

UNREQUITED

By

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UNREQUITED

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To my father, George Aptecker, who introduced me to the magic of live theatre. An artist and poet from the Bronx, New York, he had a contagious laugh, and ardent love of books, film, and chocolate pudding.

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Cast of Characters

LENORE (Female)

Passionate, fierce, tempestuous. Age 30s-40s. Any race/ethnicity.

FREDERICK (Male)

Married to Lenore. Brash, charming, a mischievous rogue. Age 30s-40s. Any race/ethnicity.

VIOLET (Female)

Curious, vibrant, kindhearted. Age 30s. Any race/ethnicity.

DOUGLAS (Male)

Violet's husband. Conventional, restrained. Age 30s-40s. Any race/ethnicity.

MRS. LINDEN (Female)

The housekeeper. An odd mixture of warm and cold. Age 55-70. Any race/ethnicity.

Setting

The Great Room of a historical house. The autumn of 1936, New York.

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue (where the next character should begin talking).

The production is welcome to make creative substitutions for props, scenery, and staging, based on budget and resources.

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Note 1: *Unrequited* is a juicy, spooky, ghostly play, rife with passion and suspense, set in the 1930s. However, despite the time period and elegant style, the play is not intended to be a precious or stately period piece. It is, in fact, intended to be a raw, living, breathing, story for modern audiences.

Note 2: In the first scene, it will start to become apparent that some characters in the play are *ghosts*. Please take note of stage directions, which offer hints to their ghostly state. For example: Lenore frequently takes cigarettes, holds them, dangles them, but cannot light or smoke them. She is thwarted in her attempts. Frederick pours drinks, but never actually drinks. Additionally, Violet and Douglas never speak directly to Lenore or Frederick in Scene 1, though this may not be clear to the audience at first glance.

Note 3: The ghosts do not remember in death, everything that transpired in life.

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“All houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

The Great Room of a historical house in the autumn of 1936. French doors look out onto a windswept landscape. The room is adorned with lamps, chandelier, sofa, bookshelf, end tables, tea table, chairs, an area rug, liquor cabinet, gramophone, telephone, and fireplace and mantel with a mirror about it. LENORE is seated on the sofa with a book. FREDERICK stands glaring at the bookshelf, discontented.

LENORE. What is it, love?

FREDERICK. These wretched books.

LENORE. Wildlife and sundry.

FREDERICK. I need a drink.

LENORE. There's gin in the cabinet.

FREDERICK. *(Opens a book and holds up the picture.)* Look here—the Indian Peacock.

LENORE. Got a light? *(She takes a cigarette and holds it poised between her fingers, where it remains unlit.)*

FREDERICK. In winter we'd find peacocks in the garden, frozen to death. *(Goes to the liquor cabinet to fix a drink.)* Care to wet your whistle?

LENORE. I call that macabre.

FREDERICK. I'd pluck their feathers. It's easy when they're dead.

LENORE. Lucky you.

FREDERICK. *(To himself.)* Why didn't they fly away? Dumb birds. *(Swirls his drink, but never drinks it.)* You're pale.

LENORE. *(Icy.)* I wish you wouldn't say that.

FREDERICK. *(Whistles a tune briefly, and then trails off.)* What was his name, love? It's at the tip of my tongue.

LENORE. Why don't you sit quietly and read your wretched book. *(Stubs out her unlit cigarette in the ashtray and takes another.)*

FREDERICK. Was it Harold?

LENORE. I don't know who you're talking about. *(Places the cigarette*

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in her mouth.) When are we getting out of here?

FREDERICK. You know who I mean, baby. The one you sent letters to. “Dear so and so ...”

LENORE. There was nobody. (*Goes to the French doors.*) I can’t remember.

(*Beat.*) The clouds are coming in.

FREDERICK. He was called Randolph, wasn’t he?

LENORE. I tell you I can’t remember. Not like I used to. Have we put the house on the market?

FREDERICK. You want to sell? We’ll lose everything. (*Beat.*) Did you perfume the stationery, baby?

LENORE. (*Pause.*) Yes. Lilac oil ... on lavender stationery.

FREDERICK. Lilacs. (*Sniffs her neck.*) Your favorite.

LENORE. He said I was the most exciting women he’d ever met.

FREDERICK. Exciting?! Why did the postman return your letters?

