

# Yggdrasil

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*Editor: Klaus J. Gerken*

*European Editor: Mois Benarroch*

*Contributing Editors: Jack R. Wesdorp*

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**By**

**Jack R. Wesdorp**

# Introduction

## Chronology for *The Blackbird Trilogy*

### *The Cradle*

- 1790 Roger Maitland born
- 1791 Winnifred Eldritch born
- 1810 Yewanda "Emma" born
- 1825 Roger Maitland captains / owns boat the *Medusa*
- 1826 Roger Maitland and Winnifred Eldritch marry
- 1830 Yewanda enslaved
- 1830 Winona Eldritch born (August)
- 1830 Roger Maitland and Yewanda arrive home, Winona is an infant (September)
- 1831 Yewanda unchained, hand ritual (February) (Winona is almost 6 months old)
- 1834 Claire Sacristan born
- 1850 Winona meets Henry Prey
- 1850 Roger Maitland dies aboard ship
- 1850 Winnifred dies 3 months after Roger (July)
- 1852 Winona and Henry marry
- 1866 Winsome Eldritch is born, daughter of Winona Eldritch and (probably) Henry Prey
- 1867 Yewanda dies a free woman after the Emancipation Proclamation

### *The Whistler*

- 1880 Winona, pregnant, flees Henry with lover Abel, leaving Winsome, 14, in Claire's care
- 1881 Wilfrid Eldritch born to Winona on board the *Medusa* off Manila
- 1882 Claire moves to Winona's hacienda in Cuba to raise Wilfrid as Winona sails the world as a trader; Winsome, age 16, remains in Provincetown
- 1888-92 At 22, Winsome begins studies at Harvard
- 1892 At 26, Winsome confronts Henry; Henry and Randolph Prey die in a fight over the confrontation; Winsome flees with lover Clam, assisted by Constable Conch Sheldrake

### *The Key*

- 1898 American battleship *The Main* moored in Havana harbor (January)
- 1898 Siblings Winsome, 32, and Wilfrid, 17, meet for the first time with Claire and Winona in Cuba; Winona and Winsome are reunited but split in acrimony (Feb)
- 1898 Claire takes Wilfrid to Provincetown to the old Maitland house (early March); the house burns down with the destruction of a magical tool

- 1899 Claire and Conch Sheldrake marry
  - 1978 Edwin Eldritch, grandson of Wilfrid, born
  - 2000 Edwin, age 22, and his wife Luciole Valencia, 6 months pregnant, visit their inheritance, the burned-out shell of the old Maitland home in Provincetown, to see if rumored treasure can be found
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# The Cradle

## **[All stage directions from audience POV]**

### **(Character motivations in parentheses)**

#### **Characters in order of appearance**

Winnifred “Freddie” Eldritch Maitland – New mother going blind, afflicted with Parkinson’s, has a lip dystrophy, becomes increasingly spastic, is given to non-sequiturs, wife of Roger Maitland.

Roger “Tiller” Maitland – Ship’s captain, away for half a year at a time, slaver and blockade runner, wanted a son, no longer loves his wife, caught between duty and desire.

Yewande “Emma” – Roger’s housekeeper, mistress, Voudoun priestess of the Yoruba, adept at sorcery, desires a child, is barren herself.

Winona “Win / Nona” Eldritch – Winnifred’s daughter, takes her mother’s family name.

Claire Sacristan – Childhood best friend of Winona.

#### **Particularities of Yewanda’s style of speaking**

Yewande “Emma” is the leading lady of this play. She does not speak pigeon English. She chooses her words very carefully, deliberately, and delivers them decisively with emphasis and conviction. She will examine what someone else says to her, determine the truth of it, and answer concisely. “I” means how she sees herself at large in the cosmos; “me” is how others see her in everyday interaction. Again, the combination “I-me” is not imperfect English; it is her complete self. She refers to other people by their full names. Naming is crucial to the Yoruba; a name defines one’s core personality; the name directs one’s purpose in this life. The name is compulsory. Yewande does use some quaint diction; no contractions; rarely uses connectives, viewing them as redundant. The speech of a priestess of the real must be simple, understandable. She will use “no” and “not” interchangeably. She prefers “no” because it enhances her sense of authority. She carries the wisdom of her people forward; will choose a successor; teaches unstintingly; always for free. If she lies, she becomes seriously conflicted. To lie in divination is impossible; but she may tell a partial truth; this, too, is a lie that only she can fathom—eventually must face—and expiate. She cannot undo her own conscience. She will grapple with right and wrong; and the mitigating circumstances between them; even her clairvoyance is insufficient to evade the pitfalls of life; there are no simple answers; yet answers there shall be. Solutions come to those who search. For them,

opportunity arises from the most agonizing moment. Pride of self-worth is a strength. She does not flaunt this pride. And if it seems to you that she's done wrong, you may judge her next to yourself. I shall not.

– J.W.

# Act 1, Scene 1

Location and time: Provincetown, August 1830. Early evening, sunset.

Setting: Interior of Winnifred's bedroom. Large canopy four-poster with curtains stage left, alcove right center with cradle, backlit projection of Cape Cod Bay at Provincetown through window, unlit charcoal brazier, treadle sewing machine, table with two chairs, oil lamp, dirty dishes, two doors, extreme stage left to hall, stage right to kitchen.

[Curtain up]

[Winnifred sits at the sewing machine looking through a large Sherlock Holmes hand lens trying to make out her botched stitches in a baby's dress.]

Winnifred: [Sighs, shakes head, throws sheet over machine, shoves chair to table, bumps into table.] No good. [Turns chair to face window, takes off glasses, polishes them.] Sssoon he'll bbe home. Sssleep now.

[Door slams, feet in hall, offstage voice.]

Roger: Wait here [sound of chain].

[R enters]

Winnifred: Tiller! I thought it wwwwould bbe weeks yet.

R: [Embraces Winnifred; backs away.] Good wind in the backstretch. How is it with you? [Indicates cradle.]

Winnifred: I had the quack in, the one you sssuggested. Ssshe thought it wwould be a breech. I didn't thing think so. So I got Tabitha to mmmidwife m-me.

R: (With disgust) That witch?

Winnifred: She wwanted to. Sssaid it was an honor to birth an Eldritch. Ssshe was right. It ww-went easy; f-five hours.

R: And?

Winnifred: (Defiant) Winona was the name wwe agreed on. Ww-wwwould you like to sssee her?

R: [Evades the question, goes to the table, examines dishes, rattles spoon.] What have you been eating?

Winnifred: Oatmeal porridge.

R: Is that all?

Winnifred: Mm-milk. I get a ffresh delivery twice a wweek.

R: Bread? Eggs?

Winnifred: No. Too difficult...

R: [He holds her at arm's length.] It's gotten worse. I can feel a slight tremor...

Winnifred: [She looks away, refuses to meet his gaze.] ...

R: You'll need help. I can't be here long. I've brought you some... something.

[Roger goes to door.] Emma! Come in here. [R opens door, he leads Emma on a short chain.] [She wears a grey shift, carries a burlap bag with her belongings in front, eyes front, head erect.]

E: Yes'm.

R: Emma, this is my wife Winnifred. She needs your help. Cook, wash, keep the house.

E: Yes'm.

R: Winnifred, Mrs. Maitland, has trouble navigating. Lighting lamps, tending fire. You must do this for her. Understand?

E: Yes'm.

R: [Points at cradle.] And you must help raise my child...my daughter...

E: [Shows a definite interest, starts toward the cradle, Winnifred moves to intercept her, stands in the way. Face-off, awkward pause, struggle for supremacy, W wins.]

E: (Shrugs) Yes'm.

R: Ah. Yes. [to W] I'll show Emma where she can sleep...in the back bedroom. [Takes chain, leads Emma through kitchen door. W sits at table, light fades outside.]

[R returns.]

R: She's secure. I'll leave you the key. [Sits at table, fiddles with the lamp]

R: [takes W's hand] It has to be. I can't see any other way. Please.

Winnifred: How did you find *that*? [She indicates kitchen door. Roger does not respond.] How was your voyage?

R: (Shakes head.) Successful. Reached Bristol in really good time. Got a new chronometer. Off-loaded in Amsterdam and reprovisioned at Le Havre. Picked up more birds on the Slave Coast.

Winnifred: How much did you ppay for ffor her?

R: (Pleased with himself.): Nothing. All the trade goods came back.

Winnifred: (Contemptuously) Sssailor.

