Not gonna go crazy. Ian will be back here. Ian will bring Jonathan. Jonathan will explain all of this. Just... stay... cool. *(A beat, looking around)* God, this place is old. How can anyone sleep here? *(A beat)* Ian? Are you here yet? *(A beat)* Oh hell. Fuck this. Ian, if you're not coming back to me, I'm going to find you.

(JENNY exits the bedroom.)

The Parlor: LAN rises from the chair, knocking over a stack of papers. He tries to contain the spill, but his efforts only knock more over. Embarrassed cursing. For a moment, LAN looks at the mess he has made.)

IAN: Well. Shit.

(LAN makes the best of it and starts piling papers back on the table.)

The Salon: JENNY enters, the lights following her.)

JENNY: *(Calling out)* Ian?

(The Parlor: LAN doesn't hear her. As he places papers back onto the table, he quickly scans bits and pieces of them, shaking his head.)

The Salon: JENNY peeps about the Salon. She calls out again.)

JENNY: Ian! Ian, can you hear me?

(This time, he hears her.)

IAN: Jenny?

JENNY: Where are you?

IAN: In here, babe.

(The Parlor: JENNY enters. She finds LAN working on the pile.)

JENNY: What are you doing?

IAN: Looking for Jonathan. *(A beat)* He's not under there.

JENNY: Is all that...

IAN: *(Clumping papers)* More ranting. *(Indicating separate files.)* Citizens of Massachusetts harbor town grow gills. Albino Boy ages at an accelerated rate. Mass hysteria among expedition survivors.

JENNY: But you haven't found him.

IAN: No. I'm just making a mess here.

JENNY: *(Impatient)* Ian...

IAN: *(Directly)* Babe, let me finish up with this; then we'll tackle Jonathan together.

(JENNY responds impatiently and dubious.)

IAN: See if you can find anything out there in the salon. Maybe you'll run into one of them there. *(A beat)* I'll be right out. I promise.

(With effort, JENNY exits to the Salon. As she leaves him, IAN finds a leather-bound journal among the papers.)

The Salon: After entering, JENNY looks about. She spies the gramophone. JENNY prods it curiously.

The Parlor: IAN pages through the journal, reading aloud.)

IAN: "Six months. Six months they've given me. Marlowe didn't want to give me any time off for this sabbatical. He thinks it's ludicrous. It's not research – not archaeology. It's playing around in funhouses telling ghost stories. It is no matter. Just sitting here at this table for the first time I can feel that I was right. The dust is thick here – a grey patina that bespeaks of age and disuse. No one's been in this house since the killings so many years ago. Maybe here I can find the key..."

(The Parlor: As IAN finishes the page, JENNY opens a drawer and fumbles with the contents: a collection of gramophone records. She pulls them out and sets the stack of records down. JENNY extracts a record from an aged sleeve and places it on the gramophone.)

JENNY: *(To herself)* The gramophone was operated by... Sienna, I hope I gave you an A.

(She lowers the needle and plays. REBECCA's voice emerges from bell.)

REBECCA: *(Recorded)* It works! Can you believe it? *(Muffled male voice)* I know. *(Muffled male voice)* You have your journal, I'll have mine. *(Muffled male voice)* You don't even know how to turn it on. *(Muffled scoff. REBECCA laughs.)* Very well. My first recording. It's such a beautiful

day here. Jon is so excited to be doing research – real research. I’m glad that he got this sabbatical. His tenure bid nearly killed him with the stress. Compiling random facts. Cutting out articles. Faxes. Emails. All going into binder after binder. You’d think he was uncovering the conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

(The Parlor: IAN hears the gramophone.)

IAN: *(Yelling over the sound)* Babe, did you find something?

JENNY: *(Calling back)* I don’t know. Are you done?

IAN: *(Quietly)* Almost.

(The Salon: JENNY looks through the stack of records.)

(The Parlor: IAN pages forward and reads to himself.)

IAN: *(Reading)* “It’s good to be gone from the archaeology department. I may be researching a cult that’s laid silent and dead a thousand years, but that’s more than I get among my colleagues. A clay pot here, a fragment of parchment there – they spend their days arguing over the remains of nothing. Nothing great. Nothing important. Just trivia. Just backbiting. Hon’s here. Thank god. I’d go crazy without her here. No. I’d go crazy without her, period.”

(As IAN finishes, JENNY puts on another record.)

REBECCA: *(Recorded)* It’s dark out here at night. Turn out the lights, and you can see all of the stars. Last night, I pulled Jon away from his work and dragged him outside. We lay down on the grass and looked up at the stars. For a minute, he came back to me. No research. No voices. Just us. We made love under the stars and fell asleep afterwards. We didn’t worry. It was warm. There’s no one around to see us. There’s just the vast, rolling hills as far as the eye can see. This morning, after we awoke, Jon and I watched the tall grass sway beneath the sun. It was like watching a sea of golden straw. I ran out, and he chased me, and when he caught me, we made love again.

(The Parlor: IAN pages forward, enraptured by the journal. JENNY places another record on the gramophone.)

IAN: *(Reading)* “Sounds. This place makes sounds. I want to call Marlowe and force him to listen to them, but I will wait. I’m not here for the house. I’m here to investigate the strange symbols I found – the ones from the scroll. The ones on the basement floor. Those dark eldritch runes may be mere letters in an alphabet long forgotten, but their very form screams within my mind.”

(The Salon: As she places the needle on the record, a hideous, alien sound howls from the bell. JENNY covers her ears.)

IAN: *(Reading)* “A vast gurgling that emits from the basement – like a great stomach awaiting a meal that will never sate it. The loathsomeness of this sound weighs upon me, for I dare not venture further down. I sense that only that way lies madness.”