LENORE. You wouldn’t know anything about it. You meet someone who makes you feel alive, you do anything to keep that feeling. You become desperate.

FREDERICK. Beatrice made me feel alive.

LENORE. The barmaid.

FREDERICK. Actress.

LENORE. Frederick, love, you didn’t care for her. You were distracted by her. Her name was Dorothy, not Beatrice.

FREDERICK. Beatrice.

LENORE. Dorothy.

FREDERICK. She took up singing. She was going to be in pictures.

LENORE. How industrious.

FREDERICK. Yes, I thought so.

LENORE. You two were always liquored up, weren’t you?

FREDERICK. Liquored up and down and all around.

LENORE. You didn’t feel alive with her. You felt numb. Just like you like it.

FREDERICK. (*Traces a finger down her cheek.*) Do you like it, Lenore, baby?

LENORE. I don’t think I ever saw you without a glass in your hand, your eyes glazed over. Gambling away your father’s fortune.

FREDERICK. Everyone gambled.

LENORE. Those poor fools who invested in your schemes.

FREDERICK. It was 1929. The market ...

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LENORE. At least some men had the decency to jump out a window. (*He grabs her arm; she yanks it free. They hear the sound of voices from the hallway.*)

FREDERICK. They're coming back.

LENORE. Don't do anything to scare them off. Put down that glass. (*Frederick places his glass down, and Lenore puts away her unlit cigarettes and sits on the sofa. VIOLET and DOUGLAS enter. Violet takes a seat next to Lenore.*)

VIOLET. What a lavish soiree.

LENORE. Did you have a grand time?! Tell us everything.

DOUGLAS. You should have seen the mayor's face. (*Goes to the liquor cabinet.*)

FREDERICK. Where's today's paper?

LENORE. Don't interrupt, Frederick. I want to hear about the/mayor. (*Douglas picks up Frederick's glass of gin, and examines it quizzically. He places it down and pours drinks.*)

VIOLET. He was in a pickle. I expect he's not used to losing.

LENORE. Was it poker? Men always think they have skill with cards, and then it turns out they don't.

FREDERICK. I used to be a smash with cards.

LENORE. (*Dry.*) Sure, you were real swell.

DOUGLAS. (*Hands Violet a drink.*) Whiskey and soda. (*As he's about to sit, Lenore rises, and Douglas takes her place next to Violet.*) He was in the library.

VIOLET. The mayor?

DOUGLAS. Tucked away in back. Near the butterfly exhibit.

LENORE. Butterflies! I wish I could/have seen ...

DOUGLAS. With his press officer. They were embracing.

VIOLET. Embracing?! That tall man? He must be as tall as a giraffe. (*She picks through candies in a dish on the end table.*)

LENORE. A tryst. How perfectly scandalous. (*Lenore drapes herself elegantly along the arm of the sofa next to Douglas, and gazes upon him adoringly. Turning her head this way and that, she examines him. She finds herself drawn to him, and pays him extra attention.*)

VIOLET. (*Selects a candy.*) Douglas, I can hardly believe it. The mayor is married.

LENORE. That doesn't mean a thing, Violet. (*Softly, to Douglas.*) Good evening. What do you say to all this? Isn't it thrilling? Two men/carrying on.

DOUGLAS. Do you think she knows?

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VIOLET. I don't think so. She seemed happy. (*Beat.*) An affair with his press officer!

LENORE. People in/love become reckless.

DOUGLAS. People in love become reckless. (*He stirs, as if sensing a presence by his side.*)

VIOLET. Was I reckless?

DOUGLAS. You were perfect.

LENORE. (*Looks at Violet.*) Yes. She is.

DOUGLAS. Let's go to bed, my pretty Violet. It's after midnight.

VIOLET. Is it? (*Douglas and Violet rise, and begin to take their leave.*)

LENORE. Don't go! It's been so long since we had company.

FREDERICK. (*Reaches for a book.*) I'd rather read about the yellow crested cockatoo.

VIOLET. Wasn't dessert divine ... (*Lenore follows them. Frederick yanks Lenore out of the way.*)

LENORE. Brute. (*Lenore scoops a vase off the table, and raises it above her head, taking aim at Frederick. He grabs it and places it down. They bicker in hushed tones.*)

VIOLET. Chiffon cake with rose petals and dollops of cream. (*She pauses and turns.*) I could have sworn the vase was floating in mid-air. (*Douglas turns to look. Lenore and Frederick freeze.*)

DOUGLAS. No more cocktails for you, Violet.

