

WITCH

by

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[commission for Writer's Theatre, Chicago]

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CAST (2F, 4M)

Elizabeth Sawyer	F	40s/ 50s/ 60s. An outcast.
Scratch	M	20s /early 30s. The devil.
Sir Arthur Banks	M	50s/60s. A wealthy and powerful man.
Cuddy Banks	M	20s/ early 30s. Sir Arthur's son, painfully shy, a morris-dancer. He is secretly in love with Frank (and also in hate.)
Frank Thorney	M	20s/ early 30s. A confident and successful young man, charming and ruthless. His ambition knows no bounds.
Winnifred	F	20s/ early 30s. Sir Arthur's servant, resigned and pragmatic, secretly married to Frank.

These characters can be played by actors of any ethnicity. Sir Arthur and his son Cuddy do not have to be played by actors of the same ethnicity.

TIME + PLACE

The Village of Edmonton: a semi-rural small town lost in the country. Then-ish. But equally of our moment. No faux-period accents, please.

NOTES

The spacing is a gesture toward indicating rhythm and how thoughts change, morph, contradict each other, escalate, or get supplanted by other thoughts as we talk. The line breaks often signal either an intensification of, or a shift away, from something. It doesn't indicate a beat or pause except where written.

[] is unspoken, although the character is thinking it

() is spoken out loud but is a side-thought

// signifies an interruption, where the // occurs

Each of the characters has what is referred to as an “aria.” This is not about increased “lyricism” or a heightened style. In these arias, an urgency takes hold, a spilling out of deeply buried things – a churning engine of truth.

1.

Elizabeth Sawyer. Alone. A light tight on her face. This is a moment out of time, a moment from the future. Her aria.

ELIZABETH

I'm not arguing for the end of the world but
then again maybe I sort of am. *This* one, anyway.
The hard stop.
The full re-set.
Burn it all down and start over.

I imagine you're not sure about this,
you might think I'm jumping the gun.
Fair enough, full disclosure: I've had a rough go of things.

Wherever I go people are like "Oh there's the witch of Edmonton"
they're like "where are you going witch"
they're like "my cow took sick, why'd you do that"
and then the whispering!
Say I'm in line at the well, with everybody else.
If I turn around, the whispering stops. Dead silence.
You don't think I know what you're saying about me?
I read lips like a champion, asshole.
Or when my hen vanished, or when my thatch burned,
or when I go to gather sticks and their dogs chase me off

—my point is, I'm not saying I don't have a grudge, because
I do, clearly, I do have a grudge.
But does that detract from my argument, or is it just an added texture?

I understand -
you're hesitating right now,
you're like: *Is she kidding, is she serious, is she crazy,*
- and those are questions. They are valid questions.
But they are not the *right* questions.

Here is the single question that you should be asking yourself:
Do I have hope that things can get better?

And if you do, then ignore me. You're fine.
But if you don't...
then maybe this is where we start.

2.

*A bar. Scratch and Cuddy Banks.
Back in the flow of time.*

CUDDY

The devil?

SCRATCH

Your soul, blood-pact, endless riches.

CUDDY

Endless?

SCRATCH

Power: reckless, abusable. Women!

CUDDY

Women?

SCRATCH

Have to pick, can't have it all, but sure, women.

CUDDY

Huh.

(pause)

I don't know why you're coming to me. I've never even gotten in trouble with the law.

SCRATCH

But you want to.

CUDDY

But I haven't.

SCRATCH
(shrugs, easy)

I'm just as interested in what you *want* as what you *do*.

CUDDY

You been to my father's place?

SCRATCH

Nah.

CUDDY

Sir Arthur, he owns the castle.

SCRATCH

Nope.

CUDDY

He's super important, everybody knows him.

SCRATCH

No.

CUDDY

My dad is a real son-of-a-bitch, you haven't been to his place?

SCRATCH

He lacks imagination.

CUDDY

(a little flattered)

...Oh.

SCRATCH

You, on the other hand, have potential.

Cuddy gets a little excited by this.

CUDDY

I perform in a morris troupe, actually, if you want to know. Me and my friends do morris-dancing, maybe you've heard of us, maybe you've seen us, maybe—

SCRATCH

I didn't mean the dancing.

CUDDY

...Oh.

SCRATCH

Although it's good to have hobbies.

CUDDY

[having to explain that]

It's not a hobby, I keep —
my dad says that all the time too, I'm like
Dad
this is not a *hobby*
this is *my life*.

SCRATCH

—Of course.

CUDDY

The morris dance is very intricate
very raw and intricate.
It's like... seriously underrated.

SCRATCH

I stand corrected.

Pause.

CUDDY

Who else have you been to?

SCRATCH

In my lifetime? In the world?

CUDDY

In Edmonton.

(this is loaded:)

Frank Thorney?

SCRATCH

Who?

CUDDY

(in love and equally in hate)

Everybody is all, "Ooh Frank Thorney."
My dad is like, obsessed with Frank Thorney.
He found him working in a field and like, took him to our castle
and for the past five years he's always like
"You should go hiking, Frank loves the outdoors"
"You should eat more meat, Frank eats meat"
"You should go on more dates, girls love Frank"
and it's like, uhh, hello, I'm your *son*
what's the BFD with Frank??

(beat)

So...just me?

SCRATCH

Sorry?

CUDDY

In the whole town, just me?

You're one of the few.

SCRATCH

Oh...

CUDDY
(he's never been special before)

Who are the others?

(then – jealous)

Does it matter?

SCRATCH

The old witch Sawyer?
I bet it's Sawyer.

CUDDY

Why do you say that?

SCRATCH

CUDDY

Everyone says she makes the crops wither
Everyone says she makes the cows dry up
Everyone says she dances with the devil in the pale moonlight.
And that's you, right? So...

*Scratch sees Cuddy's insecurity and
prepares for the kill.*

SCRATCH

I can't confirm or deny that right now, Cuddy.

CUDDY

Do you guys hang out all the time?
Do you, like, fly around on her broomstick together?
Just nod your head.
If it's Yes just look to the right.
Or if it's Yes, cough twice.
Or if it's Yes—

SCRATCH

The real question at hand is: what do *you* want?

CUDDY

...Me?

SCRATCH

Some men want wealth. Some men want land.
And some men... many men... want love.

Cuddy hastens to dispatch this train of thought,

CUDDY

There's this girl, Winnifred, we're basically a thing.
She works in my castle and
she's like... *drawn* to me
like an animal thing
so.

A beat. As sympathetically as possible:

SCRATCH

Huh.

CUDDY

What.

SCRATCH

Hmm.

CUDDY

What??

SCRATCH

Well
I hate to say this but
there's a slight problem with Winnifred.

CUDDY

There is?

SCRATCH

Winnifred is secretly married to Young Frank Thorney. So. Winnifred might be *drawn* to you. That's certainly possible. But she can't be your girlfriend... or your wife... which is a problem, considering the rumors. But maybe you don't care about the rumors.

CUDDY
(a little pale)

What rumors.

SCRATCH

They're stupid. Don't worry about them.
Your father is just a little concerned, that's all

about his heir
 getting married and *producing* an heir
 he's just a little anxious that your favorite flavor might not be "wife"
 if you get what I'm saying.

A beat. Cuddy is pale.

CUDDY

That's ridiculous.

SCRATCH

I'm sure it is! I'm sure it's ridiculous.
 I mean, Frank is certainly red-blooded
 but that doesn't mean...
 You're the son, after all!

A beat.

CUDDY

That doesn't mean what?

SCRATCH

No, nothing, it's just
adoption is a word that
 one hears floated, from time to time,
 in these circumstances.

CUDDY

Adoption?

SCRATCH

Frank as the
 "Adoptive Heir"... you know
 but:
 Rumor! Rumor.
 Probably untrue.

CUDDY

Frank Thorney??
 I *hate* Frank Thorney!

(this gets more intense as it goes)

My dad gave him a horse and now he goes everywhere by horseback! It's like, you have legs, can't you walk? It's like, you're going three feet, just fucking walk! But nope, there's Frank Thorney on his goddamn horse. And I'm like, Hi Frank, and he always just *looks* at me, he just *looks* at me, and then he keeps going. And I'm like, Bye Frank. I'm like, your dad is a farmer, Frank! I'm like, fuck you Frank! I'm like, someday I'm gonna

punch you in your perfectly-straight teeth, someday I'm gonna be like Hi Frank and then I'm gonna hit you so hard you fall off that stupid fucking horse and I'm gonna keep hitting you and keep hitting you and keep hitting you until all those straight square teeth are bashed into your stupid beautiful face and I'm gonna say BYE FRANK BYE FRANK BYEEEEEE FRAAAAANK!

(A beat. Cuddy is breathing really hard. He gets it together. He is ashamed, and also liberated. He looks at Scratch. Scratch's face is encouraging. A long beat.)

You can have my soul.
I want you to kill Frank.

SCRATCH

I think we can make that work.

3.

Scratch and Frank. Possibly the same bar.

FRANK

Who did you say you were?

SCRATCH
(a bow)

Your servant.

FRANK

Have we met?

SCRATCH

I think we have some friends in common, Frank Thorney.

FRANK

Is that so?

SCRATCH

Up in the castle, for example,
I think a number of our friends in the castle
are friends in common.

Frank's demeanor changes completely.

FRANK

Oh! well
you do look a little familiar to me
we must have run into each other at a banquet, perhaps?
maybe at a banquet.

SCRATCH

Yes, maybe at a banquet.

FRANK

How long are you in town for?

SCRATCH

Oh, just sort of – making the rounds.
Everybody's very impressed with you, you know.

FRANK
(this means a lot)

Is that so?

SCRATCH

Your bearing, your stature, your grace. Everybody's impressed.

FRANK

Oh that's very kind, that's very kind.
(Who said that?)

SCRATCH

Sir Arthur,
Sir Arthur thinks a lot of you
as I'm sure you're aware.

FRANK

Oh! well he's become just like a father to me.

SCRATCH

And Young Cuddy.

FRANK

Who?

SCRATCH

Young Cuddy of the morris dancers.

FRANK

Who?

SCRATCH

Sir Arthur's only son?

FRANK

Oh...*him*.

SCRATCH

Also Winnifred.

FRANK

(*uneasy*)

...Who?

SCRATCH

And I can't tell you how many parents have said to me, "Frank Thorney has turned out so well, Frank Thorney is the model for how we raise our children."

FRANK

Do people say that?

SCRATCH

Of course, there are things they don't know. But isn't that always the case?

FRANK

...I'm sorry?

SCRATCH

What is a town without its secrets? Its secret hates, its secret loves... its secret marriages.

FRANK

I'm sorry... who did you say you were?

SCRATCH

Oh! Sorry, my apologies.
Can't believe it slipped my mind.
I'm the devil.

A beat. Frank gets very eager and excited.

FRANK

Oh! I know this part!

SCRATCH

You do?

FRANK

This is the part where you tempt me! And I say No,
because I'm good, because I'm the hero,
always been a special child, poor but virtuous,
sort of a Noble Working Class Individual,
and my mother always said to me:
"Frank, you must be the example for your brothers and sisters"
and I *was*
(and I was also very good at sports) –
(that was later on)
– (and horseback riding),
(also later on) -
and so my whole life, really, people have been holding me up and saying:
Look at Frank,
Sort of saying: *He's special*
And I know that they're right,
There's something inside me that's incredibly rare and incredibly special,
and it is my job to *foster* that thing,
encourage that thing,

and even when we had nothing to eat, my mother always said:
 “Frank, you are destined for greatness,”
 and so here you are, and it’s your job to say: “Frank, let me tear you down.”
 But it’s *my* job to say No, and so the answer is...
 NO.