(The Salon: JENNY collects her wits and pulls the record off the gramophone. She casts it to the floor, breaking the brittle vinyl. LAN hears none of this.)

A beat. Furtively, JENNY places another record on and plays it.)

REBECCA: *(Recorded)* Here I am. Alone. There is another person in this house. I see him. I know him, but... I can't say it. I love my husband. I hate my husband. What we used to share... I now fear. *(A loud scratch where the recording drops and picks up again)* Jack. Yes. Jack. That's what I'll call you. All I can give you is a name. I know you will never hear my voice, but I must say it all the same. If there's any way you will ever know this, I want you to know that I love you very much. I'm so sad. You father loves you too. I saw the tears in his eyes when he took you. I'm so. So. So. Sorry. *(Sobbing)*

(As REBECCA's voice plays, JENNY looks up. She dashes up the stairs.)

The Bedroom: JENNY enters and madly starts looking around. She pauses at the foot of the bed. On a hunch, JENNY begins stripping covers off the bed.

The Salon: Another scratch on the record.)

REBECCA: *(Reading)* Dear Christina: You and your brother are together, I hope. Your father says that you two are in heaven, but I know when he lies to me. He lied to me. But I still pray for you. I do not dare to ask how it happens or what happens, but I pray it is fast. I pray you have no pain. I pray... but I know no one hears me.

(The Bedroom: As JENNY strips off the last of the covers, she gasps as she finds a set of shackles chained to the bed. JENNY screams.)

JENNY: IAN!

(The Parlor: LAN hears her screams and drops the journal. He rushes from the Parlor through the Salon.)

The Salon: In his rush, LAN trips, knocking the hourglass off the end table and taking a terrible spill himself. Pained cursing. LAN sets the hourglass out of his way and gets up, limping toward the bedroom.

The Bedroom: As the sand drains, the years wash over JENNY, and the pain of aging wracks her. The lights warp through the bedroom as they did when she birthed the baby.

The Salon: Hearing the commotion, REBECCA enters. She sees the used gramophone, the shattered record, and the draining hourglass. Coolly, REBECCA turns over the hourglass to stop it. She sits on the couch and waits, her bearing hot steel and cold fire.

The Bedroom: As the passage of time returns to normal, JENNY collapses. IAN reaches the bedroom and embraces her.)

JENNY: It happened. It's real.

IAN: I heard you scream.

JENNY: The world got fast. I feel... I look...

IAN: Like you aged.

JENNY: I got older.

IAN: Not much.

JENNY: I feel it. Ian, did you hear those records?

IAN: No. No. I was reading...

JENNY: He did something.

IAN: I know, babe. I know.

JENNY: Let's...

IAN: Get the hell out of here.

(Together, they limp away from the bedroom.)

The Salon: JENNY and IAN stumble in to find REBECCA, waiting. REBECCA twiddles a shard of broken vinyl in her hand.)

JENNY: Rebecca! You're here!

REBECCA: Of course I am.

JENNY: *(To REBECCA)* I know what Jonathan did to you.

IAN: To her...

JENNY: She's...

REBECCA: *(Cutting her off)* I'm his wife.

(A beat. IAN gasps.)

IAN: His wife?

REBECCA: I am.

IAN: Then you should get out of here, too. Come on. Let's go.

REBECCA: Go? We're got going anywhere.

(A beat. They stare, mouths agape.)

REBECCA: My husband has your baby.

(Blackout.)

End Act I

Act II: Scene One

(The Cellar: Darkness. A baby's cry. JONATHAN slowly trudges through the space carrying JENNY and IAN's child until he reaches the Cellar. He struggles to balance both the child and a flashlight. The beam darts about, a tentative, glowing finger in a dark. The child continues to cry. The cellar seems larger than in Act I.)

JONATHAN: Shhh. Don't cry. *(A beat)* You want your mother, don't you? I know. I know. It's unfair. It's so terribly unfair. I wish there were another way.

(The child cries out. In response, a loud groan hungrily erupts, prompting for cries from the child. JONATHAN quakes in fear.)

JONATHAN: No! Stop! Don't wake it! Please!

(The groaning transforms to a mix of primal gastric sounds. The stage takes on a hellish red hue.)

JONATHAN: Sleep, little one. Your cries make it hungry. Now is not the time to feed.

(Desperately, JONATHAN begins to rock and wiggle the child with a parent's tenderness.)

JONATHAN: *(Lulling)* Shhh. If you listen, I'll tell you where we are. See those walls? See that floor? They're dirt. Just dirt. We're underground. When there's a twister, you come

down here to be safe. Up there, you can't hide from the wind. You won't survive. Down here, you stay - safe and sound. Shhh.

(As he speaks, the child is lulled to sleep. The groaning subsides to a quiet, satisfied gurgle. The bellish lights recede to blackness.)

JONATHAN: That's better. Much better. Just a bit farther, little one. Just a bit farther. It will all be over soon. *(A beat, lulling with verse)* Who does whisper in the darkness? What has slept a' fore the dawn of man? What mouth sings in its silence? Whose hunger shall consume the land? What lies beneath this solid, flowing sea? A dreamer deepe within the ground.

(JONATHAN ventures into the darkness, flashlight pointing the way as he exits. Blackout.)

Scene Two

(The Salon: As at the end of Act I, JENNY and IAN face the seated REBECCA. The wind buffets the house.)

JENNY: Where's my baby?

IAN: Jenny, wait. *(To REBECCA)* What is this? What are you saying?

JENNY: She's saying that the baby was real and that she knows where it is. Where is my baby?