R: Freddie, I don't love her.

Winnifred: Sss... [She leaves it hanging.]

R: Lost one on the way. Too bad, a big brute too. Would have been worth more.

Winnifred: (Her radar pings) How sso, what happened?

R: [Evades the question, takes off his coat, lights the oil lamp.] Oh, nothing.

[Crescent-horned moon rising over the horizon, visible through the window.]

Winnifred: The piano needs tuning.

R: We don't have a piano.

Winnifred: Schubert tastes nice.

R: Would you like one? We can afford one. The trip was, well, lucrative.

Winnifred: I don't wwwant your mmmoney.

R: I'll sneak the pouch home tomorrow night. It'll be in the safe down in the basement.

Winnifred: Gold. Birds of paradise. Can you hear their lament?

R: [Ignores the innuendo.] Gold sovereigns.

Winnifred: We smell your blood.

R: [Adjusts the lamp.] We stopped at Jamaica. Sold the birds. One keg of rum per working buck.

Winnifred: Sugar. Need molasses ffor my oatmeal.

R: I'll get some. Traded the hens for a really fine mahogany log. So big we couldn't stow it in the hold. Chained it on deck.

Winnifred: Her chain has 49 links.

R: Had to evade [her attention wanes] the blockade [she reaches for her mug], my crew is unloading the rum right now.

Winnifred: Ballast stones, they're all fist-sized.

R: We have to build some racks to hold more barrels. I'm hauling a dangerous cargo.

[The baby starts fussing in the cradle, W shuffles to it, bumps into the sewing machine on the way, takes the baby from cradle, goes to bed, drops her shoes, gets in, draws curtain, crooning happy noises. R sits a while, gets up, sits down again, gets up, takes his coat from the chair back, puts it back on the chair, lowers the oil lamp, leaves by the kitchen door.]

R: [On the way out looks at the bed, says as much to himself as her] I don't love her.

[Shortly offstage, a chain and lock clatter to the floor. Silence.]

[Curtain]

# Act 1, Scene 2

Setting: Winnifred's bedroom, February 1831, midnight, pale moon high in sky through frosted window, orange glow from brazier, quilt in progress on sewing machine, down comforter on bed, curtain open, coat and galoshes by door, oil lamp lit on table, circular rag rug on floor center stage.

[Curtain up.]

[Winnifred gets out of bed, wears granny nightie, woolen bedsocks, skirts brazier gingerly, warms hands, goes to cradle in alcove, finds it empty, rings handbell hung from bedpost.]

[E enters from kitchen stage right, carries child and feeding bottle.]

E: Here she is. She suck most. You finish with her. [Hands child to W. W sits at table, cradles child in lap, applies bottle.]

[E checks brazier, leaves stage right.]

[Clock offstage strikes once.]

[Door creaks from kitchen, noise of coal scuttle being filled.]

[W finishes with bottle, holds it up to lamp, licks rubber teat, finds cradle and tucks child in, rings bell.]

E: [Carries in scuttle, sets it by brazier, checks child, adjusts blanket, W and E sit at table.]

Winnifred: Emma, I'm going crazy. I can feel my mind wandering away.

E: Yes'm. You worse in winter. Why you not sleep in back bedroom with me? Warmer there.

Winnifred: Bbcause he doesn't want mme in there. He... you ... bbut pput the crib in with you.

E: Winnienona almost too big for cradle.

Winnifred: I felt the quilt. You finished the edge really nice.

E: Just quilting stitch, then it done. Carpenter bringing crib soon.

Winnifred: Did you pay him?

E: He get gold piece. He smile. [They regard each other and relax.] [W extends her hand across the table, E takes it, strokes up to the elbow.]

Winnifred: What am I going to do? I feel like I'm suffocating in here.

E: I-me make more potion for you. Tabitha bring herb. Poppy wine. [Points to cradle.] [To Winona] You try with bottle?

Winnifred: Yes. The nipple works.

E: You not drink too much potion. You make a chain to poppy. Wear it for life.

Winnifred: I know. Not much of a life.

E: Not so. You keep on long way yet. Need you here.

Winnifred: And I need you. It's amazing how the chain works. To keep us apart and together at the same time. I mean...

E: I-me know what you mean. Know too well.

Winnifred: Having bad bad dreams. Mummy head hurts. I've been... [W sits bolt upright, releases hand.] In the dream, Winona's all grown up.

E: Yes. What dream? You tell.

Winnifred: She's on board a ship.

E: Long hull boat. Roger Maitland boat. [Emma slams table with hand.] I-me see this boat.

Winnifred: Yes, it's Tiller's boat. She's gone to Boston to buy..

E: Cup and saucer.

Winnifred: Yes. China plates and table service.

E: Very fancy.

Winnifred: Yes. For her shop. She owns a shop. In town.

E: Something else.

Winnifred: To see a barrister.

E: What that?

Winnifred: A lawyer. Judge. Courtroom.

E: Ah. Like bank. Wear wig? [Waves hands along head to simulate a wig.]

Winnifred: Yes. Bbut mm-more important than a bbanker. Lawyers pprove that wwe own this house. That Wwinona gets her inheritance. Sssometimes I despair...

E: Stop. [Raps table with her knuckles.] Back to your dream. More, bad more.

Winnifred: Vvery bbad more. Sshe goes to Bboston to kill a bbaby (almost breaks down in tears).

E: [Raises her hands palms out, gestures.] I-me have this one too. My hair all stand up. Now we know.

Winnifred: Sshe gets bback on board... and...

E: ... The boat sinks...

Winnifred: Ffirst it burns, then it sinks.

E: There is a man. I-me has seen him. [Points to forehead.] Here in dream. In this house. He will come.

Winnifred: Who is he?

E: He, no two, they want letter, paper.

Winnifred: From the lawyer. Yes. All ffor a ppiece of paper.

E: We-you-me will stop this. Now. [Puts fists down on table.]

Winnifred: [Sits upright.] Bbefore god we will. Tell me how. Wwhat do we do?

E: You wait here.

[While E is in kitchen, W takes a key from a lanyard around her neck, lays it on the table.]

[E returns with the hand of glory, a mummified human hand encased in wax, used as a candelabra.]

E: Hand belong to me-my father-brother. I kill him. Now we-you-me make him work for us. [Sets candle on table.] Come. Stand. [W and E face each other. W takes the key from the table, removes the chain from E's waist, W holds the chain and key.]

E: Look. Hear. Obey. [E claps her hands once, spits into them, rubs them together, clasps them in prayer, bows slightly to W, then runs her fingers over W's lips.]

E: Speak. Sing. Dance.

[W drapes the chain over the same chair back where R hung his coat.]

Winnifred: [Speaks without tremor or lisp.] Never wear that again. He can make of it what he will. Let's keep him guessing. (They laugh.) [W throws the key back on the table.]

Winnifred: The key is yours. The first of many.

E: You speak right. [Takes W's hands, hands splayed on palms] I-me can do much for your shake. Many herb, wild lettuce, Indian tobacco, marsh marigold, other than poppy. Little enough. I-me cannot fix your eyes. You will go blind. I-me will see for you. Promise. Better than married. [They laugh, pull the cradle forward to center stage on rug. Circle it three times, cross their arms over the cradle, candle on hood. E lights the candle with a match.]

[The mother's song. This melody by Jack will recur several times throughout the trilogy. It is Emma's song; she takes the lead; Winnifred repeats what Emma has started line by line, and they finish each line together. Precisions available from Jack.]

Private dreams declare your apprehension  
But if you share a dream, pay attention  
Shared dreams that portend the passage of friends  
Should be viewed through a magnifying lens  
And those that augur the death of children  
Take their future in hand, wring their fate out  
That they not be left in the wilderness  
To be consumed by indifference and doubt  
This we adjure thee, this swear agreed  
Mother she assures with our fist and speed

E: (Intones) Hand be gone, be about our will. Guard our child. Keep her safe. Fire by air, water to earth. [They wave and blow the candle toward the window. The flames of the candle move to the window, through the glass to the outside. Outside the window a candle fire dances, 5 points of light. They flare, then disappear.]

[Curtain]

# Act 2, Scene 1

Location and time: Emma's kitchen, 20 years later in 1850.