VIOLET. Promise me you'll never fall in love with the press officer.

DOUGLAS. I promise. He's too tall. I'd have to stand on tippy toes. (*He kisses her.*)

LENORE. (*Whispers.*) Do you see how he kisses her?

FREDERICK. Why are you whispering?

VIOLET. It's cold in here, don't you think?

LENORE. We'll have Mrs. Linden light a fire. Please stay. (*She approaches Douglas.*) Have another drink. The night is young.

DOUGLAS. (*Looks around the "empty" room and shivers.*) It is cold. (*Douglas and Violet exit, turning off lamps as they go. Lenore slumps against the door where they have exited, her hands grasping the doorknob.*)

FREDERICK. That was boorish behavior. They acted like we weren't here.

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(He goes around turning the lamps back on. After a distraught moment by the door, Lenore returns to Frederick.)

LENORE. Got a light? *(Takes a cigarette.)* It was unspeakably rude.

FREDERICK. *(Pouring a drink.)* You couldn't take your eyes off him.

LENORE. There's something about that man. I know him.

FREDERICK. Sure, you do. *The new tenants.*

LENORE. I mean from before. Perhaps we met in the country. *(Returns the cigarette to its case.)* Frederick, let's go to Roseland. I want jazz, and Oysters Rockefeller!

FREDERICK. Yeah baby. *(He discards his untouched drink, and swings her around in a dance.)* Oysters and champagne for my doll.

LENORE. And for you, husband, a thick steak, nice and bloody the way you like it.

FREDERICK. *(Twirling her.)* Wear your new dress, the one with the pearls.

LENORE. I'll wear whatever you like, Frederick. *(They dance. For a few moments, they seem happy.)*

FREDERICK. It's late though, don't you think?

LENORE. What if it is?

FREDERICK. We can ... go to bed.

LENORE. Is that what you like? *(She amorously runs her hands along his chest. He submits to her attentions, but then clasps her wrist to still her. Beat.)* You don't want to. *(She takes a cigarette and attempts to light it, to no avail.)*

FREDERICK. What's gotten into you?

LENORE. This house has gotten into me, with its drafty rooms, and dark corridors. Something is hiding in here.

FREDERICK. *We're* hiding in here.

LENORE. Don't be stupid. *(He reaches for her.)* Don't touch me. I can't stand it. One of these days I'll leave. You'll see. I'll go home to mother.

FREDERICK. *(He picks up the book and turns the pages.)* Mother's dead. *(Beat.)* Do you know, I think you're right about that man.

LENORE. What man? Do you/mean ...?

FREDERICK. I must have been fried to the hat not to think of it before.

LENORE. I knew there was something. Did we meet him in the country?

FREDERICK. Lenore, kitten ... he's your lover.

LENORE. You're making jokes.

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FREDERICK. Wasn't that his name? Douglas?

LENORE. That can't be right. It must have been Richard, or Tom. I can't remember.

FREDERICK. It was Douglas, wouldn't you say?

LENORE. No, I don't think so. His name was Tom. Yes, that's right.

FREDERICK. Isn't that the cat's pajamas.

LENORE. It's not him.

FREDERICK. What if it is? He wrenched your heart out and never gave it back, if you ask me.

LENORE. Nobody asked. (*She gazes longingly at the door. Her longing is palpable.*) They must be in bed by now.

FREDERICK. I saw the way you looked at him.

LENORE. (*Turns to the door.*) I'm going upstairs.

FREDERICK. (*Takes her arm.*) You're not going anywhere.

LENORE. Get your paws off me.

FREDERICK. What do you intend? To crawl into bed with them? Remind him you're exciting?

LENORE. You didn't stir in me those feelings. A person can be one way with someone, and another way with someone else.

FREDERICK. So, it is him.

LENORE. Knock it off! You're out of your mind.

FREDERICK. Don't raise your voice.

LENORE. Why did I marry you?

FREDERICK. No one else asked.

LENORE. You ruined me.

FREDERICK. I'm glad.

LENORE. Why is he upstairs?! With that woman?