(A beat. Nothing. REBECCA stares at IAN and JENNY.)

JENNY: Tell me. What do you want?

REBECCA: An end to this.

IAN: What do you mean?

JENNY: Her children. Ian, up there, the bed had chains on it.

IAN: *(To REBECCA)* Chains?

(REBECCA says nothing.)

JENNY: And the records – letters to her two children.

REBECCA: More than two.

JENNY: More?

REBECCA: More.

(A beat)

JENNY: My god. They're all dead.

REBECCA: Yes, yes they are.

IAN: What happened to them?

REBECCA: My husband took them.

JENNY: Where?

REBECCA: Down.

JENNY: Down? Down where?

IAN: The place he found in the cellar.

JENNY: The cellar?

IAN: That's what he wrote.

JENNY: Let's go.

REBECCA: You don't want to go down there.

JENNY: Why?

REBECCA: *(To IAN)* You read my husband's journal. You tell her.

IAN: He found... *(A beat)* Wait. How can we even know if this is true? This is insane.

REBECCA: It is.

JENNY: It doesn't matter. *(To IAN.)* What's down there?

IAN: Something horrible. I didn't read far enough, but...

JENNY: It doesn't matter. I'm going.

IAN: Babe, wait.

JENNY: Are you coming with me?

IAN: Don't.

JENNY: Don't go? How can you say that?

(A beat)

IAN: I don't know. That's it. I don't *know*.

JENNY: You still don't believe?

IAN: It's hard to. C'mon, let's get out of here while we can.

(REBECCA snorts.)

JENNY: *(To REBECCA)* Shut up, old woman. *(To IAN)* And I know my baby – our baby – is still alive. I can feel it. I'm not going to give it up.

REBECCA: You will learn.

JENNY: *(To REBECCA)* How do I get to the cellar? *(Silence)* Don't waste my time. Tell me.

(REBECCA remains silent. After a long moment, JENNY picks up one of the gramophone records and raises it to smash. REBECCA tries to stop her. JENNY smashes it, then takes another.)

JENNY: Was that a child?

REBECCA: *(Pained)* Yes!

JENNY: Which one?

(REBECCA scrambles to the floor and reads the label.)

REBECCA: Elijah.

(JENNY looks at the record in her hand.)

JENNY: *(Reading, sharply)* Nathan.

REBECCA: No!

JENNY: Where?

REBECCA: Down the hall. Past the kitchen. Down the stairs.

(JENNY throws the record down. It shatters. REBECCA gasps in pain and anger.)

JENNY: I'll be back with my baby.

REBECCA: *(Venom)* No. You won't. It's a long way down.

JENNY: *(To LAN)* We'll be back.

IAN: Babe, don't.

JENNY: I know, Ian. I *know*. Stay here, ok? Don't go? Don't let her do anything?

IAN: I won't. *(A beat)* Love you.

JENNY: Love you.

(JENNY exits. LAN and REBECCA stare at each other.)

REBECCA: You know where she's going, don't you?

IAN: Yes. No. I don't know what to believe. I just want to know the truth.

REBECCA: Truth is subjective.

IAN: *(Guarded)* So they say.

(REBECCA takes a record.)

REBECCA: I only have my own.

(She puts the record on the gramophone and plays.)

REBECCA: *(Recorded)* Dear Robert, your birthday was a beautiful day...

(The sound of the gramophone fades out. Blackout.)

Scene Three

(The Cellar: JONATHAN skulks in with the sleeping child. A low, gastric gurgling emanates from the walls. Supernatural lights pulse like a somnolent heartbeat.)

JONATHAN: *(To the child)* We're here. It's time.

(The pulsating lights give way to a steady, eerie illumination.)

JONATHAN: I'm sorry, little one. It's time to wake.

(JONATHAN light jostles the child awake. The child cries. The lights dim slightly, and a subtle, hiss-like sighing fills the cellar. JONATHAN holds the child out.)

JONATHAN: *(Chanting)* Gorog. Kalath. D'jaddha!

(An amorphous shadow dances along the walls. The child continues to cry. The gurgling grows louder.)

JONATHAN: *(Chanting)* Kimpo. Cthogga. Malak.

(A vast, strained groaning. The shadow on the wall flexes and bends. With labored effort, it divides. Two shadows. Four shadows. Seven shadows. Once separated, the demonic shadows move in a sinister, ceremonial fashion.)

JONATHAN: *(Crying out)* Gologgoh!

(JONATHAN sets the child down. He closes his eyes and stands ramrod still. A set of savage, glottal screams pierce the air, seemingly bounced between the shadows in call-and-response. The screams buffet JONATHAN and drown out the child's cries.)

JONATHAN: *(Quietly, escalating)* Morag do. Morag na. Morag chi. Morag dok.

(The shadows chant back at JONATHAN as he lifts the child high above his head. He marches about, the child held high. The shadows gyrate in place.)

JONATHAN: Fhtagn Tulu! Fhtagn Agon! Man Ga Hno!

(A vast groan as a door opens, spilling a turbulent red light onto the stage. JONATHAN looks to it in fear, then exits through the illuminated door with the crying child before him like a shield. Once through, the door shuts. The inhuman moaning and the child's cries continue offstage. Then, silence. Blackout.)

Scene Four

(The Salon: REBECCA sits piecing together fragments of records. IAN glowers behind her. The wind whistles low and eerie.)

REBECCA: Why are you standing there?

IAN: What should I be doing?

REBECCA: What do you want to be doing?

IAN: I don't know.

(REBECCA looks up, vinyl shard in hand.)

REBECCA: Do you?

IAN: I should have gone with her.

REBECCA: No. You shouldn't.