Two doors, one door extreme stage left to front hall, and the other, also stage left, to Winnifred's bedroom, Voudoun altar center left with tall narrow mirror, Winnifred and Roger poppets, model cradle bowl with nail, pins, hair etc., cupboard underneath with hand of glory and large glass jar]

Counter and sink with hand pump, center back, shelves overhead with medicinal bottles, bunches of herbs, large yellow ware bowl on counter, teapot and mugs on tray, bucket underneath.

Brick fireplace center right, oven overhead with tea kettle inside, brick hearth along front with cookpot on crane before fire, various tools, coal scuttle, small woodpile.

Two doors extreme stage right to Emma's bedroom and outside to yard / barn, table with three chairs center stage, no rug and no windows. Oil lamp on table, three mugs, sugar bowl.

[Piano offstage left, Winnifred is playing the mother's song poorly.]

[Curtain up]

[Winona, now 20, and Claire, 16, at the table small-talking, discussing boys, mothers, the recent death of Roger's horse, etc.]

Winona: Emma's out there with the vet right now cutting her open.

C: Tell me again. Exactly what happened? Don't leave anything out.

Winona: Well... she was doing poorly, wouldn't eat, about a week...

C: Did she take water?

Winona: Poorly.

C: Poorly (not satisfied). Dammit, it's like pulling teeth with you. Poorly, how poorly. From the bucket?

Winona: Yes. The bucket.

C: Did you wash the bucket?

Winona: Emma washed it.

C: Did you boil the water?

Winona: Probably. Don't know. Must have.

C: And so she wouldn't drink any?

Winona: Just a lick.

C: Did you try molasses?

Winona: Yes, she took that.

C: Apple?

Winona: Wouldn't take that.

C: And then?

Winona: Got all bloated. Went down yesterday afternoon.

C: And dead this morning.

[Piano stops in bedroom.]

[E comes in with a basket of apples, starts examining them very closely, grimly.]

C: Well? What'd he say?

E: [Slams an apple on the table.] Horse die of busted gut.

C: How's that possible?

E: Horse eat bent green stick with sharp point. Make hole, die slow. Very bad.

C: Tied with a sinew?

E: Yes. Tied. Sinew digest, stick unbend, make spear point in gut, make hole.

C: That's on purpose.

E: (Tight-lipped) Yes, damn well on purpose. Also happen to Millicent and Morava last year. Damn. [Continues inspecting apples.] These all good. I-me pick. We make bake pie, huh?

[Handbell rings in bedroom, E leaves.]

[Offstage] Want some pie too?

C: Will be more difficult getting into town, now...

Winona: Nope. Henry's already said he wants to break his roan to the shafts. I told him a month ago he could use our carts.

C: You don't know anything about Henry Prey and his family. Suddenly he's walking in here like he owns the place.

Winona: Henry likes me.

C: (Snorts) He's a good lay.

Winona: Well, not the only one...

C: Uh huh, and who else?

[E comes back in, busy with teapot, kettle, and bottles, picks two mixes with a spoon, grabs sugar bowl from table, snaps to Winona.]

E: You listen to your friend.

Winona: Oh, Henry means well.

C: Nobody I know knows who Henry Prey is. An enigma. Nice big word, huh?

Winona: No one we know has said anything bad.

C: Not so. His brother is a thief.

Winona: What?

C: Can't prove it.

Winona: Innuendo. Jealousy. Fear of strangers...

C: Xenophobia.

[E takes tray into bedroom.]

Winona: Mom's doing worse.

C: Emma says ... Emma says...

Winona: Yes, I heard it too. Bad news comes in threes. [They start slicing the applies.]

C: (Reflectively) Henry's brother was around here just last month...

Winona: Randy? I think he's taken a shine to you. [Samples apple.] Really good.

C: Not my type.

Winona: So. Miss Goody, what's your type?

C: Boys who look me in the eyes.

Winona: Henry does that.

C: Uh huh, horizontally.

Winona: (Giggles) And some others.

C: We might mention. Have you no shame?

Winona: None. They like me.

C: Do you miss your dad?

Winona: About as much as the moms around here miss him.

C: Two moms are better than one. We're lucky.

Winona: Three boys are better than two. We are lucky. [E returns, sits at table, they continue the pie making.]

E: [to C] I-me hear what you say. [To Winona] You think this?

Winona: (Genuinely) Oh yes, Emma dear. I am fortunate with you. Ddon't leave...

E: Don't sound like your mom. In there, in there. Not good.

C: Do you think...?

E: Yes. I-me do think. Don't know when. Next. Can't see. Make mistake, mistake.

C: So very carefully.

E + Winona: Yes. Careful.

[Bell rings in bedroom, E leaves, comes back with tray.]

E: She sleep. Soon ... soon...

[Both E and C look around expectantly. Piano, haltingly. All three stare off into space, piano goes to high trills, bottom keys thump. Emma goes back into the bedroom.]

[Front door knocker]

[Emma comes back out of the bedroom while they are talking. We hear a knock at the front door at stage left, at the end of the hallway outside the door stage left. E leaves to answer it via the external left-hand door, voices offstage, "... to her hand personally..." "Yes, I-me deliver." Door shuts, measured feet on plank floor hallway, Emma comes into the kitchen, listens at the bedroom door, then hands a black-bordered letter to Winona.]

Winona: Oh.

E: From the *Medusa*.

Winona: Oh. [Winona takes the letter, gazes at it uncomprehendingly, then drops it as if burned, E sits down tight-lipped, C picks it off the floor, E hands her a paring knife, C slits it open, reads contents, slow.]

C: Win? It's from your dad's first mate. The *Medusa* is back in port. He says the cargo was turned. The proceeds are at hand. He's given the crew their cut. He's extended their leave. With pay, he says, with pay, pursuant to your permission, he says, he says, Win, he says your dad died en route, buried at sea... died in his sleep... he feared plague... no pain... he stresses no pain... awaiting your orders... condolences ... Win?

[Win and E glaze over]

[In the bedroom Winnifred starts to shriek. Low then higher to an animal snarl, she pounds on the door with the call bell, it falls to the floor, goes silent. Silence.]

[C makes as if to get up. E shoves her back down.]

E: Stay. Here.

[E enters bedroom, comes out in ten seconds, locks door very deliberately, puts key in pocket, turns, stands guard before door.]

C: What...

E: [Shakes head.] Done.

[Curtain]

## Act 2, Scene 2

[Emma's kitchen one week later, same set except for a large funerary bouquet of flowers on the table.]

[Winona, E and C at table. C is pulling wilted flowers from the vase, E examines them, makes two piles, binds them and hangs them from hooks on the fireplace wall.]

C: [To Winona] I'm amazed how well you're taking it.

Winona: (Defensively) I'm all right with it.

C: I think you're a bit disconnected.

Winona: No, really, I'm okay.

C: How's that?

Winona: Dad was rarely home. He brought stuff home. Money. Right, Em?

E: Enough to keep you for life.

E +C: Don't ... tell ... anyone.

Winona: ...

C: Win. Don't play politics with it. Clam up about the money.

Winona: (Vaguely) All right.

C: Win! People kill for far less.

E: Listen to your friend. I-me cannot protect you much longer. [Emma and Claire stare Winona down.]

Winona: All right, I'll hide from it.

E: That's not, no, not enough.

C: [To Winona] Shut up. Don't tell Henry.

E: He that one he already know.

C: But not too much. [To Winona] (Exasperated) Do you want to live? This where it counts. Pay attention.

[Hoof beats outside, horse's whinny.]

[E checks the outside back door, comes back right away.]

E: He-him here.

C: I can't dissuade you?

Winona: (Helplessly) He likes me. I've told him he can use our barn to stall his horse ... horses...

E: You want another daddy.

C: That's queer, Win.

Winona: I'm going out... with him.

E: He wanna stick it in you.

C: And someday he'll stick it to you.

E: True.

C: So he's moved into the barn?

Winona: Well, no, not exactly.

C: Well, what?

Winona: He just needs some extra stall space. He wants to break another filly to the shafts. She's already in traces.

E: He want to hide horse.

Winona: (Defensively) Oh, no, not Henry.

C: (Sarcastic) No, not Henry. Betcha he hitches the long wagon tonight. Not the trap. Betcha.

Winona: (Smiles) I hope so.

C: Win. Whatever happens, I'll stick with you. Always. Emma has assured this. Remember that.

[Henry Prey walks in without knocking, dapper, 20ish, well-heeled, keeps his hat on, E vacates her chair, he completely ignores her the whole time he's inside. E sits at the hearth, stirs in cookpot.]

