

THE MARGINS

A Play of Supernatural Horror

by David Skeele

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(At rise PHYLLIDA stands next to a long table, a book open on it. She reads a passage from the book, then stands, hands extended, head slightly back, as if reading the vibrations in the room. A noise from outside and JONATHAN enters.)

JONATHAN

Phyllida? Are you Phyllida Franks?

PHYLLIDA

I suppose I must be.

(He offers a hand, which she takes with a little reluctance.)

JONATHAN

Jonathan Turino. It's nice to get to thank you face to face. I don't know where you came up with this place, but it's a parapsychologist's dream. Electromagnetic field readings are off the charts.

PHYLLIDA

That's what they say. An underground river beneath the house, apparently. Are you sure I can't prevail upon you one last time to use the cellar for this? Terrifically atmospheric, and you'd be that much closer to the energy source.

JONATHAN

Sorry. I already checked out the basement. Dirt floor, very damp—and there's a big oak door down there, closing off half the room. Locked tight.

PHYLLIDA

That lock hasn't worked in years...

JONATHAN

It does now. I couldn't budge the thing. And anyway, I hung these curtains, so it should be plenty dark enough, day or night.

(He sees the book.)

What's this?

(She closes it.)

PHYLLIDA

Diary.

JONATHAN

Oh. Sorry. Didn't look, didn't look. You use an antique diary. That's fitting. Very cool.

PHYLLIDA

Thank you.

JONATHAN

Well...I just wanted to say it's a privilege to have an historian in the group.

PHYLLIDA

(Stashing the book as she moves away from him)

Historian, parapsychologist—what's the difference, really? We both chase ghosts in our own ways, don't we?

JONATHAN

But still, a *psychic* historian—I don't know how Helen found you.

PHYLLIDA

She has her ways. Where are the other psychics, by the way?

JONATHAN

Finding their bedrooms.

PHYLLIDA

Is Helen among them?

JONATHAN

Mm-hmm. I put her right next to you, since you know each other.

PHYLLIDA

Very thoughtful.

JONATHAN

Well, I'd better go back down. I think the journalist is here.

PHYLLIDA

Journalist?

JONATHAN

(Starting out)

Yep. We're not screwing around here. This is all going to be a major article in the *New York Times*!

(As he prepares to pass through the curtains to exit, HELEN appears in them.)

Helen!

HELEN

Jonathan.

(An awkward moment.)

JONATHAN

Well, I'll let you two catch up.

(He exits. Beat.)

PHYLLIDA

So. Is it him?

HELEN

What?

PHYLLIDA

Big, bad Jonathan Turino? The dashing parapsychologist? The Indiana Jones of the netherworld? Is he the one? Is he the one who had your heart the whole time?

(Slight pause)

HELEN

Yes.

PHYLLIDA

(Forcing a smile)

And me just a humble historian. So boring to you, isn't it?

HELEN

I never said it was boring.

PHYLLIDA

It doesn't matter. I'm over it. Over *you*. Thank you. I appreciate you inviting me here. Speaking on my behalf. The trust it shows... Very kind.

(She extends her hand to HELEN, who takes it for a business-like handshake.)

HELEN

No problem.

(HELEN tries to withdraw her hand, but PHYLLIDA hangs on. HELEN yanks her hand loose.)

Goddamnit!

PHYLLIDA

Helen, please...

HELEN

I knew it. I knew this was a mistake. "The trust it shows..." Why am I so stupid?

PHYLLIDA

You're not stupid, you're kind. You're merciful. That's not *always* the same thing.

(She draws back, contritely.)

I'm fine. Really. It was just...emotional, seeing you again.

HELEN

This isn't going to work. I need to talk to Jonathan.

PHYLLIDA

And what? Ruin his experiment? Because it will. He'll cancel everything. And he'll never forgive you for lying to him.

HELEN

You're a vicious bitch.

PHYLLIDA

No. I'm just a wounded woman trying to heal. And I will. I am. Seeing you here, as a friend. And colleague. Getting used to that. It's part of the process.

(The sound of people approaching. MARKUS enters, talking to JONATHAN behind him.)

MARKUS

I recognized you from your book jacket.

(He holds up a copy of JONATHAN's book.)

Found it in the remainder rack. *Reality's Dark Edge*. Kind of a melodramatic title, but it looks like an interesting read.

(He spots PHYLLIDA and HELEN)

Well, hello. Markus Olin. *New York Times*.

HELEN

Helen Armitage. Nice to meet you. I'll get the others.

(She exits.)

MARKUS

(To Phyllida)

And you are...?

PHYLLIDA

Gay. You can put your penis back in your pants.

(She smiles and follows HELEN out.)

MARKUS

Wow. Who knew parapsychology could be so...hot?

JONATHAN

I'm so glad you could come.

MARKUS

Sure. Me, too. I gotta say, quite the collection you're putting together here.

JONATHAN

The most powerful psychics in the Northeast. And all of them rigorously tested, abilities all authenticated by...

MARKUS

Yeah, but... I mean, come on. Kind of a freak show, isn't it? Deaf-mutes, lesbians... Though, personally, I think the lesbian's a keeper. Did you *see* the ass on...?

JONATHAN

Mr....

MARKUS

I'm just saying, you're trying to sell this stuff to the mainstream, right?

JONATHAN

I would like to present the public with the evidence that would make them take psychic research more seriously, yes. You could say it's my life's mission.

MARKUS

Then couldn't you find some guys with horn-rim glasses and lab coats? I mean, I'm Joe Six-Pack, I take one look at these people and credibility goes out the window.

JONATHAN

The point is *results*, Mr. Olin. I made psychic ability my *only* priority here. But okay..."freaks." A *sideshow*. Unfortunately, you're probably right. Psychics, *real* psychics, are freaks. Outcasts. But who can blame them? Can you imagine growing up that way?

MARKUS

What way?

JONATHAN

A small child, hearing adult thoughts broadcast non-stop, in your own mind. Our thoughts. Can you imagine it? Like some loud, ugly, violent radio that you can never turn off. No parent can shield you from it. That “deaf-mute” isn’t really deaf at all. His name is Trace Armitage, and he was so traumatized by his childhood experiences that he lost the ability to speak. His sister Helen was luckier somehow, but even she...

MARKUS

Helen—mmm. America will love your *women*, I can tell you that much. You could make a fucking swimsuit calendar: Powerful Psychics of the Northeast!

JONATHAN

Yes. Even she didn’t escape unscathed. She wakes in the night, regularly, hearing the screams, feeling the pain. Somebody else’s agony—the rape victim, the kidnapped child. And all she can do is get there after the fact. Help the cops find the bodies.

MARKUS

And the lesbo? What’s her deal? And are you sure she’s gay? I mean, women tell me that all the time...

(There is a thumping sound from the hall.)

JONATHAN

I don’t know. But my point is, when you consider their circumstances, none of these people are really that strange...

(LANE bursts in, holding some sort of strip of plastic.)

LANE

Do you know what the mold level is in that basement? I’m already counting over 200,000 viable spores per cubic inch of *Aspergillus Niger*. Unacceptable. And I haven’t even begun testing for *Cladosporium*!

JONATHAN

Mr. Strelczyk? Are you Lane Strelczyk?

LANE

I am.

JONATHAN

Mr. Strelczyk. Jonathan Turino. I have to say, it’s an honor.