IAN: Why? What did you see down there?

REBECCA: I told you. I did not go down there. I was the wiser.

IAN: Wiser? Or more fearful?

REBECCA: Both.

(REBECCA goes back to her piecing.)

IAN: That's no answer.

REBECCA: Isn't it? You're a writer. Aren't you supposed to have insight into the human soul?

(IAN grunts angrily and turns away.)

REBECCA: Are you angry at my questions? Or afraid to tell me the answer?

IAN: I'm not afraid of you.

REBECCA: Why should you be? I'm weak. And I'm old. No, you're not afraid of me. But you are afraid. So, what do you fear?

(IAN says nothing.)

REBECCA: She will be back, you know.

IAN: When?

REBECCA: Sooner or later. Does that comfort you?

(A beat)

IAN: Yes.

REBECCA: You didn't ask how or why or what.

IAN: I don't care.

REBECCA: Ahh, but you should. When my Jonathan went down there for the first time, he came back changed. Horribly changed. She will not be your Jenny.

IAN: Bull.

REBECCA: Is change that unthinkable? Tell me: have you ever thought of leaving her?

IAN: Shut up, you hag.

REBECCA: Yes, then.

IAN: I don't have to listen to...

REBECCA: Of course you do. You didn't go with her. You chose to stay behind.

(IAN freezes.)

REBECCA: Tell me about it.

IAN: Why?

REBECCA: Because you're a writer. You tell stories. And I am your audience. *(A beat)* And you've never told her. Or anyone for that matter.

IAN: *(Disturbed)* How did you...

REBECCA: Know? *(Wryly)* Woman's intuition? *(A beat)* When one has wallowed in regret as I have, you see it immediately in others.

IAN: It was at a party.

REBECCA: Was she there?

IAN: No.

REBECCA: You went alone?

IAN: I was with a friend.

REBECCA: And?

IAN: It was the Fourth. We were all drinking, joking, shooting the bull. It wasn't just friends but friends of friends. We pulled out the board games and started playing, and I found myself on a team with this woman named Vanessa. We had met before, but that night, I just felt something... more.

REBECCA: Or something less.

IAN: Jenny and I had just begun dating, and I had started to realize that I loved her.

REBECCA: And then came Vanessa.

IAN: She was... magnetic.

REBECCA: Almost enough to pull you away from Jenny.

IAN: Yeah.

REBECCA: But, you stayed.

IAN: Yeah.

REBECCA: Despite that, you feel guilty.

(IAN says nothing.)

REBECCA: Why?

IAN: Before that moment, I couldn't imagine life without her. And then I did. Quite easily. Too easily.

REBECCA: You were afraid.

IAN: Of finding out that I was able to do that.

REBECCA: A simple story. A true story. *(A beat)* Do you have any more?

IAN: Go to hell.

REBECCA: None?

IAN: Not lately.

REBECCA: Ah. So.

IAN: So?

REBECCA: Thank you.

IAN: For what?

REBECCA: Your answer. It took long enough to pull it out of you, though.

IAN: *(Defensive)* What do you mean?

REBECCA: Your fear. My fear. We are not afraid of what we don't know.

IAN: Then what?

REBECCA: We're afraid of what we think we will find.

(Blackout.)

Scene Five

(The Cellar: JENNY enters, faintly illuminated by the ambient light. The light is cold and sterile, isolating JENNY in the depths of the darkness.)

JENNY: Jonathan?

(No answer.)

JENNY: I know you're down here!

(A flash of light and shadow. JENNY whips around to see it, but it is gone before she can spot it.)

JENNY: Is that you?

(Another flash.)

JENNY: Where are you? *(A beat)* This is the cellar... but...

(JENNY walks forward, peeps about the darkness, then turns around again.)

JENNY: It's different. *(She inhales.)* Not musty. Not cold. Cool. Dry. Clean.

(From off, the sounds of children playing.)

JENNY: My god. Is that?

(The children's voices pan across the space as if the lot of them were running past.)

JENNY: Who are you?

(The sounds of children grow louder.)

JENNY: Where are you?

(The children's voices all join in singing a children's rhyme. As it ends, the stage is enveloped in silence.)

JENNY: Hello? Is anyone there? *(A beat)* Can anyone hear me? I'm supposed to be just beneath the house. I should be able to scream. They should hear me. Simple as that. *(Screaming)* Help! Help me! *(A beat; despairingly)* Ian? Are you... *(A beat)* No. *(A beat)* No. *(A beat)* No.

(JENNY, lost, looks out into the darkness. She fights to retain composure. She fails. Her knees buckle, and she falls to the floor. JENNY rolls into a ball and mutters madly to herself. Her energy spent, she lays twitching on the ground.)

Out in the darkness, a child giggles. JENNY does not hear it at first, but as the giggling continues, her body goes taut.)

JENNY: I hear you. Who are you?

(The giggling stops, then reappears in another part of the stage. JENNY turns and faces the giggling. Again, it ceases and reappears, causes her to spin around again. JENNY snarls and advances on the sound.)

JENNY: What are you?

(JENNY plays a game of cat and mouse with the giggling, darting around the stage with mounting frustration. After several attempts, she bounds toward the sound, falls, and lays gasping raggedly for breath.)

A pinprick of light emerges from above. Tentatively, JENNY creeps toward it. She places her hand in the narrow column of light. The light bursts wider to encompass her. JENNY stands in the light as children's voices chant offstage. Illuminated eldritch symbols appear all around her as a great cacophony builds. Children laughing. Wooden timbers groaning. Something beastlike grunting. Then darkness and silence. JENNY falls to the floor.)

