

# THE KEEPER'S QUARTERS

A play  
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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## Synopsis

Desperate to overcome a crippling creative drought, celebrated horror novelist Evelyn Wray retreats to the long-abandoned keeper's quarters of a historic Maine lighthouse she has impulsively purchased. Determined to write one final masterpiece, Evelyn clashes with her sharp-tongued literary agent Nora over money, legacy, and relevance, while forming an uneasy rapport with Thomas, the local cable technician, and Deputy Sam Chadborn, a devoted fan who shares the lighthouse's grim legend of a keeper and his wife whose fatal fall from the tower may not have been an accident. As strange occurrences multiply – locked doors, shifting objects, unexplained lights, dizzy spells, and a mysterious clockwork crank tied to the old story – Evelyn begins to blur the line between perimenopausal disorientation, psychological unraveling, and genuine haunting. In a space built to cast light into darkness, she confronts the possibility that the terror she's been chasing for decades is no longer confined to the page – and that the final story she longs to write may demand more than she bargained for.

## Characters

EVELYN “EVY” WRAY (40s), a well-established novelist, can be played by any race.

Also plays ALMA FRICHET, married to Warner Frichet, an emerging painter.

THOMAS “TOM” MCKAY (30s), a cable technician, can be played by any race.

Also plays FREDERICK “FREDDIE” BOOTHBY, a local art dealer.

NORA COLLINS (50s), Evelyn's literary agent, can be played by any race.

Also plays ENID PHILBRICK, a respected art collector and curator.

SAMUEL “SAM” CHADBORN (40s), a local deputy sheriff, can be played by any race.

Also plays WARNER FRICHET, a dedicated but short-sighted lighthouse keeper.

## Setting

An historic town in Maine. The keeper's quarters, attached to an old lighthouse, and vacant for years. The interior is essentially one large room: a humble living area anchored by a wood-burning stove; a simple dining table; a compact kitchen; a modest sleeping alcove; and a plain desk with a single chair. A narrow closet is tucked into a corner. One door leads to the bathroom. Another, the front door, opens to the outside. An archway leads off to the lighthouse tower.

## Time

Present.

**ACT ONE**

*Fall. Early afternoon.*

*(The house is currently unoccupied and quiet. Voices drift in suddenly from off.)*

**EVY**

Careful coming down from there.

**TOM**

What's that now?

**EVY**

I said be careful on the ladder. I'm worried you're gonna fall.

**TOM**

Oh! Right. I appreciate it, but I do this all the time. I'll be fine.

**EVY**

I can hold it for you.

**TOM**

No, no. Don't worry about it. She's steady enough. Just maybe give me a little room. Last thing I need is you getting hurt. Liability and all that.

**EVY**

Of course. Right. If you're sure.

**TOM**

I'm sure. Tell you what. Why don't you head inside? I'll be right in.

**EVY**

Oh! Alright. And thank you for doing this.

**TOM**

If I didn't, I'd probably lose my job, so...

**EVY**

Fair enough.

**TOM**

I'll be in shortly.

**EVY**

Got it.

*(Evy enters the house, grabs her laptop from a bag, and sets it on the desk. She connects it to the monitor and plugs in the charger. A spark shoots from the outlet, startling her. Thomas enters.)*

**TOM**

Everything alright in here?

**EVY**

Yeah. I think so. The outlet just... sparked a little.

**TOM**

Old place like this, that happens. I could take a look at the wiring sometime if you want.

**EVY**

You can?

**TOM**

Well, not today, but I could swing back. Just got one more thing to finish up here first...

*(Thomas moves to the closet and slips inside. He's gone briefly before reappearing.)*

Alright, so here's what I did. I put a box in that closet there. That's where your modem and router will sit. Ran a shielded cable from the utility pole up to your roofline. Drilled through the barge board, brought it down the wall, and into that box. Now that pole is a good ways from the house; turned out to be a little over three hundred feet in fact. And at that distance you can't just let the cable hang, or it'll sag and get damaged. So, I set a temporary post about halfway out and ran the cable through an eye hook to keep the span tight. Now when I say temporary, what I mean is I can recommend a guy who could come out to put in a proper pole; set it in concrete at the right height and be done with it. That'd be extra, of course.

**EVY**

I see. Well, money's not really an issue. Who do you recommend?

**TOM**

Local guy. Easygoing enough. Answers to the name Thomas McKay.

**EVY**

Thomas McKay?

**TOM**

You can call me Tom if you like.

**EVY**

You?

**TOM**

Well, I'm not just the cable guy. I do a little bit of everything around here.

**EVY**

Convenient. All right; you're hired. When can you start?

**TOM**

Oh, uh... Well, I can swing back in a couple of days. Won't take long. About an hour to get the pole into the ground, a few hours for the concrete to set. Though I think it makes sense to wait at least a day before I shift the cable to the new post, just to be safe. Forecast looks pretty good, so no storms or high winds to worry about this week.

**EVY**

You sound like you know what you're doing.

**TOM**

I'll also take a look at the wiring while I'm here. These old lighthouses weren't built with electricity in mind, and it's probably been a long while since it's been put in, so much of what's here isn't likely up to code.

**EVY**

I expect you're right.

**TOM**

Mind if I ask you something?

**EVY**

Uh... No.

**TOM**

Did you buy this place?

**EVY**

I won it... at an auction... but yes, I mean, I did pay for it... I... I bought it.

**TOM**

I thought so. Well, if money's not too much of a concern, you might have the utilities come out, do a service drop. Then you wouldn't have to rely on that generator out there for power.

**EVY**

A very good idea, except... while I do own the property, I'm not keeping it.

**TOM**

You're not?

**EVY**

I'm planning to hang onto it for about a year or so, then I'm turning it over to the town as a donation. It's got real historical value, so I'd rather let the experts restore it and then decide whether it becomes a museum or something else, whatever makes sense. No point running a power line now if that money can be put to better use later. I can get by on a generator. The internet, on the other hand... that's what I need sorted right now.

**TOM**

Fair enough. And speaking of... you're all set. The cable's hooked into the modem. Everything's plugged in. You'll have Wi-Fi for whatever you're using. It comes with a default password; I wrote it down for you...

*(He hands her a piece of paper.)*

... I'd recommend changing it when you get a chance. Need me to show you?

**EVY**

Uh, no. I think I can manage that myself.

**TOM**

I have full confidence in you.

**EVY**

You're too kind.

**TOM**

Oh, and the network name is capital K, lowercase P-R-S, capital Q, lowercase R-T-R-S. I should've written that down as well.

**EVY**

No, it's fine. I can remember that. And it's very cute, by the way.

**TOM**

Yeah, I thought the same thing.

*(He pulls out a form and a pen.)*

Alright then. So, if you don't mind, I just need your initials here, and your signature and date here. The total amount, along with an itemized list of the work I've completed, is detailed in this section here.

**EVY**

Got it.

*(She takes the pen, adds her initials, signs and dates the form, then hands it all back to Thomas.)*

And there you go.

**TOM**

Well, it's been a pleasure doing business with you—

**EVY**

Evelyn.

**TOM**

Sorry?

**EVY**

Uh... that name on the form there. It's not my real name.

**TOM**

Oh, yeah? Well, as long as the check clears, the name on the form doesn't matter much to me. But now you've got me curious, so...

**EVY**

I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but my real name is Evelyn Wray. People I'm close with call me Evy, though.

**TOM**

Uh-huh.

**EVY**

I'm a novelist. Some would even say a fairly well-known one. Horror. Ghosts. Dead bodies. Surprise twists.

*(Continued silence.)*

Never mind.

**TOM**

Now, hold on... that might ring a bell. I mean, I'm not very sophisticated – I don't read all that much, mind you – but I'm pretty sure I've heard that name before.

**EVY**

No, you haven't.

**TOM**

Nope. I haven't. Sorry about that.

**EVY**

It's fine. Really. Not everyone knows who I am. And that's probably a good thing. Keeps me grounded. And humble. I should've just kept my mouth shut.

*(Silence.)*

**TOM**

Alright, well, I'm gonna get outta your hair before this gets... worse. It's already gotten a little awkward here, and I don't handle awkward all that well. Best I just make my escape now, I expect.

**EVY**

Probably wise.

*(An uneasy moment passes before Thomas nods and then quickly exits out the front door.)*

See you in a couple of days!

*(He's gone. Evy moves to the desk, opens her laptop, and powers it on. As she waits for it to boot up, a light in the tower comes on. Evy enters a password to unlock the laptop and waits as it loads. A dining chair shifts, as if bumped. Evy glances over, dismisses it, and returns her focus to the laptop. A car horn honks outside. As she heads for the front door, a light comes on in the bathroom. As soon as she exits the house, the bathroom door closes slowly.)*

Is that you, Nora?

**NORA**

In the flesh.

**EVY**

Didn't recognize the car. Is it new?

**NORA**

I got it in the divorce.

**EVY**

Oh, yeah? Which one?

**NORA**

Very funny.

**EVY**

Why don't you pull up a little closer?

**NORA**

I can't.

**EVY**

Why not? There's plenty of room. You're gonna twist your ankle walking over here in those ridiculous shoes.

**NORA**

I'm stuck.

**EVY**

What do you mean you're stuck?

**NORA**

The car's stuck. I must've run over something because it won't move in either direction.

**EVY**

Oh, jeez. Okay, hang on. I'll grab you a pair of sneakers. What size are you?

**NORA**

I'd rather not say.

**EVY**

Oh, for Pete's sake, Nora. If it helps, I'm a size eight.

**NORA**

Right. Well, unless you're hiding a clown somewhere in that house, I guess I'll risk it in these heels.

**EVY**

Good God. Okay. I'll come get you. And I'll look under the car while I'm at it. I can't imagine what you ran over. And honestly, who shows up to an old lighthouse in a pencil skirt and heels?

**NORA**

Your literary agent, that's who.

*(The bathroom door swings open, and the light inside turns off. A few seconds pass before the front door, which Evy left open, closes. A moment later, the chair shifts back into position. Then the light in the tower goes out. Nora approaches the front door. She calls back to Evy, who has managed to move the car forward.)*

Is it all right if I—?

**EVY**

What?

**NORA**

Is it all right if I go in?

**EVY**

Of course. Sorry, I thought I left the door open.

*(Nora tries the handle. The door doesn't budge. Evy has arrived at the door.)*

What're you doing?

**NORA**

It's locked.

**EVY**

It shouldn't be.

*(Nora tries again. The door doesn't budge.)*

**NORA**

Well, it is.

**EVY**

Okay, well, maybe it's stuck. Move over.

*(Evy tries the handle, and the door swings open easily.)*

After you.

*(They enter. Nora sets down her tote and removes her coat, glancing around in horror.)*

**NORA**

Oh, Evy. Look at this place. No offense, but it's... it's filthy. And old. Like my first husband.

*(She gives her coat to Evy, who places it on a hook.)*

**EVY**

Are you okay?

**NORA**

I'm worried about you, if that's what you're asking.

**EVY**

That's not what I meant. There was nothing under your car. I pulled it forward without any trouble.

**NORA**

So what? I've never been great with a stick shift. And, as a matter of fact, on the way here I – what do you call it – I popped the clutch on the highway. Went from seventy-five to thirty in a matter of seconds. Nearly caused a pileup.

**EVY**

Jesus.

**NORA**

Relax. Everyone was fine. I got off with a warning. No harm done.

**EVY**

And the door?

**NORA**

What about it?

*(Evy stares at Nora.)*

Oh, come on, Evy. Maybe I pushed when I should've pulled. And anyway, I'm used to people opening doors for me...

**EVY**

Of course.