FREDERICK. Because she's flesh and blood.

LENORE. I'm flesh and blood. I'm—oh I can't bear to be in this cursed house.

FREDERICK. You love the house, the intricate moldings, the stained glass.

LENORE. I'm telling you, there's something peculiar here. (*Frederick removes a gun from the hidden compartment of the end table.*) The walls have a stench.

FREDERICK. The stench of rotting lilacs.

LENORE. Put that thing away. You know how I feel about guns.

FREDERICK. You like this gun. Come have a look.

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LENORE. No, Frederick.

FREDERICK. Take it, baby. It suits you.

LENORE. I said no. Why won't you ever listen.

FREDERICK. Take the damn thing. *(He places it in her hand.)*

LENORE. There. Are you happy? *(Frederick pulls her to him. They kiss. Lenore backs away, raises the gun, points it at him ... and shoots. The sound effect of a gunshot; a soft, distant echo, a memory of a gunshot rather than the actual deafening noise of a gun going off. Frederick stumbles backwards from the impact.)*

LENORE. *(Distraught.)* Oh, Frederick. Look what I've done. *(Dismayed, Frederick places his hand over his chest, where the bullet would have penetrated. After a moment, he recovers from the shock and straightens up, unharmed. He smiles, uncertainly, brushes off his shirt, and goes to the liquor cabinet to pour himself a drink. Lenore takes a cigarette. She sits on the sofa.)*

SCENE 2

The next evening at dusk, in the Great Room. Douglas is asleep on the sofa, with papers on his lap, as if he fell asleep while working. Lenore enters the room and goes straight to the French doors. She pulls and pushes at them, to no avail. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Douglas, and turns, startled. She goes to the sofa. She stands, watching him. After several silent moments, she moves closer. She reaches for the papers in his lap, curious to see his work. She looks through them, and then places them down. She kneels on the floor in front of the sofa and examines his face.

LENORE. *(Whispers.)* I will take one kiss. *(She leans forward and kisses him. Her lips linger. She removes the handkerchief from his suit pocket, and inhales the fragrance, then places the handkerchief over her face and neck to breathe his scent deeply. She sets the handkerchief down, not replacing it in his pocket, but leaving it on his chest. Darkness approaches. She rises and goes to the French doors, where she almost disappears within the folds of the drapes. Douglas awakens. He sees the handkerchief, and brings it to his face, inhaling. He rises and brings the handkerchief again to his face—the scent of lilacs, of Lenore. He looks into the darkness that has descended.)*

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SCENE 3

The Great Room, one week later. Violet and MRS. LINDEN, the housekeeper, are having tea at the tea table. Lenore is also seated at the table. An asterisk // is placed next to Lenore's name as a reminder that Violet cannot see or hear Lenore.*

VIOLET. He flung a book on the floor, out of nowhere. The book about the birds.

MRS. LINDEN. The Whitmans used to own peacocks.

VIOLET. He doesn't sleep at night.

MRS. LINDEN. Is he having nightmares?

VIOLET. Yes, but he won't say what about. (*Sipping tea.*) He walks up and down hallways, peering inside rooms, opening and closing doors.

MRS. LINDEN. There are 39 doors in the house.

VIOLET. We were coming home from playing cards, it was Wednesday, no it was Thursday. He said ... he told me I wasn't exciting.

MRS. LINDEN. (*Kindly.*) It doesn't mean anything.

VIOLET. He said he meant my card playing.

MRS. LINDEN. Men are mysterious creatures. I was married many years.

VIOLET. You were? For some reason I never pictured you married.

***LENORE.** Really? What did you picture? The virgin spinster?

MRS. LINDEN. (*Whispers.*) Hush.

VIOLET. Pardon?

MRS. LINDEN. He died a long time ago.

VIOLET. It's Mrs. Linden then. Of course. (*Beat.*) Do you miss him?

MRS. LINDEN. Time passes. The spirit moves on. (*Looks at Lenore.*) Usually. (*Drops a sugar cube in her tea.*) He used to wake up before me and open the drapes. He liked the light. I prefer dark. After he passed ... sometimes, in the morning, the curtain is open, though I closed it the night before. (*Stirs her tea.*) I find it to be a great comfort.

VIOLET. If you didn't open the curtain, who did?

