

ANASTASIA'S PYRAMID

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BOAT - MOVING - DAY

SUPER: THE COAST OF NEW ENGLAND, 1975

It's a windy, cloudy day. An old skiff makes its way through the choppy sea.

ALICE, 30, a woman of thin build, long dark hair and soft features wearing warm clothes stands near the bow of the boat. A couple of suitcases rest at her feet.

In the stern, a BOATMAN, 70, with a weather-beaten face and surly manner, holds the handle of the outboard motor.

Alice notices something blurry in the distance, a piece of land that could be a small island.

ALICE

Yes, I think I see it now.

The boatman glances up at the sky while slowing the skiff down.

BOATMAN

If we hurry, you may still escape the storm, ma'am.

Alice glances up; she sees dark, dense clouds.

BOATMAN

Although it probably won't be raining there; when it rains in the town, the island doesn't see a drop.

She looks at him in surprise.

ALICE

How come?

The boatman takes his time before giving an answer.

BOATMAN

I don't have an answer for that. It just happens. That place is quite peculiar...

The boatman notices that his words have left an impression on Alice.

BOATMAN

What's sure is that you are going to meet a couple of months' fog. It's just another of the island's "privileges".

Alice looks at him in incredulity, as if thinking that he is just trying to scare her for fun.

BOATMAN

We don't know why either. I guess you'll find out.

The boatman guns the outboard motor and the boat moves faster. Alice turns back towards the island...

EXT. PIER/BEACH - DAY

A beach with light colored sand. At one edge of the shoreline, there is a pier. The sky is clear now.

BOATMAN

Didn't I tell you? Clear sky.

The skiff approaches the pier and the boatman moors the boat while Alice climbs up the ladder to the pier.

Once the boatman has handed up her luggage, Alice pulls out her wallet from inside her purse and offers him a couple bills.

BOATMAN

No need, it's already been taken care of.

ALICE

All the same, take it. You have been very kind.

The boatman looks at the bills with no interest while untying the mooring rope. Then he goes back to the stern and starts the motor.

BOATMAN

Take care of yourself, young lady.

After a few seconds, the skiff is quickly moving away from the pier.

Alice puts the bills back in her wallet. Then her eyes meet a wallet picture of her, looking some years younger, with a smiling mature couple, her mother and father.

She watches the photo for a few instants, a gloomy look in her face.

After placing the wallet back in her purse, Alice picks up her things and starts walking along the pier. Besides the sandy beach, most of the island is made up of dry bushes and stones.

Farther inland, on the crest of a small hill, stands a vast mansion protected by a wrought iron fence.

As soon as she reaches the beach, Alice crouches down and picks up a fistful of sand. She smiles.

The quiet is broken by loud BARKING.

In the distance, TWO HUGE BLACK DOBERMAN DOGS are running towards her. They bark as they show their teeth.

Scared, Alice stands up and takes a few steps back. Then she stumbles against one of the posts of the pier and falls on the ground.

The dogs keep coming closer. They are but a few yards away. She covers her face with her arms...

MAN (O.S.)

Freund!

The dogs stop still right in front of Alice, who lowers her arms while they start sniffing at her curiously.

Someone offers his hand to her.

It's EDMUND, 50, an elegant man with intensely blue eyes. The silk handkerchief tied around his neck grants him a certain distinction. He looks at her worriedly.

EDMUND

Are you alright?

Alice nods. Edmund helps her up.

EDMUND

I just had to say "Freund". That is "friend" in German. They obey immediately.

ALICE

(annoyed)

Well, I couldn't know that.

EDMUND

I apologize, I expected you a bit later. Why did you come so soon?

The dogs approach Edmund, who caresses them.

ALICE

The boatman... I don't really know his name...

EDMUND

(joking)

Nobody actually knows his name.

ALICE

Well, he said that a huge storm was coming, so we-

EDMUND

-The sailors and their stories about storms! He just wanted to be back in town to be the first to get to the local pub!

Edmund laughs as she smiles.

EDMUND

I'm Edmund Welcker, the person who hired you and the owner of all this.

ALICE

Alice. Alice Wilkinson.

They shake their hands.

EDMUND

Welcome home, Alice. I must say that your references are really impressive.

Alice nods, gratefully. Edmund examines his right hand, a bit sore.

EDMUND

And I see you know how to shake hands like men. You even hurt me a little... Oh, my God... You... You...

Shocked, Edmund shows her his hand. The top half of his little finger is amputated.

EDMUND

You tore off half of my finger!

Alice looks at him, bewildered. An instant later, Edmund starts roaring with laughter.

EDMUND

It's just a bad joke I usually make to newcomers.

Alice smiles, out of politeness.

EDMUND

I lost it many years ago, a silly accident at home.

Edmund picks up one of her suitcases.

EDMUND

Honestly, I was really thrilled you accepted. I had gone through several candidates the agency sent over, but your case was totally different...

(beat)

I loved your profile from the very beginning! And it even had a picture to prove your beauty!

ALICE

(blushing)

Thank you. Well, yes, I think I'm good with children. At least that is the opinion of the people I've worked with.

EDMUND

Important people, certainly.

ALICE

Yes, I've been lucky, especially after...

Alice stops herself from finishing the sentence.

EDMUND

Oh, that... Yes, I remember reading about your parents' loss. Was it... a couple of years ago?

ALICE

Two years and three months.

Edmund remains in silence for a second.

EDMUND

Well, that's another reason why this will be your place. We fully understand you. In our family, we also have our own tragedy.

Edmund looks thoughtful. She stares at him expectantly, but he just smiles.

EDMUND

Come on, grab that suitcase and come with me.

Alice picks up the second suitcase and they start walking up a path that leads to the top of the hill.

EDMUND

And, of course, consider yourself on your own island.

They laugh briefly at his remark.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

A magnificent garden flourishes behind the iron fence. It encompasses well trimmed grass, a line of bushy trees and a multitude of different plants and flowers.

Behind it is a light brick mansion of large dimensions, which stands out for the circular window that crowns its façade.

Edmund and Alice step into the garden. As he ties the dogs up, she smiles while looking at the surroundings.

EDMUND

Beautiful and lush, isn't it?

ALICE

Yes, it could be a picture on a postcard.

EDMUND

(slyly)

Pay attention.

Edmund bends down and pulls out a blade of grass. Then he burns it with a lighter. The blade melts like plastic.

EDMUND

Disappointed?

ALICE

Well-

EDMUND

-Don't mistake, not even weeds would grow here. We get all the fog in the world but not a drop of water.

Surprised, Alice looks around as Edmund drops the blade of artificial grass and takes one of the sand paths that crisscross the garden. Then she follows him.

INT. HALL - DAY

Edmund and Alice enter through the main door and step into a large hall decorated with several paintings of naval subjects and rows of vases and candelabra.

EDMUND

My little and humble lair...

Alice sets her suitcase down on the floor while looking around in wonder. Edmund smiles proudly.

The sliding doors off to one side of the hall open and behind them appear a middle-aged woman, FRAU SCHILLER, 55, two children, NICHOLAS, 8, and SARAH, 5, and two adults, NORMAN, 60, and ADRIANNE, 60.

They all smile tensely as they move closer to Edmund and Alice.

EDMUND

...and my lovely and great family.

Alice excitedly smiles while gesturing with her head greeting them all.

ALICE

It's a pleasure to meet all of you.

Edmund pushes her gently toward Frau Schiller, a lady with stony gray eyes wearing an elegant and flowery dress.

EDMUND

Frau Schiller, our eternally young governess, an institution in our family... This is Alice.

Alice shakes Frau Schiller's hand while smiling.

ALICE

Nice to meet you, Frau Schiller, I hope we become good friends.

Frau Schiller doesn't answer, just smiles back strangely.

EDMUND

I'm sorry, Alice, but she only speaks German. She's been with me since I was a child, but I still have not got managed to convince her to learn our language.

ALICE

No problem, I'm sure we'll find a way to understand each other.

EDMUND

(smiling)

I wish you the best of luck with it. You know, Germanic arrogance is very stubborn.

Edmund directs his attention to the children. Nicholas is thin and pale, his black hair minutely combed with the parting to one side. Sarah is a round, pink faced little girl wearing a flower stamped dress; an exact copy of the one Frau Schiller wears.

EDMUND

My two children, the Lords of the Castle... The little one is Sarah. She's always just behind Frau Schiller, she's so devoted to her. The boy is Nicholas. He's serious, studious... But he also likes to have fun, of course.

(to them)

C'mon, greet your new tutor.

Nicholas and Sarah approach Alice, who opens her arms to hug them.

ALICE

Hello! You don't know how much I was looking forward to meeting-

The children solemnly offer her their hands. A bit taken aback, Alice shakes them.

EDMUND

Excuse them, they're always a bit cautious at first; but once they trust you, they're loving and obedient.

ALICE

I understand. Sometimes I'm a little too... effusive.

Edmund, satisfied, caresses the children and leads her toward Norman and Adrianne.

EDMUND

And lastly, let me introduce our household service: Norman and Adrianne, husband and wife. They are efficient and, best of all, perfectionists. They haven't been long with us, but they're almost part of the family.

Norman is a thin man with little hair and a moustache laced with white hairs. Adrianne is a short, chubby woman, her hair peppered with white. They both wear stalwart gray clothes. Alice shakes their hands.

EDMUND

Would you like to see your room, Alice?

ALICE

Sure.

EDMUND

Let's go then.

The servants pick up Alice's luggage and start ascending the marble staircase leading to the upper floor. Edmund and Alice follow them.

INT. HALLWAY/ALICE'S ROOM - DAY

Edmund and Alice walk down a hallway with walls covered in red velvet. The servants stand by a door on the right side, the only one of the six that is open.

EDMUND

(to them)

Very well, you may go. I'll show her the room.

Adrianne and Norman leave.

EDMUND

This floor holds the library, the children's study room and all the service bedrooms. This one is yours, wall to wall with Frau Schiller's, so if you suffer from night terrors, knock on the wall and she'll be there immediately to soothe you.

Edmund laughs out loud while Alice smiles. Then she fixes her gaze on the narrow staircase leading up to the third floor at the far end of the hallway.

EDMUND

Right in front is the main bathroom and the-

Edmund notices that she's staring at the staircase.

EDMUND

Frau Schiller is the only servant allowed to climb those stairs. My family and I live up there.

Edmund takes a deep breath.

EDMUND

I don't want to seem harsh, but there's a rule in this house that you shouldn't forget: rooms are sacred and inviolable spaces.

Alice nods, a bit intimidated. Then Edmund smiles and gently pushes her into her bedroom...

It's a sober room comprising a bed, a mirrored wardrobe and a desk. A large window with velvet drapes occupies part of the far wall.

EDMUND

Go ahead and make yourself at home. I hope you like your room. I'll come up later to take you for a walk.

ALICE

Thank you, Edmund. For me... this is like staying at a hotel.

EDMUND

You'll be far better off than in any hotel, take my word for it. You'll meet family.

Edmund leaves. Alice examines the room and smiles. Then she starts unpacking.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Dressed for a chilly afternoon, Edmund and Alice walk near the ocean shore. The wind blows strongly.

EDMUND

I know this won't sound very professional, but... Well, I must confess that the first thing I noticed about you was your hair. It's so long and silky...

Alice looks down, embarrassed.

EDMUND

Sorry, I'm making you feel uncomfortable. I'm a brute.

ALICE

Oh, no, don't worry.

Edmund pulls a small cigar from his pocket and offers it to her.

EDMUND

Do you smoke?

ALICE

No, thank you.

EDMUND

I usually don't, only on certain occasions. Like this one.

After lighting the cigar, Edmund takes a deep puff.

EDMUND

Come with me, I want to show you something.

Edmund takes a path leading to the rockier area of the beach. Alice follows him.

EXT. BREAKER - DAY

Edmund and Alice arrive at a breaker placed a bit beyond the pier. Between the rocks, there's an area of sand and, on it, stands a pyramid of about ten feet; some of its stones have fallen off.

ALICE

(amazed)

Wow, this is fantastic...

EDMUND

Do you like it?

ALICE

Yes, sure, I love it!

A few yards from it, a red wooden boat swings among the unruly waves. A rope tied to an iron post keeps it from drifting out to sea.

They stop in front of the pyramid. Edmund grows serious and points at two of the lower vertexes of the monument.

EDMUND

This is where we found her body;
her head was to this side, her
feet to that one...

(beat)

Anastasia, my twelve-year-old
daughter; she drowned in these
waters five years ago.

Alice's smile disappears and is replaced by stupefaction.

ALICE

Oh, my God, I'm so sorry...

EDMUND

It's a tribute to her. I told you
that we also had our own tragedy.

Alice steps closer to the pyramid to examine it.

EDMUND

I'd love to show you it inside,
but I think it'd be an offense to
my daughter's memory. Her remains
lie there. We never go inside.

ALICE

Don't worry, I understand.

There is an inscription on the lintel of the entrance, some hieroglyphics.

Edmund notices that she Alice staring at them with all her interest, obviously not understanding.

EDMUND

Here lies the purest soul ever known.

Alice turns to look at him.

EDMUND

Your eyes were looking for a translation and I gave them one.

ALICE

Why a pyramid?

Edmund smiles. He doesn't seem eager to give an answer.

EDMUND

Well, that's quite a story. Egypt is my greatest passion... Anyway, I ask you to not talk to anyone about Anastasia. It was a hard blow and still hurts to remember.

Alice nods, understanding. Then she picks up one of the pyramid's fallen stones and tries to put it back in its place.

EDMUND

Don't bother. It'll just fall again as soon as the tide comes in.

Edmund grabs the stone out of her hands.

EDMUND

They're like memories; if they're not strongly attached they easily disappear...

He lets the stone slip from his hand. Alice looks beyond the pyramid, towards the red boat.

ALICE

And that boat?

EDMUND

The one from the accident. One afternoon she decided to go out alone and the sea betrayed her.

ALICE

Don't you have any bigger boat?
It might be useful if you need-

EDMUND

-A bigger boat? What for? Here
we've got everything we need.

Alice doesn't replay. She doesn't seem to be quite
convinced by the answer.

EDMUND

And if I want to go to the
mainland, I just have to phone
the village and one of those
drunkards is here in an hour.

Edmund starts to walk towards the beach while Alice gazes
again at the pyramid.

EDMUND

C'mon, I'll show you the rest of
the island.

She follows him.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a spacious dining room. There's a picture window in
one of the walls that gives onto the colorful garden. On
the opposite wall hangs a reproduction of Botticelli's
"The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti".