(a real beat)

You’re still here.

SCRATCH

I’m just hanging out.

FRANK

I said No, so why are you still here?

SCRATCH

Well, I didn’t offer you anything.

FRANK

...I’m sorry?

SCRATCH

I’m not offering you anything. I hear your No and I respect your No and I’m not trying to devalue the power of your No, but I actually didn’t make you an offer.

FRANK

Oh.

SCRATCH

Don’t feel bad or anything.

FRANK

(starting to feel bad)

I’m not.

SCRATCH

Don’t feel left out at all, it’s nothing personal.

FRANK

(feeling left out)

No no, I’m not.

SCRATCH

And you shouldn’t, because you would have said No anyway, if I’d offered you anything you wouldn’t have taken it. You have way more going for you than Cuddy Banks.

FRANK

Cuddy Banks?

(a little horrified)

SCRATCH

You remember...

FRANK

You made *him* some sort of... offer?

SCRATCH

I mean, it's funny because he has wealth, he has the title, he'll inherit his father's land – so it's funny to think about, because Cuddy actually has all the things a man could want, but I guess once you have everything, you just want more. Whereas *you* don't really have anything, but you're fine.

FRANK

What do you mean I don't have *anything*?

SCRATCH

Oh! I'm so sorry, maybe I misunderstood the situation?

The way it sounded – from you and others, mostly from others – it sounded like you come from a poor family and they don't have anything to give you – except debt, probably, probably there's a lot of debt – and you live in the castle due to Sir Arthur's good will right *now*, but, you know, eventually he'll die, and everything will go to Cuddy, so... that will be really shitty, when the time comes. But I feel like you're being really zen about the whole thing, which is so impressive.

Something in Frank changes. A glimmer of the ruthless hunger that is always just underneath his polished surface.

FRANK

All right.

SCRATCH

All right?

FRANK

I want to be heir
The castle, the title, the land
You can have my soul.

Scratch smiles. He takes a sip of his drink.

SCRATCH

I think we can make that work.

4.

*Elizabeth's country cottage. Shabby, poor.
Scratch has just arrived.*

ELIZABETH

The devil?

SCRATCH

Blah blah blah your soul etc.

ELIZABETH

My soul?

SCRATCH

Ripe for the picking.

ELIZABETH

Why *mine*?

SCRATCH

Everybody says you're a witch.
You're not, of course. But! would you like to be?

ELIZABETH

I was warned about you.

SCRATCH

Everybody is warned about me, it doesn't seem to make much of a difference.
Mind if I sit down?

ELIZABETH

As a matter of fact, Yes.

SCRATCH

Offer me a drink. Common courtesy. Can't hurt, can it?

ELIZABETH

Nobody sits in my cabin but me.

*A moment. Scratch elaborately leans but
doesn't sit.*

SCRATCH

How would you like me to fuck up some people for you.
How would you like...revenge.

ELIZABETH

You want me to sell you my soul.
Men make it sound like they're doing you a favor when what they really want is a favor done for them.

SCRATCH

Astute! That's very astute, and I hear you.
But I would say - think of it as more an exchange between friends.
Think of it kind of like a pot-luck.

SAYWER

(despite herself)

...A "pot-luck"?

SCRATCH

A pot-luck is what happens in the future, when people don't worry about food.
And instead of everybody just eating their own food as fast as they can find it, people get together, usually outside, usually somewhere uncomfortable and on a patio and with too many bugs, and everybody pretends not to notice how many bugs there are, they talk about the sunset, and they eat each other's food. Slowly. Over a great deal of time. And everybody wants to go home long before they actually do.

ELIZABETH

Oh.

SCRATCH

Something to look forward to!
You could practice, with me.
I bring power and reckless lack of consequence. You bring your soul.

A beat.

ELIZABETH

If I "pot-luck" my soul...

SCRATCH

Yes?

ELIZABETH

—And that's a big *if*—

SCRATCH

—pure hypotheticals, I understand—

ELIZABETH

What do I get?

SCRATCH

Oh! Well that's an easy one. That's where it gets easy.

ELIZABETH

Okay...

SCRATCH

You tell me. The villagers who are cruel to you? Make a list. Their cows get pox. The girls who giggle behind their hands? Warts on the hands. I mean, it all sort of depends on you, at that point.

ELIZABETH

And what would you do with it? My soul?

SCRATCH

What have *you* done with it so far?

ELIZABETH

Nothing much, I guess.

SCRATCH

Then you won't miss it.

ELIZABETH

Nobody wakes up in the middle of the night? Nobody gets an earache or a toothache or a weird uncanny ache-ache that won't seem to go away?

SCRATCH

Nobody's reported those kinds of symptoms.

ELIZABETH

Oh.

SCRATCH

So, what do you think?

ELIZABETH

Can I change my mind? If I say Yes, can I change it back?

SCRATCH

Oh! no. No no. No take-backs.

ELIZABETH

And what if I say No?

SCRATCH

You know, people ask me this sometimes. And my sort of standard – the answer I like to give – I mean, I can get dramatic, I can be like: *I tear you apart, I rip you limb from* – you know? – *I burn your entire* – like, I can do that, but honestly, the answer I like to give is: I leave. I just leave. And your entire life continues on, exactly as it was, zero change, as if I were never here. And one day, maybe next week or maybe ten years from now...or maybe on your death-bed... One day you ask yourself why is it that you have been so relentlessly miserable, why is it that you never ever, not even once, had the chance to make yourself less unhappy. And then at that moment, whenever it comes, you think of this. You think of this conversation. And you think: *Oh. I did have the chance. I did have it. I just said No.*

A long beat. And then:

ELIZABETH

No thank you.

5.

Sir Arthur's banquet hall, in the aftermath of a great banquet. A portrait of his dead wife hangs above the proceedings.

Sir Arthur is in his great Banquet Chair, holding court. Cuddy and Frank are to his sides. There's huge tension in the air. Each one is on the edge, waiting for the moment in which his world will change.

Winnifred cleans up the banquet. She walks past them weighed down with heavy dishes – sumptuous, obscene platters, tureens, etc. Winnifred walks all the way from one side of the stage to the other. Then a long pause, while she off-loads dishes and gets more. Then she walks past us again.

Every so often Sir Arthur will call to Winnifred, and then she will break her pattern and hurry over, with the thing he requests. Then back to her pattern.

SIR ARTHUR

And the thing is: the free market.
You know?

FRANK

(Certainly, certainly.)

SIR ARTHUR

And one wants to *celebrate* the free market, one wants to *embrace* the possibility of a world in which anyone, any man, (no matter his background) can *succeed*.

FRANK

Yes sir, absolutely.

SIR ARTHUR

So that's just, that's just one way of —
But then there's the issue of *legacy*. You know?

FRANK

Yes, legacy is crucial—

SIR ARTHUR

Then there's the issue of – what you hand *down*.

What you are directly responsible for.

(Winnifred!)

(Winnifred, hand-wipes!)

(back to the boys)

For example, if you raise your children right, they have a sense of

I don't know, *responsibility* toward the world.

You have *handed down* your sense of—

(Thank you, Winnifred.)

Winnifred has brought hand-wipes. She stands by patiently while the men take turns using them. She's mostly ignored.

FRANK

Absolutely sir, I think it's all about values.

SIR ARTHUR

Values, yes, values.

FRANK

And inheritance confirms values. You know?

Who you leave it all to is about what you *value*.

CUDDY

(Ohhhkay...)

FRANK

For example, a person who works hard, who gets ahead,
that's a person who you could sort of trust, trust with a legacy,
because *his* values and *your* values—

SIR ARTHUR

Everybody thinks it's about class, but it's about *values*.

FRANK

I couldn't agree more, sir, truly.

SIR ARTHUR

Your father raised *you* with the right values
and you weren't
ya know, you didn't have
but look at you!

[rich]

[things easy]

You're a bright young man, you're moving in the right [direction]
 not *victimized* by your previous hardships
 and maybe those hardships *are* a legacy—

*Now we're getting somewhere! and they're
 riffing together:*

FRANK

—of experience, of authentic experience—

SIR ARTHUR

—the means by which one gains a sense of *self*—

FRANK

—hardship as a valued teacher, really—

SIR ARTHUR
(likes this a lot)

—hardship *equals* value—

FRANK

—value *equals* legacy, *equals* inheritance—

*Frank chokes on his wine, coughs. Cuddy
 sits up expectantly, waiting for Frank to keel
 over. Frank... does not.*

CUDDY
(here we go!)

He's choking!

SIR ARTHUR

He's fine.

FRANK

I'm fine.

CUDDY
(subsides, disappointed)

Oh.

FRANK

Just got a little over-excited.

SIR ARTHUR

Very exciting stuff, values, legacy, very exciting.

*Well, if Frank isn't currently dying, and we
are still all having this conversation...
Cuddy feels the need to assert himself.*

CUDDY

OK, I just,
I *also* wouldn't say that someone who lives in a castle doesn't have hardship.

SIR ARTHUR

Oh?

FRANK

Oh-kay.

CUDDY

What.

FRANK

I mean
the "poor little rich kid" argument
we've all...

[heard that before]

CUDDY

"Poor little"—? What's that *even*—

FRANK

The whole thing about emotional hollowness, emotional lack
but I mean, once you put that up against *actual* lack
Lack of resources, lack of food, lack of shelter
Emotional lack seems... well, lacking.

*Sir Arthur breaks in, as things are getting
savage.*

SIR ARTHUR

Love a lively conversation! Gets the digestion going!

CUDDY

Well Frank
It's interesting to *me* that you seem to have such a connection to the idea of *actual* lack
when you've spent the past five years living here at the castle
and wearing my dad's clothes and eating my dad's food and
you know, riding a horse my dad *gave* you and like
I guess I just don't see what you're lacking... *physically*.

FRANK

Excuse me?

SIR ARTHUR

We've been fortunate, have a good kid
—good man— around

CUDDY

Sure, I mean sure, but I'm just interested in Frank's opinions on hardship because I understand that his background was perhaps, ah, underprivileged but he has certainly been blessed with *access*, hasn't he.

FRANK

(tight and a little raw)

Well, Cuddy

I really appreciate the help your dad has given me,
I would never fail to acknowledge that your dad changed my life—

SIR ARTHUR

(modest, a little embarrassed, but pleased)

(Oh now...)

FRANK

(this comes from a place of truth)

—but I think maybe *your* privilege makes it hard for you to understand that five years of this doesn't quite override twenty years of having nothing. *You* might forget to eat lunch, say you're at morris-dancing practice and you forget lunch, and then you come into the kitchen, you say, "I'm starving!" - you have no idea what starving is like. You have no idea. If you did, you wouldn't think that twenty years of starvation could be forgotten after one big meal.

A moment. Sir Arthur is moved and surprised. He cuts in:

SIR ARTHUR

Well-spoken, Frank

(afterthought:)

—*and* Cuddy! and Cuddy—

(smoothing it all over:)

Think it's good for men to practice the art of dissent.

FRANK

Thank you.

CUDDY

Thanks.

SIR ARTHUR

Argument used to be an art you know
 ancient Greeks and
 Syrians? probably the Syrians?
 Mesopotamia!
 (where's Mesopotamia?)
 Here, have a date
 have a fresh date
 Winnifred!

(She comes running)

A date!

(She holds out a bowl of dates. Dimissing her:)

(thank you Winnifred)
 anyway
 advanced civilizations train their young men to argue
 to think like lawyers, but with *heart*
 lawyer-poets
 think we miss that, nowadays
 violence and
 think we miss that.