MRS. LINDEN. Well ... what do you think?

VIOLET. Perhaps the wind blew the curtain open.

***LENORE.** (*She makes ghostly, wailing sounds.*) Wooooooo. Wooooooo!

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VIOLET. (*Wraps her arms around herself, feeling a chill.*) You must have loved him dearly.

MRS. LINDEN. Love? No. I wish I had. (*They stir their tea. The sound of spoons clinking against teacups.*)

VIOLET. I visited the athenaeum this morning. I hardly know a thing about the history of the house, or the families/...

MRS. LINDEN. You shouldn't have done that.

VIOLET. It was closed. Apparently, they're only open by appointment.

MRS. LINDEN. The athenaeum's records are poor. Don't go there. Ask me anything you like. I'm resident historian. Housekeeper since the turn of the century. (*The stirring of tea.*) The Whitmans gave me my appointment.

VIOLET. The family with the peacocks.

***LENORE.** Dead babies.

MRS. LINDEN. They had two children. George and Mary.

VIOLET. You tended the children?

MRS. LINDEN. Oh yes. There were always birthday parties and games. The house bustled with activity. I took pleasure in the toil. Idle hands are the devil's workshop. Those were merry days. (*Beat.*) Time and tide wait for no man. The little girl grew frail.

VIOLET. Mary?

MRS. LINDEN. She died of yellow fever. Her rocking horse is in the nursery.

VIOLET. Yes, I've seen it. Poor thing.

MRS. LINDEN. One day Mr. Rush, the gardener, said he was having lovely chats with the young lady from the house. I said, "What young lady? She died in the winter." He said, "No, the pretty girl with big green eyes. She sings nursery rhymes." (*Beat.*) "That was Mary," I said. "She died of yellow fever."

***LENORE.** Mary, Mary, quite contrary.

MRS. LINDEN. I think she didn't know she had passed. Her spirit was strong.

VIOLET. Mrs. Linden, you're pulling my leg.

MRS. LINDEN. There are things we cannot know. Supposing little Mary was caught between two worlds. What was she to do? If I were her, I would seek an amiable playmate. The gardener, for example. (*She pours tea.*) My imagination runs away with me.

VIOLET. The tea set is lovely.

MRS. LINDEN. A gift from Mrs. Whitman.

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VIOLET. You've kept up the house beautifully. The garden is divine.

MRS. LINDEN. There's mint from the garden, would you like some with your tea?

***LENORE.** Yes, please.

VIOLET. No, thank you.

MRS. LINDEN. (*Whispers to Lenore.*) Not you. (*Violet rises, restless.*) What is it dear?

VIOLET. The house has unsettled me.

MRS. LINDEN. I shouldn't have said anything about little Mary.

VIOLET. Yesterday, when I returned from town, I heard whispers coming from the bedroom. I went to investigate. When I looked inside, no one was there, but my blue dress, the one with the pearls, had been laid out on the bed. (*Beat.*) Did you do that?

***LENORE.** It's my dress.

MRS. LINDEN. I must have taken it out to be cleaned.

VIOLET. Did you though? Are you certain?

MRS. LINDEN. Why, yes, I remember now.

VIOLET. Mrs. Linden? (*Pause.*) Is the house haunted?

MRS. LINDEN. All houses are haunted houses. The rooms are alive, the ground it sits on, the roots, the soil, the air. It breathes. Some people have a finer sensitivity to what lies beneath the surface, like electricity bubbling up through the floorboards. Now I see what you're thinking. Put it out of your mind. It's a magnificent home. A work of art.

VIOLET. We fell in love with the architecture. Douglas particularly was intent on the house.

MRS. LINDEN. Many people were. The house attracted a good deal of attention after what happened.

VIOLET. I don't understand.

MRS. LINDEN. (*Beat.*) Oh, I see. You haven't heard.

VIOLET. Heard what?

MRS. LINDEN. (*Beat.*) Lenore and Frederick Prine— (*Lenore turns sharply away.*)

VIOLET. The previous occupants.

MRS. LINDEN. Yes.

VIOLET. Why did they leave?

MRS. LINDEN. (*Beat.*) They didn't leave.

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***LENORE.** I warn you, Mrs. Linden.

MRS. LINDEN. It was almost exactly a year ago in November. The day was overcast. Like today.

