

LIGHTS IN A FOREST

Writing Sample by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

A Common Lizard crawls over shards of chopped wood. It comes to rest on top of a large log, it's forked tongue flicking in and out.

An old cottage sits in the background, to the side of a large, ominous forest. Windows shimmer as smoke bellows from a chimney. A warm glow emanates from within.

SUPERIMPOSE: Somewhere in England, 1847

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

NORTON (30's) sits at the head of a dining table with a plate of food in front of him. He's handsome yet reserved.

To his side, CHARLIE (7), sits facing a young girl, ELIZA (5). They're tucking into a meal and have nearly finished.

Norton lifts a knife and fork, ready to eat. He pauses, noticing a picture frame at the opposite end of the table. He sighs, looking back and forth at the kids.

NORTON

I thought we agreed to leave her by  
the fireplace?

He looks to Charlie. Charlie looks to Eliza. Eliza looks to the floor with pouted lips.

NORTON (CONT'D)

(to Eliza)

Well? Are you going to offer her  
some food?

Eliza turns her eyes, slowly. Norton smiles at her with a nod. Eliza smiles, sliding her food in front of the picture frame.

The nearly empty plate sits motionless. Norton lets out a diminished laugh.

NORTON (CONT'D)

Just as I thought; she isn't  
hungry.

Eliza giggles.

Norton smiles gently, shooting Charlie a wink.

Charlie takes the picture frame over to a blazing fireplace, setting it on top of the mantelpiece with care.

A Collotype photograph of a beautiful woman (late 20's) is revealed inside the frame.

Norton glances uneasy at the photo, his view broken as Charlie returns to the table. There's an awkward silence.

Norton begins his meal.

The kids are silent, eyes glued to Norton.

NORTON (CONT'D)  
What is it?

Charlie shrugs his shoulders but Eliza doesn't hesitate.

ELIZA  
I miss mummy.

Norton puts down his knife and fork, taking a moment to collect his thoughts.

NORTON  
I know you do, Eliza... So do I.  
And so does Charlie.

Charlie nods in agreement.

NORTON (CONT'D)  
But mummy had to go away, love.

The kids listen carefully to their father.

NORTON (CONT'D)  
She's up in the sky, looking down  
on us. She's all around you... and  
she loves you.

He looks to Charlie.

NORTON (CONT'D)  
Both of you.

ELIZA  
Is she in the picture, daddy?

Norton smiles.

NORTON  
She is... but not the real mummy.  
Real mummy's up in the sky.

Norton nods with a reassuring smile. The kids smile in acceptance.

NORTON (CONT'D)

Right! It's way past your bedtime.  
Let's get this table cleared.

They stand and clear the table, ditching their plates on a kitchen workbench - Norton hasn't touched his food.

NORTON (CONT'D)

Charlie, dishes. Eliza, curtains.

Charlie pulls a boiler from the fireplace and walks it to the kitchen area as Eliza stands on her tiptoes to close the curtains.

Norton watches on with a proud smile as Charlie pours hot water from the boiler and into the basin.

Norton's gaze begins to drift. He finds himself staring at the fireplace. He swallows deeply, losing himself in the pretty eyes of the woman in the photograph.

ELIZA (O.S)

Daddy! It's mummy!

Norton breaks from a trance.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Mummy's in the forest!

Eliza stands on her tiptoes, looking out of the window.

Norton looks on with a dismissive expression. He ruffles Charlie's hair and heads to the window. He crouches down, placing a hand on Eliza's back.

NORTON

What were we just talking about?

Eliza points out of the window with amazement.

ELIZA

Daddy, look!

Norton squints with concern. He peers through the window.

EXT. DARK FOREST - NIGHT

A concoction of multicolored lights cruise eerily through the forest.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Norton and Eliza watch through the window with curious eyes. Charlie's head appears in between them.

CHARLIE  
What is it, dad?

Norton's eyes drift, following the lights as they pulse seductively.

NORTON  
I'm not sure.

He looks at the kids and sees the hope in their little faces.

NORTON (CONT'D)  
But it's not mummy.

He stands straight, taking time to think.

Charlie and Eliza stare up at him with anticipation.

Norton looks to the woman in the photograph once again, deep in thought. He glances back to the window.

EXT. DARK FOREST - NIGHT

The lights are moving away, the intensity diminishing.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Norton looks at his children with a sigh. He moves to the mantelpiece and grasps an oil lantern. He opens it up, revealing a thick wick inside.

NORTON  
Charlie, look after your sister.

The kids fidget with worry.

ELIZA  
Where are you going, daddy?

Norton sets alight a slither of paper over the fire.

NORTON  
Daddy's going into the forest. Help  
your brother finish the dishes.  
I'll be back soon.

He uses the flaming paper to set the lantern ablaze.

CHARLIE  
Into the forest?

NORTON  
It's alright. It looks like  
someone's strayed from the path.

ELIZA  
But when mummy went into the forest  
she never came back...

Norton freezes, closing his eyes for a moment. He sighs and  
throws the tarnished paper into the fire. He clutches the  
lantern but his eyes lock in a gaze--

--The lady in the picture frame stares at him.

He stares back, long and hard. His face fills with concern.

CHARLIE (O.S)  
Dad?

Charlie pulls on the back of Norton's top.

Norton turns to face the kids.

NORTON  
Look, I'm not your mother. I'll be  
back in a few minutes, I promise.

He ruffles Charlie's hair and gives Eliza a kiss. He moves  
across the room with the lantern and opens the front door.

ELIZA (O.S.)  
Watch out for the monster.

Norton stops in the doorway; the darkness outside contrasts  
with the warm interior. He turns, looking to Charlie with a  
glare.

Charlie looks to the floor.

NORTON  
There's no such thing as monsters,  
Eliza.

ELIZA  
But I saw it through the window.

Norton frowns, waving a dismissive arm.

NORTON  
Help your brother with the dishes.  
I'll be back soon.