H: [To Winona] Gibbous moon tonight, Nona, I've hitched up the buckboard. [C + E exchange meaningful glances.]

H: [to C]: Hi Claire, Randy was asking about you. [C stares at him but doesn't speak.]

H: [Without missing a beat, to Winona] I thought we'd take the shore road into town. No, you won't need a coat, it's marvelous outside. Besides, there's a throw in the buck... [He takes a penknife from his pocket, withdraws a lily, cuts it to size, drops the stalk to the floor.] Here. A flower for the fair. [She takes it, tucks it behind her left ear.]

Winona: Don't wait up.

[H + Winona leave, extreme stage right, C sits at table with E]

C: Something's wrong there.

E: Yes'm.

C: I don't like him. Don't know why...

E: [Nods in agreement, waits expectantly.]

C: He's polite, attentive, seems to...

E: [Nods again.]

C: He's hiding something ... someone...

E: Ah, you right, he someone else.

C: Howso?

E: He two people, maybe three, not sure.

C: How can that be? That's crazy.

E: Yes'm. I-me see this, different people in same body, very strange, don't know who you talk to.

C: Is that bad? For Win I mean.

E: She take many men. Marry only him.

C: Ah. How many?

E: [Holds up both hands five times.]

C: Fifty? Surely not yet, I know she... but... How do you know this?

E: Lines in her hand speak some. Dancing fire speak more.

C: You can see this in a hand?

E: Yes'm. Both hands, coming and going.

C: And of course you've seen her hands many times.

E: Washed them too, not wash away.

C: [Extends left then right hand across table.]

E: [Takes large hand lens from apron] You allow this? Only we know.

C: Please. I believe you.

E: [Scrutinizes both hands, compares them.] Long life, see how this one curve around wrist? One man; you meet him already have met him. Two very bad times make you sick. Friend, then mother, they go, you stay, no daughter but raise many children, but one man, then one more man much later.

C: I've only met one man, and I would not consider...

E: That him. Yes? [C nods assent.] He very good bedmate. Very good. For women this balance much not good. Yes? [C nods.] He faithful. But. Yes? [C nods.] Care for you not much. Makes wealth by thief, by threat, by how you say?...

C: Extortion, blackmail.

E: Yes'm. Those words. Bad way. Hurt other people.

C: So why should I?...

E: To guard your friend.

C: Ah. I knew it. Henry's brother. I like him even less. That little weasel. I won't have ...

E: You will. There no other way. [Releases C's hands, puts lens back in apron. They regard each other, come to an understanding, both nod simultaneously.]

C: So. I must.

E: Think it through.

C: [Starts to ask something, shakes head "no" deliberately, changes her mind.]  
Emma? Surely that is not your birth name. Who are you?

E: Yes'm. [corrects herself] Yes. [straightens.] I am Yewande of the Yoruba.

C: And what does that mean?

E: Yoruba mean people share land. Not own, buy and sell. We share.

C: And?

E: Yewande mean mother come again and again, many more.

C: Will you tell me... how did you come here? You wore a chain.

E: Yes. I still have it. Keep so do I not forget. No. Never forget. No.

C: Tell me everything.

E: (Nods) Hum... When girl become woman in ... with ...

C: Among...

E: Among my people, she mate one, two three years often. Prove she can be  
mother. I-me not. Don't know why. I am...?

C: Barren.

E: Yes, barren. Not true to my name. When this happen girl is sent away. Except if  
good cook or good witch. I do one two. Both. I learn Obeah and keep wanga.

C: What's that?

E: Obeah is wisdom, tribe-think, story-tell, mind (points at head) warrior, courage,  
lion force. Wanga is knowledge-stone, juju bag, tools, knife, glass-make-big, beaker,  
cookpot, way to make mind think, be real, be effective, make the eye grab hold, be hand  
of mind.

C: I get it. More.

E: When I am [shows 22] I go live with Olainka, my father-brother, uh...?

C: Uncle.

E: Yes, uncle. Older man, not so old, fierce warrior, wealthy man. He need insight  
eye [points at forehead]. He want tomorrow eye.

C: We call that a fortune teller or soothsayer.

E: Yes. Sooth. I hear of this. He make journey. Take me and [shows 10] men, and prisoners. Bantu, Ubangi, Masai, Watusis, many tribe. We walk to place call name wife without husband, woman no man. Whydah place.

C: On the Slave Coast of Africa?

E: Not know. Yoruba land. Whydah. Big boat there. Roger captain Maitland boat.

C: His schooner. I know he ran slavers. Didn't know he owned it. Too late now.

E: Yes. Not do him any good now (laughs).

C: Tell me about that.

E: Someone should know. Must know. You.

C: I agree. [They nod in confirmation.]

E: We all trust someone. Winnienona trust you.

C: I will not break this trust. I promise. God watch over us.

E: God. Yes. We talk god too.

C: But does god answer?

E: Sometime.

C: Out loud or in your mind?

E: Sometime out loud. Like you-me now.

C: Seriously?

E: True. Keeper of sooth cannot lie. Must tell truth always.

C: Has god ever spoken to you?

E: Not yet. No need yet. But soon. Need god-me talk soon.

C: Continue. Whydah...

E: Yes. Whydah place. Roger send trans... someone speak black speak white.

C: Translator.

E: Yes. Transman come to shore. I cook. Listen good. Olainka trade. Two men Bantu worth one frying pan. One Ubangi woman worth bag needles and thread many color. Two Watusi man worth knife chop chop chop. Maumau worth blanket. Yoruba woman worth spice chest. Other woman no tribe worth mirror. All go to boat. Chain. They not look back. I cook. Listen. All slave gone. Roger Maitland come bring keg. Rum. He give rum. Present gift he say. Gift.

C: I think I know what happens next.

E: Yessss. All drink, fall down, sleep. Chain. I try to run. Roger Maitland grab me. Chain round waist, chain me too. All go ship. Trade goods, gift, big cookpot from ship. All go. I hear Olainka trade me Yewande-me for big cookpot. He not wealthy now. He dead. [Decisively, makes chopping motion] I-me Yewande do that make that.

C: Tell me how that happened.

E: Roger Maitland keep in cabin bed. Call me Emma. What Emma mean?

C: It's a common name. A woman's name. Maybe means mother. Ma means mother. But more likely because it's because his first girlfriend was named Emma. Winona's mom told me. Emma, they were about as old as I am now, Emma went to another boy. Roger Maitland couldn't stay in the same town and see them together. Too painful. So he shipped out. Became a sailor. Worked the coastal trade routes. Became a captain when he inherited the Maitland estate and became a slave runner. More money in that. You probably remind her of ...

E: Do you think I look like... ?

C: I've never seen his girlfriend so I don't know. Probably not.

E: I-me don't remind him ...?

C: Of her? I doubt it. When did he start calling you Emma?

E: We not on ship. One two day.

C: Then it was a matter of convenience. I'm not even sure if he fucked her. I take it that he did with you.

E: Oh. Yes. First one day, one two three many times. Very good.

C: Well, then it was that. You cook, he owns you, you both like it, so it goes.

E: But not for me, not for Yewande. Oh I like all right, good bedmate, not husband, not love, not true for life, not with me.

C: Not with Win's mom either, apparently. Maybe not with anyone. Could be why Win has the wandering eye.

E: Yes. True. Sooth. [They pause.] Most.

C: Tell me about on board ship.

E: Ah. I cook, keep apart from other ... other...

C: Slaves. There no other word for it.

E: Yes. Them. (softly) And me.

C: Emma is, no longer, was a slave. Yewanda was never! a slave. I know this for sure.

E: Yes. I keep two I and her, me and her.

C: So?

E: I cook. Find Olainka below deck. He plead... I not forgive, keep silent. What man trust silent woman. (Laughs) I never forgive. But I pry a nail from firebox, big nail. Hide it and slip it to Olainka. He grateful. Fool! I know try escape. White man will kill him. I know this. See it. (Voice rises to a crescendo, accelerates.) One two three day he pry loose chain come up at night. Alone. Fool. Again.

C: You allowed him to kill himself?

E: Yes. He come up through hatch stab guard in eye. Guard yell, wake more white man. They fight. Eye-bleed man go overboard. Drown. Much noise on deck. I know what. (Jubilant) Roger Maitland run up steps with sword. Olainka grab Roger Maitland by throat. They fall to deck. I run up steps. Roger Maitland drop sword try to get loose. Olainka reach for sword. I get it first. I cut his arm. He back away. I cut off his hand. I kick it into scup... scup...