The centre of the room is occupied by a rectangular table
that Edmund presides. To his left are Frau Schiller and
Sarah; to his right, Alice and Nicholas. Norman finishes
serving a fish pudding.

NORMAN

Bon appétit.

Norman retires. They begin to eat.

EDMUND

As I was saying, an educator with
no work is something intolerable.
It's not a question of supply and
demand; culture must be imposed,
not demanded. And there are many
adults that require it even more
than the children.

ALICE

I'm afraid not everyone would
agree to that.

EDMUND

Yes, I know. Every time I leave this piece of rock, I feel like I'm being bombarded by stupidity. That's why I'm not taking my kids to any school. I want to have the control of their education.

ALICE

Well, we'll have to trust in the next generations.

Edmund looks proudly at Nicholas and Sarah.

EDMUND

These two children will be one of the few signs of intelligent life of the future, I can assure you. Salvation lays in isolation. It may sound a bit extreme, but it's the truth.

Alice slightly lifts her eyebrows, indicating her doubts.

EDMUND

We're a very special family. And our happiness resides in that uniqueness, right?

Edmund smiles at the children, who nod with cold smiles.

EDMUND

Is there anyone waiting for you on the mainland, Alice? I mean... perhaps a boyfriend.

Alice hesitates, surprised by the question.

ALICE

There was, but... Well, it didn't work out.

EDMUND

Oh, what a shame! I also have experienced the dark side of love. But why remember that? What is truly important is friendship. Sure you have good friends.

ALICE

Yes, I guess... Anyway, part of what appealed to me about this job was the chance to meet new people and enjoy the feeling of family.

EDMUND

That's wonderful!

ALICE

Besides, recent years have been hard since my parents passed away and it'll be good for me to spend some time in a place like this.

EDMUND

No doubt about it, you'll hardly find in the world a quieter place than this remote islet.

ALICE

By the way, do you have a way to contact-?

EDMUND

-No.

Alice remains quiet, almost intimidated.

EDMUND

We just don't need to contact anyone. Telephone is just for emergencies. I go over to the town once a week, usually for business or to visit a friend. But if you wish to contact someone, you can use the most traditional method: by letter. Write as many as you wish to, I'll send them.

ALICE

All right, then I'll write.

Standing beside the table, Frau Schiller doesn't seem to have enjoyed the conversation.

FRAU SCHILLER

Los, weniger reden und mehr essen.

Edmund and Nicholas laugh.

EDMUND

She says that if we don't stop chattering up a storm, we'll be having dessert for breakfast.

Alice looks around at the plates on the table. Everyone but Edmund and she have finished. They share a laugh.

ALICE

(standing up)

Anyway, I'm more tired than hungry. I might go to my room now.

Alice kisses the children good night.

ALICE
Are you ready for our first class
tomorrow morning?

The children nod, smiling.

ALICE
What do you want to start with?

EDMUND
(harshly)
They cannot have an opinion on
that.

Alice, surprised, turns to look at him.

EDMUND
I want adults to have the control
of their education, not the other
way round. Remember.

ALICE
Sorry, it was just a-

EDMUND
-Please never ask them.

ALICE
All right, I get it. Good night,
then.

Alice leaves.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

A bathroom tiled in pinkish tones. Alice finishes rinsing her mouth at the sink. Then she pulls out a bottle of ELAVIL 100mg from her robe pocket and watches it. The word "Antidepressant" is clearly displayed on the label.

Alice opens the bottle, takes out a couple of round, PINK PILLS and swallows them.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Alice leaves the bathroom. A short, low MOAN is heard. It seems to come from the third floor.

Alice turns to look at the staircase leading up to the upper floor. After some hesitation, she approaches the stairs...

EVEN LOUDER MOANS that thrill her.

Everything is dark there. There is a closed door at the top of the staircase. Alice watches it. Then she puts her foot on the first step..

EDMUND (O.S.)
And the sleepless princess with
long, shiny hair..

Startled, Alice turns around. Edmund is behind her.

EDMUND (CONT'D)
...started climbing the stairs to
the castle's tower. Are you
looking for something?

ALICE
No, just heard.. I heard something
strange, like someone-

EDMUND
-This old house is the kingdom of
strange noises, my friend. Don't
pay too much attention to them or
you'll end up going insane.

ALICE
Okay, just-

EDMUND
-Good night, Alice.

Alice notices that a key is tied to Edmund's neck.

ALICE
Yes, good night.

Edmund goes up the stairs and uses the key to open the third floor door. Alice walks back to her bedroom.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alice turns the lights off and starts undressing..

Muddled MOANS coming from Frau Schiller's room are heard. Soon they turn into SOBS.

Alice, surprised, approaches the wall. Then she picks up a glass from the night table and places it against the wall. She puts her ear to it and listens carefully..

She accidentally lets the glass slip from her grasp. It falls to the floor SHATTERING into pieces. And the sobs cease immediately..

Complete silence.

Alice starts to gather the broken pieces of glass...

A CREAKING noise coming from the door to Frau Schiller's room is heard. Then FOOTSTEPS in the hallway...

The steps stop just outside the door to Alice's room. She waits, expectantly. Then the door handle starts to turn...

Alice quickly locks the door. The handle keeps turning until it can't go further. A few instants later, it returns to its original position.

Seconds go by in silence. Alice lingers next to the door...

Footsteps again, retracing their steps. The door to Frau Schiller's room SLAMS shut.

Alice blinks, startled.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

A large library decorated with Egyptian sculptures and ornaments; three of its walls are covered with bookcases full of books, a huge section is devoted to Egypt.

The last wall contains a bay window that gives onto the garden. In the middle of the room there are a couple of reading tables.

Already dressed, Alice is sipping from a cup of coffee while examining the rows of books on the shelves. She takes one, an old book with worn down covers.

EDMUND (O.S.)

"The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" by
L. Frank Baum. Nineteen hundred.

Alice, surprised, turns around. Edmund is standing in the doorway wearing a robe. He smiles as he approaches her.

EDMUND

It's a first edition printing. I
bought it at an auction in New
York.

ALICE

How did you recognize it from
there?

EDMUND

It's quite simple; by its place,
by the color of the covers and,
most importantly, by its sound.

ALICE

Its sound?

EDMUND

Every book has its own sound when you take it. It grazes against the shelf, against other books... It's like a noiseless buzz, and different in each case. Your ear must be finely tuned to hear it.

Alice, still surprised, caresses the book's cover with her fingertips.

EDMUND

I thought that we had a perfectly equipped library in the lessons' room.

ALICE

Oh, yes, I've already checked it. It's impressive. But I just missed something lighter, like children's fiction. I was thinking of reading them aloud at the beginning of every lesson, and this book...

(nostalgic)

When I was a child I saw the film and I just loved Judy Garland. I never did get around to reading the book, though. Somewhere along the way I guess I just stopped believing in fairy tales... Have you read it?

EDMUND

Some time ago, but it's not worth it, just silly things for kids... Have you prepared the class?

ALICE

Sure, though it will just be a general overview.

Edmund nods, satisfied, and he starts leaving.

ALICE

You must be an expert in Egyptian art.

Edmund turns, looking self-confident.

EDMUND

Well, certainly I-

ALICE

-One of my cousins is working on the foundation deposit of Hatshepsut... I hope I have pronounced it right!

Edmund nods, but he cannot hide how uncomfortable he feels with the topic. No words come to his mouth.

ALICE

His name is Michael Flinders. He has written a lot on Egyptian art.

EDMUND

Then... I might have some of his works around...

ALICE

If you ever met, I'm sure you'd have a wonderful time discussing about your common passion.

Edmund nods again while smiling, uneasy.

EDMUND

Well, I'm going upstairs to dress. The children should be down any minute now.

Edmund leaves. Alice opens the book and notices that there is a handwritten dedication on the first page...

A discreet CLEARING OF THROAT is heard. Alice, surprised, turns around...

Frau Schiller is now standing in the doorway, and staring at her with a grimacing face.

ALICE

Oh, Frau Schiller, you startled me a bit.

Alice smiles and walks over to her, but Frau Schiller leaves abruptly.

INT. STUDY ROOM - DAY

It's a neat and tidy study room filled with shelves of books and educational toys.

Alice and Nicholas are seated at a round table in the center of the room. She is in the middle of her lecture and the boy watches her attentively. Sarah is drawing a picture on a smaller table.

ALICE

...And between nineteen fourteen
and nineteen eighteen there was a
great war, the First World War.
Germany and its allies not only
lost the war, but were also
harshly punished-

NICHOLAS

-The Versailles Treaty, the Saint
Germaine one, and the treaties of
Trianon, Neuilly and Sevres.

Alice looks at the boy in surprise.

ALICE

I see you're really keen on
History. Did your former tutor
teach you that?

NICHOLAS

No, my father did. He likes very
much to teach me about History.
He says that there are always
good guys and bad guys.

ALICE

(skeptic)

And who are the good ones?

EDMUND (O.S.)

Those who throw out the old and
bring in the new!

They turn towards the study room door. Edmund, dressed
and smiling, approaches the table.

EDMUND

Those capable of moving people,
of taking them from the apathy of
their lives; those are the good
ones, right, Nicholas?

Nicholas smiles while nodding with conviction.

EDMUND

(to Alice)

How is everything going? I'm sure
you have noticed the boy has the
basics down.

ALICE

Yes, it does seem so.

EDMUND

And he's still half asleep...

(MORE)

EDMUND (CONT'D)

He sleeps a lot, you know? But it's not due to laziness, he just tires easily. His brain, however, is strong as stone; and that is what's truly important.

Edmund caresses the back of his son's neck.

EDMUND

If I had taken him to school, his good talent would have been lost. Nowadays, schools have lost all respect for education. You know, all those alternative schools expanding like mushrooms...

ALICE

Well, some make a good-

EDMUND

-Yes, they're turning education into a jungle. But a son of mine deserves better than to be turned into a monkey.

Edmund starts mimicking the gestures and movements of a primate. Nicholas and Sarah watch him, laughing, while Alice smiles. Finally, he leaves.

ALICE

Before the break, I want to read to you a fascinating book...

Alice picks up "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" novel and stands up.

ALICE

In every lesson, we'll spend at least twenty minutes reading aloud.

Alice opens the book and mentally reads the dedication on the first page. It says: "To my beloved wife, a book as beautiful as her. I love you." Below it is an illegible signature. Alice remains quiet for a while.

NICHOLAS

When does it start?

ALICE

Right now, dear. I'm sorry.

Alice starts reading aloud. The kids listen to her with attention.

INT. DINING ROOM/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alice, her hair in a bun, and the family are standing around the dining room table. In its centre there is a cake with six candles.

With the help of Edmund, Sarah bends over the candles and blows hard, putting them out. The family claps loudly.

EDMUND
Happy birthday, my treasure...

Edmund kisses her daughter. Then he gently takes her chin between his fingers and turns her face toward Alice.

EDMUND
Isn't she a beauty? Look at her eyes, her hair... Just as shiny as yours, Alice!

Alice caresses Sarah's cheek.

ALICE
You didn't tell me that today was her birthday. I'd have prepared something special for her.

Edmund ignores her remark and glances at the "The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti" painting.

EDMUND
Even Botticelli himself would have sold his soul to the devil to paint her.

Alice turns toward the painting and watches one of the panels: A medieval knight on horseback, with his sword drawn, pursues a naked woman.

ALICE
Hopefully in a less tragic setting..

Edmund looks at the painting while Frau Schiller starts cutting the cake with a big kitchen knife.

EDMUND
Tragic? Do you really perceive this painting as tragic?

ALICE
Well, it appears to be so.

EDMUND
You're wrong, my friend.
(MORE)

EDMUND (CONT'D)

It's a comical representation of what a man is capable of doing when he loves a woman, and it's inspired by one of Decameron's tales. You're not going to say Boccaccio wrote tragedies, are you?

ALICE

I apologize, I didn't know.

EDMUND

I bought this copy several years ago. Now I'm searching for one of the fourth panel. Did you know that the original painting actually comprised four panels?

ALICE

I'm not an expert, I'm afraid.

EDMUND

Then, what better way to learn than with this wonder? Study it closely, it's well worth it.

Edmund turns back to the table.

EDMUND

Geben Sie mir das Messer, Frau Schiller.

Frau Schiller gives him the knife. He keeps cutting the cake while Alice studies the painting:

Hunting dogs snap at the woman's thighs and buttocks...

The mediaeval knight takes the woman's innards from her open belly...

Alice gazes at the painting with skepticism, incapable of seeing the humorous vein...

LOUD MOANS AND GROANS coming from an upper floor are heard.

Alice, surprised, raises her eyes to the ceiling. Frau Schiller and Nicholas lower their heads while Sarah's mouth drops open.

Edmund remains stock still, the knife trembling in his hand.

SARAH

Mommy...

Alice, dumbfounded, looks at the girl. Edmund, noticing his uneasiness, approaches her.

ALICE

They're the same moans coming
from the top floor I heard last
night. Is anyone sick?

EDMUND

(nervously)

It's... It's my wife, Eleanor. I
hadn't spoken of her yet, had I?

Alice shakes her head.

EDMUND

My apologies... She's in a very bad
physical and mental condition;
that's why she must be confined.
Unfortunately, she never quite
recovered from Anast... Well, you
already know.

ALICE

I understand. I'm very sorry.

Edmund smiles, gratefully.

MORE MOANS AND GROANS coming from the third floor are
heard. Edmund drops the knife on the table and gestures
for Frau Schiller.

EDMUND

Musik!

Frau Schiller and the children smile widely as they get
up. After crossing the hall, she opens the sliding doors
to the living room...

It's an elegant, spacious room with armchairs, fireplace
and a coffee table. A bay window occupies a sidewall,
next to it stands a grand piano.

EVEN LOUDER MOANS and GROANS. Alice raises again her eyes
to the ceiling.

ALICE

(to Edmund)

If you ever want me to-

EDMUND

-I want you to be a good tutor
for my children, nothing else.
For the moment, at least.

Alice nods. Frau Schiller sits at the piano and starts playing an upbeat GERMAN FOLK SONG as the children start to dance holding hands. Alice watches them.

Eclipsed by the music, the moans stop.

EDMUND

(approaching her)

The bun looks great on you. It looks... classic, and you know I'm very found of classical things.

Alice feels uncomfortable. Then he pulls a cigar from his pocket and lights it. After taking a deep puff, he smiles while looking at his family.

EDMUND

You'd never met such a happy family, had you?

INT. ALICE'S ROOM/HALLWAY - NIGHT

Seated at the desk, Alice finishes writing a letter and puts it in an envelope...

The bedroom window flies open.