(with increasing nostalgia that kind of takes him over:)

Cuddy's mom was a real ...
 she could argue like a man
 she could look you straight in the eyes and just
 decimate your argument
 just tear you apart in a thousand ways and

(this has gone to an unexpectedly lonely place)

I loved being decimated by her.

(beat)

Winnifred!

(Winnifred freezes, arms already full of dishes.)

Oh, here, I'll just—

*Sir Arthur gets up and goes for more dates.
 Frank and Cuddy eye each other. A beat.
 Awkward.*

CUDDY

How are you feeling?

FRANK

Um... great.

CUDDY

Oh.

Your head is OK? Nothing hurts?

FRANK

No ... why?

CUDDY

Oh... there's just been something going around. That's all.

A weird beat.

FRANK

How's the... morris-dancing?

CUDDY

Great.

FRANK

That's great!

No real holidays at the moment.

No parties.

CUDDY

Guess not.

FRANK

So, you'd say it's quiet.

CUDDY

At the moment.

Sir Arthur returns.

SIR ARTHUR

Women!

Cuddy's mom, she terrified me
absolutely turned my guts to ice
and I mean, I was a real man, in my prime
sort of a *man's* man, you might say, but
that woman
just one look at her
I was gone.
That's love, son:

absolute terror.
That's love.

FRANK

I'm excited to find out, sir.

SIR ARTHUR
(laughing)

Excited is he?
Well, and I don't say this lightly, young man, but
I have some friends whose daughters
might be a little higher in station than you might normally –
but I think with my strong advocacy, you might be able to—
you know, just sort of, get some irons in the fire.

*Winnifred is shooting him glares over her
dishes. So is Cuddy.*

FRANK

I couldn't possibly impose on you, sir.

SIR ARTHUR

Not an imposition at all! Not at all!
(Winnifred! A digestif!)

(Winnifred comes over with a bottle.)

Wish young Cuddy would let his old dad *impose*
but happy to, happy to.
You know, actually Frank, I've been thinking—

FRANK

...Yes??

SIR ARTHUR
(to Winnifred)

(If you would)

(to Frank)

Been thinking about—

*Winnifred pours the digestif in Frank's
lap.*

FRANK

Hey!!

SIR ARTHUR

Watch what you're doing, girl!

Sorry. I'm so sorry.
I slipped.

WINNIFRED

*She dabs at Frank's lap.
He can't look at her.*

CUDDY
(in defense of Winnifred)

It's like 90% water.

FRANK

It's fine, it's fine.

SIR ARTHUR

Watch where you're pouring, girl.

CUDDY

She's been carrying a lot of dishes, probably her hand was tired.

WINNIFRED

Sorry.

FRANK

It's okay, that's enough.

Winnifred withdraws, and is gone.

CUDDY

It's not like he *drowned*.

Sir Arthur gets up.

SIR ARTHUR

Well!
It's a beautiful day outside, lots of things to be done.
Run along boys,
sun'll go out one of these days
(scientists say)
so
get some sun.

FRANK
(this is it!)

Wait – just before –

you started to say –
What was it you were thinking about, sir?

SIR ARTHUR

Ah!!
Good boy, good reminder,
was just thinking
let's take the horses out later
give this old man some exercise.

FRANK
(deflated)

The horses...

SIR ARTHUR

Yeah, horses and dogs...

FRANK

There wasn't anything else you were going to...?

SIR ARTHUR

No, don't think so...

(senses but doesn't understand Frank's disappointment)

No horses today?

FRANK

No, yeah, of course yes. Love it.

SIR ARTHUR

Great! See you later.

He lumbers off, digestif in hand, and is gone. A beat. Frank is a little deflated. A moment, and Cuddy can't help himself:

CUDDY

Do you really agree with the old man?

FRANK

...Sorry?

CUDDY

"Yes, of course, love it..."
I can't find one thing my father and I agree on.

FRANK
(careful)

I like the way your father thinks.

CUDDY

Or do you like the way you *think* he's thinking about you?

FRANK

I'm not sure what you mean.

CUDDY

Well,
I think you *think* he's looking for a son.
But I think you *forgot* that he already *has* one.
Don't you know you're wasting your time?

FRANK

I think you might be asking the wrong question
actually

CUDDY
(a little breathless)

Oh yeah?

Frank steps close to Cuddy. So close. So close that they could kiss. The electricity sparks up. Cuddy is a little light-headed with it, and Frank knows.

FRANK

Like maybe
you should be asking *why* it is
that even though your dad has a son
(technically, you are technically the son)
he needs to find a better one.

CUDDY
(rage and longing)

I'm the heir, Frank.

FRANK

...Are you sure?

(Frank is so close to Cuddy's mouth that Cuddy is a little dazed.)

Sometimes we can get complacent
we can get complacent about what we have

and we just assume we can get what we want
 but actually we *can't* anymore, actually
 even if we were born in a *castle*
 even if we have *hobbies*
 like *morris*-dancing, for example
 even in those cases sometimes,
 deals are made, rules get changed, and
 we start to lose things.

*Cuddy reaches to close the final distance
 between them, to kiss Frank. Frank side-
 steps him neatly.*

FRANK

Hope things work out for you, Cuddy.

*Frank saunters out of the banquet hall, like
 a million bucks. Cuddy stares after him,
 bruised and seething.*

CUDDY

I'm gonna kill him.

6.

*Elizabeth's cottage. Later. Day.
Scratch is back. A little jittery, just arrived.*

SCRATCH

I thought it would help if you could sort of – see what you're getting. All the services provided.

ELIZABETH

I said No.

SCRATCH

Yes but you see
the thing is
nobody says No.

ELIZABETH

I did.

SCRATCH

But that's because you don't understand the value of the offer. I don't want to boast, but I've only been doing this a few hundred years and yet I recently got a promotion, and honestly? the secret to my success is authenticity. My offer is authentic. It is detailed and it is authentic and people are statistically, authentically happy when they work with me.

ELIZABETH

How experienced are you?

SCRATCH

I'm *fast-rising*. If you want to get detailed, my year-end numbers are better (across the board) than my senior colleagues, and my customer satisfaction is generally a good seven to ten points higher. If you heard me out, you might be surprised.

(A moment. Has he scored a point? Just in case he has, he rushes forward:)

So, here is a list of all the town-folk who have been cruel to you or said cruel things or acted impolitely. Their names, their addresses, the degree of their offense. I arranged it in a few different ways, there's sort of youngest-to-oldest (that's this one), and then there is meanest-to-least-mean (that's this one), and then I arranged them in order of the kinds of punishments I might suggest, and that list is structured in order of my favorite-to-least-favorite punishments.

(A moment)

Would you like to hear some of my favorite punishments?

Elizabeth is intrigued despite herself.

ELIZABETH
(but this is a Yes)

Can I stop you?

SCRATCH
(brightly)

Okay! Great! Here we go!
 Pox on the cow.
 Pox on the hens.
 Pox on the baby.
 That's the pox section.

(pause)

Milkmaid is ornery.
 Girlfriend is ornery.
 Wife is ornery.
 That's the Personal Relationship section.

(pause)

Ants.
 Crickets.
 Lice.
 That's the insect section.
 Are you still with me?

ELIZABETH

Those are all a bit... juvenile.

SCRATCH

I'm sorry?

ELIZABETH

You don't think?
 A bit... under-effective.

SCRATCH

I assure you, they're *very* effective! Imagine: you sneeze and an ant falls out, the internal made external, a metaphor that // I particularly—

ELIZABETH

What about wholesale slaughter?

SCRATCH

Oh.
 Well.
 That's a thing that we – I mean, that's sort of an advanced offer.
 But we *do* do that.
 But it tends to be... advanced.

ELIZABETH

Advanced how?

Advanced like that's the deal you make with men?

(An awkward moment – that is the deal he makes with men.)

And women get insects. Okay.

SCRATCH

It sort of just works out like that.

(getting flustered, as she stares at him)

It's not –

[about bias]

women have their own -

[set of interests]

and *they* tend to be the ones who ask *me*

[about insects]

so *I'm* not even

but

so

it just generally works out like that.

Unconsciously.

ELIZABETH

Well

maybe if you *consciously* offered women wholesale slaughter more often it would work out a different way. Generally.

SCRATCH

I guess maybe it might.

A beat. He is intrigued by her.

She is intrigued by him and doesn't want to be.

ELIZABETH

Is that everything?

SCRATCH

Is that – what do you mean is that everything?

ELIZABETH

Well, are you done? With your pitch?

SCRATCH

Well I guess not, because you didn't like it.

ELIZABETH

I didn't say I didn't like it, I just said it was trivial and I asked about a less trivial version.

SCRATCH

Would you like to hear my less trivial version?

ELIZABETH

Would you like to deliver your less trivial version?

SCRATCH

I wouldn't mind the opportunity.

ELIZABETH

Okay, you're on.

Are they flirting? Both of them are enjoying the interaction and also wary of it. Scratch delivers his next pitch with the energy of flirtation.

SCRATCH

Okay.

Okay.

Okay: picture this. A sea of blood. A tsunami rises up. It too, is made of blood. The tsunami of blood crashes down on your village. Those who have scorned you? Taken your place in line at the well? Imagine their faces. Right before the blood wave devours them. They are crying out for help... and then they are gone. You were a victim. You were helpless in the face of their cruelty. Now... you are revenged.

(A moment)

Yes No?

ELIZABETH

Hm.

SCRATCH

Visual. Poetic.

ELIZABETH

Pitch it to me the way you'd pitch it to a man.

SCRATCH

That *was*—

ELIZABETH

“Visual poetic”? Nope.

You'd appeal to a different sense of self – wouldn't you? – than “visual poetic.”
(seeing that she's scored a point)

I'm standing here – I'm Sir Arthur. I run this town. I have the biggest balls you've ever seen. Pitch it to me now.

Game Time. Scratch gets a whole new kind of serious.

SCRATCH

Okay.
Sir Arthur.
It's nice to meet you. I've heard a lot about you.

ELIZABETH

("as Sir Arthur", but also, with steel)

Get to the point.

SCRATCH

The point – Sir Arthur – is I have something that you've always wanted.
And that is: the power to destroy.
It's possible that you think of yourself as a man who builds.
But there is nothing so fully entwined with creation, than the act of destruction.
If I might reference some who have gone before you:
Genghis Khan. A maker of culture and language, a destroyer of armies.
Alexander the Great. A maker of nations, and ultimately a destroyer thereof.
Odysseus. A maker of journeys, and yet a maker of war.
You, Sir Arthur, are not far removed from this lineage of men. Others might not recognize that within you. But I do.
You were made for greater things than you have yet achieved.
Man cannot be given greatness. He has it or he doesn't.
But he can be given power, with which to exercise his greatness.
And power, sir, is the thing that I bring to the table.

(pause)

After you shake my hand, whatever you do is up to you. There will just be you, and the long shadows cast by your forefathers, such as they are. Alexander, Genghis Khan, Odysseus – they didn't shy away from a grand adventure.
Here is yours, come knocking at your door.
Are you ready to say yes to history?

*A beat. This has gotten electric and charged.
Even though Scratch is giving his serious
"man version" pitch.
It moves Elizabeth in a fundamental way, to
be addressed like this.*

ELIZABETH

Yes, that is different.

SCRATCH

Forgive me.

Even the greatest salesman sometimes miscalculates his audience.

ELIZABETH

Is that what happened, do you think? Did you “miscalculate” me?

Real sparks between them as:

SCRATCH

I think everybody miscalculates you.

And I think they do it all the time.

But I won't make that mistake again.

*Elizabeth feels seen. She has not felt like this
at any point that she can remember, and it
off-balances her a little.
A moment.*

ELIZABETH

And would he say Yes, do you think?