As a dim light comes up on her, JENNY collects herself and clears her throat. The sound echoes as if in a vast cavern. JENNY is shocked.)

JENNY: *(Calling out)* Where am I?

(Her own echo greets her.)

JENNY: *(To herself, echoing)* This... isn't... *(Realizing)* No.

(JENNY tiptoes forward a few paces, then pulls herself back. A well of red light bursts up, revealing to her the vastness of this cave. JENNY shudders, and her voice continues to echo.

Two sounds filter in from off: A baby's cries and a hungry gurgling. JENNY goes rigid with realization. Predatorily, she makes a quick estimation of her environment and stalks off toward the sounds.)

JENNY: *(Shouting)* I'm coming.

(JENNY exits, striding with measured fierceness. Blackout.)

Scene Six

(The Salon: IAN sits on the floor reading JONATHAN's journal. REBECCA sits beside the gramophone. She plays a record.)

REBECCA: *(Recorded)* To my dearest Jacob. I am still in pain. You fought, my son. You fought. Yours was the hardest yet. You nearly killed me. It was like you knew what awaited you here in this world, and you were not ready to be born. I can only hope that mine was the only pain felt during your short life. Love, your mother.

(IAN looks over as she takes the record off the gramophone.)

IAN: Why?

REBECCA: Why what?

IAN: Why did you let him do it?

REBECCA: He shackled me.

IAN: Jenny told me. But after the first one, why? So many children...

REBECCA: So many... Little Jack... Emily... Jacob... Elijah...

IAN: You gave them names...

REBECCA: It's all I could give them. More than life. Names.

IAN: That's...

(IAN finds no words.)

REBECCA: It is what it is.

IAN: Rebecca, why didn't you run?

(A long pause)

REBECCA: You wouldn't believe me.

IAN: Try me.

REBECCA: I love him.

(A beat)

IAN: Even after...

REBECCA: Yes.

(A beat)

IAN: I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time understanding.

REBECCA: Understanding what?

IAN: You could have left at any time.

REBECCA: How far have you read in my husband's journal?

IAN: Far enough. It's all just insane ramblings.

REBECCA: Insane, yes. But his, all the same. *(A beat)* Has Jenny ever left you?

IAN: *(Guarded)* Yes.

REBECCA: Why?

IAN: She felt –sometimes still feels- that she doesn't come first.

REBECCA: Does she?

(A long pause)

IAN: Not always. No.

REBECCA: Not always. No.

IAN: *(Protesting)* I love Jenny.

REBECCA: I see that.

IAN: It's just that when I get so focused on one thing... It's the words. And the stress. And the deadlines. Sometimes, there's a thousand miles between us.

REBECCA: And?

IAN: And she wants more.

REBECCA: A child.

IAN: Yes.

REBECCA: Why not?

IAN: I'm not ready. She's not ready. We don't have the money. It's not the time. Everything's in flux right now and...

(REBECCA stares at him in silence.)

IAN: I'm afraid.

REBECCA: Of what?

IAN: Of everything. Not being good enough.

REBECCA: The money?

IAN: Everything. That I won't "finish" it. Won't go all the way on being a good dad. That I won't finish it like I haven't finished a lot of other things.

REBECCA: Like?

IAN: This book. Deadline's coming up fast, and... nothing.

(REBECCA smiles. She caresses the hourglass.)

REBECCA: Do you need time?

IAN: Yes. I've wasted so much already.

REBECCA: Then go write. I'm not going anywhere.

(LAN looks on, dubious.)

IAN: *(Suspicious)* What are you trying to do?

REBECCA: Nothing. *(A beat)* Show you. *(A beat)* And give you what you need.

IAN: And what will you be doing?

REBECCA: Listening to my letters.

(LAN moves to depart, then stops himself.)

IAN: Just write?

REBECCA: Listen. Listen to what the house tells you. Then tell the truth you hear. In your own way.

(LAN pauses for a moment. He thinks, then turns away. LAN exits from the Salon to the Bedroom. REBECCA smiles. She puts on a record and listens.)

The Bedroom: LAN enters. He sits down at the desk and pulls out a pen and a stack of papers. He stares at them. Nothing. LAN scratches away at the paper with his pen.

REBECCA takes the hourglass and turns it over. The sand drains, and time passes quickly in the bedroom.

The Bedroom: LAN feels the wrack of time passing. He tries to get up, but he cannot. He then starts pouring text onto the page.

The Salon: When the record ends, REBECCA turns the hourglass over and stops the sand.

The Bedroom: LAN looks at the piles of papers in front of him and realizes how quickly time has passed. He struggles from the chair and stumbles down to the Salon where REBECCA waits.)

REBECCA: And now do you see?

IAN: Yes. I just... all that... how long?

REBECCA: Not long.

IAN: You did all that?

REBECCA: The words?

IAN: Yes.

REBECCA: No. Those are yours. I merely gave you the time to do so.

IAN: How?

REBECCA: *(Holding the hourglass)* He brought this back after the first time he went down there. With every turn, another nine months passes in the blink of an eye. *(A beat, reflective)* It's odd, being shackled to the bed, feeling the lump within you growing large while staring at the sand trickle down. You feel yourself growing old until the your hairs turn to grey and the lines trace their ways across your face. I cried out in pain so often – now you can see it on my face. It's the face that all my children gave me. It's a shame I'll never see them.

(IAN takes the journal again and starts paging through it.)

IAN: So it is all real.

REBECCA: How could I leave my husband alone in this hell?

IAN: *(Realizing)* Jenny...

(Blackout)

Scene Seven

(The Cellar: Hellish lights glow. Groaning and gurgling. A baby's cries. The cries silence, and the gastric groans ebb. The lights lose some of their menace. JENNY stalks in seeking her child.)