**NORA**

... I am fully in command of my faculties, thank you. Which brings us to the real question: are you okay? Because honestly, I think you've gone off the deep end. This whole thing was a bad idea from the start. And now that I'm here, and I see exactly what you've gotten yourself into... I don't even know what else to say except... well, I told you so.

**EVY**

You'd have said that no matter what.

**NORA**

That's not fair. I always give you the benefit of the doubt. Yes, you've done some very strange things before but this? This tops them all. You think this is what you need. But it isn't.

*(Silence.)*

**EVY**

Where are you staying?

**NORA**

Staying?

**EVY**

I assume you booked something nearby. I passed a couple of boutique hotels on my way in.

**NORA**

You seem anxious to get rid of me.

**EVY**

I'm just asking.

**NORA**

I'll be in town for the week. Sightseeing, shopping. Something must be going on, though, since the only room I could find was a standard with a queen bed. Not that it matters because I'm here for you, of course. I'll give you the next five days to yourself, and then we can reconvene to talk things over. And by then, hopefully, I'll have the chance to talk you out of this nonsense.

**EVY**

You're wrong. About what I need right now. Because this is exactly what I need.

**NORA**

Alright, / Evy—

**EVY**

/ You know, I've made a hell of a lot of money convincing people that there's always something lurking in the dark. Something sinister searching for someone to torment. Something clinging to a terrifying secret that it's desperate to pass along. Something that pushes a person to the edge and then drives them mad or ends their suffering by ending them. And my readers felt that, Nora. They felt it twisting inside them, felt the floor drop away. I gave them that. For almost thirty years. But now? There's nothing in the dark. Not anymore. All I do is sit at my desk, watching that goddamn cursor blink on an empty screen, a blank page staring back at me, disappointed in me. The ideas just aren't there anymore. It's like something's telling me I'm done, that I've said everything I have to say, and maybe it's time to just... give up. That I'm finished. But I'm not finished. Horror, for me, has always been about pursuing something you don't fully understand and then daring it to turn around and face you. That's what I've built my whole career on. But lately, every shadow I chase vanishes when I get too close. Every door I open leads to a bright, empty room with nothing in it but me. So, I went looking for a darker room. This lighthouse. Isolated. Beaten down. Forgotten. People say it's haunted. I suppose any place left alone long enough gets called that. One year, Nora. That's what I've promised myself. Just me, this tower that was built to keep people safe, and whatever might be waiting in the dark. I want to be afraid. I want to feel the kind of fear that... fuck it... that stops my heart. You know? The kind that tells me I'm not alone, even when good sense reminds me that I am. I need this isolation. If I'm gonna write one last book, it shouldn't come from a place of comfort. It should cost me something. Everything I've written has been about choosing between safety and the truth. Curiosity always wins out over safety. That's why my characters never leave when they should. And if the stories are true – if this place really is haunted, and I meet an ending that looks a lot like the ones I've written – then maybe that's the ending I've been working toward all along.

*(Silence.)*

**NORA**

You have any wine? A Buccella cabernet sauvignon would be nice.

**EVY**

I'm barely even settled in yet, Nora.

**NORA**

Right. I think I have a bottle of Stag's Leap in my tote.

*(She opens her tote and pulls out the bottle.)*

**EVY**

Were you listening to anything I just said?

**NORA**

Of course. That's why I asked for wine.

**EVY**

You don't find it odd that you're asking for wine when you've already brought your own? And not even one you intended as a housewarming gift?

*(Nora's coat slips from the hook.)*

**NORA**

Housewarming? Did you... did you just see that? First the car, then the door, now this. And you call this a housewarming? I'm starting to think this house doesn't want me here. Maybe it is haunted.

*(Evy picks up the coat and drapes it over a chair. Nora digs through her purse and produces a wine key.)*

Alright. Well, at least I can open the bottle. Please tell me you have stemware.

**EVY**

I have a coffee mug and a juice glass.

**NORA**

Needs must when the devil drives.

*(As Nora opens the wine, Evy retrieves the coffee mug and a juice glass, perhaps giving them a quick rinse before bringing them to Nora. Nora opens the wine and pours for them both during the following.)*

Okay, so tell me, Evy...

**EVY**

Mm hm.

**NORA**

...What are you actually risking?

**EVY**

What do you mean?

**NORA**

What're you sacrificing?

**EVY**

Where are you going with this, Nora?

**NORA**

You talk as if this is some sort of last stand. Like your career is on life support and this is your final, desperate attempt to shock yourself back into relevance. Fine. I get that you feel like you're running out of time and that you're banking on isolation to somehow produce another masterpiece. But if it doesn't work, if you come out of this with no book, then what? What's the worst-case scenario? You're still obscenely wealthy. You're still the queen of horror. Your books have been adapted, re-adapted, and they'll continue being adapted long after you're gone. So, tell me. What do you actually stand to lose? Because from where I'm sitting, it sounds to me like you have no idea how little you're actually gambling compared to how grand you're making this all sound. And frankly it's a little tone-deaf but mostly it's obnoxious.

*(She hands Evy wine in the coffee mug.)*

**EVY**

Jesus, Nora.

**NORA**

Spare me the outrage, Evy.

**EVY**

You really came all this way just to tell me that? A phone call would've done it. A text, even. And in case you've forgotten, what I'm doing here – this supposedly grand, dramatic, ego-driven scheme you think I've cooked up – is actually gonna help you in the end, too. You do realize that, right?

**NORA**

So, you've said.

**EVY**

I still need you, Nora. I can't do this alone. I can't lean on my reputation anymore.

**NORA**

You certainly had no problem leaning on your reputation when you pitched *An Unkind Woman* to Dry Point Press without even telling me, even though it's literally my job to handle pitches on

your behalf. Or when you shut me out of the rights negotiations for *The Girl Under the Cypress Tree*.

**EVY**

Frankly, you're not very popular at Dry Point; they wouldn't even take a meeting with me unless I guaranteed you'd be kept out of it. And Galinsky happens to be a friend of mine, as you know.

**NORA**

I see.

**EVY**

You and I are friends too, Nora.

**NORA**

Are we?

**EVY**

Of course, we are. And we're business partners... of sorts. Sometimes the lines get blurred, and yeah, that can lead to bad decisions. But in the end, we share the same goal, right? I get to create the work I care about, and you make money... which is... what you care about.

**NORA**

Okay. So, you're not gonna change your mind then.

**EVY**

You know I'm not.

*(Silence.)*

**NORA**

Thirty percent. That's what I need for this / book.

**EVY**

/ Thirty? Nora, that's twice your / usual cut.

**NORA**

/ I do all the legwork. I set up the meetings, negotiate the rights and advances, and I read every contract line by line. I protect you from bad deals. And I handle the promotions: signings, events, social media, interviews... Thirty percent isn't arbitrary, Evy. It covers the risk, the hustle, and the expertise. I don't just peddle your manuscript; I make sure it lands. I am at every meeting, on every call, solving every problem before it ever becomes your problem. I carry the risk of this project the way you carry the risk of writing it. Because if this book tanks, my credibility takes the hit too. And let me be clear: I don't hand your work to just anyone. Not because you know

them, not because you like them. I work with the people I choose to work with, the people I know can deliver. And you? Your job is simple: write the best goddamn book you've ever written. Can you manage that?

**EVY**

I can manage that, yes.

**NORA**

Good. I'll have an agreement drawn up. In the meantime, we'll toast to it.

*(She raises her juice glass of wine.)*

Cheers.

*(Evy hesitates but then raises her coffee mug of wine.)*

**EVY**

Cheers.

*(They drink.)*

**NORA**

So, I see you've already been making friends up here. Getting a little cozy with the locals it seems.

**EVY**

Who are you talking about?

**NORA**

The good-looking man. The one I passed on my way up the drive. Red pickup.

**EVY**

What? No. That was just the internet guy; he was setting up my Wi-Fi. Jesus, Nora, do you really think I have nothing better to do with my time? I'm not here to get laid.

**NORA**

Of course you're not. But if it happens, it happens. I mean, he did seem a little young for you, but why completely rule it out?

**EVY**

I think I'll survive.

**NORA**

A year is a long time, Evy. You're really planning to spend every minute of every day hunched over your keyboard? You know, because I can think of far better things to do while I'm hunched over.

**EVY**

I'd rather not discuss this with you, if you don't mind.

**NORA**

What if he's interested?

**EVY**

He isn't.

**NORA**

Is he coming back?

**EVY**

He has other things to handle for me, yes.

**NORA**

Then I guess we'll see.

**EVY**

Alright. That's enough.

**NORA**

For now, at least. Why don't we just put a pin in it.

**EVY**

No. There will be no pins. Nothing is being pinned, thank you very much.

**NORA**

The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

**EVY**

Please don't quote Shakespeare at me; it's overplayed.

*(A clockwork crank falls from the lighthouse tower and hits the floor. Both women are startled.)*

**NORA**

By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.

**EVY**

I wonder that you will still be talking.

*(Evy moves to the crank and picks it up.)*

**NORA**

What is it?

**EVY**

It's a... I don't know... Some kind of handle, maybe a crank.

**NORA**

For what?

**EVY**

I'm not sure. But I plan to find out.

*(Evy lowers her head, breathes in deeply and then exhales.)*

**NORA**

You alright?

**EVY**

I, um... I'm suddenly a little dizzy. And I'm... Hoo. I'm really warm.

**NORA**

Do you need to sit down?

**EVY**

Mm hm.

**NORA**

Okay, uh... how about over here?

*(Nora guides Evy to the bed. Evy sits.)*

Give me that. Before you hurt yourself.

*(She takes the crank from Evy and sets it down nearby.)*

I'm gonna get you a glass of water.

*(Nora rinses the juice glass, fills it with water, and then brings it to Evy during the following.)*

**EVY**

I don't know what's wrong with me?

**NORA**

You don't?

**EVY**

No.

**NORA**

Huh.

**EVY**

What the hell's that supposed to mean?

**NORA**

Welcome to perimenopause, my dear.

**EVY**

Fuck you. This is not perimenopause. I think I'm just overtired and maybe a little dehydrated. I might even be coming down with something.

**NORA**

You're having a hot flash.

**EVY**

No. No way. I'm far too young for that.

**NORA**

You're almost fifty.

**EVY**

If you're rounding up, I suppose.

*(Nora hands Evy the glass of water.)*

**NORA**

Here, drink this.

*(Evy takes the glass of water.)*

Do you have an ice pack?

**EVY**

No. There's... there's no ice.

**NORA**

Alright. And what about a washcloth?

**EVY**

There's a hand towel in the bathroom. Just through that door.

**NORA**

*(As Nora heads to the bathroom.)*

Okay, so, listen. I'm gonna soak the towel in some cold water. You'll just need to hold it against your neck or your wrists; that'll cool you down faster.

**EVY**

Mm hm.

**NORA**

I'll be right back. Don't move.

**EVY**

I'm not going anywhere.

*(Nora moves into the bathroom, leaving the door slightly open, and turns on the light. Evy grows visibly overheated and unsteady. She fans herself; her breathing gets heavier. She suddenly gives in and lies down on the bed. There is a strange shift in lighting as the house darkens, except for the bathroom light, which stays on. A quietness settles over the house. Suddenly, a flashlight shines through a window. It scans across various windows as it moves about the exterior of the house. Evy stirs, then slowly sits upright, alert.)*

Nora?

*(She gets out of bed and starts for the bathroom. As she reaches the bathroom door...)*

Nora?

*(A beam of light from the flashlight outside cuts across her face. She turns toward it.)*

Hello? Hello? Who's out there?