VIOLET. (*Softly.*) It's dark. I'll turn on a lamp.

MRS. LINDEN. Lenore murdered her husband, Frederick. (*Lenore goes to the French doors and covers her ears.*)

***LENORE.** (*Wanly.*) I can't hear you. (*She pulls at the doors. They don't budge.*)

MRS. LINDEN. She lost her mind. Everyone could see.

VIOLET. I cannot comprehend it. What a terrible pain you must have suffered. Poor Mrs. Linden.

MRS. LINDEN. You're the first person to ever express condolence to me.

VIOLET. I'd heard about a tragedy. I didn't realize—you see, we were on honeymoon for the holidays. We returned in the New Year.

MRS. LINDEN. Forgive me for asking, it's not my place ... I was under the impression you were acquainted with Lenore and Frederick.

VIOLET. No, we never met. What did they look like?

MRS. LINDEN. Their portraits were in the parlor.

VIOLET. Show me.

MRS. LINDEN. The pictures were removed. Curiosity seekers came to see the house after the story was printed in the paper.

***LENORE.** Tell them to go away.

MRS. LINDEN. I told them to go away. They never listen.

VIOLET. I haven't seen anyone.

MRS. LINDEN. Your husband never spoke of them?

VIOLET. I don't know anything about it.

MRS. LINDEN. Lenore was involved in all manner of social and civic affairs. Her path might have intersected with his.

VIOLET. If there were something to tell, he would have said.

MRS. LINDEN. Yes, of course, but sometimes husbands are ... forgetful. (*Mrs. Linden picks up a framed picture of Violet and Douglas.*) You're a handsome couple. (*Lenore approaches and looks at the picture too.*)

VIOLET. Our wedding day.

DOUGLAS. (*Calling from offstage.*) Violet, dammit, come here. Where are you?!

VIOLET. Do you hear? He's not himself. I'd better go see. (*She exits.*)

***LENORE.** Trouble in paradise.

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MRS. LINDEN. A new house can strain a marriage.

***LENORE.** (*Looks out the French doors.*) The bats look like splotchy ink blots in the sky.

MRS. LINDEN. The days grow dark.

***LENORE.** No more talk about the dark. (*She pushes and pulls at the French doors.*) 39 doors in the house, and not one of them opens.

MRS. LINDEN. I'll call the repairman in the morning.

***LENORE.** I wasn't always like this.

MRS. LINDEN. You used to laugh. I could hear you from the garden.

***LENORE.** A long time ago.

MRS. LINDEN. Not so long.

***LENORE.** (*Beat.*) What should I have done?

MRS. LINDEN. Well—you could have left him. (*Violet returns.*)

VIOLET. Mrs. Linden, who are you talking to?

MRS. LINDEN. Only myself.

VIOLET. Douglas can't find his hat. (*Violet joins Lenore at the French doors.*) I never noticed the bats twinkling in the moonlight, like black stars. Exquisite.

***LENORE.** Yes, they are. (*Lenore places her hand on the glass pane, and then Violet does the same—mirror images of each other.*)

VIOLET. (*Pause.*) I must go. Thank you for the tea. I'm grateful for the company.

MRS. LINDEN. Try not to worry. It never does any good to let your mind run away.

VIOLET. Thank you, Mrs. Linden.

MRS. LINDEN. (*A warning.*) Keep your wits about you. (*Violet begins to exit, and then stops. She turns slowly around, so that she is face to face with Lenore. Silence. With great curiosity, Lenore reaches out and softly touches Violet's face. Violet gasps and jumps back.*)

MRS. LINDEN. What is it, dear?

VIOLET. (*Stunned.*) I'm fine. (*She looks about the room in horror, and exits.*)

MRS. LINDEN. You've had your fun now.

***LENORE.** (*Studies the picture of Violet and Douglas.*) I am a woman who cannot be loved.

MRS. LINDEN. You're being dramatic. (*She takes the picture from Lenore and places it down.*)

***LENORE.** I want ...

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MRS. LINDEN. Yes?

***LENORE.** I want someone to think of me for hours and days on end. To be tortured by the thought of me. Why won't anybody see me?!

MRS. LINDEN. Lenore. My darling Lenore. (*Pause.*) Well. You're a ghost.