SCRATCH

Sir Arthur? Of course.

ELIZABETH

Did he?

SCRATCH

Oh – I didn't offer.

ELIZABETH

He's a pillar of the village.

SCRATCH

He's a weak little man, his soul wouldn't weigh more than half a gram, he would say yes before I'd even finished my pitch, and he wouldn't have any idea what to do with himself after.

ELIZABETH

Why me?

SCRATCH

You're the talk of the town.

ELIZABETH

You're here because the villagers gossip about me?

SCRATCH

No, I'm here because they gossip about you, and under the gossip they fear you.

ELIZABETH

I've never done anything to them. I barely do anything at all.

SCRATCH

You exist, and that's enough. And people like that – whose sheer existence speaks louder than anything they do or don't do – those people interest me. Broadly speaking.

(pause, honest)

And then you said No.

ELIZABETH

Right.

SCRATCH

And I got even more interested.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

(a certain guarded honesty)

It's not that I don't want it. What you're selling.

SCRATCH

Yes?

A beat in which Elizabeth almost says any number of things. And then:

ELIZABETH

I'll think about it.

SCRATCH

You'll...?

ELIZABETH

Come back later.

7.

In the castle. Winnifred and Frank have stolen a moment alone. Winnifred tries to keep her voice down, but sometimes it sparks in indignation. There is a rushed, hushed quality to the scene.

WINNIFRED

But when are you getting me a ring?
And when can I start telling people?
And actually, when are you gonna tell Sir Arthur?

FRANK

Whoa whoa whoa
calm down

WINNIFRED

I am calm, I'm just *asking*.

FRANK

It's not time yet.

WINNIFRED

But we're married. Right?

FRANK

Yes, of course we're married!

WINNIFRED

So why can't we tell anybody?

FRANK

You know why.
We're playing the smart game. We're playing the long game.

WINNIFRED

If Sir Arthur knew we were married, he might be happy.

FRANK

("you're being so naïve")

Baby...

WINNIFRED

He never really talks to me but
if he talked to me, he might like me.

FRANK

(“I can’t believe how naïve you’re being”)

Baby.

WINNIFRED

What!

FRANK

I love you. And you love me.

So what’s the big deal? You know?

We love each other — and we’re married— and little things like a *ring*, little things like a *dress*, those little things can wait right now. We’ve thought about this, we have a whole *plan*, and *right now* is the part of the plan where we stay quiet. Right?

WINNIFRED

...I guess.

FRANK

You guess, or I’m right?

Beat.

WINNIFRED

I just feel like

sometimes

I forget what the plan is

and then it feels like

we’re just drifting farther and farther away from each other

even though we grew up together and

you married me and

then Sir Arthur invited you here and then

I *came* here for *you*, I became a servant in the castle to be close to *you*

but

now

I’m like, dusting a portrait

and like, serving drinks,

and you’re like, sitting there next to him

at the head of the table

laughing at all his jokes

and pretending you don’t know me at *all*,

pretending I’m just the girl who’s serving you,

and not the girl who you said you wanted to spend your whole *life* with

and

then that starts to feel really really sad.

A beat.

FRANK

You know what the plan is.

WINNIFRED

Do I?

FRANK

Come on, of course you do.

When Sir Arthur makes me his heir, I'll be able to do whatever I want.

You'll be right there with me, we'll run the castle together – eventually.

But right now, I gotta be cool. I can't rock the boat.

And, you know, part of being cool is being cool with his friends' daughters.

WINNIFRED

...But what if he doesn't make you his heir?

FRANK

("you're being naïve again")

Baby.

WINNIFRED

I mean he *has* a son.

FRANK

Cuddy likes *morris* dancing.

WINNIFRED

Okayyyy but someday he's gonna meet a girl, and—

FRANK

Uhh, yeah, no.

WINNIFRED

How do you know?

FRANK

Believe me.

A beat, faux-casual:

WINNIFRED

About those daughters you mentioned...

FRANK

Okay, Winn, look—

WINNIFRED

Those *very* important daughters who might be of a station higher / than—

FRANK

C'mon, stop that Winn. You know it's just part of the plan.

WINNIFRED

Yeah but maybe that's the part where the plan starts to suck.

(low and desperate)

We don't need Sir Arthur, we could go back home—

FRANK

And do what?

*(His vehemence has silenced her – he tries
to find a gentler tone with her:)*

Sweetheart, we have to ask for more than what we were born with.

WINNIFRED

Why?

FRANK

Because if we don't ask for more, we'll end up with less.

WINNIFRED

But right now, I don't even have you.

FRANK

You *have* me, we're just—

ugh, Winn

it's gonna be fine.

With great care:

WINNIFRED

Well

I hope so, Frank, because

here's the complicated thing:

I'm pregnant.

FRANK

...You're what??

WINNIFRED

Sorry – I should say:

We
are pregnant.

FRANK

Since when?

WINNIFRED

I wasn't sure for about a week.
And then I became sure.

FRANK

Oh.
Oh my god.

WINNIFRED

That doesn't sound like a good "oh my god."

FRANK

Oh my god.

WINNIFRED

Right.
Okay.
Well
let me put it this way.
If your Sir Arthur hooked you up with somebody's rich daughter,
and you let him,
and then everybody found out you actually have a *wife*
and she's having your *kid*,
I think you might not be as shiny as you are right now, you know?
You might...tarnish. A little. In the eyes of Sir Arthur.
So. Let's lock it down, Frank Thorney.

*Something shines in Frank - that cold edge.
Frank leans in. His aria.*

FRANK
(*soft, menacing*)

Here's the thing, my love
maybe I didn't explain this clearly
so let me try it again:

Sometimes men come along
born under a special star
and that's me.
I've always known it's going to be different for me.

I didn't scrape by for nothing,
 working the land - that shitty rocky soil,
 half the time you can't even get a potato out of it,
 and some winters we get by, but some winters there's just nothing,
 there's just nothing to eat, so we pull our belts tight and wait for spring
 and then spring comes but actually, guess what, there's *still* nothing –

I don't plan to be nothing.

I got by because I could feel what I *could* be
 just under the ribs, waiting to grow,
 waiting for the right soil
 and here it is
 and here I am
 and I am ready to be great.

You too, if you want greatness,
 but maybe not you, maybe you don't
 and that's OK -
 people grow apart
 people move on
 people only take each other so far, sometimes,
 — and that's always sad, when it happens,
 but sometimes it does happen.

You're gonna be a great wife, Winn
 And you'll probably be a great mother
 and I love you to death but
 nobody is getting in my way
 not even a child
 not even you.

WINNIFRED

...Frank?

*Like a switch being hit, Frank is himself
 again, as she knows him.*

FRANK

But I'd rather we did it together.

8.

*Elizabeth's cottage. Night.
She might be wearing a nightgown.
She was on her way to bed. Scratch has
surprised her.*

ELIZABETH

Really?

SCRATCH

You said to come back.

ELIZABETH

It's late.

SCRATCH

Time! is so...

He gestures: "fluid, confusing" etc.

ELIZABETH

Also...knocking?

SCRATCH

Knocking...

ELIZABETH

It's polite. You should start doing it.

SCRATCH

Oh!

Knocking.

I'm sorry. I've never... I haven't gotten used to knocking.

ELIZABETH

I've noticed.

SCRATCH

I don't really – *return* to a place. You know? I make the grand entrance – which does not require knocking, which sort of requires the opposite of knocking – and then we conduct good business, and then I'm gone. You're the only person I've ever *re*-visited.

ELIZABETH

That can't be true.

SCRATCH

I swear it.
But! knocking.
Next time, I will knock.

ELIZABETH
(but, dry joking)

I might not invite you back.

SCRATCH

If there were to be a next time, I would knock.

A beat.

ELIZABETH

I haven't seen you for a day or two.

SCRATCH

I've been busy.

ELIZABETH

Doing what?

SCRATCH

Hither and thither, making observations, taking notes... are you jealous?

ELIZABETH

Not at all.

SCRATCH

Too bad.

Elizabeth has to crack a smile.

ELIZABETH

I suppose you want a drink.

SCRATCH

I wouldn't think of imposing... unless you were going to have one yourself.

ELIZABETH

Well I'm awake now, I might as well.
Have a seat.

*(As Scratch sits by the fireplace, and
Elizabeth pours them each a drink:)*

So you've been all around the world, seen all the things, kingdoms have fallen and only you remember that they were ever there - would you say that's a fair assessment?

SCRATCH

I'm somewhat well-travelled.

ELIZABETH

Don't tell me you're modest.

SCRATCH

I'm *fairly* well-travelled. Although my senior colleagues get out more, as you'd imagine.

ELIZABETH

(joining him)

And you all wander around the world, you stop in some town, you find some sad slob - then what?

SCRATCH

What do you mean "then what"? You've seen "then what."

ELIZABETH

So you and me – the way you're handling it with me – that's party line?
Nothing special, right? Just "how it's done"?

A spark between them.

SCRATCH

I didn't say that.

(A beat.)

You know, this might sound a little overblown to you but the training manual advises us to think of ourselves as sort of "merchants of hope," if you will and I think there's actually something to that. Let's face it, capitalism has its difficulties, any system of transaction does, but there's something really satisfying in sitting down with someone and saying: Tell me what you *hope* for, and then – (with the right transaction in place) – making it come true. But we take different approaches in different circumstances and you're certainly a different, uh, circumstance.

A beat between them. This landed. More spark.

Who's your favorite been?

ELIZABETH

My favorite what?

SCRATCH

Person. Transaction. Do you differentiate?

ELIZABETH

SCRATCH
(a moment, then)

I don't... I don't have favorites.

ELIZABETH

But you must have liked somebody more than you liked somebody else.

SCRATCH

...No.

ELIZABETH

Never?

SCRATCH
(increasingly thrown)

I... Well, in the *moment*, I suppose... there can be a certain occasional connection or recognition of some kind or interest or... but we're certainly not supposed to... Not professionally speaking.

(pause, honest:)

I'm not used to... personal questions.

ELIZABETH

I probably shouldn't pry.

SCRATCH

It's all right.

ELIZABETH

I'm not used to visitors.
Or conversations.
So...

SCRATCH

Well, you're doing pretty well so far.

They drink.

ELIZABETH

You look very young.

SCRATCH

I know.

ELIZABETH

Did you choose that guise for some practical purpose? Or do you just like to look young?

SCRATCH

Do you want the real answer, or the politic answer?

ELIZABETH

Do you think you're in the hut of a politic person?

Scratch acknowledges the humor.

SCRATCH

(a little self-conscious)

Well, there is something about young men. A certain... luminosity, if you know what I mean. A surge of purpose. A young man is a creature with a whole future ahead of him, and things might be hard for him at some point, but generally he will succeed, and the hard things will only be the things he had to master on his way to success. So when you look at a young man, who is working very hard at something, who is making you an offer – you feel good inside, subconsciously I mean, you feel like you are participating in a story about possibility and a bright future. You feel like maybe those things could apply to you too. Do you know what I mean?

ELIZABETH

(soft)

Yes I know what you mean.

SCRATCH

Does it tarnish the picture for you, hearing the reasoning behind it?

Elizabeth looks at him closely.

ELIZABETH

No, I still feel it. A certain... aura of success. It's palpable.

SCRATCH

You know, I used to appear as a woman much more often, back in the day. First I tried being very beautiful, and then I tried being much older, kind of weathered. And then I just stopped altogether and I started being a man.

ELIZABETH

Why did you stop?

SCRATCH

(honest)

I didn't like how people looked at me.

Day to day, being looked at with a kind of...

I don't know, either way it got under my skin, I had to stop.