JENNY: *(Calling out)* Jonathan! I'm here.

(A twinge of light and sound.)

JENNY: Jonathan, I know you're here somewhere. I want my baby. *(A beat)* Give me my baby, god damn you!

(With a groan, a door opens, spilling light into the space. JONATHAN stands in silhouette in the doorway.)

JENNY: There you are, you creepy bastard.

(JONATHAN enters. His gait is lighter; a burden has been lifted.)

JONATHAN: Yes. I am.

JENNY: You know why I'm here.

JONATHAN: I do.

JENNY: Well?

JONATHAN: You don't understand...

JENNY: *(Cutting him off)* Understand? I don't need to understand a damn thing. I don't know what this place is. I don't know where we are. All I know is you brought my child down to this hell.

JONATHAN: Please, listen.

JENNY: To what?

JONATHAN: Reason. All of this is for a reason.

JENNY: Reason? This place is insane.

JONATHAN: And so are we. But only because we have seen it.

JENNY: You're the crazy one.

JONATHAN: Unfortunately, no. I'm only trying to save the world.

JENNY: By kidnapping my child? How was that going to save anything?

JONATHAN: Look around, Jenny.

(She does. Demonic hissing erupts from the walls, and shadows slink about. JENNY retreats from them.)

JENNY: What are those?

JONATHAN: I do not know. Perhaps they had names once. They are old. And they are evil. But they are nothing compared to what sleeps behind me.

(As if in response, one vicious howl lashes out from the shadows.)

JENNY: And why aren't you afraid?

JONATHAN: I am. So very afraid.

JENNY: Could have fooled me.

JONATHAN: Jenny, I'm not afraid of the unknown. I'm afraid of what I know.

JENNY: And? That is?

JONATHAN: That the greatest mercy that we have ever been given is that we do not know just how precarious our place in this world is. Something great sleeps beneath our gaze, awaiting a time to wake and consume us all.

JENNY: What does that have to do with my baby? Why did you kill all of yours?

JONATHAN: There is a story...

JENNY: *(Cutting him off)* Don't waste my time.

JONATHAN: I won't. *(A beat)* It's a parable, actually. Imagine a city beyond all other cities. A paradise. There all the people are able and wise, never lifting a hand in anger nor acting with malice or greed. Every child goes to bed with a meal in its belly and blanket to keep it warm. Peace. Joy. Contentment. How, you ask? Beneath this city there is a child innocent of any and all crimes. It has no name. It suffers in darkness, beaten, starved, eyes cracked where the salt of its tears have abraded the skin. This one child's pain fuels the motor of the world – and paradise stands on a foundation of hell. *(A beat)* Would you destroy all of that for the sake of a child who will never know the paradise that its suffering creates?

JENNY: This isn't paradise. It's hell. That's bullshit.

JONATHAN: It is a form of truth. It is why I did what I did.

JENNY: You tortured my child?

JONATHAN: She never knew pain.

(A long pause)

JENNY: I have a daughter.

(JONATHAN stands aside from the door.)

JONATHAN: She's in there.

(JENNY approaches the glowing doorway. She stops and turns to JONATHAN.)

JENNY: How long ago?

JONATHAN: Not long. Just before you arrived.

(JENNY turns and enters the glowing doorway, leaving JONATHAN alone onstage. From off, JENNY weeps.)

JONATHAN: *(Heavy with regret)* And now, you see why. It is large, larger than any living being should ever be.

(JENNY emerges from the doorway, cradling the dead infant in her arms.)

JENNY: *(Broken)* Small. So small. So tiny next to it. So tiny among all the rest.

JONATHAN: Seven mouths, each capable of swallowing a city with a single bite..

JENNY: Too big. Too big for my little girl.

JONATHAN: And giant claws affixed to limbs more like tentacles than anything comprised of bones or flesh.

(JENNY, distant, comes forward and kneels.)

JENNY: No. No. She could not feed something as great as that. That thing did not kill her.

JONATHAN: No.

JENNY: You did.

JONATHAN: To keep the sleeper dreaming; for if the dreamer wakes, he shall consume the world. But sate him with the souls of newborn babes, and he shall continue his dark slumber.

JENNY: A sacrifice...

JONATHAN: Must be made. *(A beat)* I'm sorry.

(JENNY kisses her child and sets it down, covering it gently. She composes herself, then rises. Around them, a chorus of demonic laughter rises. The laughter batters JENNY until she cannot handle it anymore. Madly, JENNY springs at JONATHAN and attacks him with unmitigated savagery. They struggle. JONATHAN defends himself, but JENNY's assault carries madness, fury, and vengeance. JENNY and JONATHAN stumble through the doorway. The laughter stops. From off, we hear JENNY's attacks crescendo in their violence. JONATHAN nails as a killing blow is delivered, then falls silent. JENNY continues until spent. Then, silence.)

JENNY, bloodied and blooded, emerges from the doorway. She pauses for a moment, seeing all that is around her. Almost in a trance, she picks up her child and exits.

Lights linger, then fade slowly to blackout.)

Scene Eight

(Lights up on the Salon and the Bedroom. IAN sits on the floor of the Bedroom, piecing together pages of his novel. In the Salon, REBECCA sorts through her records. The wind sighs rhythmically.

The Salon: JENNY enters carrying her dead child. She mutters to herself. REBECCA sees her.)

REBECCA: So. *(A beat)* Is that...

(JENNY recoils protectively from REBECCA.)

REBECCA: It is. Then, you've seen it. *(A beat)* Tell me, is my husband...

(JENNY hisses at REBECCA.)

JENNY: Go away.