C: Scupper.

E: Near rail next to firebox. Much blood everywhere. Olainka scream curse. He curse me. He say no... no... [Shakes head.] I not say. [Shudders.]

C: And then?

E: They throw him my father-brother in into water. He die. I am vengeance.

C: Vengeance is yours. Immediate.

E: Did I do wrong bad?

C: Not for me to say. Only you know. You and your conscience.

E: Conscience?

C: What you think is right or wrong. Only you know. You can't hide from it.

E: No. Not hide. Not from god.

C: Yes. That's true. God knows. Eventually you must answer for it. Soon, I think.

E: Yes. Soon.

C: And when will that happen?

E: Roger Maitland trust me. Not much. They never find nail. But suspect.

C: I doubt there's any trust on a slave ship.

E: None. No one trust any more.

C: More?

E: I take hand. Bury in salt and sand from firebox. I make hand of glory.

C: What's that?

E: [Holds both fists next to her forehead, stares at Claire, makes up her mind, nods.] Come. You come now. [They move to the altar, E takes candlehand from cupboard underneath.] This. Hand of glory. One time belong to Olainka. Now belong to me, I-me Yewande.

C: What does it do?

E: Hand of murderer. Olainka kill many men. Kill woman make them slave. Hand in wax, when burn, open door, closet, drawer, all kind door. Door to future. Door to mind, door to what we think and hope. Door to spirit. Most of all door to self.

C: How does it work?

E: Not just by itself. Need key to open door. Burn candle and key come. You find or someone bring. Key to god is in your mind. Key to other people is in your voice. Key to self is in mirror. So. [Places candle before mirror.]

C: And the rest of this stuff?

E: Doll, baptize over fire, mold wax, name doll, shake to make shake, pin to make head hurt, make head crazy.

C: Winnifred. How did you do Captain Mait...?

E: This. [Shows mason jar.]

C: Is that a fly in there?

E: Ordinary fly cousin sister to tsetse fly one fly all fly. Make Roger Maitland sick. Easy to move small things. Flying things with will, fire of mind. Distance not matter. Sometime small think move very large thing.

C: And the candle?

E: I-me love Winnienona. She my child, my daughter. Keep her safe.

C: The chain?

E: So... I-me not forget.

C: Those bowls and jars?

E: Keep potion unguent medicine. Most good some bad. You make as you will.

C: I will. What else?

E: Glass-look-big. [Bends over magnifier.] Keys to house, bedroom, chain lock, cup cupboard, basement [hands them over].

C: What else?

E: You burn candle now. [C. lights candle.]

C: What now?

E: This work if no one else know you have it. Keep secret.

C: Then why are you showing me all this?

E: I-me give all everything I know, each thing me own, the ritual of my sister and brother. All yours. You use as you will. Swear now.

C: I will. As I think right.

E: Yesss. Do as you Claire think is right is good is bad. All you. You will. You will prosper. I have chosen.

C: Your lineage continues.

E: You not need. We not need priest not want priest or other to speak for us. We do this for ourselves. We. Us. You-me all the same now.

[E on knees, rubs Claire's feet.]

E: Raise many children daughter sons.

[Rubs breast bone.]

E: Live long. Be well. Do right. [Rubs lips.]

Speak truth.

[rubs eyes].

E: See all everything see far.

[Rubs forehead.]

E: Know self. Be content.

[Rubs hands]

E: Do as you will. Swear.

C: I will. I am ready.

[Claire straightens up.]

E: Then go. You go now. [C leaves stage right.]

[E sits at table, faces audience, covers both eyes with hands.]

[Curtain.]

# Epilogue

Setting: Stage shrouded in non-reflective black, including floor and 6 feet up the back. Backlit projection screen across the back with full-color Hubble photographic slides to simulate heaven. First man, first woman, second man, second woman onstage [1M 2F 3M 4F] invisible in scrimsuits; they will act as Yewanda's conscience and jury; they may speak in unison, variously, or sequentially; they will argue her case and arrive at the truth of it. At the end they will aid in her levitation.

[Subsonic generator on.]

[Curtain up.]

[Yewande "Emma" stands center stage in a straw-coloured tight spot, arms raised, head back, as if to embrace heaven. She now talks normal English as she is talking to herself.]

Yewande: Oladumaré! Oladumaré! Oladumaré!

1M 2F 3M 4F: [in unison] Who goes there! Who calls in the ancient manner?

Y: I am Yewande of the Yoruba.

F2: There are many such.

Y: I came of age in the village of Popo.

M1M3: What is your complaint, my daughter?

Y: [Lowers arms, crosses wrists in front, left over right, lowers head slightly] I have done wrong in my eyes. I have committed murder.

M1F2M3F4: [They move about the stage]. Who? When? Where? Why?

Y: My uncle Olainka on board ship, because I desired revenge.

[The voices confer soto voce.]

F4: Yes. We see him.

M3: A hideous betrayal of trust.

F2: You believed in your father's brother.

M1: You in fact extracted vengeance for 152 men and 49 women that he sold into iron manacles.

M1M2: And the 15 that he killed outright.

F2F4: Much misery ensues from him.

M1F4: We see the act.

Y: He was strangling my new man.

F2F4: Was this new man good for you?

Y: He was exciting. Satisfying. He ruled on board.

M1M3: But he locked a chain round your waist.

Y: Yes. I had no choice of refusal.

F2: Would you have refused him in different circumstances?

Y: No. I would have taken him.

M1M3: So you inveigled his trust.

Y: I knew my uncle could not, would not succeed.

F4: Thus you achieved some measure of trust at his expense.

Y: Worse. Stole his hand to do my bidding. [They confer again.]

M1: Allowable.

M3: It is justified to reinvent a murder's hand.

F4: He now lives again. His left hand is palsied. He makes redress in part.

F2F4: God offers us the chance to say no.

M1M3: If a hand abuses this primordial right...

F2: Then it's best...

M3: To cut...

F2F4: To cut...

M1M3: It...

M1F2M3F4: OFF!

Y: So I did right?

F2: I do not judge.

F4: You shall judge yourself.

M1: All we examine here...

M3: Is the truth.

M1F2M3F4: What else?

Y: I sent a telesmatic minion to bite the man I loved, hated.

M1: When?

Y: Oh, I waited. When he was of no more use to me. When his daughter, my adoptive child, came of age.

M3: To inherit.

Y: Yes. [Uncrosses wrists, balls fists.] The family fortune would be secure with his... my child.

F2F4: Let this pass. [They confer.]

M1M3: I see this act.

F2F4: It is not as you thought.

M1: Captain Maitland was bitten by a tsetse fly fully three days before you ...

M3: Dropped his homunculus in the jar with your captive fly.

F2: You did not initiate that act that infected him.

F4: With the sleeping sickness.

M3: But you did resonate with him.

M1: This is common to mated pairs.

F2: We feel our lovers.

F4: At a distance.

M1F2M3F4: Before the act happens.

Y: So I did no wrong?

F4: Not so fast. [They confer.]

M1: Intent is crucial here.

M3: You planned.

F2: You made the waxen image.

F4: You baptized it.

M1M3: You intended to kill.

F2F4: The man who trusted you with...

M1F2M3F4: His wife and child.

M1: He desired you above beyond more than her.

M3: You betrayed him.

M1M3: You shall meditate on this act before you mate again, oh my daughter.

F2F4: Oh my child.

M1: Mother who returns again.

M3: And again.

Y: I will do this. [Unclenches fists.]

M2: What else is your plaint?

F2: My daughter.

F4: My child?

Y: I lied to my child. I lied.

M1: To whom?

M3: When?

Y: To the girls when they were about 12 and 8. Claire wanted to know what Winnifred's manikin was for. I said it was to get a grip on her crazy behavior.

M3: Not so.

Y: No. Not so. I shook it to stir up her spastic anxiety. I stuck a pin in its head to increase her headache and blindness. I even rubbed its head to make her hair fall out.

F4: Winona knew.

Y: True. But I was her mother... Not... [They confer one last time, much longer this time.]

M1F2M3F4: Mother who returns again, you have become Yetunde, my daughter, I welcome you. [Y relaxes visibly, unclenches fists, clasps hands over her belly.]

M1: Behold.

F2: Winnifred fled Applachia.

M3: Where her diet had been poor. She found work in a city—Paramus—

F4: A horrid tenement—in a paint factory.