(A moment, in which her silence speaks. He realizes:)

I'm so sorry.

That was –

indelicate, I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

(a little raw)

Why are you sorry? That's your whole pitch, isn't it?

All the ways that people look at me, all those sad ugly ways – I could upgrade for the price of a soul?

SCRATCH

Yes... but I wasn't making a pitch right then. We were just... having a night-cap.

ELIZABETH

(genuinely probing)

Are we? "Just"?

SCRATCH

There's a time and a place for business. I thought we were off the clock right now.

Tell me if I'm wrong?

This means something to her.

ELIZABETH

...No.

Let's keep it ...off the clock.

The air changes.

SCRATCH

Cheers to off the clock.

Cheers.

ELIZABETH

Pause.

Why haven't you ever left?

SCRATCH

Where would I go?

ELIZABETH

SCRATCH

There are so many places, I don't know how to answer that.

ELIZABETH

But you need a ticket, yes? to go anywhere.
 Or a horse, or a donkey, or a donkey-cart.
 And for any of those things, you need money.
 And for money you need an income, and for an income you need employment
 and for employment, you need employers
 and for employers, the first thing you need
 is not *skill*, contrary to what you would think
 (skill is acquired after all)
 but a *reputation*.

SCRATCH

You've thought about this.

ELIZABETH

No, I've lived it.

(beat)

I used to be a maid in the castle, when Sir Arthur's father was alive.

SCRATCH

I didn't know.

ELIZABETH

It was a long time ago. And it didn't end well.

(beat)

Sir Arthur and I were... There was a time...
 Very young, very stupid, but...
 I thought we'd get married and then it wouldn't matter, the whole thing of my reputation.
(beat)

We didn't, as you can see, get married.

SCRATCH

Ah.

ELIZABETH

Or rather, *he* did. Just not to me.

(beat)

It made me very unwelcome at the castle, and later in the village, understandably.
Deflowered, etc. Tarnished.
How easily we jump from tarnished to untouchable.

SCRATCH

(means it)

I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

It's so strange to talk about myself.

SCRATCH

Am I prying?

ELIZABETH

Yes, but don't you mean to be?

SCRATCH

A little, but I'll stop if you're uncomfortable.

ELIZABETH

I'm not uncomfortable.

(A pause and then Elizabeth sort of blurts:)

You're very good-looking.

SCRATCH

(startled, a little flushed)

I change shapes, as we // discussed

ELIZABETH

discussed, yes, we did.

SCRATCH

So it's cheating. You know?

I'm not luck-of-the-draw. I just chose this one.

ELIZABETH

Some people know how to dress themselves. That's a skill-set too.
Wouldn't you say?

SCRATCH

I don't like compliments.

Just say: Thank you.

Thank you.

ELIZABETH

SCRATCH
(after a moment)

9.

*The banquet hall, with its dead wife portrait.
The end of a banquet.
Sir Arthur. Cuddy. Frank. The tension in the
room is palpable. Winnifred clearing dishes,
slamming them around.*

SIR ARTHUR

For example, that young lady
Sir John's youngest
she took quite a liking to you, Frank.
She took a liking.

FRANK

She was very friendly.

SIR ARTHUR

She's a good woman
that whole pack of them
good women
(you know I joke with Sir John
he hasn't done a whole lot for the world
but those *daughters* ...)
It does an old man good to see two young people
talking together like that.

*Winnifred shoots Frank a look – he ignores
her.*

FRANK

Thanks so much for introducing us.

SIR ARTHUR

My pleasure, my pleasure.
You know my old man used to say:
“A meeting like that, can only end in a marriage”
I used to be like: Dad! You're embarrassing me!
But now I know – old men, we got x-ray eyes
live this long and you can see the future.
Now, if Cuddy would let me introduce him to some of her sisters—

CUDDY
(blurts out, in the moment)

I'm seeing someone.

SIR ARTHUR
(hopeful, thrilled)

Are you now!

FRANK

Oh I didn't know that.

CUDDY
(oh shit)

...Yeah, I've been seeing someone. So.

SIR ARTHUR

Good lad, good lad.
Well who is she?

CUDDY

Well... we're keeping it on the DL at the moment.

FRANK

Uh-huh.

SIR ARTHUR

You should bring her home
bring her to dinner
let your old Dad meet her

CUDDY

She's asked me to be discrete.

FRANK

What's "she" so shy about, Cuddy?

SIR ARTHUR

Get a dinner on the calendar...

CUDDY

Yeah, definitely
later, definitely later

SIR ARTHUR

Tell her your old dad isn't so scary, not so bad
ask Frank here, I raised him like a son
man in the castle isn't so scary, is he Frank?
If you're in love, I like it!

FRANK

Yeah Cuddy, bring her to dinner, let's meet her.

SIR ARTHUR

Winnifred!

Do you have those mints, those mints that I—? [like]

(Winnifred comes over with mints)

There we go, thank you Winnifred.

FRANK

So where'd you meet?

CUDDY

Sorry?

FRANK

Just wondering where you met this, uh, girl, that's all.

CUDDY

What's it to you?

FRANK

I mean, I'm just wondering if she's a
morris-dancer

or

I don't know, are we talking a servant, or
maybe in the stables—

SIR ARTHUR

(laughing, how silly!)

Girls don't work in the stables, Frank.

FRANK

(staring straight at Cuddy)

Oh yeah. I guess they don't.

I guess girls *don't* work in the stables.

Silly me.

CUDDY

How's *your* love-life, Frank? Sounds like you met someone too.

FRANK

Well I was lucky to meet a number of Sir Arthur's friends,
have some great conversations...

SIR ARTHUR

(to Frank)

Don't be modest, Frank, the girl was mad over you
couldn't take her eyes off you... or her hands!

CRASH! Winnifred slams a platter.

FRANK
(avoiding Winnifred's eyes)

That's not true, sir, she's just enthusiastic.

SIR ARTHUR

We should have her and Sir John over for a great dinner
and Cuddy, you can invite your girl
bring her around soon, sooner the better!
Love to meet her, would just be thrilled
Have the ladies to dinner
whaddaya say, boys?

*Frank and Cuddy are both reluctant, for
their own reasons.*

FRANK

Well...

CUDDY

Yeah sometime maybe.

FRANK

Maybe later.

SIR ARTHUR

If you're gonna be that shy, somebody else will sweep in
trust me, you can't be shy in this business
gotta set your sights and then –
ZING!
like an arrow.
Cuddy's mom –
she was the prettiest girl in the room
and I coulda hung back
I coulda been shy
I coulda been like, "Why would a girl like that talk to a guy like me?"
but no
I set my sights and
ZING!
went right over.
A month later, we were married.

FRANK

Sure... sure...

CUDDY

Of course...

SIR ARTHUR

(nostalgia takes him over)

On our wedding day I said, "You sure about this?"
cuz it all went kind of fast, you know, I got cold feet
I said, "Are you gonna love me when we're old?"
And she looked me straight in the eye and said:
"Are you gonna give me a reason to love you?"

(laughing, genuine relish)

That woman! She never let you off the hook
and you never wanted to be
off the hook
you never even wanted to be.

A moment that is strange because in it, Sir Arthur feels the depths of his loss all over again. And Frank and Cuddy eye each other, each dissatisfied with how this all went, each not sure what to do next. The moment is broken when Sir Arthur stirs himself.

Well! That's enough of that.
Winnifred! My glasses, if you would?

(She produces them)

Paper?

(she produces it)

Bless you, Winnifred.
Boys.

*Sir Arthur and Winnifred exit.
A laden beat between Frank and Cuddy.*

Frank sits facing away from Cuddy, refusing to acknowledge him. He finishes his drink. That hot feeling surges up in Cuddy, anger and resentment and everything else, it surges so high he can't hold his tongue.

CUDDY

My dad's gonna get tired of you.

FRANK
(not turning)

I don't think so.

CUDDY

When he plucked you out of a field, pilanthropy was in vogue.
Watch out, it's going out of style again.

FRANK

You gotta set your sights and then ZING, Cuddy
you heard the old man say so.
Not my fault that you don't have any ZING in you.

CUDDY

You'd be surprised how much Zing I have.

FRANK

Here's the thing, Cuddy.
Every time your dad looks at me he sees a reflection of the best version of himself. And
every time he looks at you, he sees all his failures staring back at him.
Which of us do you think he wants to look at?

*The hot feeling surges into murder. Cuddy
flings himself at Frank, maybe trying to put
hands around his neck. Whatever the
gesture is, Frank subdues him quickly,
pushing him back with a laugh. Cuddy
surges forward again, and Frank puts a
hand square on Cuddy's chest and pushes
him backward. A moment. Cuddy's rage
doesn't melt, but it is confused by a bolt of
pure longing. Without knowing what he's
going to do, he puts his hand on Frank's
chest. Is it a shove? Will it become one?
Neither of them really knows. A moment that
is confused and raw and full of possibility
and also weird and awkward. And then
Winnifred re-enters.*

WINNIFRED

(They jolt apart.)

BOYS.

I'm cleaning up your banquet
so
maybe you could take this

outside.

I was just leaving.

FRANK

*He walks past Winnifred and out.
A beat.
Cuddy sinks back into his chair.
He puts his head in his hands.*

WINNIFRED
(*can't help it*)

... Are you OK?

All of this comes pouring out of Cuddy:

CUDDY

I hate him.

WINNIFRED

...I know.

CUDDY

Sometimes I really fucking hate him
the way he takes up space and
sort of sprawls around and
the way he *talks*
and

WINNIFRED

I know.

CUDDY

And then also I wanna just
put my hands around his throat and
squeeze and then
I want to mash my face into his face
and I want to be *so close* to him
I want to *wear* him.

WINNIFRED

I know what that's like.

Cuddy looks up at her.

CUDDY

Yeah I bet you do.

A beat between them.

So you know about us?

WINNIFRED

Yeah.

CUDDY

Did Frank tell you?

WINNIFRED
(with hope)

No.

CUDDY

Oh.

WINNIFRED

How do you know?

(Cuddy hesitates – still hopeful:)

Is it like... is there sort of an energy between us? Like you can just tell by looking at us that there's an unbreakable connection?

...No.

CUDDY

Oh.

WINNIFRED

The devil told me, actually?

CUDDY

...The devil?

WINNIFRED

Yeah.

CUDDY

Oh.

WINNIFRED

CUDDY
We were just talking. And we ended up talking about Frank. And he told me about you guys. This is all cone-of-silence.

WINNIFRED

Okay...

CUDDY

Actually the whole thing is, the whole mashing-my-face-into —
my whole Frank thing is also cone-of-silence.

WINNIFRED

Well, me too.

CUDDY

Oh yeah
I guess that's right
you too.

Beat.

WINNIFRED

What else did the devil say?

A conflicted beat. Cuddy struggles and then:

CUDDY

I asked him for something and... He said OK.

WINNIFRED

Okay...

CUDDY

And sometimes I'm so glad that I asked for it,
and sometimes I think it's not gonna happen, unless I make it happen,
but then
sometimes
I guess I wish that I hadn't asked for that thing at all. And I feel sad. And I feel kinda
sick.
Uh
Do you know what I mean?

WINNIFRED

No.

(pause)

What did you ask for?

CUDDY

(almost tells her and then)

It's complicated.

(pause – can't hold back:)

I just don't understand how you can wanna murder someone and then also want them to be closer to you than your own skin

I mean

is that love? is that hate?

like, what even *is* that?

Is that how you feel?

WINNIFRED

I think I used to feel like that, but lately I feel really sad

CUDDY

Oh

WINNIFRED

Really sad and really cold

like it's constantly five degrees colder than I want it to be

I mean I know it's *not*

I know it's totally just me

but that's how I feel.