(JENNY walks downstage and lays down in the fetal position, the baby curled within her. She babbles sadly.)

REBECCA: You poor thing. I never saw mine after. So much the worse for you.

(REBECCA studies JENNY for a moment, then leaves her. REBECCA exits the Salon up to the Bedroom. She enters the Bedroom, knocking lightly.)

IAN: It's incredible. It's all here. Words. So many words. Truth – not forced at all.

REBECCA: Is that what you wanted?

IAN: Yes. Truth and time. Understanding. It's all here.

REBECCA: What is it about?

IAN: This place. You. Him. The horror beneath.

REBECCA: It makes a good story. *(Nodding toward the papers)* Did you use his words or your own?

IAN: My own.

REBECCA: Put in his mouth. *(A beat)* But still true. Read me something.

IAN: What?

REBECCA: Why did he do what he did?

(IAN shuffles through the papers until he finds the passage she requested. He reads.)

IAN: *(Reading)* “And it is then that I remember the words I read upon those ancient scrolls, once presumed to be myth, now a terrible reality. This ancient god, whose name cannot be spoken by man, was put into its torpor by feeding it a tonic of the souls of newborn babes. Having tasted such sweet possibility, it returns to sleep and dream its dark and terrible dreams. And now, I damn myself as I become its servant. It is the price I pay for the continuance of this world. For all those without. And for my love. *(A beat)* It was the right thing to do.”

REBECCA: If a man is convinced that he does right in doing wrong, he will remain fixed in his course. Even to oblivion. *(Simply)* She is back, by the way.

IAN: Jenny? Why didn't...

(IAN dashes out in mid-sentence. He rushes to find JENNY in the Salon. He goes to comfort her.)

IAN: Babe. Babe. Talk to me.

JENNY: *(Distantly)* It's a girl.

(JENNY shows him the dead child. IAN looks into its eyes. JENNY latches onto him for support.)

JENNY: She's gone. She's gone. You were right. It wasn't time. And now, she's dead.

(JENNY and IAN hold each other.)

IAN: We're getting out of here, babe.

JENNY: No, Ian. We can't.

IAN: Yes, we can, Jenny. Yes, we can.

JENNY: No. Even if we do... there's something down there. Waiting.

(REBECCA enters the Salon.)

REBECCA: She's right.

IAN: What?

REBECCA: It's not going away.

IAN: Then to hell with it.

REBECCA: It will wake.

IAN: What do you want me to do? Chain my wife to the bed and turn her into a goddamn birth machine?

REBECCA: *(Calmly)* It is for the greater good.

IAN: Go fuck yourself. If you're happy feeding that thing, then you do it.

REBECCA: I have no more children to bear.

JENNY: *(A moment of clarity)* She's too old.

REBECCA: So many children. Sons. Daughters. With each one, nine more months. A turn of the hourglass and, *(She gestures.)* all that time gone. I have given what I can. Now it is someone else's turn.

IAN: *(Realizing)* That's what you want...

JENNY: We would be making the world safe...

IAN: Someone else to stay trapped in this hellhole...

JENNY: We would buy the world time...

IAN: While what? You sit around listening to those damned records?

JENNY: Protect others... keep them safe...

REBECCA: I want to be free. I've waited so long. You have to.

IAN: No.

REBECCA: Let me put it simply: if you do not...

JENNY: (*Loud, trancelike*) The sleeper will awaken from its dream. It will open up its seven mouths and consume our world. And we shall not die as it eats us but we shall live forever, nourished by our infinite, unending pain.

REBECCA: Precisely.

(*A long pause*)

IAN: No.

JENNY: Ian, we must.

IAN: Babe, how can you say that?

REBECCA: (*Interjecting*) Because she knows. She's seen it.

IAN: That makes no difference.

REBECCA: None? None at all?

(*IAN caresses JENNY.*)

IAN: No.

REBECCA: So you would condemn this entire world? For what? If you do not stay here, it will awake, and we – you – will wail in agony.

IAN: And when she can't have children anymore?

REBECCA: You pray that someone will come and take this burden from you.

IAN: Is that what you did?

REBECCA: Yes.

IAN: (*Coldly*) So it goes. And so it goes. (*A beat*) Nice plan. Did he sell that to you as he put the chains on?

REBECCA: No. Jonathan was ready to let the world succumb once I became barren.

IAN: Why?

REBECCA: He could not bear to pass this burden along.

IAN: He was able to hurt you.

(A beat)

REBECCA: He thought I was strong enough. *(Bitterly)* He was... right. I chose to stay. In sickness and in health. In good times and in bad.

IAN: So, when we walked in...

REBECCA: You were the answer to my prayers.

IAN: And you've been waiting all this time.

REBECCA: Since the first moment I felt iron around my leg.

(JENNY looks to REBECCA.)

JENNY: You. *(Looks to the baby)* You.

REBECCA: She wants another child.

JENNY: I do.

REBECCA: *(To Ian)* You could give her one.

JENNY: One of my own?

REBECCA: One to keep.

IAN: And the rest to... whatever is below?

JENNY: Another baby...

IAN: A turn of the hourglass, then walk right down to feed?

REBECCA: Exactly.

(IAN considers. His gaze narrows on the hourglass.)

IAN: Hmm. *(A beat)* Tell me again how this works.

REBECCA: Simply turn it over on the one side.

IAN: And it pushes time forward?

REBECCA: Only in the bedroom.

IAN: That's all I need to know?

REBECCA: That, and this: we are running slowly out of time. The sleeper has been growing ever nearer to awakening. When you must... you'll hear rumbles. The rumbles come more and more frequently.

IAN: And if she struggles - the shackles?