***LENORE.** Now you're being dramatic! (*Agitated, she examines herself; she looks at her trembling hands, and touches her face and chest.*)

SCENE 4

Later that evening, in the bedroom. Beside the bed is a lamp. Violet and Douglas are asleep. The wind blows the curtains. They billow eerily. Shadows and light play against the window, darting across the room. A figure in darkness stands above Violet as she sleeps—or perhaps it is the shadows. Violet turns in bed, and then sits up with a jolt. She gasps, and looks wildly about.

VIOLET. Douglas, wake up. (*She turns on the lamp.*)

DOUGLAS. What time is it?

VIOLET. Did you see? A woman in black.

DOUGLAS. That's nice, Vi. Go back to sleep. (*He kisses the air in her direction and falls back on his pillow.*)

VIOLET. (*Rises.*) She was standing at the foot of the bed.

DOUGLAS. It's the middle of the night.

VIOLET. She was right there. (*Points to the spot.*)

DOUGLAS. There's no one there now.

VIOLET. Yes,/but ...

DOUGLAS. The shadows against the walls are playing tricks.

VIOLET. I felt something tugging at the sheets. I thought it was you, but then I saw her—*looking at me.*

DOUGLAS. You couldn't see anything in the dark.

VIOLET. The air was drenched with lilacs.

DOUGLAS. (*Taken aback.*) Lilacs?

VIOLET. As if I was standing in the garden. What is it? You've turned ashen.

DOUGLAS. (*Rises.*) You're shivering. Put this on. (*He places a shawl around her shoulders.*) The rooms are damp.

UNREQUITED

VIOLET. I don't mind the damp. (*She listens.*) Do you hear the floorboards creaking?

DOUGLAS. The old bones of the house are settling.

VIOLET. Peculiar house.

DOUGLAS. My hat walked off this morning.

VIOLET. Again?

DOUGLAS. I can't find it anywhere.

VIOLET. Well, that proves it!

DOUGLAS. Proves what?

VIOLET. Something curious is afoot.

DOUGLAS. You're a funny creature.

VIOLET. I shouldn't have woken you. (*Goes to the window.*) I'm a wicked wife. (*Looks out.*) A bat is flying across the moon. All by herself.

DOUGLAS. You're not wicked. You're perfect.

VIOLET. Hardly perfect. I'll have you know I have all sorts of foibles you've never seen.

DOUGLAS. You look fetching in that gauzy gown. I can see your naked knees. Your knees are perfect.

VIOLET. They're not as decorative as your knees, with all that fur.

DOUGLAS. You like my furry knees.

VIOLET. I can barely contain myself.

DOUGLAS. Take off your gown.

VIOLET. (*Blushes.*) No.

DOUGLAS. (*Sliding down her strap.*) Just this one shoulder, right here.

VIOLET. Take off your night clothes first.

DOUGLAS. I like to see you naked.

VIOLET. I feel funny when I'm undressed and you're not, like a leg of lamb hanging in the window of the butcher shop.

DOUGLAS. (*Sliding down the strap of her other shoulder.*) Let's start a family.

VIOLET. How many children will we have?

DOUGLAS. At least a dozen.

VIOLET. (*Laughing.*) Don't come near me!

DOUGLAS. They'll have to be patient with their mother. She'll fill their heads with fantastical stories.

UNREQUITED

VIOLET. Women are natural storytellers. They don't hurry past all the details. I wonder how many books might have been published by women if they'd been allowed.

DOUGLAS. There are books by women.

VIOLET. We didn't read them in school.

DOUGLAS. Books about housewifery and romance. Not fit for school. *(He goes to the bedroom door. Stands at the door, transfixed, and then with sudden swiftness, opens the door and looks out into the hallway. He looks up and down the hallway.)*

VIOLET. What are you doing out there?

DOUGLAS. *(Steps back into the bedroom and closes the door.)* I live here.

VIOLET. You're looking for someone. *(Pause.)* Tell me about Lenore. *(Douglas looks at Violet in surprise.)* That was her name, wasn't it?

DOUGLAS. What do you want me to say?

VIOLET. Who was she?

DOUGLAS. Nobody.

VIOLET. Why did we come here?

DOUGLAS. People like to have a nice place to live. I bought a house for my wife. It isn't a crime.

VIOLET. But why here?