CUDDY

I'm sorry.

WINNIFRED

It's not your fault.

Beat.

CUDDY

Would you like to marry me?

WINNIFRED

...I'm sorry?

CUDDY

I mean. I'm not... probably ideal for you, in some ways,
(like, the most obvious ways)

but in others, I'm really great.

I have money, I have land, I have a title

and you don't have to worry about me lying to you

or sleeping with other women.

WINNIFRED

Um...

are you kidding or serious?

CUDDY

I'm serious.
I'm really serious.

WINNIFRED

Oh. I mean.
That's so nice of you
but
your inheritance...?

CUDDY

We'd need to have a kid to lock it in, but after that...

WINNIFRED

A kid...

CUDDY

You could sort of do you, and I could sort of do me.

WINNIFRED

Your dad is really not gonna want you to marry the maid.

CUDDY

Honestly, my dad is gonna be *so* happy to see me marry someone and have a kid, that it shouldn't be as much of a problem as you'd think it might be.

A beat. She didn't intend to say this, but:

WINNIFRED

Frank used to be so different with me.

CUDDY

Did he?

WINNIFRED

So different, it's like he isn't even the same person now.
We came here, and he just became so different.
But maybe something could happen and he could... change back? Do you think?
I keep thinking that some morning maybe I'll wake up and it'll be like it was, he'll come down to breakfast and just... be himself.
I guess I keep waiting for that.

CUDDY
(*gentle*)

I think that ship has sailed.

WINNIFRED

How do you know?

CUDDY

Access is a drug, Winnifred.
Once people have it, they don't usually choose to unhook themselves.

A beat. She knows he's right.

WINNIFRED

Can I think about this?

CUDDY

Okay. But like...
how much time do you need?

WINNIFRED

I'm not sure. I mean. A little bit.

CUDDY

Okay...

WINNIFRED

I mean it's a real decision, Cuddy, I need to think about it.

CUDDY

It seems like a pretty good deal to me.

WINNIFRED

Sure, I mean it is, but also
there was a time in which Frank loved me
and he looked at me in this way
that was sort of like an x-ray
except it was an x-ray of him and not of me
so when I saw him looking at me like that
I could read clear desire down to his bones.
And that's a way of being looked at that is...*life*.
It's a bolt of life going all the way through you.
And that's something you're asking me to give up.
And I'm not saying it's a bad trade but
it's a trade.

A moment.

CUDDY

Well... think about it.

WINNIFRED

Okay.

CUDDY

But think fast.

10.

*Elizabeth's cottage. Night.
She and Scratch. The air between them is
intimate, easy. Two old friends. Mid-convo.*

ELIZABETH

Anything?

SCRATCH

Within reason, but yes.

ELIZABETH

And he said, "A dog."

SCRATCH
(shrugs)

He wanted to be a dog.

ELIZABETH

That's it?

SCRATCH

That was it.

I asked if he wanted to be a dog in a wealthy household, but he just said "a dog."

ELIZABETH

That seems like aiming pretty low.

SCRATCH

You know, that's what I thought at first too. But then I thought about it, and it's like: I don't know. Dogs roam in packs. They're happy anywhere. They need very little. They always have friends. When one dog meets another dog, all it takes is a few sniffs and there you go. Humans take years to make friends, and even then...

ELIZABETH

But dogs turn on each other over nothing, over a scrap or a bone.

SCRATCH

So do humans.

ELIZABETH

I've never had any friends, I assumed it would be different with friends.

SCRATCH

Believe me, it rarely is. The statistic I heard was that, of every hundred friends you have, only trust one. But I guess that could be a changing number.

ELIZABETH

Who has a hundred friends??

SCRATCH

Statistically speaking.

ELIZABETH

What if you just have one friend?

SCRATCH

Then, statistically speaking, trust only one-hundredth of that friend.
Or trust him every one-hundred days?
Math was never my strong suit.

ELIZABETH

You said “Within reason” - what does “reason” look like?

SCRATCH

Sorry?

ELIZABETH

“Anything within reason.”

SCRATCH

Oh! I just mean - like any case-worker – don’t make me spend all my time on you. You know? You’re part of a client-list, you get one thing, you have to commit to the thing you got. It used to be more lax, but then you had all these people, they’re like, “Well when I said I wanted X, I meant Y,” and “Well when I asked for Y, I didn’t think it came with Z,” and then you’re basically just doing returns all the time, and how can you advance in sales if you’re always doing returns? Bad business.

ELIZABETH

Right.

SCRATCH

So then we got more hardcore about it, like across the line, and you’d think sales might drop because people would be more cautious (because, no take-backs), but actually sales soared.

ELIZABETH

Huh.

SCRATCH

And you know what. The guy who became a dog? He was really satisfied.

ELIZABETH

Did you ever see him again?

SCRATCH

Once, by accident. I was making a sale by a junkyard, and this dog comes running around the side of the shed, kinda mangy-looking by now, torn left ear, but with an air of real confidence. And he comes to a stop and looks straight at me. And it was him! And we looked at each other, and then he smiled, and he ran off.

ELIZABETH

I guess it worked out.

SCRATCH

I think a lot of things can work out if people just commit.

ELIZABETH

(carefully – she's thought a lot about this)

I don't think
if I did it
that I would ask to *be* anything else.

SCRATCH

No?

ELIZABETH

I don't think so, no.
And I don't think it would be about *having*.

Scratch is alert now. He can feel that the air has changed, but he stays casual, letting Elizabeth lead them wherever they're going to go.

SCRATCH

Well... that's two of the main ones.

ELIZABETH

I think
I would want
to *do* something.

SCRATCH

Do you know what you'd do?

(Beat. An uneasy energy in the room now.)

Something hot and sharp between them.)

Look, if you don't want to sell me your soul, that's fine. But I don't really understand why not. You don't pray. Not that I've ever seen. You don't seem that concerned with it, to be honest. So I guess I don't understand why you'd choose a thing you never use, over something you *would* use, something you actually need.

ELIZABETH

Are you trying to make your pitch, or are we off the clock?

SCRATCH

(a little stung)

Are you kidding me right now? When in the past week have we been *on* the clock?

ELIZABETH

I don't know, that isn't always something I can tell, precisely.

SCRATCH

Off the clock, we're off the damn clock, we *have been* and continue to be, and if you didn't already know that, then—

ELIZABETH

(gentler)

You can't keep being off the clock, you won't make any sales.

(Scratch shrugs)

Be honest. You're over at my place and we're up all night talking shit, hanging around all day, how are you getting anything done?

SCRATCH

I'm not.

ELIZABETH

Isn't that a problem?

SCRATCH

I don't know.

ELIZABETH

Okay...

SCRATCH

I don't really care.

ELIZABETH

You're a junior salesman, you're supposed to care.
How do you think people get to "senior salesman"?

SCRATCH

(gesturing between them)

Look... This doesn't happen that often. Not like this.

So I just... this is just what I want to do. That's all.

ELIZABETH

(this means a lot to her)

Oh.

SCRATCH

I hope that's OK.

ELIZABETH

It's OK.

SCRATCH

Okay.

A beat between them. Then:

ELIZABETH

Do you want an honest answer? To your question?

SCRATCH

Please.

ELIZABETH

There is so much bullshit to put up with.

There are so many times in which I'm right here, I'm right here, and people look through me like I'm empty air. There are so many times in which I say something, and people act like they didn't hear me. Or they *mishear* me, purposefully, we're down at the well and they say, "The witch is muttering," they say, "The witch cast a spell." I didn't cast a spell, I said, "Can you please move your bucket?" There are so many times in which I want to say something and then I don't – because there's a voice in my head, it says, "What's the use?" It says: "Do you really want to draw attention?" And I *want* to want to speak, but I get so tired, I just get so tired that in the end it's easier not to.

And the thing I know I have – the *only* thing – is whatever I have inside me.

The thing that makes people so uncomfortable, the thing they don't want to look too closely at, the thing they don't want to listen to – what if that thing is my soul, and then I give it away? And then they win?

And I don't expect you to understand that, but that's why.

It's not a good reason, but it's the one I have.

A long beat. Scratch is genuinely moved by this. After a moment:

It's good.

SCRATCH

Sorry?

ELIZABETH

It's a good reason.

SCRATCH

A moment. He moves closer to her. She lets him. Is he going to kiss her? Does she want him to? She isn't sure. She doesn't move at all. In the end, he sits on the ground. He leans against her. Maybe his head is in her lap. After a moment, she puts her hand on his head.

I've never met anyone like you before.

SCRATCH

That's dumb, you've been all over the world.

ELIZABETH

I've never felt this way about anyone.

SCRATCH

It'll pass. In the whole history of humankind, it always does.

ELIZABETH

I'm not human.

SCRATCH

11.

*The banquet hall, but this time it's empty.
 Sir Arthur sits alone in his chair.
 This is his aria. He addresses the framed
 portrait of his dead wife.*

SIR ARTHUR

Well
 update from the field is:
 the boy is getting bigger.

Uh
 he's not very much like me
 I guess he's more like you
 in the eyes
 but also he's not really like you either
 which sort of *demands* that one
 take him for himself alone
 which, uh,
 is harder for me than it generally was for you.

Frank is doing well!
 you would have liked him, he's really...
 he's a go-getter
 which mattered less to you than it does to me, but
 he's also very funny,
 he reminds me of you, a little,
 I'm not sure why
 maybe how it feels to be around him
 which is: you generally feel like you're more interesting
 than you thought you were -
 which is: how I felt around you.

Um

The castle is...
 a castle
 and
 not to be...
 but it still feels
 empty
 so...
 that's a thing. An everyday sort of thing.

[dramatic]

(beat – a burst)

I don't wear your clothes anymore!
 I know I told you that I used to
 sneak into your room and put on your clothes
 and stand in front of the mirror
 and see if I could see you in me
 and
 I guess I did that for a few years after you died
 maybe five years
 or six years
 or maybe I guess until our boy was
 about ten or eleven but
 then I stopped.
 I think I told you that I stopped before I actually stopped.
 But then I did actually stop, so...

What else.

(this also bursts out:)

I don't know how to raise a boy
 in this world.
 What do I teach him?
 If I let him be gentle
 he'll just be hurt by someone down the line.
 Nobody trusts boys who are gentle,
 it brings out everybody's hidden cruelty.
 So I tell him *Be tough, be tough*
 and I watch this sort of
 blunt thing grow in his eyes
 like he's disappointed in how disappointed I am
 but
 if he could just *be tough* then I would know
 that I'm raising him well enough to get by
 and then I could worry about: Is he Gentle enough
 and that could be like a
 luxury worry
 like, "Does he know how to be Kind"
 like, that could be something
 from time to time I would remind him
 to be Kind
 all the while knowing that
 he will survive, he will survive, he will outlast me.

And also we can't talk to each other.
 Frank and I can talk to each other!
 We talk all the time!
 We talk about falcons and hunting and

women and
politics and
I don't know
I don't know.

(this is hard to say out loud, but)

I don't think
Cuddy
is ever going to give us an heir.
And
I think when we were younger, I had this sort of
Optimism
about him
and about us
and about our future as a family but
I think it was *your* optimism that I had, actually
and now
that's gone
so...

I think I need to let go of that
optimism
and do what needs to be done
even if it feels
kind of terrible
actually.

(surprises himself with this:)

Sometimes I feel like I'm dying
and I know I'm not
but I feel like I am.

*(long beat in which there is so much more
he would like to say, but it all seems
suddenly futile)*

OK I guess that's all.

12.