M3: [They close in beside and behind her] She breathed lead fumes, poisonous air, drank tainted water, invisible smoke.

F2F4: The damage was done before you arrived.

M1M3: It is marvelous that her child did not sicken also.

F2: The charcoal brazier in the Maitland bedroom added final blows to a compromised body.

F4: Winnifred was failing when you arrived.

M1: The only time that she was truly lucid is when you joined hands over the cradle.

M3: In the presence of your uncle's hand.

F2: What happened to Winnifred was common in the mills and factories back then.

F4: Someday it will be named after a certain apothecary named Parkinson.

M3: It is a terrible affliction.

F2: By keeping Winona

F4: The daughter you shared  
F2: Out of that bedroom  
F4: Near the kitchen chimney  
M1M3: You did well.  
F2F4: But for the wrong reason.  
Y: Am I true to my name?  
M1M3: Indeed as you must.  
F2F4: What's more, you have increased your name.  
M1M3: No longer Yewande.  
F2F4: Mother of earth.  
M1M3: You are Yetunde  
F2F4: Mother everywhere.  
M1F2M3F4: Welcome!  
[Y bows her head.]  
F4: There is one more misstep to negotiate.  
M1M3: Also a mother.  
F2F4: By this you harmed yourself as much as her.  
M1M3: This is repercussion.  
F2F4: The bane of black magic.  
M1: My daughter, that which we do comes back.  
M1M3: Full circle.  
F2F4: Full circle.  
Y: There is one last... small...  
M3: Yes?  
Y: My father's uncle cursed me with his final breath.

M1F2M3F4: Let me hear this curse.

Y: He said, he screamed, as he went over the side,... he shrieked “Die!  
Forever!”

M1: Ah.

M3: Yes.

F4: Certainly.

M1M3: As much for himself...

F2F4: As for you.

F2: Well balanced...

F4: In either case.

M1F2M3F4: To no avail.

M1F2: For consider this, my daughter, sorceress in the deep, look.

[The Hubble projections move, some spin, some expand, change colour]

M1M3: Time is what we make of it.

F2F4: Time is our handmaiden.

M1M3: Time is ours.

F2F4: Time can endure as long as you want it to be.

M1M3: The curse of forever is divinity's sacrifice.

F2F4: That we live, and grow.

M1M3: That we learn for the experience.

M1F2M3F4: That we approach wisdom.

M1M3: Now we come to the adjuration. [Y crosses her wrists over her sternum,  
palms in, right over left]

F2F4: You will meditate.

Y: I will meditate.

M1: Be at peace, my daughter.

M3: Dream on this.  
F2: How you lied.  
F4: By telling a half-truth.  
M1: How you attacked one  
M3: To get back at another.  
F2: How you misrepresented  
F4: Your armorium.  
M1: How you grew in stature  
M3: Despite all this.  
F2F4: How the future extracts its own vengeance.  
M1M3: How you may grow in the fullness of time.  
M1F2M3F4: You will do this.  
Y: I will do this.  
M1F2M3F4: Agreed.  
Y: Agreed.

[The straw-colored tight spot fades slowly, barely perceptible red light illuminates the lower part of the stage.]

M1M3: My sister, my daughter.  
F2F4: My sister, my daughter.  
M1: Let it go.  
F2: Let it go.  
M3: Let it go.  
F4: Let it go.  
M1F2M3F4: Be suspended between heaven and earth.  
F2F4: Dream on thy frailty.

M1M3:        Become strong.

[They tip her back onto a shrouded palleque, rotate her parallel to the audience, raise her feet, slide a prepared scissors jack under the board, and raise her feet.]

[Subsonic generator off. Surf sound on, in stereo.]

M1M3:        I will watch over you.

F2F4:        Sleep, dream of the child. [They raise her around 6 feet to the level of the line between the Hubble pictures and scrim.]

[Aureole on.]

[A comet traverses heaven, right to left.]

[Curtain.]

# The Whistler

**[All stage directions from audience POV]**

**(Character motivations in parentheses)**

### **Characters in order of appearance**

Claire Sacristan – Randolph’s browbeaten wife, Winona’s best friend, and Winsome’s godmother; kept the Prey china shop, suspects Henry of a truly foul deed.

Winona “Win / Nona” Eldritch – Henry Prey’s wife; she disappears, presumably lost at sea; she and Claire kept a fine porcelain shop before her disappearance, she was prescient with Henry, pragmatic in business, and as wayward as he.

Conch Sheldrake – town constable, knows everyone, in league with Clam and Winsome.

Henry Prey – married money, hence a town elder, owns Prey’s Tavern where he holds de facto court and cooks his books in full view.

Clam – plays a half-wit to the hilt, he’s been stalking the Prey brothers since his own eldest brother was “lost at sea” with Winona, does indeed love Winsome.

Winsome “Winnie” Eldritch – Winona’s daughter, Harvard graduate, no slouch in bed, very capable in conjugal matters, an excellent psychologist, loves Clam.

Waiter – short cameo walk-on part by any well-known Provincetown restaurateur.

Randolph “Randy” Prey – Henry’s younger brother, a total ruffian and opportunistic parasite.

# Act 1

Set in Provincetown, October 1880.

Location: Fine china shop on Commercial Street across from the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House.

Stage left: Shelves with bolts of fabrics and linens. Door to street left of bay window center stage.

Center stage: Ornate show window with tureen and matching vases.

Stage right: Counter with catalog on easel, a broken chafing dish, cash register, shelves behind with crockery, glassware, beer stein, etc.]

[House lights down, cash register, door bell, muffled voices, "We'll let you know."]

[Curtain up, Claire at open door]

[Claire closes door, rearranges fabrics.]

[Through window: street, UU directly across, fall leaves in wind, UU bell strikes 2]

[Winona enters whistling the mother's song through her teeth]

W: Good morning.

Cl: Good morning, Win. It's two in the afternoon and you're on Earth.

W: Merely a convenience. [Sees broken dish] Is that Gabby's?

Cl: Gabrielle Sylva brought it in personally.

[They examine the dish.]

W: I hope she broke it herself.

Cl: She fessed up to it. Tapped a wine bottle against the handle. Can't blame the aprons.

W: (Doubtfully) I don't think we can fix this. Not worth sending back to the potters.

Cl: Besides, there's a piece missing. See? These two fit here and here but the center oval is gone. Smithereens. Wild party...

W: When? Who?

Cl: Friday night, buncha visors and mitres.

W: We should have been there but I was with Yummie.

Cl: Oh, good choice. He certainly is. Did he wear the patch?

W: Both eyes wide open. He's shipping tomorrow.

Cl: I couldn't have gone, Randy was home.

[Window shopper]

W: Customer?

Cl: Probably not. Right hand in her pocket. See the belt and that light bulge? Helltownner.

[passerby moves on]

W: Was Randy interesting?

Cl: Ardent. [both grin]

W+Cl: So something's afoot.

Cl: I'll haul it out of him.

W: Carefully. [looks distressed, bilious, fingers the broken dish]

Cl: Oh, but I have good news. Gabby got a new table, rectangular with a center sliding leaf. That means...

W: More guests, and proper manners dictate...

Cl: Better tableware. She already bought the rose embroidery damask and all the napkins.

W: Oh. Yes, I'll see to that. We'll have to restock.

Cl: Here's the best part. She wants a tureen with all the accessories. I showed her some catalog plates. Here [turns pages] this one and really this one, but the roses have to match.

Cl: There is enough on the bolt for at least three more. I'll cut it and wind some bobbins. The number 1 spool?

W: The best. And let's have Millie sew them. She pins nice folded hems.

Cl: And she needs the work. Her treadle probably needs servicing, it's been a year.

W: I'll send the carriage man. He's good with machinery. Singer?

Cl: I think so. I can drop the fabric and thread with her on my way home. I'll find out.

[A young couple approaches the window, look for just a moment, he looks to SL, they see Randy coming, step away into the street and leave SR]

[W steps to the window]

W: Ah. Here's your randyman. Right on cue.

[R slouches by, black felt hat, collar up, looks SL, W waves, R moves off SR]

W: He's been following me.

Cl: He wants to know who you're with.

W: He's not very good with disguises.

Cl: Oh, I don't think he cares. It's just his way.

W: Sailors are safer than townsmen.

Cl: Sure, sailors leave.

[W moves back to counter, fingers the dish, slides it closer, looks into it, makes a slight heaving motion, Cl moves in, puts hand on W's belly.]