LANE

Yes.

(Slight pause)

Well? What about this basement?

JONATHAN

We won't be using the basement.

LANE

But that woman said...

JONATHAN

We'll be doing it here.

LANE

Here?

(He sniffs the air.)

Still dusty. And this was my last *Aspergillus* test kit. I'll have to...

JONATHAN

This is Markus Olin, of the *New York Times*.

LANE

Oh. The press? What an excellent idea.

JONATHAN

Mr. Strelczyk is a psychic of staggering ability. Duke University came to interview him, ended up staying a week. Devoted an entire journal to him.

LANE

(To Markus)

Got a camera?

MARKUS

What?

LANE

A camera.

MARKUS

Umm, in the car.

LANE

Get it. If you want to see something cool.

(HELEN enters, followed by TRACE, and then, at distance, PHYLLIDA.)

JONATHAN

Great. Everyone's here. Welcome. Have people met Lane Strelczyk? This is Trace Armitage, Helen Armitage and Phyllida Franks.

LANE

Oh, my. *(To Helen)* Got a camera?

JONATHAN

All right. I'd love to begin, if everyone's ready.

LANE

You tell me an object, an animal: anything you want. I can take a camera, place it against my head and boom, that image will be on every frame of the film. Works with Polaroids or regular.

JONATHAN

If we could begin, we really have a lot to cover here.

LANE

Doesn't work with digital. I don't know why.

JONATHAN

Please. If we could begin. Thank you. I think you've all become acquainted downstairs. I can guarantee you'll get to know each other much better, and very soon. I want to welcome you all to the Whalen Mansion. I apologize for the primitive conditions, but it's a special old place. It's...well, why don't I let our historian give us a brief background.

PHYLLIDA

Certainly. Built by Dennis Whalen, a wealthy industrialist, in the early nineteenth century. A pretty typical nineteenth-century robber-baron—worse, really. His textile mills were the perhaps the most oppressive factories in the entire Hudson River Valley. He spent most of his life lobbying against labor-reform laws. His wife died in the 1860s, and he lived here alone until 1884, when he committed suicide. It was once a stunningly beautiful home, but it's sat vacant for almost sixty years.

HELEN

Why?

PHYLLIDA

(Shrugs)

Monster to take care of, I imagine. Power company bought the land eight years ago, and tried to knock the place down.

MARKUS

Tried?

PHYLLIDA

An historian saw the wrecking ball and contacted the State. Got it declared a New York State treasure. Now they can't touch it.

JONATHAN

That historian? Wouldn't happen to be...?

PHYLLIDA

Guilty.

JONATHAN

Bravo.

PHYLLIDA

(Bowing slightly.)

Thank you.

(In the direction of HELEN)

We historians lead surprisingly interesting lives.

JONATHAN

(To the group) Let me congratulate you. You have been chosen to be part of what I believe will be an extraordinary experiment. A...groundbreaking experiment.

(Pause)

Most of you already know the details. You've all received your prospectus. All except Mr. Strelczyk, who asked *not* to be briefed beforehand.

(They turn to look at Lane. He touches his forehead and smiles.)

LANE

I might influence you before the experiment even begins. It's happened before.

(Various subtle reactions to his egotism among the group)

JONATHAN

You can't be too careful, I suppose. Well, Mr. Strelczyk—may I call you Lane?

(LANE gestures his assent.)

You may have heard of a study conducted in the 1970s in Toronto, in which a group of people were able to successfully “create” an entity.

MARKUS

An entity?

JONATHAN

A being. A kind of ghost. An artificial ghost, if you will. As I described in the prospectus.

LANE

An “artificial” ghost? I’m intrigued.

JONATHAN

Yes. This group actually *made up* a personage, an historical personage. They invented a name for him, an entire life story. Well, long story short, after a long period of meditation and séances, they were eventually able to make contact—actual contact—with their invented ghost.

MARKUS

Make contact? How?

(JONATHAN frowns at him)

HELEN

Table rapping, mostly. You know: one knock for “no,” two for “yes.”

PHYLLIDA

Violent raps, as I remember. And the interesting thing about the answers...

JONATHAN

...was that they all coincided, *exactly*, with the history they had invented. The answers that were already in their own minds.

LANE

Aha.

JONATHAN

Yes. Without a doubt, *they*—the group—were causing the phenomena to happen *themselves*. They had created a ghost.

LANE

All right. But...*table rapping*? I could do that right now...

HELEN

Not just table rapping. Eventually they had table levitation, moving furniture, all kinds of telekinetic phenomena.

LANE

Okay, mildly impressive, but if it's all been done before...

(He looks around at everyone.)

Please don't tell me I traveled 150 miles just to copy someone else's half-assed experiment.

JONATHAN

Oh, no. There's a major difference. You see, for some reason, this group decided it was important that all of its members were just ordinary people. No psychic power among them. That they were able to create their entity this way was a remarkable accomplishment, but we should bear in mind that it took an entire *year* before they began to see results.

LANE

A year?

JONATHAN

For a long time I've been tortured by a question: what would happen if someone *really* took this idea seriously? Did it with actual *psychics*. In a venue absolutely *humming* with electro-magnetic energy. What would happen?

(Slight pause)

One thing I can promise you. It won't take a year. We're going to do it in a mere...three...weeks. Yes. With Mr. Olin here as a neutral observer, we're going to be...

MARKUS

Whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. Three weeks?

JONATHAN

Yes. Three weeks. It's in the... Did you even *read* the prospectus?

MARKUS

The first page. I'm with Lane. Objectivity. Come in with a clean slate.

JONATHAN

Is...this a problem?

MARKUS

Yeah, I'd say it's a problem. I've got to be in Flushing at 10:00 a.m....

JONATHAN

Tomorrow?

MARKUS

(Smugly)

Got an interview with Martina Hingis. Then it's off to the Republican convention...

JONATHAN

So...wait. You're saying...

MARKUS

Tonight. That's all I've got.

JONATHAN

One night?

MARKUS

Uno noche. And I'm only here tonight because it's my day off. Sorry. That's the deal.

JONATHAN

(Trying to contain his fury)

It is *not* the deal. The deal was that you were to document a scientific experiment! A *three week* scientific experiment!

MARKUS

Are you even listening to yourself? We are talking about the *New York fucking Times*!! You actually imagined that they would pay a reporter three weeks salary to sit around watching you play with your wee-jee board! Don't you get it? I mean, I'm sorry—you seem like nice...people, I guess. But this is a joke, essentially. A quirky little piece for the "Living" section. "Local News" if you're lucky. You totally surprise me with something I can't explain, then *maybe* the science editor wants to take a look at it.

JONATHAN

One night. You expect us to create an entity, to surpass the Toronto experiments, in one night.

MARKUS

Oh, I don't expect anything. Less disappointment that way.

JONATHAN

Get out of here.

MARKUS

(Shrugging as he gathers his stuff)

You people have a nice three weeks.

PHYLLIDA

Wait.

(Markus stops.)

Quite a gauntlet you've thrown down here, Mr. Olin.

(To Jonathan)

Why don't we pick it up.

JONATHAN

What?

PHYLLIDA

Let's do it. Tonight.

JONATHAN

That's ridiculous.

PHYLLIDA

Is it? Look. Look around you. Look at the group you've assembled. Think, Mr. Turino. You want publicity? Let's make history. Create an entity in *(checks her watch)* twelve hours. One that knocks the socks off those Canadian dabblers.