*The castle. Banquet scene. As usual.
Winnifred and the dishes, etc.*

Sir Arthur has the weight of a secret on his chest. Meanwhile Cuddy, with increased confidence, tells the table about a "date" he was on, and how manly he was during it. This is less parody or clear bullshit, and more a moment in which (to haunting effect) he is trying on a number of Frank's mannerisms, performing a kind of masculinity that is inexorably tied to Frank.

CUDDY

And then we went hiking, and she was like Oh I'm Cold
so I gave her my jacket and then
she slipped and she was like Ow My Ankle
so I did a little Boy Scout Medical Care, ya know,
and then we got lost in the woods so I turned a rock into an impromptu compass
(magnets!)
and we found our way back to civilization and
I carried her the whole way because of her ankle
And then I took her to lunch
(rib-eye)
and after lunch we went for a spin on my horse.

SIR ARTHUR

Well
uh
I'm glad you had a good day, Cuddy.

CUDDY

What did you guys do?

SIR ARTHUR

Well
I read the newspaper. I looked over some Reports
(the Workers, the Fields)
and I took a walk in the woods with Frank.

FRANK

Great day for a hike. Glad you got one in too, Cuddy.

CUDDY

Great day for a hike.

FRANK

Where'd you go?

CUDDY
(*vague*)

Woods.

FRANK

Yeah there's lots of trails, we were on Gold Crest
came up the side of Old Leather and then went down Gold Crest
by way of the rock-slide, ya know,
what about you?

CUDDY

Oh, we climbed a mountain.

FRANK

Yeah, which one?

CUDDY

We sort of got lost, we wandered for a while.

FRANK

Sure, sure, I guess I just
wonder *where* you were, you and your girlfriend were,
where you guys were having your hiking extravaganza.

SIR ARTHUR
(*cuts in*)

Cuddy my lad, there's something I think we should all talk about.

CUDDY

What's up?

SIR ARTHUR

Your mother believed in family meetings.
I don't know if you remember this but
whenever things got contentious she would
pound on the table and say, "Family meeting!"
Even though it was just me and her at first,
and then you as a baby
(do you remember that?)

CUDDY

Uhhh... Not really?

SIR ARTHUR
(*wistfully*)

“Family meeting.”

CUDDY

...So what’s up?

SIR ARTHUR

Well...
you see
I have been thinking.
About legacy.

CUDDY

Legacy?

SIR ARTHUR

About this castle. About this land.
About our family name, and the weight of that name
and how each of us, in our own way, contributes to... legacy.

CUDDY

Okay...

SIR ARTHUR

And it’s not easy for me to say this, and I know this could be
hurtful
if viewed in the wrong light, but
I hope you can understand the *right* light in which to view this
when I say that I have chosen Frank
to be my heir.

CUDDY

Uhhhh...
What?

FRANK
(*also a little stunned*)

...What?

SIR ARTHUR

You are still my son, and an important member of this family, Cuddy.
But a man with two sons has more chance of a *legacy*
than a man with one

and
in this particular case
Sir John has made an offer
to Frank
of his daughter.

CUDDY and FRANK

What?

*At the same time Winnifred drops a dish.
It shatters. They all turn to look at her.*

WINNIFRED
(*dazed*)

Sorry.

The men turn away and ignore her again.

CUDDY

Dad, what are you talking about!

SIR ARTHUR

Hear me out, Cuddy—

FRANK

His *daughter*?

*Winnifred is a little dizzy. She sits down. The
men don't even notice this. She holds her
stomach.*

SIR ARTHUR

I was going to mention that to you earlier, Frank
but I needed a moment to get my thoughts in order.
Cuddy, I know this might seem like a shock
and it might seem upsetting
but believe me, it's for your good. *Our* good.
Frank and Sir John's daughter will get married
(we looked at the calendar, Frank,
we were thinking next month but
we should do an avail-check)
but
that will just – clear up some space for *you*, Cuddy.
To just... be you.
Maybe you want to be in a monastery?
Maybe you want to become a sort of... wandering scholar?

Maybe—

CUDDY
(a pathetic plea)

But I have a girlfriend.

SIR ARTHUR

...Cuddy...

CUDDY

But I have a girlfriend, you just haven't met her yet.

SIR ARTHUR

Cuddy, please believe me —

I want you to be happy.

Your mother would have wanted you to be happy.

But this family needs a next generation

and I think Frank's desires

(and Frank's *opportunities*)

bring something to the table that simply can't be ignored.

CUDDY
(bursts out)

But I'm marrying Winnifred!

*All the men turn to look at Winnifred.
She's sitting on the floor, holding her
stomach.*

SIR ARTHUR

Excuse me?

FRANK

Bullshit.

CUDDY

Tell them, Winn! Tell them what we said.

(Winnifred is silent)

Tell them, we're getting married!

SIR ARTHUR
(gently)

Cuddy, leave the poor girl alone.

CUDDY

You can't do this to me.

SIR ARTHUR

You'll still *live* here. You'll still *have* the things you have, Cuddy, you won't have certain... responsibilities hanging over you, but it's basically the same!

CUDDY

(*heartbroken*)

But it isn't the same.

WINNIFRED

(*to Frank*)

You said the plan was *Us*, you said we'd be together.

FRANK

(*to Winnifred*)

My plan? What's up with you and Cuddy!

SIR ARTHUR

(*to Cuddy*)

How is it different?

CUDDY

(*to Sir Arthur*)

You're replacing me.

WINNIFRED

(*to Frank*)

He made me an offer and I said No.

Sir John's making you an offer - are you gonna say No?

SIR ARTHUR

(*to Cuddy*)

You're being emotional about this, boy, it's just about logic.

It's about the land, what happens to the land.

WINNIFRED

(*to Frank*)

Are you saying No?

CUDDY

I don't give a shit about the land, let him have the land! I care about our *name*.

It's your name, it's *my* name. It isn't *his* name.

SIR ARTHUR

Cuddy...

CUDDY

It's the only thing we have in common, that doesn't mean something to you?

SIR ARTHUR

Son...

WINNIFRED

Are you saying No?!

They all look at her again, surprised.

SIR ARTHUR

What's that?

A beat, and then:

WINNIFRED

Frank married me.
We're married.

A breathless beat. And then Sir Arthur looks at Frank.

SIR ARTHUR

What's she talking about?

FRANK

I have no idea, sir.

A moment. Defeat writes itself across Winnifred. But she tries once more:

WINNIFRED
(straight to Sir Arthur)

I know we never talk
I basically just move dishes and
find your mints and your glasses and your paper but
I'm his wife and I'm having his kid.
It's not an easy thing to say but
it is the truth.

Sir Arthur, despite himself, is uneasy.

SIR ARTHUR

...Frank?

FRANK

I told you, I don't know.

SIR ARTHUR

Are you sure...?

FRANK

You've given me a new life, a new place in the world. Why would I throw it away for a maid?

SIR ARTHUR

(a little ashamed)

I didn't mean —

FRANK

I understand sir, it had to be asked. But —

(straight to Winnifred, cold)

— we've never even spoken.

Winnifred gets up and walks out of the room.

SIR ARTHUR

I've always thought the girl was strange.

(A beat. He's uncomfortable. Cuddy is completely shut down.)

Well boys,
I know this was hard but
I think it was a good talk and
Let's all walk it off, and just...
I'm gonna just...
Okay! All right! We got this.

He makes some sporting gestures that don't comfort Cuddy and don't connect with Frank, and then he leaves. A long silence.

Cuddy sits, devastated. Frank hesitates, watching him. There is nothing cruel in Frank right now. He feels the weight of Cuddy's pain, and it doesn't make him particularly happy.

FRANK

Not that it probably matters but your dad didn't... say anything to me.

So. It's not like I had any kinda... heads-up, or...

CUDDY

It wasn't about the land.

I don't actually care if you have the land, or the castle, or any of this bullshit, I just wanted to be a morris dancer. But his *name*...

You can't understand, but —

FRANK

(quiet)

I do.

A moment. Cuddy looks at him.

CUDDY

Yeah?

FRANK

Yeah I understand.

CUDDY

Oh.

FRANK

(not mean or flip)

I'm still gonna take it though.

I can't not take it.

But I understand.

A moment between them. It is stripped of contention – oddly intimate. A recognition of sorts, with the games gone.

CUDDY

And Winnifred?

FRANK

Well.

She's having my kid.

CUDDY

So that was true?

FRANK

Yeah.

CUDDY

What are you gonna do?

FRANK

Well
I'm gonna marry Sir John's daughter
and take your family name
and get somewhere. Finally I'm gonna get somewhere.
And I guess also I'll feel really shitty for a while
when I think about Winnifred
and I'm gonna have to learn to not think about her
and once I learn that, I think I'll feel okay again.
You know?

CUDDY

Do you love her?

FRANK

Yes, but that matters less than it should.

(A moment.)

Do *you* love her?

CUDDY

...No.

FRANK

And your hike in the woods...?

CUDDY

I wasn't in the fucking woods, Frank, give me a break.
I hate the woods.

*A moment that is almost shared humor –
almost affectionate:*

FRANK

Look... for what it's worth, maybe now you can get what you want.

CUDDY

I don't think so.

FRANK

Your dad will be off your back, for one thing.
Maybe now you can live it up.

CUDDY

I don't think I'm gonna get what I want.

FRANK

Why not? You wanna be a morris-dancer? be a morris-dancer!
You wanna...hang out with whoever? Nobody cares.

CUDDY

Not "whoever."

FRANK

Sorry?

CUDDY

(with intention)

Not "whoever," Frank.

A moment between them.

Frank understands what Cuddy meant.

He feels the weight of longing directed at him. He's not sure what to do with this.

Cuddy reaches out and touches Frank's face. Tender, dangerous. Cuddy's thumb over Frank's lower lip. A beat. And then –

FRANK

I can't.

CUDDY

I know.

FRANK

Your dad, and
everything
pretty much everything
super messy

CUDDY

I know that.

This is the only thing Frank can offer in this moment – and as such, the tone is at odds with the words:

FRANK

I'll let you fight me.

What?	CUDDY
I'll let you fight me.	FRANK
I don't want to fight you.	CUDDY
If you want you could just we could just fight.	FRANK
Why would I want to fight you?	CUDDY <i>(really asking)</i>
It might help.	FRANK
How?	CUDDY
I've found that generally violence helps.	FRANK
Oh.	CUDDY
Generally things start to feel better when it's simple and focused and sort of urgent but we don't have to. It's just if you want.	FRANK
	<i>Cuddy knows this is the only thing Frank can give him, and in that light:</i>
Okay.	CUDDY

Okay?

FRANK

I'll take it.

CUDDY

They negotiate their way into this fight.

Maybe Cuddy sort of pushes Frank and waits to see how that feels. Maybe Frank encourages Cuddy to push him. It's a little bit like a dance at first, or like two kids playing. It's playful, curious, strange. New for them both.

It escalates. It becomes wild, reckless, savage, continuously inventive. Not slapstick, but with a sense of play that always tilts over the edge back into danger. Sometimes we aren't sure if we're witnessing destruction or a seduction. Strange things come to hand and are used as weapons, but we believe in the danger of these things.

Then the real violence leaks in.

Cuddy and Frank get each other down on the ground, they bleed and sweat, they squirm free. Cuddy is increasingly frenzied. He taps into a violence inside himself that is a revelation, a tidal wave, that sweeps him off his feet. Frank falters in the face of this onslaught. It wasn't what he was expecting.

And then... this happens quickly, so quickly, faster even than the speed of Cuddy's understanding. Cuddy kills Frank.

A moment. Cuddy realizes what he's done. He is transfixed. He's frozen. Disbelieving at first. This wasn't what he wanted. Was it?

A beat on Cuddy, kneeling by Frank's body.