Startled, Alice jumps in her seat. When she recovers, she stands up and goes over to the window. Before closing it, she looks down towards the garden...

Beyond the gate, a TALL SHADOWY FIGURE makes its way through the brushes and walks down the path toward the beach. A moment later, whoever it is disappears.

After some hesitating, Alice closes the window...

There is something scribbled on the steamy pane. It seems to be a word: TOD

She stares at the word, uneasy...

The SLAM OF A WINDOW and CREAKING STEPS in the corridor are heard.

Alice, alarmed, runs to the door and opens it. She meets Edmund, perspiring, his hair is ruffled.

ALICE

Edmund?

Edmund stares at Alice's body, which looks gorgeous in her dressing gown. Automatically, she covers her body as much as she can with her arms.

EDMUND

(hesitating)

One of the shutters just... wrecked with the wind. I came downstairs to adjust it. These old houses have some bad points, too. I'll tell Norman to repair it first thing in the morning.

Alice stares at him in silence, unconvinced. She tries to peer into the hallway, but he gently pushes her back.

EDMUND

Go back and rest. Today has been quite a day for you, I guess.

Edmund starts leaving.

ALICE

Please, wait a minute.

Edmund turns to look at her.

ALICE

I've... I've had the impression of seeing someone outside, some kind of shadowy figure hanging around the house... Is there anyone in the island, apart from us?

EDMUND

All the inhabitants of this little island are inside the walls of this house, my friend, so that didn't happen. This evil weather can play tricks on our eyes.

He takes a last and sneaky look at Alice's body.

EDMUND

Good night, Alice.

Edmund leaves. Alice enters back her room and looks at herself in the mirror. She looks weary. Then she pours herself a glass of water and swallows some pink pills.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Alice strolls through the garden. She sees Sarah swinging on a tire hanging from a tree while Frau Schiller pushes her. They both laugh. Nicholas is playing with a ball.

ALICE
Good morning, kids!

Sarah smiles at her while waving her hand. Nicholas stops playing and approaches her, looking really excited.

NICHOLAS
Are you reading us "The Wizard of Oz" again?

ALICE
Did you enjoy it?

NICHOLAS
Very much! And Sarah, too!

Alice's face enlightens with satisfaction.

ALICE
Then we'll have to keep on reading.

Alice caresses his head.

ALICE
How do you say "Good Morning" in German?

NICHOLAS
Guten Morgen!

ALICE
(with a bad accent)
Guten Morgen! Okay, thanks.

Nicholas leaves and resumes his playing with the ball as Alice approaches Frau Schiller.

ALICE
Guten Morgen, Frau Schiller!

Frau Schiller's smile turns to a grim expression while looking away. Alice notices that she has a lace on her neck just like Edmund's, the key to access the third floor. No answer from her.

A bit disappointed, Alice walks over to Norman, crouched down and replacing parts of fake grass.

ALICE
Good morning, Norman.

Norman turns and glances at her.

NORMAN

Good morning, Mrs. Wilkinson.

ALICE

It's a shame that nothing grows here, isn't it?

NORMAN

Where?

ALICE

In the island.

NORMAN

Well, I don't entirely agree with that... We have plenty of rain in spring, and the soil is not that bad.

ALICE

(surprised)

I thought it never rained here.

NORMAN

You'll see for yourself.

Alice glances up at the windows of the second floor.

ALICE

Have you already fixed the shutter?

NORMAN

What shutter?

Alice points at the second floor windows.

ALICE

The second floor; the wind tore off one of the windows' shutters last night.

Norman glances at the windows, confused.

NORMAN

I haven't repaired any shutter, and it doesn't seem to be any broken.

ALICE

You sure? Last night-

NORMAN

-If it were broken, Mr. Welcker would have told me.

Alice glances back up at the windows and purses her lips in confusion. Then she politely smiles and goes back to the place where the kids are playing.

ALICE

Ok, kids! Break is over, time for our lessons!

EXT. PIER - DAY

Norman loads a suitcase and a briefcase on a hired yacht while Alice hands Edmund a couple envelopes. A different boatman, YOUNG BOATMAN, 30, is leaned against the railing of the ship smiling at her.

ALICE

(to Edmund)

Would you mind mailing these letters for me?

Edmund takes the envelopes and glances over them quickly.

EDMUND

Family?

ALICE

No, I'm afraid I don't have a close relationship with my relatives... One is for a friend, Mark; and the other for my former employer, a letter of thanks.

Edmund pockets them and grasps her by the shoulder.

EDMUND

Sorry to hear that, having family is very important for all.

(smiling)

In any case, don't forget that on this island you have one.

ALICE

(smiling)

Thanks. You don't know how good it makes me feel to hear that.

Norman steps off the boat.

NORMAN

All set, sir.

EDMUND

(to Alice)

Well, I must get going.

(MORE)

EDMUND (CONT'D)

Business is business. If you don't closely watch your properties, they get robbed.

NORMAN

Have a good trip, sir.

EDMUND

Thank you, you may leave.

Norman leaves while the young boatman bends down and starts to untie a rope from the pier.

ALICE

Safe trip.

Alice tries to leave too, but Edmund gently grabs her by her arm.

EDMUND

One more thing, Alice... I saw you this morning talking with Norman in the garden, right?

ALICE

Yes, I was asking-

EDMUND

-No, please, you don't have to explain anything to me. I just want to warn you not to pay too much attention to him. I guess that by now you must have noticed that he has a... well, a drinking problem.

(beat)

All drunkards have short term memory lapses. In a while, he may not even remember that I've left. But he's loyal and hard worker, otherwise I'd have got rid of a man with such... weaknesses.

Alice nods, surprised. The boatman finishes untying the rope and Edmund starts climbing the yacht's ladder. From the deck, he turns to look down at her.

EDMUND

By the way, I think I found the explanation to your mystery figure. It was probably Norman having one of... his nights. See you tomorrow! Take good care of my kids!

ALICE
Is there anything I can do for
your wife while you're gone?

Edmund's face quickly grows serious.

EDMUND
There's no reason why you should
enter my wife's room, Alice.

ALICE
I didn't mean to do that, I just-

EDMUND
-Remember the rule: our rooms are
sacred and inviolable spaces. Only
Frau Schiller has permission to
assist my wife in my absence.

Alice doesn't answer. They stare at each other. After a few seconds, the boat is moving away from the pier. She turns on her back.

ON THE BOAT'S DECK (SECONDS LATER)

Edmund opens the letters to check them out. After reading them for a while, he tears the letters up and throws them overboard.

EXT. BREAKER - DAY

Alice reaches the breaker where the pyramid stands. After moving closer to it, she pulls a notebook from her pocket and writes down the pictures of the hieroglyphic.

A few instants later, Alice pulls out her notebook and fixes her gaze on the pyramid's cracked wood door. Then she reaches out and cautiously pushes the door handle...

Several stones fall from the top of the pyramid, scaring her. She changes her mind and leaves.

INT. STUDY ROOM - DAY

Alice finishes writing some mathematical problems in an exercise book at the table while Nicholas watches her and Sarah draws a tall man by a shore.

ALICE
(to Nicholas)
Here you go, let me know when you
have finished.

Alice hands the exercise book to him. Then she looks at Sarah's picture for a while...

ALICE
What're you drawing, Sarah?

SARAH
It's the window monster. Do you like it?

ALICE
Yes, it's scary.

SARAH
Haven't you seen him yet?

ALICE
No, should I have?

SARAH
Sure. He always appears when Christmas is coming, and is dangerous. Well, so says Dad-

NICHOLAS
-Don't listen to her, Alice, she's just talking nonsense.

Alice shushes him.

ALICE
(joking)
Mind your own business, little man. This is a girl talk.

Sarah sticks her tongue out at Nicholas, who drops his gaze back to the exercise book.

SARAH
But I think that the monster is not bad at all. He's nice to me. Anyway, he cannot come in.

ALICE
Why?

SARAH
I don't know... Well, I believe he can only come in if an adult in our family says the magic word.

ALICE
The magic word? What's that word?

Suddenly, Nicholas looks at Sarah in fear.

SARAH
I can't tell you because then he would come in and Dad would be angry with me.

Eleanor's MOANS AND GROANS invade the whole house.

ALICE

How is your mother? Have you seen her today?

NICHOLAS

We cannot see her. She is very ill. Only Frau Schiller and Dad can see her.

Frau Schiller's GERMAN FOLK PIECE coming from the living room's piano totally eclipses the moans.

ALICE

Would you mind asking her to stop playing? It's not easy to talk-

NICHOLAS

-She can't do that.

ALICE

Why?

NICHOLAS

It's her duty.

Nicholas stares at Alice, seriously. Then he drops his gaze back to the notebook.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

It's a spacious kitchen all tiled in white. Next to the countertop, Adrienne is cooking over a cast iron stove. Norman is sat at the table, drinking wine.

The kitchen door opens, Alice enters. The servants turn around, surprised.

ALICE

Sorry, I just came for a glass of water.

ADRIANNE

(smiling)

Don't worry, just a little scare. There's a jug of fresh water in the fridge, I'll get you a glass right away.

ALICE

Oh, don't bother, I'll get one myself.

Alice picks up a glass from the countertop and approaches the refrigerator. After opening it, she serves herself a glass of water and takes a sip.

ADRIANNE

Lunch will be ready in a few minutes. If you wish, you can proceed to the dining room.

Alice walks over to her.

ALICE

It smells very good.

Adrianne nods with a smile.

ALICE

Does Eleanor have a special diet or will she eat the same as us?

Adrianne's expression turns serious.

ADRIANNE

I don't know.

ALICE

You mean she's not going to have lunch?

ADRIANNE

I don't know. Her meals are the sole responsibility of the master and Frau Schiller.

ALICE

But-

ADRIANNE

-Those are the orders. It's not me who cooks them, anyway.

Alice finishes her glass of water and places it back on the countertop...

A short MOAN coming from the third floor is heard.

ALICE

I can't get used to those moans, to tell you the truth. They even sometimes wake me up.

No answer from Adrianne, who doesn't seem eager to give Alice much information.

ALICE

I can't understand either how he could forget telling me about her when I arrived. He only told me the day after! Do you know her? In person, I mean.

Adrianne shakes her head.

ADRIANNE

We were hired just a few years ago. By that time, she was already... confined.

ALICE

Did you know the former servants? Why did they leave?

ADRIANNE

I have no idea what the problem was with the former servants.

Norman gives Adrianne a hard look expressing that she has already spoken too much.

ADRIANNE

Anyway, it's absolutely and strictly forbidden to set foot in her room. Rooms are sacred and inviolable spaces.

Adrianne smiles resignedly.

ALICE

Yes, I'm very familiar with that... Well, he can be strict sometimes, but it doesn't bother me, I'm happy to be here.

ADRIANNE

It can get lonely too. Sometimes we miss people so much.

ALICE

That's why we all have to stick together.

Adrianne smiles at them. Then she leaves.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

It's a sunny afternoon. Alice slowly pulls a book from the shelves. As she does, she listens to the faint noise the covers make as they brush against the other volumes.

A few instants later, Alice puts the book back into its place. Then she notices a book called: "The Handbook of Hieroglyphs" and picks it up.

With the book in her hands, she walks over to one of the reading tables. Then she takes the notebook and a pencil from her pocket, and starts deciphering the hieroglyphic on the pyramid's lintel.

GARDEN

Next to the swing in the garden, Sarah holds in her hands a music box with a ghostly pale ballerina dancing. Then she widely smiles while looking up at someone unseen...

SARAH

Thank you.

LIBRARY/GARDEN

Alice keeps deciphering the message. She writes down the beginning of the translation: "Death..."

Her work of translation is interrupted by a HIGH CHILDISH LAUGH coming from the garden.

Alice turns toward the window overlooking the garden and, filled with curiosity, stands up and approaches it...

Sarah, holding the music box with both hands, is laughing as talking with someone hidden behind a tree...

A LONG SHADOW cast on the grass reveals who is behind the tree. It's seems to be a TALL MAN...

ALICE

Sarah!

Alice, worried, runs out of the room.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Alice runs up to Sarah and bends down worriedly towards her. The tall man is no longer there.

ALICE

Are you okay? Who was that man
you were talking to?

Still smiling, Sarah plays the music from the music box. It is a SLOW, NICE COMPOSITION.

SARAH

Music!

Alice examines the box. There is something scratched on the wood, a word: TOD

ALICE

Did the man give it to you? Did
he give you the music box?

Sarah nods. She seems to enjoy the song, and plays it one more time as soon as it stops.

ALICE

Sarah, who's that man?

Sarah doesn't say a word. Keeps on smiling and plays the song one more time. Then she leaves.

Alice looks around, uneasy. There is no one. She shifts her gaze towards the library's window...

Frau Schiller is there, looking severely at her. Then she leaves too.

EXT. BEACH - EVENING

Night is falling. On the beach, Alice is staring out at the horizon deep in thought. The wind blows strongly, ruffling her hair.

The dogs, frolic around behind her, start BARKING as they stare towards one side of the island.

Alice turns in that direction...

In the distance, on the breaker beyond the pier, there is a dark human figure. It's a TALL MAN standing still. He seems to be watching her.

A few seconds later, the man disappears among the rocks.

Alice stays there, astonished, while the dogs keep on barking nervously.

EXT/INT. BREAKER/PYRAMID - EVENING

Alice reaches the breaker where the pyramid stands and the boat is tied up.

There is no one there. After looking around, she moves closer to the pyramid and slowly pushes the wood door handle. Then she switches on a flashlight and enters...

Humidity from the sea has turned the interior into a damp place. A corridor leads to a wide room with walls filled with hieroglyphics and decorated with sculptures. In its centre there is a sarcophagus placed horizontally.

Alice starts examining the walls and the sarcophagus. She notices that its slab is partially displaced. She reaches out to it...

A loud BARKING is heard.

Startled, Alice turns towards the corridor...

The dogs stand there, barking and growling as they stare at her. A few seconds later, they run off.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alice enters through the door leading to the garden and slightly shivers while puffing. Adrianne helps her off with her coat. Norman is drinking heavily as usual.

ADRIANNE

The wind is starting to blow hard, isn't it?

ALICE

Yes, and it's cold.

NORMAN

Winter is just around the corner. A harsh one, no doubt.

ALICE

Do other people ever visit the island? I think I saw someone-

ADRIANNE

-Other people? What people?

ALICE

I'm sure I've seen a man around, a tall man.

Adrianne and Norman look at each other, confused.

NORMAN

Did you see any boat moored nearby?

ALICE

No, just the red one.