*(The flashlight pivots from Evy toward the front door. Evy remembers the crank and grabs it. She then moves to the front door. A sudden, loud knock on the door startles her. She raises the cranks as she moves closer to the door. Another loud knock.)*

I have a gun.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Oh, jeez. Well, I sure hope not.

**EVY**

I'm sorry, what?

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

I said I sure hope you don't have a gun.

**EVY**

Well... I do.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Alright then... that's not ideal. So, here's what I'd like you to do. Just set it down somewhere, maybe a good distance away from you. Then unlock the door and we'll talk this through.

**EVY**

Are you out of your goddamn mind? I am not opening that door. You need to leave. Right now. Or I'm calling the police.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Well, that'd be me. Deputy Sam Chadborn. Tell you what... I'll hold my badge up to the window so you can see I'm official.

*(He turns his flashlight to another window and moves to it. Evy edges cautiously toward the same window, crank still raised. Suddenly, Sam presses his badge against the glass. Startled, Evy steps back but then moves in again to inspect the badge.)*

You know that's not a gun you're holding there, right?

**EVY**

What?

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

You said you had a gun. But that thing there? That's very much not a gun. Now sure, looks like you could do a fair bit of damage with it... but you'd have to get awfully close.

*(She lowers the crank and sighs.)*

**EVY**

I'm opening the door.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Much obliged.

*(She turns on a light and then moves to the front door and opens it, revealing Sam.)*

Evening.

**EVY**

What can I do for you, Deputy...

**SAM**

Chad / born.

**EVY**

/ Chadborn.

**SAM**

Please. Sam's fine.

**EVY**

Sam.

**SAM**

So... I got a call from one of the locals. Older fella. Calls in fairly regular. Always worried about something that usually turns out to be not much of anything. Anyway, he mentioned he'd driven

past the lighthouse a couple times and saw some lights on, some activity. Asked if someone might check it out. Truth be told, I figured I'd find the place empty. But here you are. So, I guess my question is... what brings you out here?

**EVY**

I happen to own the place.

**SAM**

Well, I'll be damned. You're the one who bought it at auction.

**EVY**

That's right.

**SAM**

Huh. I'd heard talk the town might turn it into a visitor center or something. Never crossed my mind someone'd actually live here though. I mean, folks are glad someone wants to preserve the place. But live in it? That's... a choice.

**EVY**

I have other reasons for being here. Though, I suppose it doesn't hurt that I can keep an eye on the place while I go about my business.

**SAM**

I see. And what sort of business might that be?

**EVY**

Oh, no. I'm not putting myself through that humiliation again.

**SAM**

Humiliation?

**EVY**

Forget it. It's not important. Honestly, the fewer people who know, the better.

**SAM**

You know, you're saying that to a man whose whole job is poking into other folks' business. But I can take a hint. And it looks like we cleared up our little mystery here anyway. I'll say this though: I'm glad they're preserving the place; she's a beautiful old structure.

**EVY**

She is.

*(Silence.)*

**SAM**

Alright then. You have yourself a good night.

*(He turns to go.)*

**EVY**

I've heard it's haunted.

*(Sam turns to her with a smile.)*

**SAM**

That's what folks say. Of course, that's only if you believe in that sort of thing.

**EVY**

I believe in a good story.

**SAM**

Then I suppose you might be curious.

**EVY**

I might be.

**SAM**

Alright then. Well, I can tell you what happened here but be warned. Some stories have a way of sticking with you. And sometimes they follow you into your dreams.

**EVY**

Bring it on.

**SAM**

Well, now... back in the late 1800s, a man by the name of Warner Fricet took over as the lighthouse keeper here. He moved in with his wife, Alma, and they expected to eventually have a couple of kids, so that maybe they could one day help out, possibly carry on what they had started. But children never came. Warner blamed Alma for it, though really, nobody knew if she couldn't have children or if the problem was his. Either way, he couldn't let it go. Over time, his frustration grew, and folks began to say he changed, became mean-spirited. This lighthouse was his whole world. Every day he'd fuel the lamp, clean the lens, wind the clockwork... whatever it took to keep that light going. He also took very good care of these quarters and the grounds. He kept detailed records, made sure supplies were stocked, and sometimes he'd show visitors around. And Warner wanted Alma right there with him, working side by side. Not just living

together but sharing the daily grind. To him, that's what a real marriage was. But Alma wasn't cut out for it. She was an artist, and she painted whenever she got the chance: seascapes, the cliffs, even the lighthouse itself. Helping with the maintenance made her feel like she was giving up the one thing that really mattered to her. Oh, and they argued about it all the time. He said she wasn't doing her part; she insisted he cared more for this lighthouse than for her. Neither one would back down. Then, one day, a letter arrived; one that Warner intercepted. It was from an influential art dealer and curator who had seen a few of Alma's paintings at a local shop in town and was interested in her work. The letter made mention of her talent and her unique style and floated the idea of an exhibition where her paintings could be shown with other up-and-coming artists. And of course, Warner read that as a threat, as proof that the world beyond the lighthouse might be calling her away from him. If she left – even if it was meant to be for a short time – he feared she might never come back. And that's what broke him. So, one night, Warner told Alma he needed help raising the weights back up so he could get the light turning again. He said he was feeling kind of weak and needed an extra set of hands to wind them up. Alma wasn't exactly excited about climbing the tower – it had been ages since she'd gone up there – but she went anyway, following him up that spiral staircase and into the watch room. Now, what actually occurred from that point on has been the subject of years of speculation and debate. No one could ever really come to an agreement on the exact circumstances. What is known is that Warner was never charged with any wrongdoing, and he continued to run the lighthouse until one day he just... vanished.

*(Silence.)*

**EVY**

So, what happened?

**SAM**

What do you mean?

**EVY**

Up there. In the watch room.

**SAM**

Oh, yeah. Well, it depends. Which version do you want?

**EVY**

The darkest one.

**SAM**

Okay. Well, some folks think Alma found that letter tucked away and decided to slip something extra into Warner's dinner that night, which would explain why he later said he wasn't feeling

well. She knew he'd need her help tending to that lantern. Others, though, believe it was Warner who feigned illness, knowing Alma would feel obligated to come up and assist him. It didn't really matter which version was true. Either way, things escalated, tempers flared, and the argument turned physical. At some point, Warner got his hands on the crank—

**EVY**

*(She retrieves the crank.)*

This crank.

**SAM**

*(Sam takes it and inspects it.)*

Well, I'll be... that just might be the very one. Anyway, it seems Warner got his hands on it and swung it at Alma, but he missed, sending her scrambling backward, where she slipped and tumbled down the stairs. Or maybe it was Alma who grabbed the crank, swung it at Warner and lost her footing instead. Whichever way it happened, Alma ended up dead at the bottom of that staircase over there. No sign that she was pushed or struck. Just an unfortunate accident.

**EVY**

And which version do you believe?

**SAM**

Neither.

**EVY**

Neither?

**SAM**

Well, I mean, the Frichets were real people, of course, and they did take care of this lighthouse for many years. And although Warner had a reputation for being a little gruff, he was actually a pretty nice guy. Alma was a decent artist, and the townspeople loved her; they found her sweet and funny. They'd occasionally buy her paintings, and every now and then you might even spot one hanging in a furniture shop or a tavern.

**EVY**

I see.

**SAM**

You sound disappointed.

**EVY**

Very much the opposite.

**SAM**

Good. So, maybe you could use it then.

**EVY**

Use it how?

**SAM**

In one of your books.

*(Silence.)*

Truth be told... I'm a pretty big fan, Miss Wray. You remember that little collection you put out a few years back? Those leather-bound booklets, detectives' notes from your novels. Scribbles, half-finished thoughts, things they noticed while they were working a case. I carry one around most days. Don't know why I'm asking, of course you remember it. Anyway, my favorite is Roy Tibbits. From the Clap of Thunder series. Just a hell of a character. And, well, if it wouldn't be too much trouble... would you mind signing it?

**EVY**

Uh... sure. Of course.

**SAM**

Oh, that's... well, that's just great. Thank you.

*(He pulls a leather-bound booklet out of his jacket pocket and offers it to Evy.)*

**EVY**

Is my signature okay, or would you like it personal—?

**SAM**

Personalized... if it's not too much trouble.

**EVY**

Not at all.

*(Evy takes the booklet from Sam and goes to her desk. Sam follows, still holding the crank. She sits, picks up a pen, and prepares to sign.)*

**SAM**

So... this is where it happens, huh?

**EVY**

Where what happens?

**SAM**

Your next book. Right here. This desk. That computer. This lighthouse. That's why you're out here, isn't it?

*(Evy smiles and then signs the booklet, reading aloud as she writes.)*

**EVY**

"To Sam Chadborn: Detective Roy Tibbits has nothing on you."

*(She hands the booklet back to Sam.)*

There you go.

**SAM**

Incredible. Thank you.

**EVY**

*(Eying the crank in his hand.)*

Sam...

**SAM**

Yeah?

**EVY**

That... that stays here.

*(Sam glances down, realizing he's still holding it.)*

**SAM**

Oh. Well, I'll be. I didn't even realize I was still holding it.

**EVY**

I mean, technically it belongs to me. But more importantly it belongs to this house. And you know... it might even be some kind of artifact.

**SAM**

I'm sure it is. Here you go.

*(He hands her the crank, and she places it on the desk.)*

Well... I think it's about time I got out of your hair.

*(He starts toward the front door. Evy follows him.)*

**EVY**

Back home to the wife and kids.

**SAM**

Oh, jeez. I wish. Never had much luck in the love department. No, I've still got my shift to finish. Late one. But yeah... other than that, it's just me at home.

**EVY**

I'm sorry. That sounded flippant. I didn't mean it that way at all.

**SAM**

Don't you worry about it. Happens a lot.

**EVY**

I still feel awful.

**SAM**

Don't. I take no offense. You have yourself a good night, alright? And if you need anything out here, anything at all, you just give me a call.

*(He hands her a business card.)*

**EVY**

Thank you, Sam.

**SAM**

My pleasure.

*(He exits. Evy remains still for a moment. She's slightly disoriented, unsettled by the sense that time isn't moving the way it should. She crosses to the cupboard, opens it, and takes out a proper wine glass. Grabbing the bottle of Stag's Leap, she returns to her desk, pours herself a glass, and settles into her chair, preparing to write. She pauses, takes a deep breath, and logs onto her computer. She opens a blank document, studies the empty page for a moment, then begins to type... slowly at first, then faster as she finds her stride. Time passes. The lights subtly shift, suggesting either its progression or its distortion. At last, Tom enters from the bathroom, carrying a wet hand towel.)*

**TOM**

Maybe a little ice in this'll help some?

**EVY**

*(Still typing.)*

Oh. Thank you. That's a great idea. There's some in the kitchen.

*(Tom gets some ice, puts it in the towel, and brings it to Evy during the following.)*

**TOM**

Sorry you're feeling rough. Seems a little early for the flu, but with a fever, who knows.

**EVY**

It's not the flu.

**TOM**

Alright then, Dr. Wray. So, what is it then?

**EVY**

I'd rather not say. But don't worry, it's not contagious.

**TOM**

Good to know. Hey, so, the, uh... the concrete's fully set up out there. Solid as it's gonna get. Moved the cable over to the new pole. Swapped out some of the wiring in here too. Ran what I could through the walls without tearing anything up.

**EVY**

What do I / owe you?

**TOM**

/ What're you working on there?

**EVY**

*(She looks up from her computer.)*

Hm? Oh. This?

**TOM**

That the next one? The big masterpiece?

**EVY**

That's the plan.