(Looks at the group, challenging them)

What do you think? Are we capable of doing this?

LANE

In my sleep. For fifty bucks I'll do it right now.

(HELEN looks to JONATHAN, but he is still in shock. She looks to TRACE, who shrugs.)

HELEN

It's...possible, I suppose.

PHYLLIDA

Mr. Turino?

JONATHAN

Twelve hours? It's going to take us longer than that to invent the character's history. We don't even have the beginnings of a character...

PHYLLIDA

I do. Have the beginnings.

(Pause. PHYLLIDA smiles serenely)

JONATHAN

What?

PHYLLIDA

I was thinking...perhaps a servant girl. An English servant girl. Put her somewhere in the middle of the century—say, 1850s.

JONATHAN

What are you doing?

PHYLLIDA

I'm an historian. It's why I'm here, no? Indentured servants were still used here in the mid-nineteenth century, though the practice was becoming obsolete. Tuberculosis was common here—maybe we could give her a nice tragic death from tuberculosis. It's what killed Mrs. Whalen...

JONATHAN

Wait! We're supposed to invent her *together*. It's part of the protocol...

PHYLLIDA

I took the liberty of doing some advance invention. Lucky for us I did, wouldn't you say?

LANE

Can she be pretty?

PHYLLIDA

Sure.

JONATHAN

(Thinking)

A servant girl?

PHYLLIDA

Oh, I know: you had your heart set on some rich, white man. Some titled landowner. Sir Nicholas Frothingham....

JONATHAN

That's not what I...

PHYLLIDA

That's the way the Canadians went, of course. But why *not* a servant? Why not a girl? You should take a history course this century, Mr. Turino. We're shining light into the *margins* now, giving voice to the voiceless. Everybody swept underneath history's rich, white rug. The women, the servants...

LANE

Can she have a nice body?

PHYLLIDA

Tits like Florida grapefruit, if it helps you imagine her, Mr. Strelczyk.

LANE

Florida grapefruit. Oh, that does help.

HELEN

I like her.

LANE

Me, too.

(During the above exchange, MARKUS has wandered back in and taken a seat, intrigued by the conflict. Everybody watches JONATHAN. JONATHAN eyes Markus, who shrugs)

JONATHAN

All right.

(Lights up on the group assembled loosely around a table. LANE and TRACE have their hands on the table surface, raring to go. HELEN, PHYLLIDA and JONATHAN are ranged a little farther away. HELEN has a notepad and pencil.)

HELEN

Okay. Five-foot four, black wavy hair, brown eyes.

LANE

A comely lass, all around. I love that word: “comely.” But she doesn’t have a name. She needs a name, doesn’t she?

JONATHAN

I’d say the name is crucial. Any ideas?

PHYLLIDA

How about “Kate,” or some variation on Kate? A popular name among the working classes at the time.

(TRACE begins to write something.)

JONATHAN

Fine with me, but we still need a last...

(TRACE hands him what he’s written.)

Kate...Beck.

(PHYLLIDA gasps. They look at her.)

PHYLLIDA

That’s...a great name. How did you happen to come on the idea of “Beck?”

(TRACE shrugs and points to his head, but he seems a little disturbed by something.)

JONATHAN

Blunt. Easy to remember. I like it. Any objections to “Kate Beck?” Okay then. We’ve got a name and some vital statistics. Now we need a *personality*.

HELEN

Maybe some hobbies. How about needlepoint? A servant girl would have some kind of skill like that, right? Phyllida?

PHYLLIDA

(Raising her eyebrows)

Needlepoint. All right.

HELEN

Oh, sorry it’s not *empowering* enough.

JONATHAN

(Cutting in)

Needlepoint is fine.

(TRACE has been writing something on a piece of paper. He hands it to HELEN.)

HELEN

And how about animals? She could take care of the estate's animals, too.

PHYLLIDA

Animals?

LANE

Surrounded by loving animals as she does her needlepoint. She's Cinderella! The bluebirds bring her fabric every morning...

PHYLLIDA

(Suppressing a laugh)

It is kind of cloying, isn't it? Anyway, most estates would have had a gamekeeper.

HELEN

You're controlling everything about this...

PHYLLIDA

(Pointing to her watch)

Time, dear...

HELEN

Did you just call me "dear?" You think that's less belittling just because you're a woman?

PHYLLIDA

Oh, for God's sake, Helen...

JONATHAN

Okay, people...

HELEN

You think I don't recognize these condescending comments for the manipulative crap they are?

PHYLLIDA

Manipulative? Is that what the pot's calling the kettle these days?

HELEN

Wha...?

PHYLLIDA

Oh, yes, do that appalled self-righteous thing. It's your sexiest look.

JONATHAN

Helen? Phyllida? What's... Is there something going on here?

PHYLLIDA

(Turning to him)

Why, you must be psychic.

LANE

Mold! I smell mold!

(Peers into a box near him.)

Books! Old books! Nothing breeds black mold like books!

JONATHAN

We'll move the books! Here.

(He hands the box to Markus, who paws through them.)

Look, do you think we could remember that we have a member of the media present, recording all of our behavior?

MARKUS

Oh, don't behave on my account. I love reality television.

JONATHAN

Exactly. That's exactly what I mean.

MARKUS

(Pulling out a book)

"Seven Types of Dementia," by Ludwig Edelstein. Good stuff.

PHYLLIDA

Dennis Whalen's book collection...

JONATHAN

(Checking his watch)

Less than ten hours now. Could we *please* move on? Everyone?

(Everyone gives some kind of sign of assent.)

Let's sum up. What do we have?

PHYLLIDA

(Reciting quickly)

Kate Beck, born in Bristol, England, 1838. Worked as a ladies maid, before being fired for petty theft and anti-social behavior...

HELEN

Wait a minute—anti-social behavior? I don't remember that.

PHYLLIDA

I'm embroidering a little, but all right, we can stop and discuss it if you don't like it...

JONATHAN

Whatever. Fine. Just keep going.

PHYLLIDA

All right. Saved from penury by the intervention of a visiting wealthy American, who offers to take her away as an indentured servant. Brings her here, and she goes on to become renowned for her needlepoint...

JONATHAN

Wait. Wait. Here? We're putting her here? Actually using this house in our scenario?

PHYLLIDA

Oh. I don't know. But why not? It fits. There *were* servants here in the 19th century.

JONATHAN

No mixing fact and fiction. It violates the protocols of the experiment...

PHYLLIDA

But given the time situation...

JONATHAN

I said *no*.

(Awkward pause)

We'll think about where she lived later. I think we might have enough to begin. Maybe we should try to...establish her.

(No one notices TRACE, working furiously with pen and paper)

LANE

Absolutely. Give Kate Beck a little test drive. How do we do it?

JONATHAN

Well, I've created a series of meditation exercises...

MARKUS

(Checking his watch)

Sounds slow.

JONATHAN

(With a murderous glare at Markus)

It is. Okay. Condensed version. Everyone gather around. I need you to concentrate. Think of everything we know about Kate Beck. Her past. Her occupation. Her... hobbies. See if you can form a picture of her in your mind's eye. Yes. Close your eyes if it helps. But as you're creating your picture, make sure you're listening to the others. Let *their* picture help form your picture.