NORMAN

Then I don't see how you could see anyone.

ALICE

But I saw him clearly.

NORMAN

Just forget it. Strong wind can cause hallucinations.

ALICE

(firmly)

Strong wind can cause headache, not hallucinations.

ADRIANNE

Living here will do you good,
Alice. You'll soon forget your
problems.

ALICE

My... problems?

ADRIANNE

Maybe I'm being indiscreet, but
the thing is that he told us
about your parent's loss. And I'm
sure that can really affect your
mind.

Alice looks offended.

ADRIANNE

We fully understand you. Norman
and me, we are both orphans. So
think about this: at least you
could enjoy your parents for many
years. We never met them.

Alice doesn't seem to find any comfort in her words and
leaves with a straight face.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Seated on the edge of her bed, Alice takes the pink pills
from the night table and swallows a couple of them.

A loud MOAN coming from the upper floor is heard.

She clicks her tongue. Then she starts unbuttoning her
dress...

Another MOAN, louder... Alice stands up and turns to look
at the door.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRCASE - NIGHT

A wall lantern illuminates the hallway. Alice approaches
the staircase and looks up.

The third floor door is ajar. Another LOUD MOAN...

Alice hesitates, both fear and curiosity growing in her
eyes. Then she takes a deep breath and starts going up
the stairs...

A heartrending SCREAM is heard. Alice, worried, runs
upstairs...

When she arrives at the door, it suddenly flies open and Frau Schiller appears.

FRAU SCHILLER
*Was machst Du hier?! Ich dachte
 wir hätten es Dir klar genug
 gesagt!!*

Startled, Alice takes some steps back and stumbles down part of the staircase.

ALICE
 (ashamed)
 I'm sorry. I just wanted to help.

FRAU SCHILLER
Geh weg!

Alice obeys and returns to her room.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alice starts undressing again. While she does, she has the impression that someone might be spying on her..

She approaches the window and looks through it in the direction of where she saw the shadowy figure..

Nothing to be seen.

After finishing undressing, she gets into bed and takes the "Handbook of Hieroglyphics" and her notebook from the night table. Then she resumes the translation work.

Written on the notebook, we can read the first draft of the translation, with has nothing to do with Edmund's previous translation: "Death is not the end..."

EXT. PIER - DAY

The young boatman guides the yacht up to the pier, where Alice is waiting for Edmund. He tosses her a rope.

EDMUND
 Good morning, Alice!

ALICE
 Good morning!

Alice ties the rope to one of the posts.

EDMUND
 How is it that Norman didn't come down?

Edmund hands his luggage to Alice, who deposits it on the pier.

ALICE

He was busy, so I told him I'd come.

EDMUND

I guess "busy" in his vocabulary means he has a terrible hangover.

Edmund descends the yacht's ladder. Then he smiles at her as he gently caresses a lock of her long hair.

EDMUND

Thanks for coming. It's great to be welcomed home.

Alice awkwardly smiles back while Edmund picks up his luggage. They start walking towards the beach.

ALICE

Your wife screamed last night. I mean... more than the usual. I was really worried about her.

Edmund turns toward her and gazes at her seriously for a few instants.

EDMUND

Frau Schiller is perfectly capable of taking care of her.

(self-pitying)

Besides, there's not much to do when she's going through one of her crisis. That's why I brought a new medicine from town.

Edmund takes a small flask from his overcoat and shows it to Alice for an instant.

EDMUND

Kind of experimental, but the doctor said it really works with patients suffering from severe dementia.

ALICE

Wouldn't she receive better treatment in dry land, or at least with the company of a nurse?

Edmund's face darkens.

EDMUND

You should be talking to me about my children's progresses, dear, not my wife's illness.

ALICE

There's another thing: I don't think it was appropriate to tell the servants about my life. My-

EDMUND

-I rule the island as I rule my family. And families don't have secrets. I hope you don't get mad at me for saying this, but I'd rather worry about the influence of chemicals in me than in other things.

Alice abruptly stops and looks at him, more surprised than angry.

EDMUND

Families don't have secrets, Alice.

Edmund takes the path that leads to the mansion.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - DAY

Alice, her hair let down, opens the bottle of pink pills and swallows a couple of them. Then she looks at herself in the mirror of her bedroom...

She looks sick and weary. She touches the long part of her hair and contemplates it. After some hesitation, she takes some scissors and starts cutting it.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Edmund, Frau Schiller and the children are sitting around the dining table while Adrianne finishes serving a soup.

Alice, wearing a short haircut, enters the dining room and walks over the table. Under Edmund's shocked eye, she takes a seat.

ADRIANNE

Bon appétit.

Adrianne retires. Everyone except Edmund begins to eat.

EDMUND

Alice... You... Your hair...

ALICE

Oh, that! I was just tired of it.
I hadn't worn a short haircut for
fifteen years. What do you think?

NICHOLAS

I like it!

Alice smiles at Nicholas. Complicity is growing among
them.

EDMUND

But you...

ALICE

Don't you like it?

Edmund starts to get red in the face with anger. Sarah
has the music box by her side and plays it.

EDMUND

Could you please stop playing
that, Sarah?

Sarah hides the music box under the table. It keeps on
playing for a while.

EDMUND

All right, Alice, I'll tell you
my opinion...

(beat)

What you've done with your hair
is hideous. Even worse, it's
criminal.

Alice, incredulous, doesn't answer. Adrianne peers from
the doorway.

FRAU SCHILLER

Sieht ja häßlich aus.

EDMUND

Even Frau Schiller thinks it's
atrocious!

ALICE

It's just a haircut. It'll grow
back in a few... What am I doing?
It's none of your business!

EDMUND

If you're going to ask for an
opinion, you need to be mature
and be prepared for criticism.

Enraged, Alice stands up and shoots a glare at Edmund. Then she leaves, leaving the food almost untouched.

From the doorway, Adrianne watches her as she does. She also shoots a brief glare at him and leaves behind Alice.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - DAY

Alice runs into her room and slams the door shut. After sitting on the edge of the bed, she starts crying.

Adrianne enters the room and places her hands on Alice's shoulders, trying to comfort her.

ALICE

How could he speak to me like that?

ADRIANNE

There, there dear... He's just not used to the presence of a smart young woman. You know, some men-

ALICE

-But I'm so disappointed! I want to fit in here. I really want it. I need it, but...

(beat)

I'm starting to feel uneasy in this house, Adrianne. Don't you find this place... bizarre?

The look on Adrianne's face says she wants to say something, but she finally holds it back.

ADRIANNE

My husband and me, as you might imagine, have worked in a lot of places. And believe me, the rule number one to maintain sanity is: "Never interfere. Mind your own business".

ALICE

But I... I cannot ignore the things that I don't understand... Don't you think that his relationship with his wife is...? Well, I'm sure he loves her very much, but...

Adrianne hesitates before giving an answer.

ADRIANNE

I wouldn't be so sure about that.

Surprised, Alice turns towards her, happy to hear that Adrienne is opening her heart.

ALICE
What do you mean?

ADRIANNE
Well, probably I'm talking too much, but it seems quite obvious that he doesn't take care of her as he should. I can't either get used to hearing her moans...

ALICE
They chill me! But he says-

ADRIANNE
-I know what he says, that she's not quite right mentally, she's very unstable and sensitive...
(beat)
But notice how the moans get higher when he or Frau Schiller are around. She feels better when she's alone.

ALICE
I can't either understand why we cannot see her. Any other person would be happy to share the burden. What's he hiding?

ADRIANNE
I don't know for sure... But the temptation to climb those stairs and find out what's going on in that room is too much for an old gossip like me.

They smile at each other. Alice stands up.

ALICE
Perhaps we could-

ADRIANNE
-Let's leave it here. If Norman knew what I'm telling you, he'd strangle me to death.

ALICE
I understand.

ADRIANNE

Have a good afternoon.

ALICE

Thanks, Adrienne. It was nice talking to you.

Adrienne dries Alice's tears with a handkerchief.

ADRIANNE

You can always come and talk to me. In fact, there's something about him I'd like to tell you, but not now. And please don't come when Norman is around. He doesn't want any complications.

They smile at each other. Finally, Adrienne leaves.

INT. FRAU SCHILLER'S ROOM - DAY

Frau Schiller, who has been following the conversation through a little hole that connects both rooms, stops spying and closes the hole with a malicious look.

EXT. ISLAND - NIGHT

Night falls over the island. Soon it starts being covered by a thick mist. The foggy winter is coming.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Alice reads on Egyptology at one of the tables in the library, her notebook next to her. The glass in the window is frozen over and the outside fog is visible.

EDMUND (O.S.)

Dinner was delicious; you don't know what you missed.

Alice raises her eyes and sees Edmund near the door. He approaches while she glances back down at her book.

EDMUND

I'm very sorry for the incident at lunch. I behaved like a real idiot. It won't happen again, I promise.

ALICE

Don't worry, it's forgotten.

EDMUND

Glad to hear that. I really don't like resentful people.

Edmund approaches one of the shelves and takes a book, apparently at random, "The Taming of the Shrew".

EDMUND

Anyway, you should eat more. You look rather sickly. A cold winter is coming and we all need to take care of our health.

Alice doesn't answer, she keeps on reading. Edmund goes back to the table and places a hand on her shoulder.

EDMUND

What are you reading? Egypt, again! This family seems to have awakened a strong desire to learn about Egypt in you, haven't we?

Alice hesitates before giving an answer. She finally opens her notebook, to the page where she has written down the lintel's new translation.

ALICE

I... I have discovered an alternate translation to the hieroglyph of the entrance to the pyramid.

Edmund doesn't like her words. He grabs the notebook out of her hands and glances down at the translation.

ALICE

"Death is not the end, just the beginning".

EDMUND

(overweening)

Alice, my dear, it takes years of study and practice to translate just one of these hieroglyphs. I even had to ask for advice when I wanted to select them. It's not a job for amateurs.

ALICE

Could you teach me? I want to learn.

The question catches him by surprise.

EDMUND

I'm... I'm too busy for that, I'm afraid. Otherwise it would be a real pleasure for me.

Edmund gives the notebook back to Alice while she looks at him a bit disappointed. Then she stands up.

ALICE

A friend of mine is travelling
around the region, and would like
to pay me a visit; Mark, I think
I already told you about him.

Edmund's expression changes completely, his eyes grow wider and wider. He stares shocked at her.

EDMUND

A friend? Here?

ALICE

Yes, would that be a problem?

Edmund doesn't answer; hieratic, he just stares at her.

ALICE

Edmund, are you alright?

He still doesn't move. Then he recovers and smiles.

EDMUND

What were you saying? Oh, yes,
your friend... Of course, it would
be a pleasure to have him here.

ALICE

Then I'll write him. Goodnight.

EDMUND

Goodnight.

Alice leaves. Edmund remains hieratic, thoughtful.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM/HALLWAY - NIGHT

Seated at the desk, Alice swallows a couple of her pink pills. Then she picks up her fountain pen and starts to write a letter. The pen runs out of ink. After shaking it, she tries again. Nothing.

She opens a desk drawer and pulls out an ink cartridge...

A light KNOCKING on the window is heard.

She turns her head toward the window, draped close with velvet curtains. Not giving it more thought, she twists open the fountain pen and changes the cartridge...

The KNOCKING is heard again.

Perplexed, she leaves the fountain pen on the desk and approaches the window. She pulls the curtains back...

There's nothing, just the darkness and the fog. After waiting a few seconds, she returns to the desk...

The KNOCKING again. Alice quickly turns back.

There is nothing in the window. She clicks her tongue, annoyed, and takes a step forward...

Out of nowhere, the sinister silhouette of a THIN TALL MAN pounces on the other side of the frozen glass.

Alice shouts as she jumps back, falling to the floor.

The man, whose face is hardly visible, reaches out with one of his bone-thin hands and starts to draw on the pane with his finger as a GROAN of distress is heard. Finally, he writes: TOD

Alice, terrified, quickly crawls out of the room. Edmund, alarmed, is crossing at that moment the hallway.

EDMUND

What's going on?

ALICE

A man! There's a man at my window!

EDMUND

What are you talking about?
Please, calm down!

ALICE

I just saw him! Believe me!

Edmund grows serious and stares down at her a moment.

EDMUND

Okay, let's go. Show me.

Edmund helps her to stand up. Then he enters the room resolutely, Alice following him cautiously...

There's no one in the window. "Tod" is still written on the pane, but now the word is disfigured.

ALICE

He was... He was there, just behind the pane...

Edmund opens the window and peers out into the night. It's freezing. A strong wind floods the room.

EDMUND

There doesn't seem to be anyone in the garden either.

ALICE

And what about these letters? He wrote them!

EDMUND

What letters?

Alice points at the word "Tod".

EDMUND

That... can be anything.

ALICE

I saw him, I swear!

EDMUND

The wall surface is too smooth to climb...

(ironic)

Well, perhaps he was thirty feet tall, or perhaps he flew here...

ALICE

I'm serious, Edmund!

Edmund takes her by the arm and leads her to the bed.

EDMUND

Calm down, dear... What have you eaten these past days?

ALICE

Mmm... not much.

EDMUND

Don't you think it might have something to do with all this?

ALICE

What do you mean?

EDMUND

We have two clear explanations for this... mystery: First, you have eaten very little lately; and a long fasting may be a cause of hallucinations. Remember the lives of many saints and mystics; they all had one common factor: a poor diet. Hence their visions...

Edmund picks up the antidepressant pills flask from the floor and examines it.

EDMUND

And second, but not less important... the pills of false happiness. Why do you take them?

ALICE

I take them since my parents' death. I need them.

EDMUND

(ironic)

Yes, of course. Everybody needs them.

Edmund takes a closer look at the bottle label.

EDMUND

Amitriptyline... This is a tricky substance. It can lead to several side effects if you abuse it. Do you know what one of them is?

Alice shakes her head.

EDMUND

Visual hallucinations... What a marvellous coincidence.

Edmund hands her the bottle.

EDMUND

If you keep on swallowing four pills a day, you'll end up with visions of pink elephants dancing "The Nutcracker".

ALICE

How do you know that I take four pills? Are you spying on me?

EDMUND

Well, it's just... an estimation.

For the first time, Alice does not show any personal confidence. She doesn't control the situation and looks scared.

EDMUND

Come on, cheer up. We'll do a couple of things. First, let's draw the curtains...

Edmund goes up to the window and...

The tall man is again on the other side of the frozen glass. It seems to be looking directly at him.

Edmund's expression changes completely. Now he's truly scared. He draws the curtains and turns around, shocked.