Cl: Yes?

[no answer, shrug]

Cl: (Brightly) Look, there's Conch, our new constable. In a dashing new officer's cap, very impressive.

[Conch passes window, L to R, looks in briefly, salutes, follows Randolph]

W: (straightening up) I'd like him.

[W beckons, Co hesitates, looks SR, nods, enters]

Co: Ladies?

W: Are you following that man in the felt hat?

Co: [takes out notebook] [to Claire] Miz Claire, you don't have to say anything. [reads from notebook] Randolph Prey, aka Racid and Rander, so, suspected of horse theft, RO, repeat offender, once at Barnstable, once at Sandwich Fair, once on the Auburn Commons, and once at a private sale in Brewster, seems burglary, specializes in the same venues, so, he's careful, doesn't get liable, second storey, knows locks, not above breaking a window, treacle and a paper bag are his calling cards, so, highway robbery, so blackmail extortion prima facie, never brought upon charges, how'm I doing?

W: Admirably.

Co: [to Claire] You're in a tight spot, talk to me any time. [to W] So are you and likewise. Last night he was in the Crown and Anchor barroom while you were upstairs. No need to demure, I've seen it all and expect to see it again.

W: [flirts with him] I like the cock of your jib. Sometime?

Co: Only when I'm off duty. Around here that's not often. Don't hail me on the street. Your Henry and his felonious brother are in cahoots. I'm sure of it. Don't seem to be as cozy with me.

W: Do you think...?

Co: I do think. When they're successful at some nefarious business, they'll do it again and again. Eventually they'll run into someone bigger and badder. Then it's over. I give it another eight or nine years. After all, they are brothers.

W: Yes, ten years. Thank you.

Co: All right. [Co salutes Claire, nods to W. Leaves]

Cl: There's a good one, Win. Do we trust him?

W: Certainly. Introduce him to Winnie. Make sure she likes him.

Cl: In ten years she'll be 24. These are perilous times. I'll be there. (changes subject) Gabby left a list. And I added some. Here. Business should pick up. There's several new houses opening, at least a few more dives and eateries. And the Pennimans were

in yesterday. Here's their list, we should move all this common crockery to the back room and display our best wares. Like attracts like.

W: What does Randy want?

Cl: He went to see Sylva yesterday.

W: (with some alarm) What? During business hours?

Cl: Just before the bank closed for the day.

W: I'm surprised that Sylva would even talk to him.

Cl: About ten minutes. Willie Teller told me.

W: What?

Cl: Money, blackmail.

W: Who?

Cl: You. Henry. Every dammit somebody.

W: He's only walking free so he can attract the big fish. Bait.

[Cl at window]

W: I can feel Henry coming.

Cl: Yes. Looks very patrician. That's what beguiled you. Now it's separate bedrooms.

[W moves behind the counter with alacrity, Cl stands at cash register, blocking her in] H enters, strides to register, rifles through it, takes the bills, leaves coins.]

W: At least leave us enough to make change.

[H steps back, balls right fist, extends left hand into partial claw, hunches down, does not look at W, speaks in a guttural voice.]

H: Change for what? You've not sold a pisspot out of here in weeks. The shop is barely afloat and will go under soon.

[H turns to Cl, straightens up, L hand at side, R hand on his heart, smiles, charming, speaks in a tenor voice, meets her eyes]

H: Claire my dear, Randy and I had a business appointment of some importance yesterday. When he didn't show up, I was worried for his safety and went to your house

to find him. Your mother said he was in town. Do you know where he went and who he was to meet?

Cl: Mr. Henry, sir, he went to the bank but that's all I know.

[his eyes tighten, lips compress, head tilts slightly to the right as if searching behind her]

H: When you see him, tell him we should meet at his convenience. Soon. [turns to W, assumes first guise]

As for you, runaround, I expect you home tonight.

[As he turns to leave, W retches into the dish, doubled up behind the counter. H turns, glares, nods knowingly, stalks out, slams door] [Cl gets pitcher of water and towel from under the counter, fills two glasses and offers one to W]

Cl: Well, what now?

W: It's all right, I'm just getting rid of some really bitter bile.

[both drink then move back to CS]

Cl: Win, I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have left all that cash in the till. It's my fault he got it.

[W goes to the window, lifts lid, takes a big wad from the tureen and drops it in Claire's apron pocket]

W: This is yours. Don't let Randy know you have it!

Cl: Oh lord, you are leaving.

W: I have to. I can't sue him for divorce because then I'm dead in the dunes. Can't run and take Winnie with me; I'd lose the house, the shop, all my friends and you. You won't leave your mom; that'd be the death of her. Alone...

Cl: ...in that house with Randy. NO.

W: It's been getting more strained between me and Winnie. She knows all is not well. Besides, Henry seems to have taken a shine to her.

Cl: Maybe a little too much.

W: That's why I need you here. To watch. If it goes seriously amiss, grab her and run.

Cl: Where?

W: Cuba. Some little fishing village on the east end. Go to the bank; there's a contingency fund. They'll also disburse a stipend to you; it can't be much. Henry and Randy would suspect. Just enough to keep you going. Shop income.

Cl: Something else.

W: Yes. An abortion.

Cl: Did you miss...?

W: Two. It has to be soon. I can get it done at Harvard med, substantial donation and they'll fix that little problem and assure a scholarship for Winnie.

Cl: Not so little.

W: I'll grapple with my conscience for the rest of my...

Cl: What else?

W: I'm seeing my lawyer. Iron-clad will. Henry has to be executor; he'll have what he wants. For a while. It can't be you to oversee the money. They'd kill you.

Cl: Are you sure or suspect?

W: I'm certain. I'm an Eldridge as of old.

[Cl nods assent]

W: And you're good too. Well named.

Cl: You're not going home tonight, are you?

W: Definitely not. The boat leaves on the tide at the witching hour. I'll be safely aboard...

Cl: (Agast) No...

W: In the arms of Abel. He wants to be captain.

Cl: You're incorrigible.

W: I'll send the porcelain.

[they hug, move to door]

W: And the documents will come on the mail train.

Cl: Will I ever see you again?

[W leaves past window to SR. Wind blows leaves through the door. Claire shuts door very quietly. One glass on the counter falls over, spills water, Cl on her knees facing the audience, starts crying, shriek. Curtain.]

# Act 2

Set in Provincetown in 1892.

Stage left – Prey’s Tavern, slightly canted to allow entrance onto the stage in view of the audience but hidden from the other actors, ornate carved sign PREY’S over door, side window, lamppost with fake gas light, table in front, two chairs, backlit projection of harbor, masts, blinking lighthouse.

Stage right – Barrel, rope coils, nautical debris, lobster trap.

Dark stage, lamplight, lighthouse blink, occasional shroud creak, water lap.

[Harbor ambience, 5 bells, repeats farther away from other ships, curtain opens]

[Clam enters from door to Prey’s Tavern carrying his boots, leaves door open, puts on boots, slips a knife into a boot, tightens pant cord, takes a good look around, whistles once with a boson’s whistle and beckons at door.]

[Winnie enters, brushing her hair, slips on her shoes, puts on a strand of pearls; they’ve obviously been at it all night]

W: I needed that. How’d you manage the upper room?

C: (Diffident) Circumspect help on the inside.

W: I didn’t think you’d asked my dad.

C: He’d be horrified.

W: And you probably wouldn’t be alive now.

C: Agreed. I don’t like him. His wastrel brother even less.

W: We’re going through with it? Right?

C: Why not let your lawyer handle it? He’s competent. And we could leave now. Right now.

W: No, I have to know. I have to be sure. I’ll have the truth out of him. At the end only the truth will suffice.

C: How will you get the truth out of him? He lies as a matter of course. (Sardonic) It’s like his compass can’t find north.

W: That's true. He's schizophrenic.

C: Yeah. A two-faced bastard. What you'd call a psycholane.

W: Psychopath. He's always right and it's always someone else's fault.

C: Money talks in this town. But blood counts. So how can you open him up?

W: We used to play a game, him and me, back when I was about eight. Six years before Mom...

[He moves in, hugs her, kisses her and straightens her bras straps]

W: We used to pretend that we're somebody else, like we're looking in at us from a distance, through a one-way window, listening to us through a door.

C: Alice through the looking-glass searching for something really slippery.

W: Yes, partially reflective. You're a smart man, Mr. Clam.

C: Thank you. And this worked?