(Everyone concentrates for a few moments. TRACE lunges forward with a completed drawing of a servant girl in 19th-century servant garb. To the extent that the audience can see it, there should be something very disturbing about the drawing. Something very wrong in the facial expression, or body language. Nothing too melodramatic—no blood, eyes without pupils, etc. It is simply a realistically rendered drawing with something subtly but unmistakably wrong about it. Of course, the audience probably won't get a good look at it. Any disturbing quality will be communicated mostly by the characters' reactions to it.)

My god. Trace, this is amazing.

(PHYLLIDA crosses to them and takes it. She gasps a little. The others look at her.)

PHYLLIDA

(Covering)

It's...very close to what I was seeing.

(HELEN takes the drawing.)

HELEN

Oh my g... Me, too. I'd just started forming a picture, but this hair, this face...

JONATHAN

(Trying to contain his excitement)

Lane?

LANE

Give her here.

(He takes the drawing.)

Hmm. She's ugly. And you call those Florida grapefruit? Though how can you tell with this stupid smock/apron combo? I know, let's make her a *French* maid! Wouldn't that be...

JONATHAN

So this isn't what you were seeing?

LANE

Oh no, it was. Pretty much. It just wasn't what I was *trying* to see. Very irritating. One of you has an incredibly powerful projection ability. It must be, to override *me*.

(To everyone)

This time *I* get to do the breasts! I'm leaving if I don't get to do the breasts!

JONATHAN

Fine, Lane.

(He turns to MARKUS expectantly.)

MARKUS

What? Is this your evidence? He draws it and everybody else claims they saw it?

JONATHAN

No, not evidence. Just...I didn't think we'd have a picture of her for another week. It's a wonderful tool to have. Pass that drawing around. Memorize her features, get that picture in your heads.

(They do so.)

Let's keep going. Everyone ready?

(TRACE gestures at them.)

HELEN

He's wondering if we should be holding hands.

LANE

I don't do hands.

JONATHAN

O.K. The right idea, though. What if you sort of...psychically hold hands? Reach out to each other. With your minds. Cross each other's boundaries. Can we create that sense of intimacy without actually touching? Let's try.

(They close their eyes, perhaps subtly angle their bodies into more of a circle.)

Yes. That's it. We've created her visual being, now try...touching her, perhaps. Feel... the rough fabric of her clothes. Her hair...

(Concentration deepens. LANE is concentrating on her breasts, willing grapefruit-shaped fullness into his hands. There is a sudden sound, perhaps—a crack or something equally jarring—and TRACE and PHYLLIDA both are yanked out of their trance. Much more powerful, though is the effect on HELEN and LANE. She screams; he screams even louder and recoils in pain.)

LANE

She hit me! She stabbed me, I think! My ribs, my ribs! I'm bleeding, I'm bleeding, oh my god I'm bleeding...

(PHYLLIDA rushes over and fights to get his shirt untucked, then pulls it up, searching for a gash. TRACE hurries to HELEN, who leans against the table, panting.)

PHYLLIDA

There's nothing there. Not a mark.

LANE

But she... I felt her... She...

PHYLLIDA

Who? Who did you feel?

LANE

She...

(He looks around wildly)

I don't know. Someone.

JONATHAN

Helen. What happened?

HELEN

I don't know. Something was touching me. It was...so horrible. It felt like...worms crawling on me. Or centipedes. I just...

LANE

Lashed out? So it was you!

JONATHAN

Wait. We're saying Lane somehow...touched Helen psychically?

PHYLLIDA

Fascinating.

MARKUS

(Scribbling in his notebook.)

Yessiree.

LANE

I wasn't *touching* anyone! I was doing exactly what you asked me to—*summoning* an image. But if I'm going to be assaulted— *(To HELEN) accused.*

HELEN

I never said it was Lane.

PHYLLIDA

Oh, so what *are* you saying?

JONATHAN

All right. *Enough.* Time fucking out. Look. We're not going to get anywhere this way. We have to forget about personal agendas. Somehow act as a group and focus on *Kate Beck*. Can we do that? Please?

(LANE grudgingly acquiesces. He holds up the picture)

Thank you. Just...concentrate on this image. And let's try something. Can we say her name together? Softly. Kate. Beck. Kate. Beck. Kate...

(They all begin to chant with him. It builds slightly and the air seems to thicken with their concentration.)

Can you see her?

HELEN

(Softly)

Yes.

(TRACE nods.)

LANE

Yes. Yes, I do. So clear.

JONATHAN

Phyllida?

PHYLLIDA

I think so. Yes. She's there. With...stairs behind her?

HELEN

Stairs!! Yes! I see that, too. Stairs.

LANE

I have stairs, too. A red Oriental runner going up them...?

PHYLLIDA

Yes! That's it exactly! I can't believe it!

JONATHAN

Beautiful. You're sharing an image, people. Keep concentrating. Keep going.

PHYLLIDA

She...looks so scared. Do you see that?

HELEN

Yes! I see the exact same thing.

PHYLLIDA

Oh my god. It's really her. I can see her. I can *see* her.

JONATHAN

This is incredible work! Keep it going.

HELEN

Don't be frightened, Kate. We're your friends.

LANE

We're better than friends. We're your *creators*. We command you...we *will* you...to smile.

PHYLLIDA

There. Is she...?

HELEN

Yes. She's smiling! But...it's... I don't like that smile. Make it...nicer.

LANE

I'm trying. Yes. That's it. That's better. Nice Kate. She's going to serve us...cake.

MARKUS

Cake? What the fuck?

HELEN

I see what he's saying. The...pie spatula thing, right?

LANE

A pie server, yes. Like a triangle? She's holding it up.

PHYLLIDA

A servée, they called them. This one's so dirty, though. Is it dirty?

LANE

It is. Looks like...blood. Dried blood.

HELEN

(In sudden terror)

Wait! No! Are you seeing...? Is she...?

LANE

No! Put it down, Kate. We command you to take that...thing away from your face!

(They all begin to writhe in their seats [except JONATHAN and MARKUS], screaming or exhibiting some other horrified behavior. Ad-libs are encouraged here.)

STOP IT!!

(They're shaken out of the vision.)

JONATHAN

What happened? Describe it to me.

PHYLLIDA

What was...? Did she...?

LANE

You know she did.

JONATHAN

What? What happened?

HELEN

She...she...

(She can't find the words. TRACE makes a sawing/cutting motion next to his face.)

LANE

Yes. She...cut chunks out of her face.

(Long silence. Everyone is stunned. PHYLLIDA seems to be thinking with all her might. JONATHAN looks from one to the other.)

JONATHAN

All right. Who is it?

LANE

What?

JONATHAN

Who is doing this?

(No one answers.)

Don't know what I'm talking about? Somebody does. Somebody is poisoning the well.

HELEN

What does that mean?

JONATHAN

Fucking things up. Destroying the experiment.

HELEN

Who would do that? It doesn't make sense.

JONATHAN

(Looking pointedly at HELEN.)

I know who *isn't* doing it.

(Looking at the others.)

Beyond that, I don't really know anybody here very well, do I?

(To PHYLLIDA)

In fact, I don't know you at all.

PHYLLIDA

You think I could do that? To *them*? I'm the weakest one here. Other than you.

JONATHAN

(To LANE)

But you're the strongest one, aren't you? Be a piece of cake for you.

MARKUS

No pun intended.