**TOM**

You can plan for a masterpiece? I mean, doesn't it just happen? Or not happen? I'm just trying to understand how someone can plan for one.

**EVY**

I never said it'd be a masterpiece. That was your word, not mine. What I do want is for it to be better than the ones before it.

**TOM**

How many have you written?

**EVY**

Well, if, uh... I suppose if we're just counting novels... sixty-seven.

**TOM**

Sixty-seven? You serious? That's... what do they call it... prolific.

**EVY**

God, I hate that word. People toss it around like it's a compliment just because someone churns out a bunch of projects in a year. "Wow, you're so prolific." Really? Let's be honest: making a ton of stuff doesn't make you prolific. It just means you're very busy doing not much of anything at all. Sure, you can crank out a hundred songs, books, paintings, whatever. But if most of them are mediocre or worse? That's not prolific. That's a waste of time. It's not just about volume. It's about volume and quality. It's about showing up again and again without phoning it in. It's the tenth piece still landing. The twentieth still surprising. The fiftieth not feeling like a watered-down remix of everything before it. Anyone can repeat a formula: copy, paste, and call it a new project. Real prolific? That's work that stays strong across the board. It's stamina with standards. It's discipline when you're tired. It's taste when you're tempted to rush it. It's knowing when to scrap something even though you could publish it. And yes. It does take talent. Not just raw talent but developed talent. The kind you've sharpened over a lot of years until your instincts are dead accurate. So that when you produce a lot of work, you're not just spraying ideas all over the place. You're landing them. Like a dart finding the bullseye. A lot of work is easy. A lot of good work? That's rare. That's prolific.

**TOM**

Are you prolific?

**EVY**

Not especially. I just happen to be admired by a handful of very influential people who insist I'm a genius, which only proves they aren't.

*(Tom laughs.)*

What?

**TOM**

You're a funny lady.

**EVY**

I wasn't trying to be.

**TOM**

Exactly.

**EVY**

And don't call me "lady."

**TOM**

My mistake. So, you're not a lady?

**EVY**

I'm a woman.

**TOM**

And a funny one at that.

**EVY**

I thought you said you didn't like things getting awkward.

**TOM**

I don't.

**EVY**

Then tread lightly. Because you're getting very close.

**TOM**

Is that a warning?

**EVY**

It's an observation.

**TOM**

Should I go then?

**EVY**

You know, when you call a woman of a certain age “funny,” you’re implying she’s quaint. Diminished. So, if you’re not provoking me, then you’re testing me.

**TOM**

Maybe I am.

**EVY**

Why?

**TOM**

I don’t know. Guess it’s because you kind of fascinate me. You hide behind all that talk: standards, discipline, saying you’re not all that prolific when everything about you says otherwise. You’re a bit complicated. Maybe even a little weird. I kind of like that, truth be told. I work with live wires. Been around enough of them to know one when I see it. And you? You’re charged, no doubt about it. Nothing you do is halfway. Even your hot flashes come with a whole damn lecture attached...

**EVY**

Careful.

**TOM**

...You’re pretty sharp. Little intimidating too.

**EVY**

Intimidating?

**TOM**

The way you look at me. Like you’re deciding whether I’ve earned a spot in one of your books.

**EVY**

Maybe I am.

**TOM**

So, am I doomed?

**EVY**

Undecided.

**TOM**

Well, if you’re gonna write me, at least let me help you with the details.

**EVY**

Such as?

**TOM**

For starters... I didn't come back today just to check on the concrete.

**EVY**

No?

**TOM**

No.

**EVY**

Then why did you come back?

**TOM**

Because I believed you when you said you wanted to feel something that cost you.

**EVY**

I never said that. I mean, yes... yes, I... I did say that. Just not to you.

*(Tom moves in to kiss Evy. She responds, and they kiss with urgency, intensifying as they move toward the bed. Their movement is clumsy, bumping into furniture and fumbling as they remove a few items of clothing. The lighting shifts to a subtly surreal state, then gradually fades into night. The window near the desk rattles, blows open, and then shuts abruptly on its own. The front door slowly opens by itself and then slams closed, causing a small box on a kitchen shelf to tip over and spill its contents into a pan. Inside the woodstove, the logs shift slightly. The load door closes on its own, and a fire ignites, burning brightly for a short period before extinguishing. The stage returns to darkness. Silence as the lighting gradually transitions to morning. A knock at the front door.)*

**NORA**

*(Off.)*

Evy? Evy are you here?

*(Nora tries the handle and pulls on it a couple of times.)*

Goddamnit.

*(She stops and then remembers to push on the door. It swings open.)*

Right. Push, not pull.

*(She calls out.)*

Evy!

*(Evy jolts upright in bed, groggy and disoriented.)*

**EVY**

Nora?

**NORA**

In the flesh.

*(Evy reaches for a robe or shirt, pulling it around herself as she gets out of bed.)*

**EVY**

What the hell are you doing? You can't just walk in here.

**NORA**

The door was unlocked.

**EVY**

An unlocked door is not an invitation to let yourself in.

**NORA**

You're not alone.

**EVY**

What?

**NORA**

*(She looks toward the bed.)*

I spy with my little eye...

**EVY**

You need to go.

**NORA**

Oh, come on. We're adults. It's fine. I came to bring you back to town for brunch. Your friend can join us if he wants. Or she. I mean, we are in Maine, after all.

**EVY**

You could've texted. Or called.

**NORA**

Please. You wouldn't have answered. Or you would've agreed to meet me and then not shown up. So, I decided to come get you and drag you out of this lugubrious lantern.

*(Sam – not Tom – sits up in bed.)*

**SAM**

Well, I've got the day off, so I'd be happy to join you ladies for brunch.

**NORA**

Deputy Chadborn.

**SAM**

Ms. Collins.

**EVY**

This cannot be.

**NORA**

As true as steel.

**SAM**

The thief doth fear each bush an officer. I know a little Shakespeare myself.

**EVY**

Thief? What do you mean, thief? Nora, what did you do?

**SAM**

Oh, nothing too serious. Just a small misunderstanding mixed with a bit of absent-mindedness over at the Filigree Folly. Cozy little jewelry shop in town. Run by Gus and Charlie Watson. Nice fellas.

**NORA**

Adorable couple. Anyway, I tried on this beautiful bracelet to see how it looked, got a little distracted, and somehow wandered out of the store with it still on my wrist.

**SAM**

Honest mistake. Happens more often than folks like to admit.

**NORA**

In my defense, the place was absolutely packed with shiny things: rings, cameos, brooches, pendants, pins. Everywhere I turned, something sparkled. I didn't know where to look, let alone what to choose. So, I thought I'd step out for a quick lunch, clear my head, make a decision... and then, of course, head right back.

**SAM**

Which is where I joined Ms. Collins.

**EVY**

At the shop.

**SAM**

No. At the restaurant.

**NORA**

Much to my surprise.

**SAM**

Official business, of course.

**NORA**

Though we had a perfectly nice meal anyway.

**SAM**

We sure did. That is, once we got past the whole "ma'am, you seem to have wandered out of Filigree Folly with unpaid merchandise" matter.

**NORA**

Just a little snag in our budding friendship.

**EVY**

Amazing.

**SAM**

Anyway... maybe I should get dressed and wash up. Mind if I use your bathroom?

**EVY**

You know where it is.

*(Sam gathers his clothes and exits to the bathroom. Nora removes her earrings and slips them into her tote as Evy watches, disapproving.)*

What has gotten into you?

**NORA**

Never mind that. Just get yourself ready. Wear something nice, and a little makeup wouldn't hurt. If people hear a celebrity's in town, it could help us out. Stir up a little interest in the book.

**EVY**

That's exactly what I don't want. Not right now, anyway. I'm not leaving this house. If you're hungry, I can make you something.

**NORA**

Oh, splendid idea. Let's see what we've got.

*(Nora moves to the refrigerator and opens it.)*

Okay, well, unless you've developed a taste for mildew, I'm afraid you have no food.

**EVY**

There must be something in there we can use.

**NORA**

No eggs. No yogurt. No fruit. Nothing that ever remotely resembled a living creature.

*(She rummages through the refrigerator.)*

Let's see... Oh! Some possibly expired creamer... half a lemon... a jar of what might be mustard... and something I dearly hope is soup but strongly resembles a container of bird excrement.

*(She opens the freezer.)*

Ah! Ice! I thought you said you didn't have ice.

**EVY**

There wasn't any.

**NORA**

Well, there is now, which means this house clearly intends for us to at least have a drink.

**EVY**

It's ten in the morning, Nora.

**NORA**

Which is exactly when civilized people begin brunch.

*(She closes the freezer and begins opening cupboards.)*

Now then, where would a woman hiding from the world stash the prosecco?

**EVY**

I don't have prosecco.

**NORA**

I see you now at least have proper wine glasses. Do you have champagne?

**EVY**

No.

**NORA**

Vodka? Tomato juice? Any kind of juice?

**EVY**

No.

**NORA**

Good Lord, Evy. What exactly are you living on? How are you hydrating? Surely even hermits require electrolytes.

**EVY**

I have coffee and oatmeal.

*(She moves toward the small kitchen shelf and stove where the tipped box and pan sit. She picks up the pan and peers inside.)*

At least I think this is oatmeal.

**NORA**

*(Having followed Evy.)*

I've never seen oatmeal that color.

*(She notices the tipped box.)*

Ah. Here we go.

*(She takes the box from the shelf.)*

Oh, dear.

**EVY**

What? What is it?

**NORA**

Brunch has seemingly taken a very dark turn, Evy...

*(She turns the box toward Evy.)*

...This appears to be rat poison.

**EVY**

Rat poison?

**NORA**

*(Reading.)*

“Guaranteed to rid your home of rats and mice.”

**EVY**

Does it mention literary agents?

**NORA**

You should be so lucky. And for the record, if you’re planning to off me with poison, you’d have more success with a lobster frittata than with oatmeal.

*(Sam enters from the bathroom.)*

**SAM**

How’re things going out here?

**EVY**

We’re doing alright. Except... listen, Tom–

**NORA**

Sam.

**EVY**

Sorry, what?

**SAM**

Not sure who this Tom fella is, but I’m Sam.

**EVY**

Deputy Chadborn.

**SAM**

Yeah... but Sam's fine.

**EVY**

Where's your shirt?

**SAM**

Good question.

*(He spots it on or near the desk.)*

There it is.

*(He grabs it and puts it on. As he does, he notices the crank on the desk and casually stows it.)*

**NORA**

Alright, that's enough stalling. Let's go, Evy.

**EVY**

No. As a matter of fact, I'd like the two of you to leave.

**NORA**

Sam, would you mind giving us a minute?

**SAM**

Sure thing. I'll be right outside.

*(Sam exits through the front door.)*

**EVY**

I need space, Nora.

**NORA**

I've given you space. And frankly, how much more space do you need? You have this lighthouse all to yourself. All the way out here. And an entire ocean just outside that window there.

**EVY**

And I need time. You said you'd give me at least five days – to start writing, to get inspired, to find my footing – before we checked in again. And I'd really appreciate it if you didn't feel the need to check on me anyway. You know, because it really pisses me off.

**NORA**

I gave you seven days. Seven. And that was more than three months ago.

**EVY**

What? No. No, that's not right. You're messing with me.

**NORA**

Am I? You might want to take another look at our latest contract.

**EVY**

I haven't even had a chance to read it yet.

**NORA**

That's odd. You signed it.

**EVY**

No, I didn't. I haven't signed anything. I haven't even seen it.

**NORA**

Well, I certainly wouldn't recommend signing a contract without reading it first. Though, at this point, whether you read it or not is irrelevant.