EDMUND

(recovering)

And second, you'll eat. You'll see how you feel much better on a full stomach. I'll be right up with something, don't move.

Edmund quickly leaves while Alice glances worriedly at the drapes covering the window.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Alice walks over to the toilet and lifts the lid. She hesitates. Then she pulls out several pill bottles from her pockets and empties them into the toilet. Finally, she flushes and leaves.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Carrying a flashlight, Alice nervously walks through the foggy garden. As she does, she tries to see something in the surrounding darkness.

ALICE

Hello? Is anybody there?

Nobody answers. Once she arrives at the tree from which the tire swing hangs, she shines the flashlight on it.

The swing is still. Alice takes a step forward...

Suddenly, the tire starts swinging back and forth, as if pushed by an invisible force.

Startled, she jumps back. Then she watches the swing as if hypnotized, the flashlight trembling in her hand.

The tire keeps swinging back and forth again, now with momentum...

Over Alice's shoulder is now a terrifying DISFIGURED FACE...

It's a TALL MAN whose eye sockets are empty and his bloody cheeks are torn.

TALL MAN

(hoarse)

Tod...

Startled, Alice jumps forward while shouting. Then she takes a few steps back while staring at him in horror.

The tall man starts to walk towards her. He wears dark, torn clothes; his gait is clumsy, as if he were wounded. A harsh groan accompanies each step he takes...

A few yards ahead, Alice trips and falls on the ground while the tall man keeps approaching. He reaches one of his bone thin hands towards her...

After a few tense moments, Alice picks up the flashlight and quickly stands up. Then she runs away.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Once in the mansion, Alice quickly closes the door and locks it. Then she turns toward the inside of the hall...

A few yards from her, the dogs stare at the door as they growl menacingly, showing their teeth.

Behind them, Frau Schiller stands at the top of the first flight of stairs. She stares at her severely.

ALICE
(shocked)

I... I...

Alice faints.

DREAM - EXT/INT. BREAKER/PYRAMID - DAY

It's a sunny afternoon. Alice wakes up among the rocks of the breaker. After standing up, in the distance, she sees a boy running towards the pyramid.

ALICE
(confused)
Nicholas?

He doesn't hear her and enters the pyramid. Alice starts walking towards there.

ALICE
Nicholas? Is that you?

The sky starts to darken as thunderclouds creep up around the sun. In a few seconds, it is overcast and storming.

Alice quickly enters the pyramid to find the boy knelt down next to Anastasia's sarcophagus, with his back to her. He seems to be crying.

ALICE
Nicholas!

Alice runs up to Nicholas and bends down worriedly toward him. Then he turns towards her...

It's not his face, but the hardened face of the boatman from the opening scene.

Alice gasps in shock while the man's expression changes abruptly. He stops crying and gets serious.

BOATMAN

If we hurry, you may still escape
the storm, ma'am!

Alice steps back in horror while he starts laughing out loud...

A ghostly pale YOUNG GIRL, 15, wearing wet hair and clothes, appears next to the entrance and reaches for Alice's face while a groan and a stream of blood erupt from her mouth.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - DAY

Alice wakes up in her bed, screaming in fear and covered in cold sweat. Soon Edmund bends down over her and tries to calm her.

EDMUND

Calm down, Alice, it was only a
nightmare! Family's here, no need
to be scared!

After a few seconds, Alice calms down and she sits up.

EDMUND

What were you doing last night in
the garden? You were supposed to
be waiting here for the food to
come, as a good girl.

ALICE

I saw him again. Face to face. He
was completely disfigured...

EDMUND

Who?

ALICE

The man on the window.

Alice sits on the edge of the bed and coughs a couple of times. Then she stands up slowly. Edmund seems to be fed up with the situation.

EDMUND
Those pills...

ALICE
I got rid of them.

EDMUND
That's good news! I'm happy to hear that! So I guess... peculiar as we are, my family has already had a good influence on you.

ALICE
He said a name: Tod. Do you know who he is?

EDMUND
I don't. But I do know that if you don't eat a bit more, you'll-

Alice starts coughing again. Edmund pulls out a bottle of vitamins from his pocket. Then he gently pushes her down to sit back on the bed and sits down by her side.

EDMUND
I'm worried about you, Alice.

Edmund takes a couple of vitamin capsules and places them in her hand. Then he stands up.

EDMUND
Please take these vitamins. Soon you'll stop seeing and hearing things, you'll see.

Alice calmly places the vitamins on the night table.

ALICE
I'm not taking anything, Edmund.

EDMUND
You need to be strong. Don't forget that tonight is the...

Edmund abruptly stops speaking, as if he had said too much. Then he covers his face.

ALICE
(confused)
Tonight? What will happen tonight?

EDMUND
Oh, I messed it up. I wanted it to be a surprise for you. I'm a complete idiot...
(MORE)

EDMUND (CONT'D)

(uncovering)

Well, I hope it will at least cheer you up: we'll have a great Christmas Eve party tonight! I've been preparing it for weeks. Many friends and business associates will come. We'll have a ball! What do you think?

Alice nods indifferently.

EDMUND

Our parties are just amazing. And my kids are eager to share it with you. They just... love you!

Alice smiles listlessly.

EDMUND

If you don't cooperate, I'll have to ask Frau Schiller to prepare one of her tonics, and I can assure you that they are far worse than any hallucination.

Edmund leaves the room laughing out loud. Alice looks at the vitamin capsules. Then she gets out of bed and leaves frame. A few instants later, she Alice reenters frame and grabs the vitamins.

INT. STUDY ROOM - DAY

Nicholas is writing in a notebook on the table while Sarah plays with her music box. Nearby, walking around in circles, Alice reads aloud from "The Wizard of Oz".

ALICE

"My darling child!" she cried, folding the little girl in her arms and covering her face with kisses. "Where in the world did you come from?"

She coughs a couple times.

NICHOLAS

Are you alright?

ALICE

Yes, it's nothing, just a cold.

ALICE

"From the Land of Oz," said Dorothy gravely. "And here is Toto, too."

(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

"And oh, Aunt Em! I'm so glad to be at home again!" Period. Did you like the book?

NICHOLAS

Yes, I really liked it. And Sarah loved it, too.

Sarah nods with conviction.

ALICE

I'm glad to hear that. Now let me take a short break for coffee.

Alice reaches for a cup of coffee while Nicholas keeps writing and Sarah starts playing again the music box. Then she walks over to the window...

Twenty feet away from the window, the disfigured tall man stands still in the fog.

Alice jumps back, startled. The coffee cup slips from her grasp and SHATTERS to the floor in pieces.

Surprised, Nicholas shifts his gaze towards her.

ALICE

(staring at the tall man)

Nicholas... Please come here...

Carrying his notebook, and as Eleanor's MOANS AND GROANS invade the house again, Nicholas approaches her and looks at the window... His expression doesn't change.

ALICE

You see him, don't you?

Nicholas creases his brow, as if confused.

NICHOLAS

See what?

Alice, still staring at the tall man, breathes out loudly and tensely. She raises her voice.

ALICE

Don't lie to me, Nicholas. I know you're seeing the same as I am.

Nicholas squints, as if trying to get a better picture.

NICHOLAS

I just see the fog. What do you see?

Alice tries to calm herself and glances down at Nicholas' notebook...

To her surprise, all along the reading Nicholas has been writing "TOD" in capital letters.

Alice grabs the notebook out of his hands.

ALICE
(scared)
Why... why TOD?

NICHOLAS
It's just a word.

ALICE
It's not just a word? Why have
you written it?

SARAH
(approaching)
Because you have to say it...

Nicholas quickly shushes Sarah.

NICHOLAS
(to Alice)
Don't pay attention to her. It's
just a word.

ALICE
Don't lie to me, Nicholas! Tell
me why is written on my window
pane! What is the relation with
the Tall man?

Alice looks at both kids, now scared, but receives no answer from them. Then she grabs him by the arm.

ALICE
(angry)
Tell me what's happening,
Nicholas!

Nicholas doesn't answer, absolutely scared. Sarah drops the music box to the floor and starts crying.

The dancing ballerina gets stained with coffee, looking even creepier.

Edmund enters the living room and walks over to them, a look of concern on his face.

EDMUND
Hey, what's going on in here?
What's the fuss?

Alice lets go of Nicholas, who takes a step back.

EDMUND
What's wrong? Why are you...?

As soon as Edmund looks through the window, he jumps back, speechless...

Alice, surprised, looks at him. A hopeful smile appears on her face.

ALICE
See, it's true! You see?! There
he is, before your very eyes!

Edmund slowly turns back towards her, his astonished expression quickly transforms into an indifferent one.

EDMUND
I don't know what the devil
you're speaking about.

Alice's smile freezes.

ALICE
Don't... Don't lie to me. I know
you can see him.

EDMUND
See who?

ALICE
The tall man!

EDMUND
(disappointed)
Oh, this again...

ALICE
You can see him! I know! I saw
how startled you were!

EDMUND
Startled? Why? I just slipped on
the coffee on the floor. Did you
drop it?

Alice shows him the notebook of Nicholas filled with the word "TOD".

ALICE
How about this word? Tod! It's
everywhere!

EDMUND
That word means nothing.

Desperate, she starts to get red in the face.

EDMUND
Are you okay?

Alice doesn't answer, she's more than uneasy. The moans stop. Edmund clicks his tongue.

EDMUND
I try to take care of you, Alice,
but you won't listen. And I'm
sorry, but that haircut just
doesn't help either. You're so
unrecognizable you probably look
in the mirror and see a man.

Edmund laughs. Then Alice, unable to contain her anger,
picks up a LETTER OPENER and menaces him.

ALICE
Don't lie to me! You're hiding
something! I know you're hiding
something! Where's Adrianne?! I
want her to tell me that the Tall
Man doesn't exist! Call her!

ADRIANNE (O.S.)
I'm here, Mrs. Wilkinson.

Alice, surprised, turns around. Adrianne is standing next
to them. She looks through the window.

ADRIANNE
I'm so sorry, but I don't see
anything either.

Surprised, Alice turns to watch the garden again. The
tall man has disappeared from sight... Edmund takes the
opportunity to snatch the letter opener from her hand.

EDMUND
Have you gone mad?

Alice hesitates in shock. Then she leaves.

ADRIANNE
(to Edmund, humble)
Have I done right? Frau Schiller
told me that I should be here
now.

Edmund nods. His expression is that of a worried man.

ADRIANNE

She is a good girl...

EDMUND

Rule number one: Never interfere
with the house. Remember?

Adrianne nods.

EDMUND

Leave.

Adrianne obeys; a sad expression in her face.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - DAY

Alice is packing her suitcases on the bed. Edmund enters
the room and looks at her in surprise.

EDMUND

What are you doing?

ALICE

You don't need to tell me, I
already know. I'm fired.

EDMUND

Fired? Why?

ALICE

Well, I just pulled a knife on
you in front of your children.
Frankly, I wouldn't be surprised
if you had me arrested.

EDMUND

First, it wasn't a knife. It was
just a letter opener. And second...
Who cares? That's old history!

Alice hesitates for a few instants. Then she sighs and
keeps packing her luggage.

ALICE

Anyway, I'm leaving now.

EDMUND

What's the matter, Alice? I'm
beginning to think... Is it a
matter of money? Honestly, your
salary is pretty gener-

ALICE

-I can't stand it anymore! This
house is just... All I want is to
leave and forget all!

They remain in silence for a few moments. Then she starts crying quietly.

ALICE

It was all a mistake... I came here trying to get my life together, to forget the past. But I failed. I failed miserably...

Edmund gently places his hand on Alice's shoulder, trying to console her. There's something erotic in his approach.

EDMUND

Give us another chance. We'll do my best to see that you feel good with us here. You're family now, and I never give up on family.

ALICE

Please, Edmund, don't insist.

EDMUND

Tonight's party! The Christmas ball! Have you forgotten? Many people will come. We'll have a masked ball with music...

Edmund widely smiles as he looks at Alice expectantly, but she doesn't answer.

EDMUND

I'm begging you, Alice.

Alice coughs a little.

ALICE

I'd like to leave tomorrow first thing.

EDMUND

Please, don't... Do you want more money? I'll pay you double! Triple the amount!

Edmund pulls a checkbook from his pocket and signs a blank check. Then he rips it out and hands it to Alice.

EDMUND

Just write whatever amount you like.

Alice drops the check.

ALICE

It's not a question of money!

Edmund, desperate, kneels down in front of her and takes her hands.

EDMUND

Just give us a last chance, we
deserve it. Please, Alice...

Alice hesitates. Then she sighs tiredly and nods.

Edmund stands up and embraces her effusively. She remains rigid, surprised by his passionate reaction.

EDMUND

Thank you! You don't know how
much this means to me...

Behind Alice, the Tall Man reappears in the window at the far wall of the room...

Edmund sees the man, his expression grows serious. After staring at him for several seconds, the Tall man leaves...

Edmund takes a deep breath and moves away from Alice.

EDMUND

Now sleep a little bit, my dear.
Take some time for yourself, all
right? And please eat.

He leaves. Alice picks up the check from the floor and places it on "The Wizard of Oz" novel resting on the night table. Something on the check catches her eye...

Edmund's signature is perfectly legible.

Confused, she opens the book to the first page and reads again the handwritten dedication. Then she compares the two signatures...

They are totally different.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Alice worriedly enters the kitchen.

ALICE

Adrianne, I think I have found
something that...

To her surprise, the servants are not there. It's Frau Schiller who is cooking some kind of cake. She doesn't even turn.

ALICE

Oh, I'm sorry! I thought...

FRAU SCHILLER

(with a strong
accent)

Adrianne not here! Christmas!

ALICE

Are Norman and Adrianne out for
Christmas?

Alice interprets Frau Schiller's silence for a yes.

ALICE

That's strange, they didn't
mention anything. Besides, I
haven't seen any boat...

Alice looks at the kitchen table. There is an unfinished
glass of wine on it, and a bottle that is more than half.

ALICE

Are you sure, Frau Schiller?

FRAU SCHILLER

Busy! Out!

Alice, intimidated, leaves.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The room has been turned into a ballroom, ornaments and
colored ribbons hang from the walls. In its centre stands
a Christmas tree adorned with lights. A record player
plays a GERMAN CHRISTMAS CAROL.

Under Edmund's watchful eye, Nicholas and Sarah run
around the tree as they open different boxes. Inside,
there are masks of different colors and shapes.

Alice pokes her head in the door. After noticing her,
Edmund goes to greet her with one of his best smiles.

EDMUND

What do you think? Nice?

Alice nods while smiling. She looks now different. Then
she starts talking with a fake attitude, as if she were
consciously saying what he wants to hear.