LANE

(Pale, shaking)

How dare you! I'm just as upset by what we were...forced to watch as anybody.

HELEN

He is. I can tell. He's not faking, Jonathan.

LANE

(To HELEN)

Thank you.

JONATHAN

(To MARKUS)

What about you? Make a good story, wouldn't it?

MARKUS

Are you fucking kidding me?

(JONATHAN turns to TRACE.)

HELEN

Oh, no. You can't be thinking...

JONATHAN

I never said it was intentional. Maybe somebody's bringing in some nasty baggage. I never asked exactly what that childhood trauma was.

(The two men stare at each other. TRACE begins to hyperventilate and shake.)

Have anything to do with face-cutting, maybe?

(HELEN runs to TRACE's side and tries to calm him, then rounds on JONATHAN fiercely.)

HELEN

You evil, prick...motherfucker. If you could see yourself right now, you'd know why I left you. When you're in it, nothing's more important than the work, is it? Not even basic human decency.

(Startled by her words, he's deflated now.)

JONATHAN

Okay. I'm sorry. Trace, I apologize... Everybody...

HELEN

A child molester.

(Everyone turns to her.)

He lived across the street from us. From the day he moved in, Trace was a different boy. Went into a shell. Stared at the floor around people. Spent all his time in the basement with pillows over his head. Pillows. He was trying to shut it out.

MARKUS

Shut out...

HELEN

Little boys. Oh, he never touched Trace. He didn't have to. Trace was there for all of it. In his head. Long before he even knew what sex was. But no *face cutting*. There. Now everyone knows. You happy?

(An uncomfortable silence.)

JONATHAN

Everyone. I'm really sorry. I...just need a break. Could we take a break? Five minutes? I'm sorry.

(He slumps into a chair, despondent. Everyone slowly files out of the room. HELEN is the last.)

Helen. I don't know what to do. Tell me what to do.

HELEN

What...are you saying you, like, *need* me?

JONATHAN

Yes.

(She laughs softly.)

What?

HELEN

I was just thinking...if you had even said that *once* before... Who knows?

JONATHAN

I don't...

HELEN

Don't you get it? I'm not a damsel in distress. I'm not this fragile, tortured psychic, you know? Drifting around your...island of stability.

JONATHAN

I never...

HELEN

Yes, you did. And I'm sick of it. Just because I'm quiet, and I try to treat people nicely, everyone wants to project all this crap onto me.

(Pause)

JONATHAN

Okay. All right. I get it. So what do I do?

(Slight pause)

HELEN

I don't have a clue.

(They both burst out laughing. Slight pause.)

JONATHAN

"Evil prick motherfucker?"

HELEN

(Shrugging)

I swear sometimes. And you were messing with my brother.

JONATHAN

I'll never make that mistake again.

HELEN

Better not.

(He moves to her.)

JONATHAN

Helen. You and *Phyllida*?

HELEN

It's over.

JONATHAN

Look at me.

HELEN

It's over.

(He takes her in her arms, kisses her. PHYLLIDA steps into the room, watches. HELEN breaks free.)

JONATHAN

Helen. I'm...

PHYLLIDA

Isn't this cozy? I thought I saw something in the prospectus about avoiding romantic entanglements....

JONATHAN

It's all going to shit, anyway. The rest of you can have a Roman orgy in the foyer for all I care.

PHYLLIDA

Yes, well. As appealing as that sounds...

(MARKUS enters, TRACE and LANE behind him.)

MARKUS

Uh, FYI, the front door's stuck. I couldn't budge it.

JONATHAN

It's an old house. The door-frames get warped. I'll help you put a shoulder into it next break.

(They all file in.)

Listen. Sit down, please. Let me say again how sorry I am. Helen's right. I get obsessed. I *am* obsessed. But it's because I believe so much...in people like you. I'm so tired of hearing people laugh at you. That people look at me and think of Casper and Scooby Doo. That they look at you and think of state fair gypsies and fucking 1-800 dial-a-psychics. And laugh. It's so wrong. And we have a chance here to make it right.

But for me, it's the last chance. I'm out of money. Out of...credibility. This one goes belly-up, and...

I know I've insulted you. Accused you. But is there anyone here willing to forgive me and give this thing another try?

(Pause, then TRACE raises his hand. PHYLLIDA follows suit, and after another moment, HELEN does also. LANE does, too, a little grudgingly.)

Thank you. All of you. Look, I'm just thinking. In the Toronto experiment, the entity was their friend. A representation of their collective goodwill, if you will. Somehow, we seem to be creating something more...malign, and I don't know why. But I know you're good people, and this is a labor of love. Maybe if we could make an extra effort to bring our love to it, to just...try to think of Kate Beck in a loving way. Could we just envision her...I don't know, in the sun? A beautiful summer day. Happy. Doing her needlepoint...

(PHYLLIDA snorts and rolls her eyes. HELEN glares at her.)

And it occurs to me that we've already achieved a visual image, and some tactile responses, but no actual communication.

PHYLLIDA

I was thinking the same thing. And I have an idea—given the time constraints. Automatic writing.

MARKUS

Auto-who?

PHYLLIDA

Letting Kate write through one of us. It would save a lot of time, instead of waiting for table-raps. All those yes-or-no questions.

HELEN

It's Trace's specialty.

(TRACE nods eagerly, and lifts his pad and pen.)

JONATHAN

All right. Good idea. Set it up.

(HELEN and TRACE sit opposite each other, her placing her hand on one of his.)

LANE

What are we going to ask her?

JONATHAN

That's right. We'll need to have a question.

PHYLLIDA

I've got one.

HELEN

(Under her breath)

It figures.

PHYLLIDA

How about "do you like the master of the house?"

JONATHAN

Good, fine—that's good. Now remember—let's just think of her *positively* for a moment...

(He closes his eyes)

I'll do it with you. Markus, join in. We need everybody. Come on. Kate. We love you, Kate. You're happy. Happy Kate. We have a question for you. Helen, would you please do the honor?

HELEN

Kate. Do you like the master of the house?

(Nothing.)

Do you like the master of the house?

(More nothing. Then suddenly TRACE's hand starts to move in a large, looping script. His hand stops. He opens his eyes and HELEN turns the paper around. There is nothing on the paper but scribbling.)

MARKUS

What the fuck's that supposed to be?

HELEN

Trace?

(TRACE shrugs helplessly, a little dazed.)

JONATHAN

Try it again. And *concentrate*.

(HELEN glares at him.)

Please.

HELEN

Kate, do you like the master of the house? Talk to us, Kate.

(Everyone stares at the pen in anticipation, deepening their concentration. The pencil moves again, but still in random scribbles. TRACE redoubles his concentration—they all do—but he begins to show signs of distress. Suddenly, HELEN gasps and recoils from the table clutching the back of her head.)

JONATHAN

(Running to her)

Helen?

(TRACE's mouth opens, and a horrible, gravelly voice emerges from it.)

TRACE

DIE DIE DIE YOU ARE SHIT DIE UGLYGIRLDIEUGLYGIRL. YOU ARE SHITSHITSHIT PEEL YOURFLESHYOURUGLYFLESH DIEDIEDIEDIEDIE...

(TRACE collapses against the table, then slumps to the floor. JONATHAN leaves HELEN's side to run to him.)

JONATHAN

Trace! Trace, are you all right?

(HELEN shakes off her own pain and follows.)