**EVY**

There is no contract, Nora. I haven't seen a contract.

**NORA**

You're wrong. Promotional obligations... at my discretion. Appearances. Interviews. Signings. Whenever I decide, within reason. And I'd say brunch falls well within reason. All you have to do is sit there and smile, Evy. Enjoy something nice to eat, maybe have a drink or two. And if someone happens to recognize you and it creates a little buzz, all the better.

**EVY**

Show me the goddamn contract, Nora.

**NORA**

Check your email.

**EVY**

I want to see the original hard copy.

**NORA**

There isn't one. No one does hard-copy contracts anymore.

*(Evy seethes for a moment, then suddenly crosses to her computer. She manipulates the keyboard, pulling up her email and searching for the message with the signed contract. She scans it with trepidation, occasionally glancing at Nora with disdain, her eyes finally widening as she sees that she has indeed signed it.)*

**EVY**

Nora...

**NORA**

And the date. Did you notice the date you signed it?

*(Evy looks again at the document.)*

**EVY**

I... I don't understand. I mean... I just got here. Didn't I?

*(Silence.)*

**NORA**

Well, it sounds like you're finally getting what you came here for. A classic be careful what you wish for, though I know how much you despise aphorisms. Almost as much as you despise Shakespeare. So, here's my advice: pull yourself together, clear out whatever ghosts you've managed to stir up in this place and then get back to the job you signed up for: finishing the book. Because if memory serves, that little detail is spelled out quite clearly in the contract as well. Which means you can skip brunch today. And don't worry. Whether or not Sam is the kiss-and-tell type, I promise I won't press him too hard for details about last night. I'll see you soon, Evy.

*(Nora exits through the front door. Off.)*

Looks like it's just you and me for lunch, Sam. Evy prefers not to be disturbed... though one might argue she already is.

*(Evy stands quietly for a moment. She then takes the Stag's Leap, kept just out of Nora's sight in the previous scene and somehow always full, along with a wine glass. She pours herself a drink, takes a sip, and sits at her desk to write. The lights slowly shift to dusk as she continues. Suddenly, raised voices are heard arguing in the tower above. Evy stops writing, rises, and moves cautiously to the spiral staircase, pausing to listen.)*

*NOTE: The following dialogue does not need to be fully intelligible. It should feel heated and tense, with clear emotional stakes even if some words are indistinct. The voices, performed by the actor playing Evy if recorded or by Nora if live, and the actor playing Sam, may sound distant or hollow to emphasize atmosphere and intensity over clarity.*

**WARNER**

Steady now, Alma. Keep the line true. If it slips, we lose the turn.

**ALMA**

I fail to see why this lighthouse must claim both our hands and every waking hour besides.

**WARNER**

Because that is the work. Ships depend on it. That weight must descend clean, or the lens falters. This tower does not run on idle fancies and paint.

**ALMA**

My paintings are not fancies.

**WARNER**

They are when they keep you from your duties.

**ALMA**

My duty is not to vanish into this tower.

**WARNER**

Your duty is to your husband.

**ALMA**

And yours is to your wife. Though one might never guess it from the way you worship this cursed lantern.

**WARNER**

Mind your tongue.

**ALMA**

You're jealous. You cannot bear the thought that I might belong to something beyond this tower.

**WARNER**

And what calls you away? That letter?

**ALMA**

You had no right to read it.

**WARNER**

No right? It came to my house.

**ALMA**

It came to me.

**WARNER**

To tempt you away. To fill your head with empty promises.

**ALMA**

You do not know that.

**WARNER**

I know enough. I know what happens when a woman starts dreaming beyond her husband.

**ALMA**

No, Warner. You only know how frightened you are of it.

**WARNER**

Watch the drum. Don't let it run.

**ALMA**

Do it yourself then.

**WARNER**

I need your help.

**ALMA**

You demand it.

**WARNER**

Because you belong here.

**ALMA**

I belong nowhere I must be chained to remain.

**WARNER**

Give that back.

**ALMA**

No.

**WARNER**

Alma—

**ALMA**

Let the light go dark for one night. Perhaps then the world will notice something besides Warner Frichet's precious tower.

**WARNER**

Hand me the crank.

**ALMA**

Or what?

**WARNER**

Do not test me.

**ALMA**

Then do not cage me.

*(Silence. Evy stands there quietly, listening, expecting more, but none comes. After a moment, she draws a breath and ascends the spiral staircase, disappearing into the tower above. The lights shift in their usual strange way, then dim to near darkness. A barely visible human form suddenly falls from above, striking the floor below. End of Act 1.)*

## ACT TWO

*Continuous from Act 1, though now set fully in the late 1800s. Dusk.*

*(Complete silence. The lighting has returned to a natural state, no longer heightened or surreal. The desk is gone, in its place, a stool and an easel. A painting rests there, covered in a large muslin cloth and turned away from the audience. The body at the foot of the stairs is Warner. Alma descends the staircase, stepping carefully around him without touching him.)*

**ALMA**

Warner? Warner?

*(She stops and looks around the room. She considers moving the body but then decides against it. Better to leave it and go straight to the nearest police call box. She crosses to the closet, grabs a coat, and pulls it on as she heads for the front door. The door sticks when she tries it; she works it a moment until it gives, opening to reveal FREDERICK BOOTHBY and ENID PHILBRICK on the other side, Freddie just about to knock.)*

**FREDDIE**

Alma Frichet. Where are you off to in such a hurry? Did you not receive my note?

**ALMA**

Mister Boothby—

**FREDDIE**

Please... Freddie.

**ALMA**

Yes, of course. Freddie. I'm sorry. My husband tends to handle the correspondence. It's possible he didn't pass it along; he keeps himself quite busy with things about the lighthouse, as you can imagine.

**FREDDIE**

Of course. Then forgive me for arriving unannounced. Miss Philbrick has come up from Boston especially to meet you. And to see your work.

**ALMA**

Miss Philbrick?

**FREDDIE**

Yes. She's closely acquainted with Isabella Stewart Gardner. I imagine you've heard the name.

**ALMA**

Oh. Well, yes, of course. I have indeed. It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Philbrick.

**ENID**

Enid, please. I may spend my time among society, but I'm not much for formality. It's tiring.

**ALMA**

I imagine so. Well, as you can see from the state of things here, we don't get out much. We live simply. And on very little.

**ENID**

Many artists of some renown have begun with far less. There's no fault in it. If anything, it lends a certain... authenticity to the work.

**ALMA**

Authenticity. Yes. I suppose that's one way of putting it.

**FREDDIE**

Miss Philbrick has a keen eye for such things. She wouldn't have made the journey otherwise.

**ENID**

No, I wouldn't. I've learned it's rarely the grand studios that hold the most interest. It's places like this. Where something is still... developing.

**ALMA**

Then I hope it does not disappoint. I've had little formal training. Only what I've managed on my own time.

**ENID**

May we come in? I should very much like to see some of your work, though it seems we've caught you on your way out?

**ALMA**

No. No, that can wait. Yes. Please, do come in. I have a painting just here I can show you.

**FREDDIE**

Excellent.

*(Alma ushers them in and steers them straight to the easel, making sure they don't catch sight of Warner's body. She hovers awkwardly beside the painting as Enid and Freddie wait.)*

**ENID**

Do you mind?

**ALMA**

Oh. Right. Of course. I'll just—

*(She pulls the muslin cloth off and, thinking quickly, takes it and drapes it over Warner's body as Enid and Freddie scrutinize the painting.)*

**ENID**

Hmmm.

**FREDDIE**

Ahhh.

*(Alma joins them.)*

**ENID**

I must say, Alma... I've come a long distance on very little certainty. Only Freddie's assurances, and the two rather modest studies he was kind enough to send me, which hinted at a sensitivity not yet shaped into anything fixed. But this... this is more difficult. At first glance, one is tempted to call it faithful. The hand is steady, the eye attentive, everything appears to be where it ought to be. And yet, the longer one looks, the less it behaves. It begins to slip. Not away from reality, exactly, but out from under it. There's a kind of insistence in it. As though the subject has been pressed too far, seen too closely, and in that closeness, something has... shifted. Not enough to name, but enough that one feels it. It does not flatter what it observes. Nor does it condemn it. It simply presents it until the presentation itself becomes... questionable. I find myself looking for the place where it resolves, where it settles into something familiar. But it refuses that comfort. It hovers just at the edge of recognition and stays there. One could argue it lacks restraint. That it goes further than is strictly necessary. And yet... stopping short would have been the safer choice.

**ALMA**

You're disappointed. I'm sorry.

**ENID**

On the contrary. It's exceptional. I should like to see more.

**FREDDIE**

Where is your husband, by the way?

**ENID**

Why do you ask her that, Freddie?

**FREDDIE**

Only that he may wish to be present for this. He might have a view of things we ought to hear or concerns we should address.

**ENID**

Nonsense. This is not his work. It's Alma's. And I suspect he does rather more than handle the correspondence that comes to the house. Likely he decides what reaches her at all.

**ALMA**

He's... not here just now.

**FREDDIE**

I see.

**ENID**

All the better. Then we may speak plainly. You must show me the rest. Everything you've kept back. Sketches, studies... whatever you have. Especially what you were not intending anyone to see.

**ALMA**

I'm not certain there's much worth—

**ENID**

There is. I can tell there is. Work like this does not arrive alone. May we?

**ALMA**

Everything else is in the boathouse.

**ENID**

The boathouse?

**ALMA**

That's where Warner asked me to store them. He felt they cluttered the house and wanted them out of the way.

**ENID**

They'll be ruined out there. The damp air, the salt, the shifts in temperature, insects, rodents... It's entirely reckless.

**FREDDIE**

Perhaps we should have a look before the sun sets.

**ENID**

Yes. Immediately. Whatever remains, we must see it as it is, before it's lost entirely. How long have they been out there?

**ALMA**

Weeks. Months. As soon as I finish one, Warner removes it from the house.

**ENID**

And they've been out there that long? Unprotected?

**ALMA**

It seemed easier.

**ENID**

Easier for whom? No Matter. Come. We shouldn't waste another moment.

*(She starts off.)*

Freddie.

**FREDDIE**

Right behind you.

*(Enid exits. Freddie lingers a moment, noticing the muslin cloth on the floor.)*

Alma?

**ALMA**

Yes?

**FREDDIE**

What's this here? Are you working on a sculpture of some sort? It seems rather a departure from your other work.

**ALMA**

No, no. Nothing of the sort. Just dirty linens. Another household chore I've yet to tend to.

**FREDDIE**

Linens.

**ALMA**

Yes. Just that.

**FREDDIE**

Of course.

**ALMA**

*(Gesturing to the door.)*

After you.

*(Freddie hesitates, then gives a small nod and exits. Alma lingers a beat behind him before following, leaving the door ajar. A quiet moment passes. Then the “body” twitches beneath the cloth, followed by a series of awkward, increasingly impatient wiggles until he manages to sit bolt upright, the cloth still draped over him like a bedsheet ghost. He rises, shuffles blindly around, nearly tripping over himself as he tries to pull the cloth off and only succeeds in tangling it further. He lurches toward the door just as it swings shut on its own. He walks straight into it with a dull thud, winces, and collapses backward in a heap, the cloth settling back over him as if nothing happened. Evy appears from the bathroom and spots the body on the floor. We have returned to present time, morning.)*

**EVY**

What the hell are you doing, Sam?

**SAM**

*(Still under the cloth.)*

I... I don't rightly know.

*(She spots the easel and the painting.)*

**EVY**

And what's this? Where's my desk? My computer?