ALICE

It looks fantastic!

EDMUND

There will be more than fifty people. We'll serve some finger food in the dining room, but the highlight will be here... The ball! Here, this is for you.

Edmund hands her a mask. It's an ivory mask with feathers and only covering the top part of the face.

EDMUND

Don't forget to put it on before the party starts. We, hosts and guests, will only show our faces after it has finished; a whim of mine, a game. Christmas and Mardi Gras altogether.

ALICE

(faking again)

Wow! Christmas and Mardi Gras altogether! Such a good idea!

EDMUND

I've turned the library into a changing room. You'll find more accessories there.

ALICE

Where are Adrianne and Norman?

EDMUND

I decided to give them a week off. I like for everyone to spend these days with their loved ones.

ALICE

Oh, nice...

Alice seems to be asking herself who are "the loved ones" of two orphans like Norman and Adrianne.

EDMUND

Do you feel like lending us a hand? As you can see, there's only the four of us.

ALICE

If you don't mind, I'd like to rest a little more. I'm still feeling a bit weak. I'll be happy to help later.

EDMUND

As you wish, my dear.

Alice leaves. Edmund watches her go, not fully convinced of her new attitude.

DREAM - EXT. BEACH - DAY

It's a sunny day. Alice wakes up confused on the shore and stands up...

A loud BARKING is heard. The sunny day abruptly turns into a cloudy one.

Alice turns around to see the tall man, whose face is unseen, desperately running down the beach. The dogs pursue him at a run, and barking furiously.

A powerful VOICE of another man shouts from afar.

ANOTHER MAN (O.S.)

Tod! Tod! Tod!

Finally, the dogs reach their prey and start tearing at his face with their teeth.

ANOTHER MAN (O.S.)

Tod! Tod! Tod!

Alice turns towards the voice... An expression of horror grows on her face.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM - DAY

Alice wakes up suddenly in her bed, shocked and covered in cold sweat. She looks around, uneasy. It's as if her dream had revealed something terrifying to her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The children and Frau Schiller are now decorating the entrance hall's walls. Edmund approaches Frau Schiller and affectionately pinches her around the waist. They both laugh and start dancing to the music.

EDMUND

Do you know what, dear? I think
I've found my soulmate...

For a second, Frau Schiller believes that she is the person he refers to.

EDMUND

She's quite stubborn and nosy,
but she understands child's
psyches and I'm sure she can
learn to be sweet too...

Frau Schiller smiles, blushing.

EDMUND

Yes, Alice just needs to feel
loved; to have a sense of family.
And the kids just love her!

Her smiles freezes, her face turns to hate.

EDMUND

Many things will soon change for
this family...

At that moment, Alice enters the room. The kids say hello
to her in an affectionate way. Sarah even embraces her.

ALICE

(faking again)

I feel much better now. How can I
help?

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

It's getting dark. The beach is covered by a dense fog.
Long lines of torches light the pier and the shore.

About a dozen motorboats are moored at the pier as the
GUESTS make their way ashore. They all wear masks in
different shapes, sizes and colors.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Alice opens the door to the library. To her surprise, at
that moment Edmund is inside changing his clothes and
getting ready for the fancy dress party. He hides his
body behind some fancy party boxes.

ALICE

I'm sorry. I didn't know...

EDMUND

Don't worry. I'm changing here
because I didn't tell my wife
anything about the party. I
didn't want her to suffer.

ALICE

I understand. I just came... for
some feathers. I want to play a
little game with the kids.

EDMUND

That sounds great!

Alice opens up a box and takes some long, colorful feathers.

ALICE
Here they are.

Alice notices that Edmund has left his key lace to the third floor on a chair. She moves some more boxes, as if she were looking for something else, and places one of the boxes on the key, trying to make Edmund forget it.

EDMUND
Are you looking for something else?

ALICE
No, I think I have everything.
I'll be at the party in a while.

EDMUND
Don't be late!

ALICE
I won't.

EDMUND
I'm so happy to see that you've taken the right decision... for you and for us.

Alice doesn't answer. She just smiles and leaves.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Alice is getting dressed for the party. Her appearance is not good; her face is pale and haggard, her look is lost and bewildered.

After taking a couple of vitamin capsules, she finishes zipping up her elegant long ivory dress and sprays her with some perfume...

A distant chorus of ghostly CHILDREN'S VOICES coming from the sink's drain is heard.

VOICES (O.S.)
(singing)
I am slowly going crazy, 1-2-3-4-
5-6- switch. Crazy going slowly
am I, 6-5-4-3-2-1 switch.

Alice stares down at the strainer while trembling in fear...

The voices start to sing louder and faster. Then they start roaring with LAUGHTER.

Filled with panic, Alice turns on the faucet to drown the voice. Some seconds later, she turns it off. There are no more voices.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

The guests enter the mansion. Edmund, wearing a maroon mask, greets them as they enter, while Frau Schiller and the children, also wearing masks, take their coats.

Stunned and wearing an ivory mask, Alice climbs down the staircase and steps into the hall. She stops. Then Edmund notices her and gestures for her to approach. She does.

EDMUND

What're you doing standing there?
You must be here, with me. You're
as much the host as I am.

Alice nods, looking absent. Edmund gently pushes her towards a middle-aged couple next to him, MR. RADCLIFF, 60, and MRS. RADCLIFF, 60.

EDMUND

Let me introduce Mr. and Mrs.
Radcliff. He's an important
aeronautical engineer. If a plane
ever crashes, it is his fault.

They smile at his joke out of politeness.

EDMUND

Alice, my children's tutor.

Alice shakes hands with them.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Decorated with Christmas ornaments, the dining room is filled with dozens of guests. Laid out on the long table are canapés of all sorts, which they devour happily.

Next to an end of the table, Alice pours herself a glass of wine. She takes a sip and looks around...

Soon her gaze lands on a PLUMP MAN, 45, wearing a white mask and watching the Botticelli painting. She goes over to him.

ALICE

Edmund says it's funny.
Satirical.

The plump man turns his head towards her.

PLUMP MAN
You sure? I'm not art expert, but
I find it terrifying.

ALICE
So do I, though it's impossible
to say so to him.

Alice offers her hand to the plump man.

ALICE
I'm Alice, his children's tutor.
I don't believe we have been
introduced yet.

The plump man shakes her hand.

PLUMP MAN
You're not... Edmund's wife?

ALICE
Eleanor? No, I'm not. She keeps
sick. You know, the poor woman
didn't quite recover from her
daughter's loss.

The plump man does not seem to know remotely what she is
talking about. That surprises her.

ALICE
Didn't you know about that?

PLUMP MAN
Well... Yes, yes, I'm pretty sure
someone told me about...

ALICE
Since when do you know Edmund?

PLUMP MAN
Several years now...

ALICE
I didn't know he had so many
friends. He seems quite solitary.

PLUMP MAN
He's a good man; intelligent,
polite, concerned for his people...

EDMUND (O.S.)
Quiet, please!

At one side of the table, Edmund holds a glass of wine
while the guests turn to look at him expectantly.

EDMUND

I'd like to toast a good friend,
a woman as wise as she is honest,
as strong as she is sensitive...

He raises his glass to Alice, standing at the opposite side of the table. Frau Schiller, not far from him, holds Sarah and Nicholas while looks at the situation in anger.

EDMUND

Her name is Alice, and she's the
lady with the white mask I'm
pointing at...

The guests stare curiously at Alice as she lowers her gaze.

EDMUND

You must understand, my dear, I
could do no less. Thank you for
everything you have done for me
and my family. To you...

They all drink and start applauding.

An OLD LADY, 80, wearing a silver mask takes Alice by the hand and pats it gently. She turns towards her.

OLD LADY

Congratulations. It's obvious
that he appreciates you.

Alice nods, gratefully.

OLD LADY

He's a good man; intelligent,
polite, concerned for his people...

The old lady's phrasing, so similar to that of the plump man, perplexes Alice.

ALICE

Since when do you know Edmund?

OLD LADY

Several years now...

These words discomfort Alice.

Suddenly, as the old lady widely smiles at her, a handful of slimy worms start crawling from her teeth...

Alice's expression turns to disgust.

OLD LADY

Is everything alright?

An instant later, the old lady's denture is clean and white again.

ALICE
(confused)
Yes, just-

At the other side of the table, Edmund throws his glass against the wall and raises both arms outwards.

EDMUND
And now, we dance! We dance until
the sun comes up!

The guests applaud and exclaim excitedly. Lively dance MUSIC coming from the living room starts to play.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

The closed door to Eleanor's room; MOANS AND GROANS are heard.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alice makes her way among the dancing guests as smiling at some of them. Then a hand grabs her by the shoulder, forcing her to turn around..

It's Edmund, who is dancing livelily with a MATURE WOMAN, 50, at the rhythm of The Calvanes' SONG "Crazy over you".

He takes Alice by the arm and draws her closer to MARTIN, 50, a little gray-haired man with the upper part of his face covered by a black mask.

EDMUND
This is Martin, an old friend,
and a marvelous dance partner.
C'mon, Alice, dance with him.
What're you waiting for?

Martin, who seems slightly tipsy, practically jumps into Alice's arms. Edmund laughs. They start to dance.

MARTIN
You're so lucky to live here with
him... He's a good man; intelligent,
polite-

ALICE
-concerned for his people...

MARTIN
(surprised)
Yes, that's exactly what I was
going to say.

Alice pulls away from him while looking at him uneasily. Then she approaches Sarah and Nicholas, who are dancing, and whispers something into their ears.

The children nod a couple of times, as if agreeing to a plan. Frau Schiller approaches...

FRAU SCHILLER

Is there something I have to know?

ALICE

(nervously)

We... We have prepared something special for the party. I'm sure you'll like it.

Frau Schiller doesn't seem quite convinced.

ALICE

By the way, your English is getting better and better everyday. Congratulations.

Alice starts to make her way towards the hall. Frau Schiller watches her go with an evil look.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Alice makes her way among the guests, bumping into a few of them, while nervously looking around...

A HAND grabs her by the arm. It's Martin.

MARTIN

Hey, where do you think you're going? You owe me a dance. If I come to parties like these is to have the chance to dance with a young beautiful lady.

Martin throws himself on her arms. Alice looks around the group of guests.

ALICE

I have to leave... I'll be back soon.

MARTIN

C'mon, move a little bit...

Alice's nervous expression turns to irritation.

ALICE

If you don't get your hands off
me right now, I will punch you so
hard it will make your head spin.

Martin gasps. Then he slowly takes his hands away from her. She leaves upstairs.

INT. LIBRARY/GARDEN - NIGHT

Empty boxes everywhere, scattered on the library's floor. People have not been very careful picking up their party goods.

Alice enters and looks for the boxes that she left on the keys. There it is: the key with the lace is still there.

Alice puts the key in her pocket. Then she hears noises coming from the outside, so she goes over to the window.

Some of the OLDER GUESTS are already leaving...

Suddenly, their heads spin all the way around and they start singing while smiling at her insanely.

GUESTS

I am slowly going crazy, 1-2-3-4-
5-6- switch. Crazy going slowly
am I, 6-5-4-3-2-1 switch.

Alice gasps in shock. Then she forcefully closes her eyes and covers her ears with both hands.

GUESTS (O.S.)

I am slowly going crazy, 1-2-3-4-
5-6- switch...

Once the voices stop singing, Alice opens her eyes and looks down at the guests...

They are again walking normally, their heads in their places.

Alice, nervous and dazed, closes the window. She takes a deep breath, trying to calm herself.

INT. THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Alice nervously unlocks the door leading to the third floor and starts crossing the hallway. The floor SHRIEKS at every step. She spots that there's a telephone and a big telephone book in a corner.

The door to Eleanor's room is ajar and the light is on. MOANS AND GROANS are heard. She walks toward the light...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The guests dance happily in the living room. Martin does it with a YOUNG GIRL, 20, who looks uncomfortable.

Frau Schiller seems distracted. She cannot see Alice. A few seconds later, she looks in the opposite direction. Now she cannot see the children, either.

When she is about to leave after Alice, Edmund comes to her and offers his hand.

EDMUND

Do you want to dance, Madam?

Frau Schiller hesitates. Then she nods, smiling, and puts her arms around his neck. Unexpectedly, Edmund takes them away from him.

EDMUND

Oh, sorry, dear, I didn't mean me, but...

Edmund takes by the arm an unattractive, overweight man, MR. BERRY, 70, and draws him closer to Frau Schiller.

EDMUND

...Mr. Berry. He dances like an angel... and tells hilarious jokes!

Frau Schiller doesn't answer. Then she shoots a glare at Edmund and leaves. He watches her go, confused.

EDMUND

(to Mr. Berry)
Women, the most unfathomable mystery of all...

INT. ELEANOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alice pushes the door and enters Eleanor's room. It's a wide and elegant room all in white. It has a ghostly appearance, as if time had stopped on the inside...

After getting close to a wall table at the side of the room, Alice browses some drugs on it (painkillers, for the most part). Then a photo portrait catches her eye. She picks it up...

It's a portrait of the family: Edmund and Frau Schiller pose with proud smiles on their faces; Eleanor, her face covered by a veil, holds Sarah, one year old, in her arms while Nicholas, four years old, looks at the camera with scared eyes; the dogs rest at the family's feet.

A MOAN of pain is heard.

Alice shifts her gaze towards the back of the room; there stands a white curtained bed. The curtains are drawn. She places back the portrait on the table and starts walking towards the bed.

ALICE
(shyly)
Eleanor?

Another moan is the only answer. Alice reaches the bed and slowly opens the curtains...

There is a woman lying in the bed. It's ELEANOR, 45. She wears a long, white nightgown; her face is covered by a silk veil.

Horrified, Alice notices that Eleanor's arms and ankles are tied to the bed.

ALICE
(nervous)
I'm... I'm Alice, your children's
governess... Sorry if I'm bothering
you, but...

Alice moves closer to her as Eleanor keeps moaning in pain. She takes her hand and smiles while caressing it. Eleanor's breathing seems to relax.

ALICE
I really wanted to meet you. Your
family has spoken very highly of
you.

Eleanor answers with a faint moan. Alice hesitates for some seconds. Then she unties Eleanor's hand.

ALICE
Your kids are great. I'm taking
care of them. Your husband-

A louder, painful moan comes from Eleanor's mouth as she tightly squeezes Alice's hand. The CRACKS in her bones as she squeezes her hand are heard.

ALICE
I know you're very sick, but you
have to be strong, Eleanor.
(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

Your family loves you, they need you. Do you promise that you'll keep fighting?