HELEN

Oh, my god. Trace? Trace? Can you hear me?

JONATHAN

He's got a pulse, but it's slow.

(She seizes his face and tries to get him to see her. TRACE opens his eyes. He is dazed, baffled. Everyone stares, panting. There is something feverish, excited, about PHYLLIDA'S reaction.)

MARKUS

(On phone)

Stu, you're gonna need to get someone else on Hingis. I know, I know I did, but something's happening here... Listen, could you ask Brenda? She'd die for something like this... No, no, don't put me on hold! Fuck!

JONATHAN

(To HELEN)

What happened to you?

HELEN

It doesn't matter.

JONATHAN

Yes. It does.

HELEN

There was pain. Right here. *(She points to a place toward the back of her skull.)*
Like...ice. A cold pain. And there were...words.

JONATHAN

What words?

HELEN

I'm...not sure. "Black" something. Over and over. But I couldn't make it out. Listen Jonathan, there's something strange here I'm getting. A horrible kind of energy. I've worked on serial killer cases, and this is...*worse* somehow. The...malice I can feel. And it's so strange. It's all...jumbled, and...

LANE

Bad acid.

JONATHAN

What?

LANE

Like bad acid. I'm really more of a projector than a receiver, but what I could pick up...I know what she's talking about. It's like a bad trip. You know, like when your grandma's face starts melting and Komodo dragons come out of the wallpaper and... Oh, come on, are you going to tell me I'm the only one who's ever tried acid?

PHYLLIDA

(Raising her hand)

No.

MARKUS

Nope.

(JONATHAN looks around, and grudgingly raises his hand, too. He turns to PHYLLIDA.)

JONATHAN

What about you? Did you see anything?

PHYLLIDA

(Evasive)
Me? Nothing.

JONATHAN

Are you sure?

MARKUS

Stu? What did she... What? *What?* You're fucking kidding me. No, I know you don't kid. Okay. Look, sorry. Don't call Brenda. Yeah.

(MARKUS snaps his phone shut)

Fuck me. He got word. She's going to accuse Venus Williams of steroids! To me, tomorrow! I gotta do it. Can't we get this thing moving any faster?! Get this fucking show on the road?!

(TRACE tries to rise, but slumps back against a piece of furniture.)

HELEN

We've got to get him out of here.

PHYLLIDA

You mean...stop the experiment?

HELEN

Yes.

PHYLLIDA

Wait. Let's think this through. Make sure we're not overreacting...

MARKUS

He's waking up, isn't he?

HELEN

What's wrong with you assholes? Can't you see he's in shock? Jonathan?

(JONATHAN struggles for a moment, then makes his decision.)

JONATHAN

Yes. It's over. Fuck it. We're leaving.

(He turns toward the door. It slams. Everyone jumps, swears, ad-libs, whatever. Pause.)

MARKUS

Bullshit. Bull. Shit.

(He runs out and we hear him wrestling with the door.)

It's stuck!

JONATHAN

Just push on it. Hard!

(LANE rushes back to help.)

MARKUS

I am! It's like...a slab of fucking concrete!

LANE

It won't move! Not even the knob!

JONATHAN

Fuck.

(He leaves TRACE with HELEN, passes through the curtain and tries. Swearing ad-libs. HELEN holds a protective arm across her brother, glaring at PHYLLIDA.)

JONATHAN

(Re-entering)

God damn it! This doesn't make sense! This doesn't make any sense!

LANE

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but...the bad acid. It seems to be getting worse.

HELEN

He's right. I don't even have to try now. It's just there, pushing in at me... *(fighting off panic)* I'm scared to close my eyes. I keep...seeing things.

(JONATHAN looks around, thinks.)

JONATHAN

Phone. Which is in my other pants. In my bedroom. Markus, you have a phone—call the paramedics, cops, someone...

MARKUS

911. It's all I know how to do.

(He punches in buttons and waits.)

Wait! I don't even know where the hell I am. I just followed my GPS.

JONATHAN

Put it on speaker and Phyllida can direct them. Right, Phyllida?

PHYLLIDA

Yes.

(He puts it on speaker. We hear the phone ring once, a weird, truncated ring that goes a little staticky, then...)

PHONE

DIEDIEDIEDIE UGLYGIRL YOU LIVE IN SHIT YOU DIE IN SHIT CUT YOUR FACE YOUR UGLY FACE CUT IT NOW CUT IT NOW...

(MARKUS flings the phone and it stops. They stare at the phone.)

LANE

Windows? We could break a window...

JONATHAN

Yes! Pull down these curtains!

PHYLLIDA

Bars. BARS! On the windows.

(The freeze.)

JONATHAN

Shit, that's right.

PHYLLIDA

Dennis Whalen put bars on the windows before he died. Even on the third floor. No one knows why.

(They stare at each other, panic rising slightly in the air. MARKUS runs through the curtain and smashes into the door with a wounded sound.)

MARKUS

FUCK!

(He comes back in.)

If we had something— A tool, like a screwdriver or knife maybe I could pick the lock...

LANE

You know how to do that?

MARKUS

Are you kidding? I'm from the Bronx.

(They all begin looking any place they can, searching behind curtains, etc. MARKUS finds a drawer somewhere [in the side of the table?] and roots around in it, coming up with something—a metal tool of some kind.)

Aha! Give me five minutes and...

(He starts off with it, then stops, holding it up in the light. It is a triangular silver pie-server, stained all over with something brownish. Everyone stares at it, then MARKUS drops it with an exclamation of horror and disgust.)

HELEN

Is that...?

PHYLLIDA

Holy shit.

(Long pause. They look from each other to the object on the floor. Mouths open to venture an opinion, then close.)

LANE

What is going on? Will somebody please tell me what's going on?

JONATHAN

(Quietly)

Don't bother with the lock. She's not going to let us out.

MARKUS

Who?

JONATHAN

Kate.

MARKUS

Wait...*what?* What the fuck does that even mean?

JONATHAN

I don't know. I don't know what any of this means. We've got to think...

MARKUS

You're saying your *entity* has locked us in here?

JONATHAN

Yes. I don't know.

MARKUS

(Pointing at TRACE)

Your *entity* did...whatever the fuck it did to him? That doesn't make any sense!

JONATHAN

No.

LANE

But...this is *us*, right? Our *entity* is us. We created her. All we have to do is *uncreate* her. Banish her.

PHYLLIDA

No.

(Everyone turns to her.)

That won't work.

MARKUS

Why the fuck not?

JONATHAN

Yeah. Why the fuck not?

(PHYLLIDA gropes for words. JONATHAN advances on her, suspicious.)

Phyllida?

(TRACE suddenly makes some sort of sound and sits up.)

HELEN

Trace?

(She runs to him.)

Are you all right? Oh, my god, are you all right?

(He is dazed, disoriented, but he nods.)

Where have you been? What happened to you?

(He doesn't remember, but he still somehow wears the ravages of wherever he has just been. Think: a nightmare you can't quite recall, even though its claws somehow remain in your psyche.)

LANE

Get him up. We need him.

HELEN

What?

LANE

We *need* him. We need everyone who brought Kate here to make her go away.

HELEN

I don't know...

LANE

There's nothing to know. Get him up! Come on, everybody.

JONATHAN

Markus! You, too. Get in here.

LANE

Hold hands! Hold hands!

(They gather around the table.)