**SAM**

*(Still under the cloth.)*

Wish I could tell you, but I don't know.

**EVY**

That's not an answer. You were out here. Alone. And all of this... wasn't here. Certainly not five minutes ago.

**SAM**

*(Still under the cloth.)*

Doesn't look any different to me, though I don't exactly have the best vantage point from here.

**EVY**

Do you mean to tell me you're trapped under a... what is that? A bedsheet?

**SAM**

*(Still under the cloth.)*

If it is, it's got a mighty low thread count.

*(Evy moves to Sam and pulls the cloth off him.)*

**EVY**

What are you wearing?

*(Sam gets up off the floor. He's dressed in late-1800s lighthouse keeper's work clothes: overalls, a long-sleeved shirt, worn boots.)*

**SAM**

You're asking a lot of questions of a man who just lost a battle with a whole mess of fabric.

*(A knock at the door.)*

**EVY**

What!?

**TOM**

*(Off.)*

Uhhhhh... It's Tom.

**SAM**

*(Calling out.)*

Is that Thomas McKay?

**TOM**

*(Off.)*

Last I checked.

**SAM**

*(To Evy.)*

Well, I'll be damned. So that's the Tom you were talking about. Guess I've got myself some competition then. He's good-looking, I'll give him that. And I got a few years on him, sure, but I reckon I can still hold my own.

**EVY**

This isn't a competition. You understand that, right? And if it were, neither of you would qualify.

**TOM**

*(Off.)*

Would you mind opening the door? I've got my hands full.

*(Eveyn moves to the front door and opens it.)*

Much obliged.

*(Tom enters, carrying Evy's laptop and a brand-new monitor. Evy closes the door behind him.)*

**EVY**

What's all this?

**TOM**

*(Setting everything down on the kitchen table.)*

Your laptop. And a new monitor. Monitor's on me. I'll have to charge you for the work, though.

**EVY**

Now, hold on just a damn—

**TOM**

*(He starts to set things up. Re: the laptop.)*

This thing was a bit of a mess, Evy. No offense. Malware piled on malware. I ran a full scan twice: first pass took care of the big stuff, second pass caught what was tucked away out of sight. Cleared the junk, shut down a whole mess of background nonsense that was chewing through your memory. Trimmed up your startup, too. Got your OS updated; you were a few patches behind, holes big enough to float a lobster skiff through. That's all buttoned up now. Couple drivers were just about ready to give out, especially the graphics one. That flicker you kept seeing? That was it giving up the ghost. I wiped it and put in a clean install.

*(Taps the monitor.)*

This ought to help. Picture's sharper, easier on the eyes. And don't worry; I didn't go nosing through your files. Not my business. Kept to the bones of it, just got things running the way they should. Starts quicker now. Runs smoother. Connection ought to hold steady. Truth be told, that's about as clean as she's gonna get without swapping parts... or replacing her outright. Anyway... you asked me to fix it. So, I fixed it.

*(To Sam.)*

How you doing, Deputy Chadborn?

**SAM**

Doing just fine. And you, Tom?

**TOM**

Can't complain. Staying out of trouble, for the most part.

**SAM**

Glad to hear it. Been a while since I've had to bring you in. What was that again? Drunk and disorderly?

**TOM**

No, no. I wasn't drunk. But I did hit the fella. Put his jaw ought of place. So... just the disorderly, I guess.

**EVY**

Are we all caught up, gentlemen?

*(Nora pushes the front door open.)*

**NORA**

Success!

**EVY**

Oh God No.

**NORA**

I'm always a sight for sore eyes, Evy.

**EVY**

I'd rather have ocular herpes, Nora.

**NORA**

I must say, this little shift you've been going through has done wonders for your demeanor, my dear.

*(She notices the painting.)*

Oh. There it is.

*(She moves to it.)*

It's beautiful. Really. And you've got it in a great spot. Listen, you should have this appraised; it could be worth quite a bit. Tom's already pulled the others out of the boathouse, packed them up, and moved them to the old oil house; they'll be safer there. Honestly, Evy, I think you might be sitting on a small fortune. You really should have someone take a look—

**EVY**

Alright. Just... just stop. All of you. For one second, just stop talking and listen to me. Because it feels like I've wandered into the middle of some fever dream. And maybe I sound like a lunatic saying that – maybe I do – but at least I'm aware enough to question it, which is more than I can say for the rest of you. Sam... what the hell are you wearing? You look like you crawled out of a goddamn museum exhibit, and you're standing there like that's perfectly normal, like I'm the one who's supposed to adjust. No need to answer that. Tom... you took my computer. The one thing in this entire godforsaken place that actually belongs to me, that does what it's supposed to do. And you just... what? Fixed it? Improved it? You had no right to touch it. And this... this painting. It wasn't here. None of this was here. I leave a room, I come back, and everything's been rearranged. And somehow, I'm expected to just nod along and accept it? So, can someone – anyone – give me a straight answer? Because I didn't come all the way out to the edge of nowhere just to be pulled into other people's nonsense. That was not the plan. You were not the plan. I came here to work. To focus. To strip everything down to the bone and get something real out of it. And instead, I've got... what? A deputy playing dress-up, a cable guy with boundary issues, and a gaslighting literary agent. And, you know what? I'm done. Do you hear me? I am done pretending this is charming or quirky or even remotely acceptable. I don't need company. I don't need commentary. And I sure as hell don't need whatever this is. So here it is, plainly, in case I haven't been clear enough: I want to be left alone. Because none of this matters to me. Not right now. Not compared to what I came here to do. And if that sounds cold, or rude, or ungrateful, then good. At least it's honest.

*(Silence.)*

**NORA**

You're right, Evy. You do sound like a lunatic. That said... I have been pushing you a little too hard. The book is what matters right now. Everything else can wait... the artwork included. It's safe. For the moment. Just remember it's yours. So, don't be too quick to hand it over.

**EVY**

Which reminds me of something else I wasn't ready to hand over. The crank. Where is it? Because it was right here. On the desk. I put it there. I know I did. So, which one of you took it?

**SAM**

Uh... That'd be me.

**NORA**

You little devil, Sam.

**EVY**

Not what I'd expect from someone in your line of work.

**TOM**

If you've got butter on your head, best not wander out into the sun... or something like that.

**SAM**

Well, like I say... happens more often than folks like to admit. I didn't take it for the money. More of a keepsake. Something to go with my collection of detective mysteries. I'll get it back to you right away, Evy.

**EVY**

Evelyn. That's how you'll address me from now on. All of you. And yes, that includes you, Nora.

**NORA**

Whatever it takes to get that book finished.

**TOM**

For what it's worth, I was just trying to help. Didn't mean to upset you, Evy – sorry. Evelyn.

**EVY**

Everyone out. Now.

*(Sam and Tom exit. Nora lingers.)*

**NORA**

Now that the boys are gone, let me make myself very clear. I see what you're doing... Evelyn. I've been watching it take shape: little adjustments, small omissions, the way you steer a conversation just half a degree off where you want it to go. Subtle. Careful. You almost had me convinced it wasn't deliberate. And you'll be surprised to hear this... I'm going to allow it, for the time being. Because you're in control. You always have been. So, you can stop with the little

fits... the trembling hands, the wide eyes, the performance of not knowing what's happening to you. It's just not... landing. Not anymore. Not with me. I'll give you this, though: whatever this is you've been playing at, it's been better than anything you've written in a very long time... tighter, meaner, not a drop of emotion wasted. Which is exactly what made it so interesting to watch. Until it wasn't. Because now it's starting to feel a bit overplayed, don't you think? All these accusations, the outsized anger, these ghosts you keep pointing to like they're just out of sight and only you can see them... it's all getting a little on the nose. Which leaves us with two possibilities: either you've got nothing of value to show me, just blank pages and borrowed atmosphere, and this whole thing is a distraction from the fact that you've actually, finally run dry or... you've got something exceptional, something real. And you're already thinking three steps ahead, figuring out how to lock it down, how to keep it out of my hands, how to cut me out of it. And here's the part I can't quite shake: if it's the second one... if you do have something... why does it feel like you're not the only one trying to keep me from it? You're the one who brought Sam and Tom into this, not me. I'm no fool.

*(Silence.)*

Finish that goddamn book. And then let's get the hell out of here.

*(She exits, leaving the door open. A long moment and then, without warning, the door slams shut. Blackout. The darkness lingers, then gives way as lights return uneven and surreal, time slipping forward and backward, stuttering out of sequence. Evy sits at her desk, typing furiously. Around her, the house begins to shift as doors open and close, windows lift and slam, lights flicker on and off. Furniture moves. Objects slide, tip, and fall as the space rearranges itself in contained, mounting chaos, never fully breaking, but never still. At long last, everything suddenly goes quiet. Darkness again. When lights come up, Evy, the computer and monitor are gone. We have returned to the late 1800s. Warner's body is on the floor under the cloth. The door opens as Freddie enters followed by Enid.)*

## ENID

Why do you insist on arguing with me? Go back to the boat house, bring her out, and get her in here. She cannot have simply vanished, and we cannot afford to behave as though she has. The last thing we need is a prolonged inquiry... searching, digging, questions leading to more questions until someone begins looking where they ought not. We must give them no cause. Look at this place. It speaks for itself. The tower, that narrow staircase. It would not take much. A misstep. A fall. People would accept that easily enough. Or better still, her husband. I have heard enough to know his nature. Demanding. Suspicious. Always watching her, always imagining things. It would not be difficult to believe he finally lost patience. Called her up there on some errand, waited until her back was turned, and then the slightest start, the smallest push, and down she went. It is simple. And it would hold.

## FREDDIE

And what if it were the other way round?

**ENID**

In what sense?

**FREDDIE**

What if Alma lost patience with him? It is plain enough he stands between her and her freedom, the freedom to pursue her work as it ought to be pursued. And there she is, on the very edge of something real. You have seen it yourself. The paintings are remarkable. I did not exaggerate. And yet she is meant to remain here, in this place, cold and damp, shut away from everything, only to watch it all pass her by. What if she could bear it no longer? What if, in a moment of anger, she followed him up the tower, with no plan, only carried by the force of it, to confront him or perhaps to plead her case. And then, in a moment of poor judgment, she struck him. Not to kill, perhaps, only to make a point. But he falls, misses his footing on the stairs, and that is the end of it.

**ENID**

Ridiculous.

**FREDDIE**

Is it? What if it has already happened, Enid?

**ENID**

What do you mean?

**FREDDIE**

Come and see.

*(He leads her to Warner. He lifts the cloth just enough to reveal the body. Enid takes it in, startled, but contained.)*

**ENID**

How did I miss this?

**FREDDIE**

I very nearly did myself.

**ENID**

This complicates things.

**FREDDIE**

No. It improves them. We intended an accident, a fall within the house. Quiet. Contained. Now we have something better. Better than questionable. Now we have cause. A dead husband. A dissatisfied wife alone with him. No witnesses. No clear account. And, most importantly, no need for invention.

**ENID**

So, we abandon the original plan?

**FREDDIE**

No. We refine it. We leave him exactly as he is, untouched, unmoved, so that when he is found, the question is not what happened—

**ENID**

But how, and why. The focus shifts to Alma.

**FREDDIE**

Precisely. Except she will not be available to answer for it. So, we proceed, not as planned but with adjustments. Not a fall from the stairs but from the cliffs. More decisive. A woman in grief. Overcome. Knowing she will be implicated. She goes out... and does not return.

**ENID**

Regret. Despair. Finality.

**FREDDIE**

And no one left to contradict it.

**ENID**

You are certain this will read cleanly?

**FREDDIE**

Cleaner than anything we could have staged inside these walls.