13.

*Elizabeth's cottage, night. Scratch is there.
So is Winnifred. She has just arrived.
Elizabeth watches Winnifred with a
growing intensity.*

SCRATCH
(a little nonplussed)

What can you *get* for it?

WINNIFRED

Yes.

SCRATCH

You want to sell your soul and you want to know what you can *get* for it.

WINNIFRED

Yes, that's right. What'll you give me?

SCRATCH

... What do you want?

WINNIFRED

What kinds of things do you offer?

ELIZABETH
(to Winnifred)

You're doing this all wrong.

WINNIFRED

What did you get?

SCRATCH

Oh, she hasn't...// we haven't...

ELIZABETH
(same time, also a little flushed)

We haven't...

WINNIFRED
(to Elizabeth, shocked)

You *haven't*?

SCRATCH

We're just friends.

ELIZABETH
We're just talking.

WINNIFRED
(*"That's so weird"*)
...Oh.

A beat.

SCRATCH
How did you know how to find me, anyway?

WINNIFRED
(*gesturing to Elizabeth*)
Everyone says she has seven teats and a scar like a pentagram
and she dances with the devil in the pale moonlight -
and that's you, right? So...

ELIZABETH
Seriously?

WINNIFRED
Sorry!

ELIZABETH
Seven?

WINNIFRED
(Sorry)

SCRATCH
That didn't come from me, I have no idea.

WINNIFRED
So anyway, here I am.

Beat.

ELIZABETH
How's the castle?

WINNIFRED
Drafty.

ELIZABETH

How's Sir Arthur?

WINNIFRED

Exhausting.

ELIZABETH

How's the baby?

SCRATCH

What baby?

(The women look at him. He catches up.)

Oh.

Whoa.

Congrats.

WINNIFRED

(to Elizabeth)

You can see it on me?

ELIZABETH

Right when you walked in.

WINNIFRED

Nobody else has noticed yet.

ELIZABETH

I'm particularly observant.

Is it Sir Arthur's?

WINNIFRED

No, Frank. But he's dead now, so—

SCRATCH

Whoa no way.

WINNIFRED

... You really haven't been keeping up to date.

Scratch kinda shrugs like, wow guess not.

ELIZABETH

And here you are, unwed, disgraced. Sounds familiar.

WINNIFRED

Oh no. No you don't. We're nothing alike.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

WINNIFRED

You're looking at me, and you're maybe enjoying a little pity, you're like: "Welcome to the land of the outcasts." But guess what – I'm not gonna end up like you. And that's what this guy is for.

(turning back to Scratch)

You're Door Number Two.

SCRATCH

(genuine)

Nice pitch.

WINNIFRED

That was my warm-up. Here's my pitch.

(This is her aria. Simple, powerful, urgent.)

I don't want a lot.

I *did*, I *did* want a lot. I wanted Frank -

the way he used to look at me, the way he used to laugh,

the way he sometimes made me laugh,

the surprises that were good surprises, little windows into a kind of mystery

that permitted some faith, some crazy faith

that we could build something together

that we could come up with a whole new life,

one our parents weren't capable of,

but we *would* be, we'd figure out how, we'd invent it.

But you know what?

Then I grew up.

So now what I want is this:

I want to stay in the castle

and keep dusting the mantles and cleaning the kitchen,

(although I'd like someone else to fetch the water

maybe we can add a rider, someone else does the water)

and I want my kid to be a girl, so people can ignore her

and she can stay safe and quiet and out of the way

and maybe sometime, years from now,

there can be a stable boy or a servant

and we don't have to love each other but maybe we could be friends

or we could get along with each other most of the time, well enough,

and then Sir Arthur will permit us to get married

and then we'll grow old

and then one day I'll die

and they'll have me buried in the castle churchyard

it doesn't have to be a prime real estate, but maybe it could be near Frank
 (I'd like it if it was near Frank)
 (or within earshot, anyway)
 (or close enough that if wildflowers grow, in the spring, maybe the same bees that go to
 his flowers would come to my flowers) -

And if a soul is what that costs, I don't think that's so much, really,
 because what's a soul ever done for me?

A beat.

SCRATCH

Well I think we can make that work.

ELIZABETH

That's your pitch?

WINNIFRED

...What.

ELIZABETH

All you want is more of the same?
 If you're gonna sell your soul, sell it for something better.

WINNIFRED

(gestures to their surroundings)

What, like this? Great choice, looks like it's really working out for you.

ELIZABETH

It may not be not fancy, but I lead my own life.

WINNIFRED

Your own life sucks. And when you die, *if* they bury you, nobody's gonna say, "Put me
 near her." You're the loneliest person in the world. If that's what "better" looks like, I'll
 stay up in the castle, thanks.

Elizabeth wants to argue... but she can't.

ELIZABETH

OK, so I'm not the poster-child for a good time. Fine, I never said I was.
 So pick something different, pick a new / thing —

WINNIFRED

There are no new things! There's a certain set of things, and whether you're at the castle
 or in a hut, or if you moved to a big city tomorrow – they'd still be the same things. And
 what's more, you know that.

ELIZABETH

That's not true.

WINNIFRED

No?

Even if nobody knew you were a witch, would people suddenly lean in, to hear what you had to say? Would your opinion suddenly matter to the men who make decisions? And me – let's say I ask the devil to make me – nobility! The top of the heap. The men go out hunting, the men go to war - and there I am, sitting alone at the end of a very long table. And the room is very silent, and there's still nobody listening.

Where's our new world, Elizabeth?

A moment. Elizabeth hears this.

ELIZABETH

So we have to imagine one, we have to imagine things differently.

WINNIFRED

I can't.

Everything I think of, it looks like what I know.

I can't see what a new world would look like.

(really asking)

Can you?

*A beat. Elizabeth tries. She really tries.
And... she can't. Her silence says it all.*

WINNIFRED

If we're smart, we'll take what there is, what we know. We'll carve out a corner, make some concessions, and get by.

That's what I plan to do.

And if you have any sense, you'll do the same thing before the devil moves on and you lose your Door Number Two.

(back to Cuddy)

So do I sign somewhere? Do we need a lawyer?

How did Cuddy do it?

Scratch has a realization.

SCRATCH

Oh.

Oh shit.

WINNIFRED

What?

SCRATCH

I never filed the...
Oh shit.

WINNIFRED

What is it?

SCRATCH

I sort of forgot to...
I sort of got a little sidetracked and...
that whole
(Frank too)
never formally
hmm...
Oops.

(shrugs – what can I say)

Paperwork!
... No point now?

(moving on)

I'll stop by the castle tomorrow, we can get the details ironed out.

He holds out a hand. They shake.

WINNIFRED

I'll be waiting.

She leaves. Elizabeth makes her decision.

ELIZABETH

Okay.
All right.

SCRATCH

What's that?

ELIZABETH

I'll sell you my soul.

SCRATCH

...What?

ELIZABETH

I'll sell you my soul if you pull the plug.

SCRATCH

...I don't understand.

ELIZABETH

Destroy it all and see what grows.
That's what I want.
And you can have my soul.

SCRATCH

What – what about you?

ELIZABETH

A hot wind blows through, and I'm gone.
And everything starts over.

SCRATCH

That's –
Wait, no, that isn't –

ELIZABETH

You said tell you what I want? That's what I want.

SCRATCH

But we could go somewhere – you and I –

ELIZABETH

Scratch—

SCRATCH

I'd quit my job—

ELIZABETH

Scratch.

SCRATCH

No! No deal.

ELIZABETH

I want to sell you my soul.

SCRATCH

I don't want it.

ELIZABETH

Yes you do. You've never wanted one more.

SCRATCH

(this is true, but...)

Not on those terms.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

(very gently)

You've seen civilizations the world over.

You've seen how they rise, how they fall.

This one is done. You can see that, can't you?

We're caught in the web of a thing our parents built
our grandparents and the grandparents of our grandparents
and so we're building it now too.

We don't know how to do anything other than keep building
even as the strands wrap tighter and tighter around our necks,
we keep building.

So if there's no stopping, no changing, no way to escape
then you have to wipe the slate clean and start again.

(she takes his face)

Let's start again. Okay?

SCRATCH

I love you.

ELIZABETH

I believe you.

SCRATCH

Can't that be enough?

ELIZABETH

For what?

SCRATCH

You and me, fuck the rest of them.

ELIZABETH

I can imagine we'd have some real fun. But then one day, maybe a hundred years from now... One day we'll notice that nothing around us seems to have changed, everyone is just as vicious and frightened and banal as they were before. We'll think: *Shouldn't anything at all have changed?* And then at that moment, whenever it comes, we'll think of this moment, right now. We'll think: *Oh. We had the chance to change all of this. We did have it. We just said No.*

14.

Alone, Cuddy Banks performs a very sad morris dance. This is his aria.

He does it just for himself, with no sense that there are any eyes on him.

It is about anguish and desire and sorrow and loneliness that is constant and searing, and the sick feeling of victory when you've achieved a thing you wish you hadn't actually done, but you were capable of it nonetheless.

It is very strange and uncomfortable and oddly beautiful and sometimes funny and sad.

It should move us, even as we squirm a little.

Cuddy finishes. He stands very still, his chest heaving out of breath, transported, close to tears.

15.

*Scratch, alone. In a narrow focused light.
Similar to the way Elizabeth was in the
beginning. His aria.*

SCRATCH

I really appreciate everything you've done for me?
but I think I just
am maybe having a little difficulty
at the moment
in this particular industry
and
I don't want this to be like, I'm *quitting*
but
maybe I just
need to take a time-out...?

(beat)

I've been thinking about, you know,
what I want to do instead and
I'm not, let's face it, the most *organized* [person]
which is why, you know, that *paperwork...* [wasn't on time]
(so sorry about that)
uh
but maybe I just wanna travel for a while.
Like, see the world, and not have to engage in any kind of
transactionary thing, but like
have some croissants and go biking or whale-watching or
whatever.
And I know things are all falling apart, the whole thing is
coming apart at the seams
which is rife with opportunity, I mean I understand what kind of
moment we're in
so maybe I'll just go on vacation for a little bit
and then if I start to feel better, maybe I can come back then
and we can talk about resuming on a part-time basis?
Or like a free-lance thing, or...?

(beat, without meaning to:)

I'm having a really hard time sleeping.
I just lie awake all night and
there's a particular color that exists
in the span of time right before the sun comes up
this particular shade of blue that's almost bruise
and I see that color every morning now.
And I try to do all these exercises, like I take deep breaths
or I do the thing where you relax your muscles in groups

your feet, then your calves, then your thighs,
 like you work upward until your brain is relaxed and you fall asleep –
 but every time I get to my heart area, I start to feel like I'm having a
 sort of slow-motion panic attack
 for hours
 so I never get to the part where you fall asleep.

(beat)

I know you can't really answer this, because
 we just should do our jobs, and I get it, entropy is the point anyway,
 but
 I have no idea if there's anything better coming down the pike
 or if *this is it*, if this is what it is forever -
 but then also,
 if this *is* what it is
 then shouldn't we just learn to live with it?
 Be happy in small ways
 Be lucky in small ways?
 A person could love a person and
 that could be enough
 couldn't it?

(beat – raw, from the heart)

But
 what if there is something *amazing* ahead
 and all we have to do
 is burn down everything we know
 to get to it?

But maybe these aren't the right questions.

There is a single question that I have been asking myself
 over and over again
 all night, until everything turns that one alarming color
 and all day,
 I keep asking myself this question, and...

*(beat – raw, anguished – a question of
 sorts:)*

I find it so hard to have hope right now.
 I just find it so hard to have hope.

*Black out.
 End of play.*