Kate Beck. Back into air with you. You do not exist. You are nothing. *Nothing*. Everyone say it.

PHYLLIDA

No. We shouldn't...

ALL

(Except PHYLLIDA)

Nothing. Nothing.

PHYLLIDA

No!! Don't...do this...

ALL

(Except PHYLLIDA)

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

LANE

Is it working? Helen? I don't think it's working.

(He sees the drawing on the table in front of them.)

MARKUS

The drawing. Destroy the drawing! Just...undo everything we did.

LANE

Yes! That makes sense! I guess.

(LANE grabs at the notebook, but MARKUS takes it.)

MARKUS

No. Let Trace do it. Trace needs to destroy the drawing!

(They stare at him.)

I don't know!!

(TRACE takes the notebook and moves to the center of the room. The others take up positions around him. PHYLLIDA watches apprehensively as TRACE crumples and tears the picture.)

ALL

(Except PHYLLIDA)

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Noth...

(Suddenly, TRACE thrashes and makes some sort of sound. HELEN runs to him, then screams and falls.)

HELEN

He's bleeding!

JONATHAN

What?!

(He runs to him and helps HELEN raise him to sitting. There is a bleeding gash on his face.)

MARKUS

Jesus!

(Pandemonium. Everyone jumps back from the table. HELEN pulls a handkerchief from her pocket and applies it to his cheek.)

Check the door. Let's check the fucking door.

(*MARKUS and LANE run to the door. MARKUS can be heard swearing, and then they reappear. HELEN holds TRACE, presses a handkerchief to his cheek.*)

It's the same. The door's the fucking same!

PHYLLIDA

I think you're just making her angry.

JONATHAN

That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make any sense!

PHYLLIDA

Don't try to banish her. Communicate. It's the only way. For whatever reason, we can't go back. We must go forward. Try the automatic writing again.

JONATHAN

Absolutely not. We can't give her any more reality than she already has.

PHYLLIDA

What choice do we have?

LANE

It's getting worse. I'm getting pictures... I can't even describe how horrible... I don't dare close my eyes.

HELEN

Yes. Me, too. And that *pain*, it's like ice inside my skull. Jonathan, you remember how I learned to shut things down? To put up a wall. I can't seem to do that now. Nothing I try...

PHYLLIDA

Well?

JONATHAN

Shit. *All right.* Trace?

(*The look HELEN gives him freezes him.*)

Okay. You're right. No Trace.

PHYLLIDA

Helen! We don't have a choice!

HELEN

You have me. I'll do it.

PHYLLIDA

But you... Do you even do automatic writing?

HELEN

My way. We'll do it my way. I'm going to need an object. Something of hers.

LANE

But she doesn't...

HELEN

Something we can *imagine* is hers.

(She picks up the servée. She is trembling, but determined.)

Like this. Give me your concentration, everyone. I'll be going into trance. Going in as deep as I can.

PHYLLIDA

No. Helen, no...

HELEN

(Preparing)

You said it before. We don't have a choice. Now I'm going to need you to...

PHYLLIDA

NO!!

(She wrenches the servée from HELEN'S grip and retreats to the other end of the room.)

I'm not letting you. It's too...

(Pause. Everyone has turned to stare at her.)

...dangerous.

(JONATHAN crosses toward her, slowly.)

JONATHAN

Talk.

PHYLLIDA

I don't know what you...

(He takes a step toward her and slaps her, full-force, in the face. She rockets several yards and collapses to the floor. Appropriate reactions of shock from group, including ad-libs. PHYLLIDA sits up.)

MARKUS

Whoa!! What the fuck was that?

JONATHAN

Shut up. Phyllida. They say that anger is mostly made of fear. Have you heard that? Well, right now I am more frightened than I've ever been in my life. So if you don't start talking—this exact second—I am going to beat you to death with my bare hands. And I mean that.

MARKUS

What's happening?

(JONATHAN takes another step toward her. She brandishes the servée, then takes in the others' focus on her. She slumps.)

PHYLLIDA

Why not? It's late in the day for lies, I suppose.

(MARKUS grabs a chair and hurls it to the floor.)

MARKUS

WILL SOMEBODY TELL ME WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON??!

PHYLLIDA

You haven't figured it out?

HELEN

Figured *what* out?!

JONATHAN

She's real. Kate Beck is real.

PHYLLIDA

Clever you.

JONATHAN

Who is she?

PHYLLIDA

Why, she's Dennis Whalen's servant girl. His slave. His...concubine. I discovered her existence three months ago. And I haven't been able to get her out of my mind. She was going to be a journal article. Now I think she might be an entire book.

JONATHAN

Why? Why would you do this?

PHYLLIDA

Can't you see? Can't you see? *Historians*. You think it's boring, Helen? Well, you're right. We spend our pathetic days picking through the bones and ashes of the past. The deeds of sale. The cast-off clothes. The ledger entries. The scraps, the fucking... *leftovers* of life. The shit living, breathing people throw in the back of drawers and forget. But we dream, all of us. Oh yes, we're *tortured* by the dream...

HELEN

What dream?

PHYLLIDA

The time machine, of course. To go *back*. We can never have it. But what if...what if the most powerful psychics ever to gather in one room were to concentrate all their energies on bringing the past to *us*! Do you see, Helen? It wouldn't be boring! Not boring at all! "Creating artificial ghosts." Measuring...*electro-magnetic energy*. That's boring!!

HELEN

You lying bitch.

PHYLLIDA

Please don't say that, Helen! I love you. Please. If you knew how much I love you...

(She gets up to run to HELEN and JONATHAN intercepts her, shoving her back.)

JONATHAN

Talk to us, god damn it! Why? Why is she doing this to us? Seeing how you know her better than anybody.

PHYLLIDA

But I don't. Oh, if it was Dennis Whalen, maybe I'd know something about him, but remember, I work in the margins. The nameless ones. The forgotten. Kate Beck lived on this earth for who knows how long and barely left a trace. An entry in an English courthouse. A contract of indenture. And (*pulling out the diary*) several pages in Dennis Whalen's diary.

JONATHAN

Dennis Whalen's...?

PHYLLIDA

Oh, yes. It's his. Let's read, shall we? "Oh, Kate, my little cherub dove, if you only knew how you *revitalize* me." Which, of course, is nineteenth-century for "I'm fucking you regularly." (*To the air*) Isn't that right, Kate? Wasn't your great white master raping you daily? But then, something happens. She stops "revitalizing" him. He stops writing in his diary. And he sets about turning part of his root cellar into a tiny...prison.

HELEN

Prison?

PHYLLIDA

Yes. Behind that big, oak door. There's still the remains of a bed-frame bolted to the wall. The broken remains of a chamber pot, buried about three feet below the dirt floor. Right next to a small...skeleton.

(They react with shock.)

MARKUS

Bullshit.

PHYLLIDA

Oh, it's there, believe me. I just don't know *why*. What did she do to make him lock up his little cherub dove? One day his sex toy, the next his prisoner. Why?

(Unnoticed by the others, TRACE has taken up the sketch-pad and pencil again and begun to draw.)

HELEN

(A realization)

Prisoner?

PHYLLIDA

I'm thinking the same thing. He held her prisoner, she's holding us.

MARKUS

But...why? It's not our fault! We didn't fucking rape her!

PHYLLIDA

I don't think she realizes that.