**ENID**

Except...

**FREDDIE**

Except what?

**ENID**

What if she is carried out to sea? We are left again with her disappearance, and the risk of a wider search.

**FREDDIE**

Fair point. I'll drop her onto a talus slope. High enough that the water won't carry her off, and where she can be plainly seen from above. Her body easily recovered.

**ENID**

Good. It's settled, then. Fetch her and take her straight to the cliff. I have no desire to witness it. Do what must be done, then return quickly. I'll remain here.

**FREDDIE**

At once.

*(Freddie exits. Enid crosses to the window and looks out toward the cliffs. She lingers for a moment, still and contemplative. Then she turns and moves to the painting, studying it quietly.)*

**ENID**

Exquisite.

*(Behind her, the shrouded body stirs. It rises, more controlled now, more deliberate, again taking on the silhouette of a bedsheet ghost. It steadies itself, then moves silently to a position just behind Enid. The figure lifts its hand and slowly pulls the cloth away, revealing Warner with the crank in his grasp. He raises it above Enid's head. A crack of thunder. A flash of lightning. Complete darkness. In that darkness, heavy rain pours down outside as the lights slowly shift, returning to the present day, near sundown. Enid and Warner are gone. The laptop and monitor have reappeared. The painting remains. The rain continues as the front door opens, revealing Evy returning from checking on the generator. She carries a wet umbrella, which she pauses to shake off and set by the door before moving further inside. There is no power and the generator has failed. She moves around the house, lighting candles or perhaps lanterns. Her cellphone rings. Lights rise on Tom, on his phone, as Evy answers hers.)*

**EVY**

Hello?

**TOM**

Evelyn. Glad I caught you—

**EVY**

Yeah, well make it quick, Tom. The power's out. Generator's dead. I'm down to whatever charge I've got left on my phone.

**TOM**

Yeah, I figured. I'd come get you, but there's no way I'm getting my truck out there through this mess. Road to the lighthouse is thick as chowder.

**EVY**

Is that normal?

**TOM**

Mud season.

**EVY**

Mud season?

**TOM**

Spring thaw. The ground gives way all at once. Makes getting around difficult, depending on where you're headed.

**EVY**

Spring? How is it / already spring?

**TOM**

/ Nearly Spring. Came early this year. Listen. Best thing you can do is hunker down. I'll swap my tires, wait for the rain to ease up, then I'll come out and get you.

**EVY**

I appreciate it, but I'll manage. I don't want you here. I don't want anyone here. I don't need saving.

**TOM**

I'm coming anyway. You can argue with me when I get there. And before you hang up... I wanted to say I'm sorry again. For butting in. You're right. I crossed a line. That said, I need you to hear me out.

**EVY**

What is it?

**TOM**

I locked down your manuscript.

**EVY**

You did what?

**TOM**

I put a block on it. That file is yours and yours alone. The new monitor I set up has a built-in camera with facial recognition. Between that and your password, nobody's getting in but you.

Nobody. Not even me. That document stays locked unless you open it. Figured you'd want it that way.

**EVY**

Why would you do that, Tom? Has someone been trying to get to it?

**TOM**

I can't say for sure. And one more thing.

**EVY**

Okay.

**TOM**

You might want to check the news. Quickest way. Just search your name... and "gone missing."

*(The call drops. Tom is gone.)*

**EVY**

Tom?

*(The front door blows open. Evy moves quickly to close it and lock it. As she turns away from the door, there comes a loud knock on it.)*

Jesus. Who is it?

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

It's Sam.

**EVY**

Sam? What are you doing out here? How'd you even make it up the drive?

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Mind if I come in a minute? Got that crank with me. Figured I'd return it proper.

**EVY**

Now's not a good time, Sam. You can leave it on the step. I'll get it later.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

It's coming down pretty good out here. Wind's picking up, too.

**EVY**

Right. Well... I mean, you made it all the way here, didn't you? I'm sure you'll make it all the way back. I expect you're used to getting around in this kind of weather.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Ordinarily, yeah. But I don't have my cruiser; I'm off duty. Car's stuck in the mud about halfway down. Had to walk the rest.

**EVY**

You're putting me in a really tough spot here, Sam.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

You're right. You're right. I'm sorry. I'll just set it here on the doorstep. Might be I can rig something up. Get enough traction to ease her out.

**EVY**

Oh. Alright. Good. That's... that's good to hear. Thank you.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Sure thing.

*(A soft clink as the crank is set down. Footsteps retreat. Evy stands still, listening. Something about it doesn't sit right. She moves to the door but doesn't open it. Hesitates. Then she unlocks it and opens it.)*

**EVY**

Sam?

*(She spots the crank on the doorstep and picks it up. She looks out into the rain.)*

Sam!

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

Yeah?

**EVY**

You might as well come in. Dry off a minute.

**SAM**

*(Off.)*

You sure?

*(Evy doesn't answer right away. She looks down at the crank, turns it once in her hand.)*

**EVY**

Yeah. I'm sure.

*(She steps back inside, leaving the door open, the crank still in her hand. Sam appears in the doorway. Raincoat. Hat. Something like a vintage lighthouse keeper's raingear.)*

**SAM**

Much obliged.

*(He closes the door behind him.)*

Early for this kind of weather.

**EVY**

So, I've heard.

**SAM**

*(Indicating his coat and hat.)*

You mind if I...?

**EVY**

No. Of course not.

*(He removes the coat and hat, hangs them on a hook. Beneath he is dressed plainly.)*

Power's out. I can light a fire if you like, but... I'm running a bit warm as it is. Seems to be the norm lately.

**SAM**

I'm good. I'll head out once the rain lets up some. Just wanted to make sure I got that back to you. And I am sorry... for taking it. Not my finest moment. Can't say I'd blame you for not trusting me.

*(Silence.)*

**EVY**

Seems you've been spending a fair amount of time with Nora over the last... however long it's been.

**SAM**

Oh. Well, I wouldn't say a fair amount. But we've crossed paths a few times. Drinks, meals... a walk or two around town. We don't get many like her around here. Been a bit of an eye-opener.

**EVY**

I'm sure it has. I'm a little worried about her.

**SAM**

How do you mean?

**EVY**

I'm starting to think she's having some... financial trouble. Struggling a little, maybe.

**SAM**

Well... it's not really my place to say. I try not to pry.

**EVY**

It's your job to pry.

**SAM**

Yeah... I suppose that's true. It just feels different in this case. And Nora and me... we haven't exactly had that kind of conversation.

**EVY**

Do you want to earn back my trust?

**SAM**

I'd like you to trust me. Just... not the easiest thing for me to go there. You're asking me to speak on something I'm not certain of. About someone I've spent time with. That's a line I don't much want to cross.

**EVY**

And yet you crossed it with me.

**SAM**

Fair enough.

**EVY**

If you tell me what you suspect – not what you know, not what you can prove – just what you suspect... I think you'll find that'll go a long way.

**SAM**

Toward what?

**EVY**

Toward me trusting you again.

*(Silence.)*

**SAM**

Alright. I don't think she's broke. Not exactly.

**EVY**

Then what?

**SAM**

I think she's... stretched. Maybe. She's brought up the divorces. More than once. Always like it's a joke, but there's something behind it. Doesn't sound like anything ended clean. And that hotel situation... she keeps saying everything decent in town's booked. Had to settle for a smaller place, queen bed, nothing fancy.

**EVY**

That's what she told me.

**SAM**

This time of year, though. Town's usually quiet. Not much fills up. But she still spends like she's not worried. Usually picks up the check. Orders like it doesn't matter. Nothing quite adds up.

**EVY**

And the bracelet?

**SAM**

Could've been a mistake. But she wasn't rattled. Not the way most people would be.

**EVY**

No. She wouldn't be.

**SAM**

And she talks about you. Where you're at with the book. Whether it's coming together. What happens if it doesn't.

**EVY**

She's my agent.

**SAM**

Sure. Just felt like more than that. If you're asking what I suspect... I think she's got a lot riding on how that book turns out. And I don't think she's told you all of it.

*(Silence.)*

**EVY**

And what's been going on with you?

**SAM**

I don't know what the hell's been going on with me. I haven't felt like myself in a while now. Something's off. I get these stretches where things... slip. Like I'm there, but not really there. I'll say things, do things... and then it's like I come to and I'm already past it. Can't quite track how I got from one moment to the next. And it's not just forgetting. It's... incorrect. Like the pieces don't line up the way they should. Time moves funny. People, connections... they don't sit right. It's like something else is steering for a bit. Borrowing me. Then it passes. Just like that. And everything feels normal again. Quiet. Easy. So, I tell myself it's nothing. Don't dig into it, Sam. Don't go looking for answers you're not gonna like. Just let it go. Keep moving.

**EVY**

I've experienced that too. Not the same, maybe... but close enough. The difference is... I can't let it go. I can't just move on.

*(The sun is gone now. A sudden sound from above, something drops, clattering. Evy and Sam both turn toward the staircase. Sam lifts a finger to his lips, signaling for Evy to stay quiet.)*

**SAM**

Alright. Listen. I'm gonna head out. I've bothered you enough. Looks like the rain's let up some. I'm sure I've got something in the trunk to get the car out of that mud.

*(He shakes his head slightly as he continues, subtly cueing her to decline.)*

I could take a look at that generator before I go, though... if you want. Don't like the idea of you out here alone without power.

**EVY**

Oh. Uh... no. No, it's alright. I'll be fine.

**SAM**

Okay. If you're sure.

**EVY**

I'm sure.

**SAM**

Here. Take this.

*(He pulls out a portable charger.)*

**EVY**

What is it?

**SAM**

Keep your phone charged. Doesn't need an outlet. Just plug into it and you'll be good to go.

*(He hands it to her with one hand, reaches for the crank with the other. Evy takes the charger and gives him the crank.)*

**EVY**

That's very kind.

**SAM**

You bet. So, uh... So, I'll be off then.

**EVY**

Alright. Thank you... for everything.

*(Sam gives a nod and moves towards the front door. Evy follows, a step behind. He opens the front door.)*

**SAM**

Lock up behind me. Sit tight. You'll be alright.

*(He steps aside, pulls his hat and coat from the hook and slips into the bathroom. He closes the bathroom door just shy of a latch.)*

**EVY**

*(Calling out.)*

Be careful walking! And drive safe!

*(She shuts the front door. The latch clicks. She then turns the deadbolt, letting it sound. Evy stands there, listening. Then faintly from above, movement. Nora appears on the staircase, muddy shoes in hand, and starts down. Her legs are covered in mud as well.)*

**NORA**

You've got those two men / right where you want them, don't you?

**EVY**

*(Performing but believably startled.)*

/ Good God, Nora. What are you doing up there? How did you get in?

**NORA**

I've recently mastered opening doors on my own. Or perhaps I came with the house. Consider me the only elegant fixture here.

**EVY**

I can live without elegance. But this... this is something else, Nora. It's deranged. Even for you. The hiding, the lurking... you've really outdone yourself. And while I'd give anything for you to disappear and leave me in peace, I'm not naive enough to believe you will. You never do. So, let's just end it. Properly. Alright? You tell me what you came here for, and it's yours. Then you go. Far, far away. No more calls. No more messages. No more contracts. No more surprise visits. Because I don't know what you're capable of anymore. I've just found out I've gone missing. I can only assume it's another one of your marketing tricks, but at this point... who knows. And frankly... right now, you're scaring the shit out of me.