REBECCA: *(Withdrawing a key)* My husband locked them with this.

IAN: Let's go take a look at them. *(Kisses JENNY)* Stay here, babe.

(REBECCA exits toward the Bedroom. IAN follows. As he leaves, he takes the hourglass. JENNY sits on the floor.)

The Bedroom: IAN and REBECCA enter.)

IAN: *(Nodding to the bed)* And the key goes there?

REBECCA: *(Bitterly)* I have become intimately familiar with these chains.

IAN: I guess you would.

(A beat. IAN looks to the hourglass, then the bed. REBECCA notices his discomfort.)

REBECCA: You know what must be done.

(IAN puts the hourglass down.)

IAN: Rebecca?

REBECCA: Yes?

IAN: Jonathan studied ancient cults, right?

REBECCA: Yes.

IAN: Did he ever study the Greeks?

REBECCA: Of course.

IAN: Did you?

REBECCA: It was how we met.

(Suddenly, IAN blindsides REBECCA, smashing his elbow against REBECCA's head and sending her to the floor. IAN takes the stunned REBECCA and drags her to the bed where she shackles her. REBECCA struggles furiously against the chains. IAN stands just out of reach holding the hourglass.)

IAN: Do you remember the Eumenides?

(REBECCA, still dazed, merely nods.)

IAN: They would find those who hurt and killed their kin and hound them. Never letting up. Never showing mercy. Until the killer went insane.

REBECCA: *(Croaking)* Or...

IAN: Or.

REBECCA: They killed themselves.

(IAN kneels down to face her.)

IAN: I can't.

REBECCA: But the world...

IAN: Even if it means the world, I can't do that to her. *(A beat)* You're right. I'm afraid. I'm afraid to see Jenny hate me. I'm afraid to see myself in the mirror. That thing beneath us may have driven your husband mad, but that look – that knowledge – would destroy me.

(IAN places the hourglass in front of REBECCA, then rises to leave.)

REBECCA: Ian...

(He stops.)

IAN: Yes?

REBECCA: Could you play something for me? On the gramophone?

IAN: I thought that you couldn't hear anything up here.

REBECCA: Leave the door open. Perhaps... I'll be able to hear something.

(IAN exits the Bedroom, leaving REBECCA alone.)

The Salon: Ian descends the stairs. From off, the sound of children. JENNY hugs their baby tightly on the floor. LAN goes to the gramophone. He picks out a record and places it on the turntable. More sounds of children. A meaty thump down the stairs. LAN lowers the needle, then goes to embrace JENNY.

The lights fade down until a pair of spotlights illuminate REBECCA and JENNY and LAN.

The Bedroom: REBECCA turns over the bourglass as the record plays. Her body withers as time slips away.)

REBECCA: *(Recorded)* It's dark out here at night. Turn out the lights, and you can see all of the stars. Last night, I pulled Jon away from his work and dragged him outside. We lay down on the grass and looked up at the stars. For a minute, he came back to me. No research. No voices. Just us.

(Silence. Blackout.)

Scene Nine

(Lights fade in slowly on the Bedroom. JENNY sits upright in a ball on the bed. LAN sleeps beneath the covers. LAN stirs. He looks at JENNY.)

IAN: *(Sleepily)* Hey babe.

JENNY: *(Distant)* Hi.

(LAN strokes her hair. She does not respond.)

IAN: Couldn't sleep?

JENNY: No.

IAN: They're gone, babe. They can't hurt us anymore.

JENNY: What will we do?

IAN: We're getting the hell out of here.

JENNY: They're dead, Ian.

IAN: I know.

JENNY: Someone will know that something happened here.

IAN: Maybe.

JENNY: And when they find us? What do we tell them?

IAN: The truth.

JENNY: They'll never believe us. *(A beat)* I'm not sure if we can go back. *(A beat)* Did you hear anything during the night?

IAN: No. Did you?

(A beat)

JENNY: No.

IAN: I was out like a light.

JENNY: Good.

IAN: Man, this bed is cold.

JENNY: The whole house is cold. The wind was blowing all night. Freeze you right down to the bone.

IAN: Good, old prairie wind – freeze your butt off before you can sit.

(JENNY gives a mild, tense guffaw.)

IAN: Did you check your phone yet?

JENNY: Not yet.

IAN: Hope they got the tower back up. Sooner we can call for help, the better.

(A beat)

JENNY: Yeah.

IAN: We'll be out of here soon, babe. We'll leave all of this behind us.

(A pause)

JENNY: I was going to go make coffee.

IAN: *(Shivering)* Damn fine idea.

JENNY: I'll go make some. Be right back.

(JENNY gets up to leave.)

IAN: Hey babe?

(She stops.)

JENNY: Yeah, Ian?

IAN: You know...

JENNY: Yes?

IAN: After we get back, we need to talk. About the apartment.

(JENNY is alarmed.)

JENNY: We don't need to talk about it...

(LAN raises his hand to calm and quiet her.)

IAN: I just think we should look at moving into something a bit bigger – another room, maybe.

JENNY: *(Realizing, happy)* Yeah.

(LAN smiles.)

JENNY: *(Urgently)* Coffee!

(JENNY leaves LAN alone in the Bedroom. He smiles, half to himself, half to the world. Then, he grimaces.)

IAN: *(Grumbling)* Aww, man. I hope they left the bathroom where I found it last time.

(LAN throws off the covers and stumbles off the bed. He trips and falls – the shackles on the bed have been locked to his leg. He struggles against the chains. He kicks. He scratches. Nothing.

From off, a vast, hungry moaning fills LAN with fear and shock.)

Silence. Blackout.)

Finis

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