JONATHAN

We need to communicate. Somehow. Communicate with her...

HELEN

(Softly)

Yes.

(Unnoticed, she picks up the servée and closes her eyes.)

MARKUS

But what the fuck was that voice? Coming out of the phone, coming out of him. That wasn't a girl!

JONATHAN

He's right. God damn it! It still doesn't make any sense.

LANE

Oh my god. Look at my skin. Look at my skin!

MARKUS

What? I don't see anything.

LANE

Right there! The black. The specks. Mold. In my skin. The mold is in my *skin!*

MARKUS

I don't see *anything!*

JONATHAN

We cannot afford to panic. Everybody has to keep it together.

PHYLLIDA

If we could just *talk* to her. Talk to her somehow...

LANE

On my legs, too! Look!

(MARKUS grabs LANE by the collar.)

MARKUS

Dude, there is nothing on your fucking skin! Get it?!

(TRACE holds out a completed picture. JONATHAN notices it first.)

JONATHAN

Trace?

(TRACE hands him the picture. It is a dark blob of a face, vaguely humanoid, strange, disturbing. PHYLLIDA moves closer for a look. MARKUS drags LANE, who whimpers but tries to hold it together. Across the room, HELEN has fallen into a trance.)

Is this the voice? Is this what's talking to us?

(TRACE indicates that he thinks so.)

Who is it? *What* is it? What the fuck is this?!

(HELEN sits upright. There is something very different about her. It's in the way she holds herself perhaps, the expression on her face or the look in her eyes. When she speaks, it is with a light cockney accent.)

HELEN

“Black Henry.”

(PHYLLIDA walks toward her, in shock, the paper still held in front of her.)

PHYLLIDA

Helen?

HELEN

(Pointing at the paper.)

“Black Henry.”

(HELEN catches sight of her pointing hand and examines it with a mixture of fear and wonderment.)

I...am.

PHYLLIDA

(Almost overcome)

Kate? It's you, isn't it? You're here. You're really here.

HELEN

I...am.

(Everyone stares at her in horrified amazement. JONATHAN steps forward.)

JONATHAN

Kate.

(She turns her head to him, oddly, as though trying to figure out the mechanics of the movement.)

Who is “Black Henry?”

HELEN

(Sing-song)

Black spot, black spot. Black spot, worms and rot.

JONATHAN

We don't understand. Who is "Black Henry?" What is Black Henry?

PHYLLIDA

No. *Where* is Black Henry? *Where* is the black spot?

(PHYLLIDA suddenly touches the place on her head that felt cold for HELEN previously. HELEN/KATE turns to her, placing her hand on the exact same spot, and smiles.)

PHYLLIDA

Black Henry is in your...brain? In her brain. That's it. That's it!

JONATHAN

What?

(She runs to the boxes, rummages through and pulls out the old book.)

PHYLLIDA

Seven Types of Dementia. She was...crazy. The voice was...inside her head!

(TRACE rolls onto the floor, in agony.)

MARKUS

What are you saying?

JONATHAN

A schizophrenic will hear voices in her head. Maybe even think she's taking *orders* from them. Like some kind of evil intelligence.

PHYLLIDA

My god. Can you imagine how horrible? Locked in a dark, moldy cellar with nothing but her mental illness for company. Going crazier and crazier. I wonder if he was still raping her then...

HELEN

(Moaning with fear)

He's... He's....

PHYLLIDA

(A realization)

Is that it, Kate? My poor Kate? Did you cut your face so he wouldn't think you were pretty anymore? So he would *stop*?

MARKUS

So you're saying...you have us locked in here with a fucking *schizophrenic ghost*!

HELEN

He's... He's here.... He's *here*...

LANE

There is nothing on my skin. There is nothing...

(He looks at his skin and screams.)

JONATHAN

Stop it! We cannot panic. We cannot afford to panic.

MARKUS

There's something wrong with the air. She's doing something to the air.

HELEN

He's here.

PHYLLIDA

Kate. You are a strong woman. You are *not* shit, you are *not* nothing. And you have a voice now. You are important. You are not ugly. Kate. Please.

(HELEN/KATE turns to PHYLLIDA, and for a second it almost seems she is going to kiss her. The others watch with bated breath, fighting to keep their composure.)

Helen? Yes, that's it, my love. Come back to me. Come back to...

HELEN

(Softly)

Black. Henry.

(Abruptly, the horrible rasping voice starts pouring out of her.)

YOUARESHIT YOUHAVEINSHIT YOURFLESHISROT STINKINGCARCASS
EYESCRAWLARECRAWLINGMAGGOTSEYESAREMAGGOTS...

(TRACE curls into a fetal ball. LANE claws at his arms. MARKUS again runs to the other side of the curtain, where we can hear him smashing himself repeatedly against the door.)

PEELYOURSTINKINGUGLYFLESHFLESHFLESH YOUROTTINGSHIT
YOUROTTINGUGLYYOU SHOULDDIEDIEDIEDIEDIEDIEDIE
PUTRIDSKINISBOILSANDPUSANDUGLYDIEDIEDIEYOU SHIT
YOUROTTINGFACEITSTINKSITSMELLSITSROTTINGFLESHITCRAWLSWITH
FLIES YOURCUNNYCRAWLSWITHFLIESYOUROOZINGFLESH
ITSTINKSITROTSIT...

*(HELEN raises the blade of the servée and prepares to carve her face.
JONATHAN leaps for her and grabs her wrist.)*

JONATHAN

HELEN!

*(The servée clatters to the floor, but HELEN seizes JONATHAN by the
throat with an iron grip and forces him to the floor, all the while staring
straight ahead. He thrashes there, choking. PHYLLIDA tries to pull her
off him.)*

PHYLLIDA

HELEN! PLEASE! STOP IT!

*(HELEN swats her away, sending her flying. She moves back to her
again, picks up the servée.)*

HELEN

YOUR FACE IT BURSTS WITH PUS AND SLIME AND SHIT YOUR FACE IS SHIT
YOUR FACE IS SCABS AND SORES YOURCUNNYCRAWLSWITHFLIES...

PHYLLIDA

STOP IT! HELEN, I'M SORRY. I'M SO SORRY. STOP IT. PLEASE STOP IT, OH
PLEASE STOP IT, STOP IT, *STOP IT!!*

*(PHYLLIDA abruptly plunges the blade into KATE's chest.
The voice stops. HELEN releases JONATHAN'S throat, and he rolls
away, gasping. Almost silence, broken only by the whimpering of the
others as the visions slowly dissipate, then PHYLLIDA begins to wail,
cradling the bloody body of HELEN. JONATHAN crawls over and tries to
administer mouth-to-mouth, but it is hopeless, and it becomes an
anguished kiss. TRACE finally recovers enough to see what's happening
and he moves to her as well. MARKUS staggers in, face bloodied.)*

MARKUS

It's...open. The door's open.

LANE

Open. We can... Is she...?

JONATHAN

She's gone.

(MARKUS gapes. The phone rings, making everyone jump. They all stare for a couple of rings, then MARKUS fearfully picks it up.)

MARKUS

(He listens for a moment.)

Fuck Venus Williams. And fuck you, Stu. Call the cops. Ambulance. Send them to...wherever the fuck we are. They can trace my phone. I'll leave it on.

(He tosses the phone away from him. They all stare vacantly. The lights fade.)

THE END