*(Silence.)*

**NORA**

You know what infuriates me most about you, Evelyn? It's that your life has always had a way of bending in your favor. You started out with nothing, or close enough to it, and somehow there you were, a kid with ink all over your fingers, already seeing the world in ways other people couldn't, already crafting sentences beyond your years. And people noticed. Of course they did, they always do with you. Doors opened, editors paid attention, readers latched on, and before long you weren't just writing horror, you were redefining it. You became the voice everyone else chased, the one setting the tone, the one they measured themselves against. And every time you took a risk that should never have paid off, every time it looked reckless or impossible, it still rewarded you. You buy a goddamn crumbling lighthouse on a whim to scare yourself into relevance, and in doing so you find a story, a history, and even a hidden stash of valuable

paintings. That's your trick, isn't it? Not luck, not entirely. Instinct. Unnerving, unfair instinct. The same instinct that carried you when you were nobody, scribbling in the margins, and the same one that still refuses to let you fail, no matter how hard you try to tempt it.

**EVY**

So what? So, I've been working with what I was given. Isn't that all any of us can do, what we're supposed to do? Except you. You know, you've been given a lot, Nora. More than most. And instead of working with it, you just keep pushing against it. Why? What's this really about? Is it this idea that what you do isn't art, that it doesn't count? You've spent your life supporting people with creative minds, helping bring something into the world that gives people joy, gives them something to hold onto, maybe even a way to escape for a moment, and somewhere along the way you decided it didn't belong to you. That it wasn't yours. But it is, Nora. It absolutely is. You just don't value it because you're not the one being recognized. Me thanking my agent when I win an award isn't enough. The money isn't enough either. So, what is it then? Jealousy? This isn't junior high. This is life. You work with what you have. I work with what I have. And if you don't like what you've become, that's on you. It has nothing to do with me. So, here's my advice. Grow the fuck up.

*(Nora moves toward Evy, who bristles slightly, but she passes her and goes straight to the painting. Evy follows Nora.)*

Is that it? Is that what you want? The artwork? Because it doesn't belong to you. Any more than I belong to you. And it doesn't belong to me. It belongs to this house. To Alma.

*(Nora stares intently at the artwork. Evy crosses to the front door, unlocks it and opens it.)*

It's time for you to go, Nora.

**NORA**

*(Not taking her eyes off the artwork.)*

I've ruined these heels. And this skirt.

**EVY**

They can be replaced. I'd offer you my boots but, well... they're not meant to be squeezed into.

**NORA**

*(Eyes fixed on the artwork.)*

Exquisite.

*(Suddenly Sam, dressed as Warner, or perhaps Warner himself, who can say, emerges from the bathroom and moves quickly, deliberately toward Nora, his arm raised, the crank in his hand. The moment he reaches her; the lights go out. A quiet moment passes before lights come up slowly. Evy*

*is gone. We've returned to the late 1800's. Warner is seated, breathing heavy, spent. Enid is on the floor. Freddie bursts in, frantic.)*

**FREDDIE**

She's run off. Couldn't have gone far, but I can't find her.

*(The house is dim, and he does not yet see Enid or Warner.)*

Enid?

*(He turns toward the painting, catches sight of the body on the floor.)*

Enid...

*(As he moves to her, Warner makes his way to the front door and closes it. Freddie turns to see him.)*

**WARNER**

So. The letter writer finally finds his way through the door.

**FREDDIE**

What... what's happened?

**WARNER**

You tell me. You're the one who's been whispering in my wife's ear from afar. Filling her head with nonsense. With lies. Pen and paper. Very convenient. Safe.

**FREDDIE**

I wrote to her, yes. About her art.

**WARNER**

Her art. Idle brushwork and wasted hours, and you come along and dress it up as something... important. Something worth leaving me for.

**FREDDIE**

I said only what I believed.

**WARNER**

No. You said what served you. You saw a woman shut away and thought her easy to turn. Tell her she's gifted, tell her she's meant for more, and she'll follow you straight out the door. That was your plan.

**FREDDIE**

No.

**WARNER**

No? Then what? Money? You meant to make something off her? Off us? You've chosen a poor house for that. There's nothing here to take.

**FREDDIE**

There is something. But it isn't Alma. It's the work. She's good. Better than good. She's exceptional. And whether you see it or not doesn't change that.

**WARNER**

She's needed here. She's my wife.

**FREDDIE**

Are you not hearing me? It's not Alma I want. It's her work.

**WARNER**

And without Alma, you've nothing.

**FREDDIE**

She's nobody. And certainly no use to you, not in the way you measure things. Do you have any notion what she's produced? The volume of it? What it might fetch, if handled properly? I never needed Alma. I had Enid. She's known. Respected. An artist in her own right. All we had to do was put her name to the work. Alma's hand is close enough to Enid's that no one would question it. Truth be told, Alma's the better painter. Far better. But that hardly matters. All we had to do was convince the right people Enid had come into her own. That she'd grown into it. That she was ready to be shown, properly shown, in the best galleries, before the sort of people who decide such things.

*(Enid stirs and moans.)*

**ENID**

Freddie...?

*(He moves to her.)*

**FREDDIE**

Thank God. Enid... Enid, stay with me. You'll be alright. Do you hear me? You'll be alright.

*(To Warner.)*

This is your chance. Whatever it is you want. I can give you money. More than you'd ever have need of. All you've got to do is find your wife and bring her back here. I'll see to the rest.

**WARNER**

I'm a simple man with simple needs. I've two things in this world. This lighthouse... and my wife.

**FREDDIE**

Strange you'd place this house before her.

**WARNER**

I've no concern for your opinion on how I manage my household. Take your lady friend and go. Let those paintings rot where they lie. I've no use for them... or your money.

**FREDDIE**

A fool. That's what you are. You'd sooner let it all rot than face what's right before you. Do you think the world cares for your light? For your ledgers and your duties, for all the small, careful things that make you feel useful? It doesn't. But that...

*(He points to the painting.)*

What Alma's made... that has weight. That has value. And you'd bury it here out of spite, out of fear, because you cannot bear the thought of it belonging to anything beyond your reach. You speak of duty, of keeping things in their proper place, but you've mistaken possession for purpose. Those paintings were never yours to hide, and they won't stay hidden, not now, not after what I've seen. I will have them. Do you hear me? I will have them, because they deserve to be seen, and I am the only man here willing to see that it's done. You can cling to this house, to your rules, to whatever small authority you think it gives you, but it won't stop what's coming. Men like you never understand that. You think you can hold back time by sheer will. You can't. You never could. Your days are numbered. This life, this post, this tower... it's already slipping from you. Soon enough, there'll be no need for men like you at all. You'll be replaced by something with less heart than you... no heart at all. And when that day comes, there'll be nothing left of you. Not a mark. Not a memory. And when I walk out that door, I'll take what matters with me... whether you like it or not—

*(Freddie suddenly lunges at Warner, knocking the crank from his hand and sending it to the floor. They collide, grappling, each fighting for control. The struggle turns violent and desperate, neither willing to yield. Both men spot the crank and scramble for it at once, hands colliding, each trying to wrench it free. Warner gains the upper hand, forcing Freddie onto his back and straddling him, pinning him down. Freddie struggles beneath him, but it's no use. Warner wrenches the crank free, raises it high, and brings it down with brutal force onto Freddie's head. Freddie goes still. Alma enters.)*

**ALMA**

Warner, please!

*(Warner raises the crank again.)*

Warner, enough!

*(Warner turns, seeing her. He hesitates, then lets the crank fall from his hand. Alma crosses to him and helps him to his feet.)*

**WARNER**

I'm hurt.

**ALMA**

I can see that. But it's over now. It's time to mend.

**WARNER**

I did what I had to do. To protect what was mine.

**ALMA**

Yes. You've protected it. And I'll be forever grateful for what you've done... for me.

**WARNER**

I need to rest.

**ALMA**

Of course. But now is not the time, my dear. Your head. You may be concussed. Sleep would not serve you, not just now.

**WARNER**

The room... won't hold still.

**ALMA**

Then don't trust it. Trust me. I think it best we step outside. What do you say? It's a fine night. The fresh air, the cool breeze... it will do you good.

**WARNER**

You're right. I'll stay strong. A walk, then. Where to?

**ALMA**

Oh... just out toward the cliffs, I think. The view is beautiful from there.

*(They exit. A stillness settles over the room. After a moment, Enid stirs and reaches toward the painting. Her hand finds the base of the easel, setting it in motion, and it slowly turns, revealing the painting to the audience. The image lingers as Enid collapses once more. Lights fade to black.)*

*(NOTE: The painting is open to interpretation but should avoid an overtly comedic tone, leaning instead toward something unsettling or ambiguous.)*

## EPILOGUE

*(Lights up. The painting is now shown as a book cover with the title *The Keeper's Wife* and the name Evelyn Wray. Evy sits in an armchair or on a stool, dressed in heels, a pencil skirt, and a blouse, and begins reading from the novel.)*

### EVY

They did not rush.

The lighthouse stood behind them like something that had outlived its purpose, its great glass eye dark, its bones creaking as the wind pressed against it. Alma closed the door with care, as though noise might wake something inside. She and Warner stood side by side, facing the open stretch of land that led to the cliffs. The wind came stronger now, sliding along the ground, curling around them, tugging at Alma's skirt and lifting a loose strand of her hair across her cheek. They started walking, the path narrow and worn, pressed into the earth by years of use, mostly his. Alma walked slightly behind at first, then beside him, their steps settling into an easy rhythm. The sea, somewhere beyond the rise, made its slow, endless sound, and the silence between them carried weight, the kind that settled in the chest.

The ground sloped upward, then leveled as they neared the cliffs. Grass gave way to bare earth and stone, the wind steady at their backs. Alma glanced toward the horizon, where sea met sky in a clean line. "Hard to imagine living anywhere else," he said. Alma's brow tightened. "No need to imagine it," she replied. They reached the edge, the tide churning white against the dark below. Warner took one step closer while Alma stopped a few feet back. The wind pressed harder, flattening their clothes and filling their ears. "You ever think about what might have been?" she asked. Warner shifted his weight. "No." "Neither do I," she said, though it sounded less certain than she intended.

The wind gusted, and Warner adjusted his stance, one foot edging, then correcting. Loose stones shifted near the lip. Alma noticed but said nothing at first. "Careful," she said at last. "It's loose there." He nodded, distracted. "I've got it." But he was not looking down. He was looking out. The wind surged again. His heel slipped. Alma's hand lifted, not quite reaching him, or perhaps it did. It was hard to say after. It happened quickly. The next step faltered. The stone rolled. His balance tipped, just enough. Then the wind came again, stronger. A hand might have caught him. A word might have anchored him. But there was only the sea and the narrow space between them, and in that space something seemed to hesitate, just long enough. Warner's foot slid. His body followed. For an instant he hovered, caught between correction and surrender, and then he was gone.

Not with a cry, just a sudden absence where he had been, his form dropping out of sight beyond the edge, swallowed by the dark below. Alma stood very still, the wind pressing against her as if urging her forward, as if asking her to look. She did not, not right away. Instead, she stared at the empty space where he had stood. When she finally stepped closer, slowly and carefully, the cliff

offered nothing back. No movement, no shape, only the churn of water far below and the fading echo of something that might once have been a man.

The thought came quickly, unwelcome and yet impossible to ignore. Warner gone. Freddie and Enid as well. None of it by Alma's hand, nothing that could be laid at her feet. And yet it would follow her all the same, not as blame but as story. A tragedy others would repeat, examine, attach to her name. She could already feel the shape of it, the way it might travel, the way it might open doors. The grief would be expected. The shock, the sympathy, the attention. And beyond it, her work, waiting, seen now through that lens, carried further than it ever could have on its own.

*(End of play.)*

PERUSAL