DOUGLAS. People buy houses.

VIOLET. It was a coincidence?

DOUGLAS. Are you accusing me of something?

VIOLET. I simply want to get to/the bottom ...

DOUGLAS. They wanted to sell quickly. We got the house for a song and dance. Don't ask so many questions. *(He goes to the dressing table and takes a bottle of pills.)* I'm going to bed. Take these pills, you'll sleep better.

VIOLET. What if something happened and I didn't wake up in time?!

DOUGLAS. You'll be fine.

VIOLET. I saw someone! *(She hesitates.)* I thought I had.

DOUGLAS. Have you lost your marbles, Vi?

VIOLET. Really Douglas, my marbles are perfectly intact. Need I remind you, you're the one whose been walking about in a permanent gloom all these days?

DOUGLAS. A man can't walk around his own house?

VIOLET. *(Taking the pills.)* Give them to me. *(She tosses the bottle in the dresser drawer and folds her arms.)* There. That's better.

UNREQUITED

DOUGLAS. It's sleeping powder. Not poison. I have an appointment in the morning. I'll sleep in the guest room.

VIOLET. No. You stay. I'll go. I don't want to be here with *her*. (*She marches to the door, and then turns back.*) Did you think I wouldn't find out?! (*Silence.*) Did you love her?

DOUGLAS. You're my wife. I married you. You're perfect.

VIOLET. I'm not. I'm always late, I'm the pits at cards, I have bad habits, you wait and see.

DOUGLAS. Violet, if you run off to Coney Island and become a carnival barker and get fat off of taffy, I'll love you.

VIOLET. (*She softens.*) Would you love me if I were the bearded lady?

DOUGLAS. No. I would display you behind glass at the circus.

VIOLET. I want to show you something. Wait right here.

DOUGLAS. Where are you going?

VIOLET. You'll see. (*She exits. Douglas sits on the bed and cradles his face in his hands. After several moments, Violet returns with a painting.*) I've been painting plants and insects from the garden. (*She shows him the painting.*)

DOUGLAS. Violet, it's so ...

VIOLET. Grotesque.

DOUGLAS. I didn't know you felt this way.

VIOLET. What do you mean? (*She examines the picture.*) Yes. I see. But I'm not melancholy. I'm happy.

DOUGLAS. Why don't you paint violets?

VIOLET. Violets?

DOUGLAS. Let's go to bed. (*He gives her a quick peck.*) It's late. (*He turns off the lamp. They get in bed, turning this way and that. The wind gusts, disturbing the window curtains. In the center of the room, nearly imperceptible, is the flowing movement of a woman's dress, a glimpse of her hand, her fingers ... Douglas sits up, stricken. He rises and goes to the center of the room.*)

VIOLET. What is it? Did you see something?

DOUGLAS. Go back to sleep. (*His heart racing.*) The shadows against the walls ... (*He peers into the darkness.*)

UNREQUITED

SCENE 5

The next morning in the Great Room. Mrs. Linden does housework with good cheer. She dusts, and straightens chairs, picture frames, and pillows. She arranges dishes prettily around a pot of tea. She polishes silver.

MRS. LINDEN. Cleanliness is next to godliness. *(She hums happily.)* A clean house makes a statement that you care. *(Gestures to the audience with her duster, as if doing an advertisement about the joys of housekeeping.)* Details matter. Civility is the foundation of society. *(She does an elegant dance around the table as she arranges chairs.)* Always be sure to clean the corners of a room. *(She prances to a corner with her duster.)* Particularly, the shadows. You don't know what might lurk in the shadows. *(Smiles too brightly.)* Here's a homemaker's tip: Drawers are marvelous storage nooks. No one thinks to look inside the secret compartment. *(She removes the gun from the hidden compartment of the end table and polishes it.)* There. Much better. *(Places the gun back inside the compartment.)* You mustn't forget to polish the silver before company arrives! *(Cheerfully polishes the silver.)* If you put a little elbow grease in it, you can see yourself in the silver. *(Looks at herself in the silver. Forlorn, she places the silver down.)* Hard work is its own reward. *(She sits in a chair and stares listlessly. Silence. Then she becomes like jelly as she slowly slides to the floor, as if she has lost control of her body. It's like she's sliding into water. She lies there, sprawled on her belly.)*

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