Eleanor doesn't answer, she just keeps moaning. Unable to stand the curiosity, Alice reaches out her free hand and slowly pulls her veil back...

Her face is completely disfigured; as with the tall man, her eye sockets are empty and torn apart. She seems more a corpse than a human being.

Alice gasps in horror. Then she tries to break free from her grip, but Eleanor grabs her while SHRIEKING in pain.

After a struggle, Alice manages to get loose from her and falls back into the wall table, causing some drug bottles and the photo portrait to CRASH down to the floor.

Alice runs out of the room.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alice nervously opens the door to the children's bedroom. Toys everywhere: rocking horses, spooky porcelain dolls...

A couple of suitcases have been left on their beds. It seems that they have some kind of escape plan.

Alice opens the window, takes the suitcases and tosses them out to the garden.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Music is off. Most of the guests have already left. Mr. and Mrs. Radcliff approach Edmund.

MR. RADCLIFF

We're leaving. Congratulations,
it was a great party.

Edmund nods while smiling. Mr. and Mrs. Radcliff smile too, but as if waiting for something.

MR. RADCLIFF

I don't mean to be ordinary, but...

EDMUND

Oh, yes, forgive me, I forgot.

Edmund pulls a roll of bills from his jacket pocket and counts them. Then, he hands them to Mr. Radcliff.

EDMUND

Thank you for coming.

Mr. Radcliff puts the bills away.

MR. RADCLIFF

You know you can count on us for any occasion. We could even bring more people.

EDMUND

Great, I'll keep that in mind.

They shake hands. Then Edmund looks around, worried.

EDMUND

Have you seen my kids?

MRS. RADCLIFF

I'm afraid we haven't.

EDMUND

They must be in the garden, then.

MRS. RADCLIFF

Or hidden somewhere... You know how kids are.

EDMUND

(distracted)

Yeah, of course...

MR. RADCLIFF

Have fun.

EDMUND

Thanks. Safe trip.

Mr. and Mrs. Radcliff leave.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Alice, clearly dazed, gets back to the hallway. Something on the floor next to Edmund's room door catches her eye...

It's one of her pink, antidepressant pills. She picks up the pill and examines it, surprised.

INT. EDMUND'S ROOM/HALLWAY/CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A luxurious bedroom, wider than Eleanor's. Everything around is expensive, as if Edmund had left the most expensive corner in the mansion for himself.

Alice enters and carefully closes the door. Then she looks around while walking into the room..

One of the drawers of Edmund's desk is slightly open. She crouches down and opens it a little more.

The drawer contains some papers, pens and a few bottles of vitamin capsules. She opens the drawer a bit more to check the bottom of it...

A dozen bottles of ELAVIL 100mg, her pink pills; beside the bottles, a mortar containing pulverized pink remains of the same pills.

Alice, perplexed, examines them. Then she picks up one of the vitamin bottles and opens it. She takes some of the bicolor vitamin capsules and opens them too...

Pink powder. The vitamin capsules has been emptied and then filled with pulverized antidepressants.

ALICE
Son of a bitch...

A heartrending SCREAM coming from Eleanor's room is heard.

Alice, startled, approaches the door, slightly opens it and has a look at the hallway...

Frau Schiller, a bloody kitchen knife in her hand, is getting out of Eleanor's room. She is not wearing the mask any more.

Horrified, Alice quickly closes the door. Fortunately, Frau Schiller hasn't seen her.

FRAU SCHILLER
Where are you, bitch? I know you
are here! I'm not waiting with
you as much as I have waited with
the other!

Frau Schiller walks the hallway, hunting Alice.

FRAU SCHILLER
If Edmund doesn't know what is
best for him, I will have to show
him!

Frau Schiller gets into the kids' room and has a look at it...

FRAU SCHILLER
Am I speaking your damn English
right, Alice? Yes, sure I am...

The closet is open. Frau Schiller sneaks up trying to surprise Alice, but there's none inside.

EXT. PIER - NIGHT

Sarah and Nicholas are hidden behind some rocks, not far from the pier. Some noisy guests, many of them drunk, pass by. A boat departs. There's only one left.

SARAH

(scared)

Are they leaving without us?

NICHOLAS

No, they aren't. She'll be here in a minute, then we can leave.

SARAH

Maybe she cannot weigh the suitcases. You put too many things.

NICHOLAS

It's not that. She'll be here soon.

INT. EDMUND'S ROOM -DAY

Frau Schiller gets into the room and looks around. It seems there is nobody there...

FRAU SCHILLER

Don't try to hide, bitch, I will find you anyway!

Alice comes out suddenly from behind the door and smashes a vase on Frau Schiller's head. She immediately starts bleeding as the knife slips from her grasp. Then she falls to the floor, stunned.

FRAU SCHILLER

You... You...

Alice reaches down to pick up the kitchen knife, but Frau Schiller recovers and pounces on her. They roll on the floor and start fighting..

It seems an uneven situation; surprisingly, Frau Schiller is far stronger than Alice and beats her really hard with a sadistic look.

Finally, Frau Schiller straddles her and gets the knife. Alice seems to be totally defeated...

Frau Schiller is about to stab her in the face...

FRAU SCHILLER
Time to die, sweetie!

A SHOT is heard. The top of Frau Schiller's head blows up. An instant later, she falls like a stone.

Behind her, Edmund appears holding a shotgun. He takes his mask off and looks down in sadness at the dead body.

EDMUND
I'm sorry, Moni. You didn't
deserve that.
(to Alice)
So here you're. You had to come
up here... no matter what I told
you.

Still shocked, Alice stands up and wipes away the blood from her lips. She has bruises all over.

EDMUND
Sacred and inviolable spaces! Did
I not say that a thousand times?

Alice is now just in front of him, her eyebrows furrowed and an angry expression all over her face.

ALICE
You lied to me!

EDMUND
What do you mean?

ALICE
-This!

Alice pulls the antidepressant bottles from her pocket and drops them to his feet.

ALICE
And this!

Alice opens one of the bicolor vitamin capsules and pours the pink powder on the floor.

ALICE
I don't even know what's real
anymore!

Open-mouthed, Edmund stares down at the capsules.

EDMUND

I... I had to do it. I just did it
to protect you.

ALICE

(choleric)

You didn't have to protect me
from anything!

EDMUND

Yes, I had... The tall man.

Alice doesn't answer, taken aback. Then Edmund sits down
on the bed and lights one of his cigars. He takes a puff.

EDMUND

His name was Joseph. He worked
here years ago as Anastasia's
tutor. He was a strange person,
lonely, very quiet. I think that
something was wrong in his head...

(beat)

At that time, I wasn't the man I
am now; I spent a lot of time
away from home, I didn't care
about my family. So he wanted to
take advantage of that and tried
to replace me, as simple as that...

(beat)

I had to dismiss him. Some months
later, he died in a car accident.

ALICE

So he's real?

Edmund nods.

EDMUND

Everything weird you've seen or
heard except the tall man were
hallucinations, but I needed you
to have them once you got rid of
your pills. It was like masking
his presence behind them. If I
hadn't done it, you'd have run
from here.

ALICE

Your family sees him too?

Edmund nods again.

ALICE

But Nicholas was with me when I
saw him in the study-

EDMUND

-You'd be surprised by how well Nicholas is able to control his feelings.

Alice's expression turns to incredulity.

EDMUND

But don't fear. That stupid ghost will leave in a few days and everything will be back to normal again. Trust me.

Alice gets the knife from the floor and holds it firmly behind her. The manoeuvre remains unseen for him, focused on his speech.

EDMUND

We need you here, Alice. You're very important to us. We love you.

ALICE

What about the servants? Do they see Joseph?

EDMUND

No. I guess he doesn't consider them as part of this family.

ALICE

But I'm not either.

EDMUND

Well, somehow you're already one of us. At least we think so.

ALICE

I'm leaving tonight.

EDMUND

What? I made this party for you. I wanted you to be family. I did it... as a sign of love. Yes, a sign of love. That's exactly what it was!

No answer from her.

EDMUND

I invited all these people here for you and this is how you repay me? I haven't ruined all this for nothing!

Alice starts to cough and hack. After swaying on her feet, she leans against the wall not to fall. Edmund draws near and put his arm around her waist.

EDMUND
Are you okay?

ALICE
Don't touch me!

Alice tears herself away from him. He tries to embrace and kiss her, but she slaps him.

ALICE
Get your hands off me!

Edmund steps back, frustrated.

ALICE
I'm leaving right now. I take the children with me.

EDMUND
(shocked)
What?

ALICE
They come with me. Definitely, this is not the best place to grow up.

Alice glances down at Frau Schiller's dead body.

ALICE
Besides, I'm afraid you're going to spend a long time away from them.

EDMUND
That remains to be seen...

Edmund ejects an empty shell from his shotgun and starts loading another into the chamber...

Without wasting a second, Alice stabs him in the shoulder with the knife.

Edmund falls to his knees while shouting in pain. Then she takes a candelabrum and hits him in the head.

Alice runs out of the bedroom as Edmund remains on the floor, unconscious.

INT. THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Alice goes to the part of the hallway where the telephone is and tries to telephone, but the line is totally dead..

The cable has been cut. She starts running out of the third floor.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Alice tries to get the suitcases from the place where they have fallen. It is very dark and she only finds one of them..

Finally, she notices that she is wasting time looking for the suitcase and runs in the direction of the pier.

INT. EDMUND'S ROOM

Edmund recovers himself. He is bleeding, and looks weak. He gets out of the room, walking with some difficulties.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Guided by the light of a flashlight and the torches, Alice runs through the fog towards the breaker area.

ALICE
Nicholas! Sarah! Are you there?
Can you hear me?

Nobody answers. No sign of the children.

A strong gust of wind suddenly blows out the torches. She stops running and looks around in disorientation..

A singing chorus of CHILDREN'S VOICES coming from the fog is heard.

VOICES (O.S.)
I am slowly going crazy, 1-2-3-4-
5-6- switch. Crazy going slowly
am I, 6-5-4-3-2-1 switch.

Alice forcefully closes her eyes and covers her ears with both hands.

ALICE
Stop... Stop it...

The voices keep singing, louder and louder.

ALICE
Stop it!

The singing abruptly ceases, then a total silence. Alice uncovers and sighs, slightly relieved...

A loud BARKING is heard in the distance, approaching...

Alice notices something blurry about twenty yards ahead. It's the breaker. She runs towards there.

EXT. BREAKER/PIER - NIGHT

Alice gets to the rocky place where the kids are hidden. They embrace her.

NICHOLAS

You're bleeding! Who did that to you?

Alice touches her lip, which is bleeding again.

ALICE

Oh, it's really nothing.

NICHOLAS

Was it him who did it?

ALICE

That's not important right now.
Let's go where the boats are!

Alice looks in the direction of the pier. The last ship is departing. They run as fast as they can, Sarah falling down and making them losing time...

When they arrive to the pier, the last boat is already gone, but it is not far from them. They can see some of the passengers under the lights of the boat.

ALICE

Wait! We need help!

NICHOLAS

Please come back!

SARAH

We need you!

Alice, her arms up, tries to indicate them that they have to go back...

The people on the boat misunderstand their gestures and start waving them goodbye.

ALICE

No! No! Please come back!

People keep on waving them goodbye. The boat is soon too far to be seen.

ALICE

The red boat! Hurry!

They leave running the pier.

EXT. BREAKER - NIGHT

Alice and the children arrive at the place where the red boat is docked. She bends down to untie the mooring rope...

The boat is now secured to the pier by a thick chain with a padlock.

ALICE

What...?

Alice tries to open the padlock unsuccessfully.

ALICE

Okay, don't worry, we'll manage somehow... Now we have to hide...

She doesn't really know where to go.

NICHOLAS

We should go inside the pyramid.
He never gets on the inside. He
says it's a sacred place.

ALICE

Yes, I know, but-

The BARKING is heard again. They turn around, straining to see through the fog... The dogs are coming closer, they bark furiously while showing their teeth.

ALICE

Let's go there!

They start running towards the pyramid.

INT. PYRAMID - NIGHT

Alice and the children quickly enter the pyramid. After locking the door, she switches on a flashlight and they walk through the corridor leading to the main room...

ALICE
We'll be safe here. Tomorrow is
Thursday, and the supply boat
will arrive. We'll leave with
them, right?

Nicholas and Sarah nod, unconvinced. Then Alice picks up
a matchbox from a table and lights some wall torches.

ALICE
Much better this way...

Alice approaches the sarcophagus and runs her fingers
over it.

ALICE
Anastasia... Do you remember her?
Well, you were too young when
she... Sarah, you were still in
your mom's womb, weren't you?

Alice turns to smile at Sarah, but she doesn't answer.
She and Nicholas look at each other, confused.

ALICE
Anastasia, your sister, your
older sister...

NICHOLAS
We don't have any older sister.

ALICE
Yes, the one who drowned at sea
five years ago. I know it's still
painful for you, but-

NICHOLAS
-You're wrong, Alice. I've always
been the older one.

Sarah nods.

ALICE
(confused)
But... your father told me...

Alice drops her gaze back to the sarcophagus. Then she
pushes away with both arms the displaced slab of the
tomb. It falls to the ground SHATTERING in half.

Alice, because of the odor, covers her mouth and nose
with a handkerchief while pointing the flashlight beam
into the sarcophagus...

There is a SKELETON. It seems to belong to a man, a tall
man. He wears dark, torn clothes and the front part of
his skull is destroyed.

ALICE
Oh, my God...

FLASHBACK-DREAM - EXT. BEACH - DAY

The dogs reach the tall man and start tearing at his face with their teeth.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. PYRAMID - NIGHT

Nicholas and Sarah approach the tomb to look inside, but Alice gently pushes them back.

ALICE
Stay back! Don't look!

The children obey. Then Alice notices a paper sticking out of the skeleton's jacket pocket. She picks it up...

It's an older family portrait, very similar to the one she found in Eleanor's room:

A TALL MAN, 40, wearing a suit appears instead of Edmund and Frau Schiller. Next to him, there is a beautiful and uncovered Eleanor wearing a pregnant belly, and Nicholas, three years old. All of them are smiling, with no dogs.

FLASHBACK - INT. ELEANOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alice watches the first family portrait with Edmund, Frau Schiller and the dogs.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. PYRAMID - NIGHT

A new expression of horror grows on Alice's face. Then she drops the picture to the ground...

EDMUND (O.S.)
You cannot have an idea how
disappointing this situation is
for me...

Startled, Alice and the children turn around. Forcing a smile and bleeding from his shoulder, Edmund steps out from a dark corner of the room while holding his shotgun.

EDMUND
Oh, Alice, you should have
included in your curriculum that
you're a curious little cat... that
is so good with puzzles...

EDMUND (CONT'D)

And that you enjoy stabbing your employers and throwing candelabra at their heads!

Edmund laughs.

ALICE

If you really love these kids, just leave them alive!

EDMUND

Before I decide what I want to do with you, I'd like to have the pleasure of dropping the last piece of the puzzle.

Edmund approaches the sarcophagus.

EDMUND

His name was not Joseph, but Arthur. Mister Arthur Howard Dickinson... Our dear friend had a wonderful little family, but he preferred spending a lot of time away from home or at the library... In short, he didn't care a whit about his family. At that time, I worked here as a tutor, just like you did...

(beat)

The decision was therefore very simple to make: I knew I could do better than him. I wanted to do better than him. I just did it.

ALICE

Why does he come back?

Edmund smiles again. But we notice that the topic makes him uneasy.

EDMUND

To tell you the truth, I don't know why he's around, nor do I care. I only know one thing: he always ends up leaving.

ALICE

And Anastasia? Where is she buried then?

EDMUND

You haven't still found out that for yourself, Alice? Oh, how disappointing...

(beat)

There's no Anastasia. She never existed. It's just the name of the orphanage Frau Schiller and me were brought in: St Anastasia. What a place! Rats wouldn't like living there! But we had to, because we had nobody...

(beat)

When you came to the island and asked me about the pyramid... I felt kind of inspired. A tragic family is always more attractive.

ALICE

I've noticed that lying inspires you.

EDMUND

No, you're wrong. Life inspires me.

Edmund takes a cigar from his jacket and lights it. Then he inhales deeply and opens his eyes again.

EDMUND

But that's the past. Let's talk about the present. The first thing we'll do is come back home. It's a freezing night and I have to take a look at my shoulder...

(beat)

I didn't know you were as good with knives as with books, Alice.

Edmund laughs. Meanwhile, Nicholas watches down the family portrait on the ground.

EDMUND

Come on, kids, come with your father.

Nicholas raises his eyes and stares piercingly at him...

NICHOLAS

You're not our father.

EDMUND

Clever boy! But believe me, it's
always smarter to be on the side
of the guy holding the shotgun.

Tension grows. They all stay still. The children don't
move a muscle. They just lay closer to Alice.

EDMUND

My patience is coming to an end!
Come with me!

SARAH

You're not our father.

EDMUND

Come with me right now! All of
you!

Edmund forcibly grabs Sarah by her arm. Alice tries to
stop him.

ALICE

Don't touch her, bastard!

With a quick and vigorous movement, Edmund slams the butt
of his shotgun against her face. Alice falls unconscious
to the ground.

INT. ELEANOR'S ROOM - DAY

A ray of morning sunlight filters through the window,
landing on Alice's face. She opens her eyes...

Surprised, Alice finds herself lying in Eleanor's bed and
wearing a wedding dress. She rubs her eyes and coughs a
couple times. Something on her lap catches her attention...

It's a small envelope.

After sitting up, she opens it. Inside there are a couple
folded pages, written by hand. She unfolds the pages and
starts to read.

EDMUND (OFF)

Good morning, Alice. First of
all, Merry Christmas Day. How are
you feeling? I hope better than
last night. If you don't mind my
saying so, you were, once more,
somewhat unhinged and violent.
Better to forget it, I already
have.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alice, still wearing the wedding dress, enters the living room. The Christmas tree as well as all the ornaments and ribbons have disappeared.

EDMUND (OFF)

I regret to inform you that something terribly painful has happened. My dear wife Eleanor passed away last night.

The middle of the room is now occupied by a white coffin set on a long wooden table. Several wreaths and bouquets of flowers surround it.

EDMUND (OFF)

As you can see, I did my utmost to make her funeral chapel as dignified as possible. Everything had been ready for months.

Alice hesitatingly draws closer and looks inside the box. There rests the body of Eleanor, wearing a white dress and with her face covered by the silk veil.

EXT. MANSION FAÇADE - DAY

The white mist spreads through the garden and the lower part of the mansion façade.

EDMUND (OFF)

Sorry to say that I have taken the same journey as my wife and Frau Schiller. I must warn you that the sight of my body might be unpleasant, so just look at me as little as possible and try to remember the good times we spent together.

INT. HALL/DINING ROOM - DAY

Alice fearfully approaches the doors to the dining room and opens them. Then she gasps in horror, covering her mouth with both hands...

Seated around the dining table, with their bowed heads covered by bloody clothes, are the bodies of Edmund and Frau Schiller. The dogs wander around the bodies while sniffing them curiously.

EDMUND (OFF)

You will find me in the dining room, facing the Botticelli. I'm sure that as I contemplate that wonder the journey that I now undergo will be less painful.

Alice cautiously walks over Edmund's body and watches it: his right hand on the table holding an unlit cigar, the shotgun at his feet...

Alice shifts her gaze towards the painting "The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti"...

There is a fourth panel hanging on the wall next to the painting. It seems to depict a wedding reception.

Alice watches the panel for a few more instants. Then she takes a last look at the bodies and moves away from the table toward the hallway.

A few steps ahead, she abruptly stops. A look of utter bewilderment spreads across her face.

After stepping back, she carefully stares at Edmund's hand...

The little finger of his right hand is not partially amputated, just folded. Her expression turns to fear...

FLASHBACK - EXT. BEACH - DAY

Edmund shows Alice his hand. The top half of his little finger is amputated.

EDMUND
You tore off half of my finger!

Alice jerks, startled. Then Edmund starts laughing.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Alice removes the bloody clothes from the heads of the dead bodies... They are Norman and Adrianne.

Edmund, wearing a morning coat with a red rose in its lapel, comes up behind her.

EDMUND
Boo!

Alice, startled, turns around. Next to him, scared and wearing wedding clothes, there are Nicholas and Sarah.

EDMUND
(laughing)
Sorry, I couldn't resist the
temptation of doing so. Are you
alright?

Alice doesn't answer, shocked. Then Edmund picks up the shotgun from the floor.

EDMUND

I'd be lying if I told you that all this was planned. In fact, I should be right now where Norman is. I was convinced that this was my destiny, so that's why I gave you that stupid farewell letter. But sometimes... Yes, sometimes you can only see things clearly when you feel the cold breath of death on the nape of your neck.

Edmund points at the fourth panel of the painting.

EDMUND

The fourth panel, entitled "The Wedding Banquet". I lied to you, I actually bought it some years ago, but I preferred to keep it instead of hanging it next to the others. I felt I had to wait for the right time. And that time came just a few hours ago... I hung it up, and then I watched it, fascinated, while putting the barrel of this shotgun into my mouth...

(beat)

But then I understood. Yes, I understood everything...

Edmund smiles from ear to ear, his eyes looking feverish...

EDMUND

You're the fourth panel, Alice. The new love, happiness, true happiness!

Alice is speechless for a few seconds.

EDMUND

Don't you have anything to say?

Alice shifts her gaze towards the dead bodies. Then she stares back him with a mix of incomprehension and anger.

ALICE

Why did you have to kill them?

EDMUND

Often the most broken paths lead to the most beautiful places... I simply had to do it. They knew too much.

ALICE

You... You're absolutely crazy.

Alice takes a step toward the door, but Edmund quickly stops her by aiming the shotgun at her.

EDMUND

I have not finished yet, dear.

Intimidated, she steps back to the table.

EDMUND

Take a seat, everyone.

Alice and the children obey. Edmund covers the head of the dead bodies with the clothes.

EDMUND

It's been a long search, years
and years trying to find my soul
mate with Frau Schiller's help.
It may have been Eleanor, but she
never accepted me. She was so
devoted to her husband. That's
the reason I had to punish her...

Edmund smiles bitterly while looking at the Botticelli.

EDMUND

The dogs, you know, like the
scorned horseman in the painting.
Fortunately, I managed to stop
them before they ripped open her
throat. She didn't deserve to
die. I just wanted to show that I
loved her with all my heart. It
was worth it though it cost me a
finger.

Edmund snatches the unlit cigar from Norman's hand.

EDMUND

But all that matters now is you
and me. I feel this is the end of
the journey, the moment of truth...

Edmund lights the cigar and closes his eyes. Then he inhales deeply and opens his eyes again.

EDMUND

Will you be my wife, Alice?

Alice stares at him in silence, perplexed.

ALICE

Edmund, are you aware of what you
have done?

Edmund doesn't answer.

ALICE
Please, look at them. Look at
what you have done.

EDMUND
(ignoring her)
Our destinies have been linked,
Alice. Life wanted it this way.

ALICE
You killed them, Edmund.

EDMUND
We both were chasing the same
thing: a real family. Now we have
the chance to reach our dreams.

Alice stands up, angry.

ALICE
You killed them, you fucking
psychopath!

Edmund aims his shotgun again at her.

EDMUND
Shut up! Shut up and sit down!

Alice obeys, intimidated.

EDMUND
I'm giving you the chance to be
happy! Catch it! The world's not
the Land of Oz! Nobody will give
the Tin Man a new heart! There's
no future for you out there!

Alice doesn't answer. Edmund puts his shotgun down and
takes a deep puff from his cigar.

EDMUND
I'll ask you just once more...
Will you be my wife?

A SLOW, NICE COMPOSITION is heard. It comes from the
music box holding in Sarah's hand. Edmund, irritated,
grabs the box from her hands and throws it on the floor.

EDMUND
Answer, Alice!

Alice hesitates for a few instants.

ALICE
I'd rather tear my eyes out than
marry you.

Edmund doesn't react. He stares at her in shock. Then he places himself by the window.

EDMUND

It's okay... You don't want to be my wife and that's okay... I... I understand. That's life...

Edmund's expression turns somber...

EDMUND

Now you'll die, these kids will come with me and I'll only have to hire new servants and start looking for a new tutor. Back to beginning. My beginning...

(beat)

Stand up and come with me, Alice. We're going for a little walk on the beach with my dogs.

Alice nervously looks around. Then something in the music box on the floor catches her eye...

The word "TOD" scratched on the wood.

Alice's fear turns to hope. It's like she just made a fascinating discovery.

FLASHBACK - INT. STUDY ROOM - DAY

Sarah talks with Alice while drawing a tall man by a shore.

SARAH

Well, I believe he can only come in if an adult in our family says the magic word...

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Edmund gets angry.

EDMUND

Didn't you hear me? Stand up!

Alice stands up as he snaps his fingers to get the dogs' attention. She looks at the children, who nervously nod.

EDMUND

Come on, follow us.

ALICE

Please, let me ask you one last question. Just a question...

Edmund nods.

ALICE
Did you really consider me part
of this family?

Surprised, Edmund hesitates.

EDMUND
Yes, I did. You were part of
this family.

Alice nods. Then she seriously stares at Edmund, who
looks at her in confusion...

ALICE
Tod...

Nothing happens. She looks at Sarah, confused.

SARAH
Louder!

Alice takes a deep breath and...

ALICE
TOD!

Someone bursts through the window and grabs Edmund from
behind, immobilizing him...

It's Arthur, the tall man.

ALICE
TOD! TOD!

Suddenly, the dogs stiffen to attack position and start
barking and growling as they stare at Edmund; their eyes
glowing red as if possessed.

ALICE
TOD! TOD!

Edmund aims his shotgun at the dogs while struggling with
the tall man, but one of them jumps at him and bites his
arm deeply...

The shotgun drops from his grasp and falls to the floor
as Edmund screams in pain.

The tall man lets go of Edmund, who falls to his knees
while complaining of his arm hurting.

ALICE
TOD! TOD!

The dogs pounce on Edmund and furiously start tearing at
his face with their teeth.

Edmund stretches his arm out to grab the shotgun, but it's too far away.

Under Alice's shocked eyes, Edmund keeps stretching his arm out to the shotgun as the dogs brutally devour his face and throat...

Finally, Edmund picks up the shotgun and fires. The shot hits the head of one of the dogs, which falls dead.

The second dog tries to run away, but Edmund shoots him down too.

Covered in blood and with his face and throat ripped to bloody shreds, Edmund crawls away from the dead dogs and leans his back against the wall...

Alice, Sarah and Nicholas stare at him in horror.

EDMUND
(dying)
Alice? Kids? Are you... Are you
still there?

They don't answer. Alice runs towards the children and embraces them.

EDMUND
You'll... You'll have to help me.
They seriously hurt me...

They keep staring at him in shock while the tall man remains stock-still.

EDMUND
Frau Schiller will lend you a
hand... She worked as a nurse in
her youth, you know? She... She did
a great job with Eleanor and sure
will do so again...

Edmund blindly loads a shell into his shotgun.

EDMUND
Everything will be fine... Yes,
everything will be fine again...

Edmund shoves the shotgun's barrel into his mouth and pulls the trigger.

After the SHOT, Alice and the children lower their gazes to the floor. Then Alice raises her eyes to the tall man, who remains motionless, and stares at him.

A few instants later, Arthur turns around and leaves.

EXT. PIER - DAY

It's a sunny morning. A small supply boat approaches the pier as a HORN is heard.

INT. HALL - DAY

Standing at the main door of the mansion, Alice tucks the "The Wizard of Oz" book away in her purse. She smiles.

Carrying their luggage, Nicholas and Sarah walk over her. She gently strokes them.

ALICE
Are you ready?

The children nod.

ALICE
Okay, let's go. They're already here.

Alice opens the door to let them out. Then she follows them and starts closing the door. But something catches her attention into the hall...

Eleanor and Arthur (with their normal appearance, as in the second portrait) stand at the top of the first flight of stairs...

They stare at her seriously.

ALICE
(intimidated)
Nicholas, Sarah...

The children turn around to look at the stairs. Then they get flabbergasted.

SARAH
Mommy...

After a few moments, the ghosts of Eleanor and Arthur smile while opening their arms. Alice, still shocked, smiles too.

ALICE
C'mon, kids, go.

Nicholas and Sarah hesitate.

ALICE
C'mon, don't fear! Go!

The children happily run to their parents. Alice widely smiles.

EXT. PIER - DAY

The supply boat is moored to the pier.

EDMUND (OFF)

To finish, I can only wish that here you may find the happiness that you so desired. We'll be by your side, supporting you from somewhere. Having family is very important for all.

The young boatman starts unloading supplies from the ship.

EDMUND (OFF)

Goodbye, Alice. I wish you all the best. Your friend, Edmund Welcker...

(beat)

Oh, I almost forgot. "Tod" is a German word. It means "death". The dogs obey immediately.

FADE OUT.

THE END