W: Sure. We could tell each other everything and yet not feel guilty about it. His attitude changed when we started doing that. Less of Mom and more of me...

C: (Emphatically) Pederast, I like him even less. He was already planning it. Six years before...

W: We'd talk in the third person. Identities became fluid. It'd be Daddy, Henry, Mr. Prey—see, I'm still slipping in and out of it.

C: Too easy. Yup. Creepy. Don't do that with me.

W: With you trust and truth walk hand in hand.

C: It's possible. Just waiting for the opportunity.

W: I liked it very much back then. Mom became more distant. It's why I went in for psych at Harvard.

C: Well, we'll see if those expensive four years pay off pretty soon.

W: Definitely. I'll have him out on this table. Today.

C: I'll be watching. Here comes Conch.

[Footsteps crunching gravel offstage, jingling keys]

W: You look thoroughly disreputable. [she turns his cap askew]

C: Assiduous practice, off to the end.

[he slouches to the barrel, she leaves stage left]

[offstage]

Constable: Good morning, Winnie. I just passed by his house. He's up early. Unusual.  
Should be here soon.

W: Thanks, Conch. Places everyone.

Clam is seemingly asleep far stage right on a pile of rope. Legs sprawled over the lobster trap. Common sailor lout garb. Sunup takes 2 minutes.

Enter Conch in a constable's uniform, badge, visored cap, club, boots, from stage left. He checks the tavern door, window, turns off the streetlamp, whispers a few words to Clam, who bestirs himself into a slouch.

Conch [faces audience]: The boat disappeared

under suspect circumstances

heavy with passengers

and expensive porcelain.

No wreckage was ever found,

no bodies, no. Nothing.

Henry Prey collected the insurance on his wife,

on the boat and its cargo,

a small fortune back then,

and he inherited his wife's family estate.

So Henry Prey became a rich man in short order.

He parlayed this wealth into a position of trust,

at the bank, on the wharf, and sometimes in the pulpit.

A clandestine bully,

he in effect owns the town.

Selectman Prey,

a curmudgeon to be reckoned with.

Bona fide scourge with the flourish of his fountain pen.

As we know, greed is a disease,

and it's contagious.

What's more, it breeds contempt

for our social boundaries.

So it is with Randolph

—that's Henry's younger brother.

He's been plotting his course

to the motherlode of stuff.

His wife Claire was best friends

with Henry's wife Winona,

so Claire knows that something's rotten

in the state of Prey.

You can be sure

that Randy and Claire

have been talking—

circumstantial evidence

but perhaps just enough

to manoeuvre Henry

into making a mistake,  
maybe some simple blackmail,  
maybe a smear campaign.

Thus we come to Henry's probable daughter Winsome.

Claire said mommy wasn't sure,  
neither was daddy dear.

That little tuneless whistle  
is her mom's legacy.

Winsome turned twenty-six  
and it was her mom's money  
so no doubt  
she has some hard questions  
for her father.

She's a plain-spoken girl,  
graduated magna cum,  
knows how to reef a sail,  
and deploy a drogue anchor.

Down on Commercial Street  
they're calling her Boobs Ahoy  
beauty is a curse  
and at the bank it's Princess Prey

where they're fascinated  
with the contents of her purse.

Everyone wants something.

Oh,  
and that man over there,  
that's Clam the town idiot.

He's a very good act.

His brother was on board with Winona  
getting wenched,  
so you can bet Clam's paying very close attention.

The fact is he and Winsome have been secret lovers.

Ah,  
here's Henry about to falsify his books.

[Henry enters stage left carrying a valise, raps with his cane on the tavern door, takes a chair facing stage right]

Conch [to Henry]: Good morning sir, all's well.

[Conch leaves.]

[Cameo walk-on by a well-known restaurateur or innkeeper such as James Mack, Betsy etc. Waiter enters from the tavern door, apron on.]

Waiter: Your usual, sir?

Henry (grumpy): Coffee, whiskey.

[Waiter serves, pours, leaves. Henry deposits his valise to the right, removes the ledgers, papers, starts making checkmarks, refers back and forth, occasional chortle. Winsome enters stage left, hidden around the corner of the tavern, watches her father, then straightens up, squares her shoulders and enters whistling through her teeth. She takes the seat facing her father. Henry calls, raps the table, waiter enters.]

Henry: Give my daughter anything she wants.

Winsome: Coffee and one of your muffins, please.

[Father and daughter stalk each other over the table. Clam moves very slowly to watch them with obvious distaste. Henry is increasingly flustered, pours more whiskey into his tankard. Winsome continues her irritating whistling.]

Henry: (finally) What? What is it?

And stop that infernal whistling.

Tuneless maundering.

[Winsome starts deferential, then gradually takes the upper hand, straightens in her chair, switches to third person. Clam, still slouched, pulls out a little telescope, watches Henry's face, punctuates the dialogue with the boson's whistle.]

Winsome: Claire said that you and Mom...

Henry: (Quickly) Claire says a lot of things.

Winsome: She said you and Mom weren't getting along.

Henry: Claire's a blabbermouth.

Winsome: Is it true?

Henry: What?

Winsome: That you and Mom were at odds?

Henry: Not any of her business.

Winsome: But it's mine. It is true?

Henry: What?

Winsome: That my mom and dad were not ... you know.

Henry: She said *that*?

Winsome: Well, not in so many words... to that effect.

Henry: That's private and personal... Dammit.

Winsome: But not hidden from me. I was there.

Henry: Why should I...

Winsome: Because I have a right to know.

Henry: What makes you think...

Winsome: Separate bedrooms. Thin walls. Common chimney flue. I was listening.

[Henry slumps.]

Henry: What do you want?

Winsome: The truth. For once. Please. I have to know.

Henry: What else did Claire say? [He sidesteps.]

Winsome: That the china shop was failing. Not so?

Henry: Well, yes, that's true. It couldn't pay the help.

Winsome: Claire kept the counter. She remembers very well how mother, Mrs. Prey, paid her salary.

Henry: If a business can't meet payroll, it deserves to go under.

Winsome: Don't sidestep the issue. Mother Prey disbursed so her friend could eat. It was the right thing to do. Claire also said that Mr. Prey was a mooncusser. How about that?

Henry: Oh, when he was much younger. Many scavenge the beach.

Winsome: Was he successful?

Henry: A few times. Once he coaxed a dragger into the breakers. Nowadays with the lights and patrols...

Winsome: And he planned a train robbery.

Henry: It didn't work.

Winsome: Why not?

Henry: His brother got cold feet.

Winsome: Who owned the boat?

Henry: Prey and company.

Winsome: How could such a boat disappear without a trace?

Henry: That's easy. Hire a pirate.

Winsome: Were there no inquiries?

Henry: Some. To no avail. Lloyd's of London paid handsomely. Three times...

Winsome: Three?

Henry: On the boat, on the cargo. And on her, unfaithful slut.

Winsome: Mrs. Prey took a lover aboard?

Henry: Some local sailor, able-bodied bastard. [Clam flinches and clenches his left fist.]

Winsome: And the other passengers?

Henry: Oh, they were in the way. Glubglub. The china too went to China. Ain't that a laugh? Boat's proly out there. Never cum back. Bastards.

Winsome: I have heard Bidy Silva's box of pearls went missing from the bank vault after Mr. Prey became a trustee.

Henry: Silva couldn't prove anything. He couldn't even prove where they came from.

Winsome: It was their family heirloom. How could Mr. Prey do such a thing?

Henry: Pearls are no good sitting in a bank vault.

Winsome: Sweet Bidy's pearls. They should be worn by her descendants.

Henry: Well, *you're* wearing them now.

Winsome: !

Henry: He had them strung specially for you. They'll never know.

Winsome: All right.

Henry: He did it all for you.

Winsome: All right. When Mrs. Prey went aboard, whose idea was that?

Henry: She wanted more teapots in the store window to attract...

Winsome: Who booked her passage?

Henry: She did. She disliked packet boats.

Winsome: Mr. Prey?

Henry: Yes?

Winsome: Are you my father?

Henry: No. Yes.

Winsome: I know my mother. But I don't know you.

Henry: No. Don't say that.

Winsome: Henry Prey?

Henry: Yes?

Winsome: I've brought you a letter from my mother's lawyer.

Henry: No. Don't. Please.

[Randolph enters stage left and hides around the corner of the tavern, unseen to Henry and Winsome, skulks about, listens to lawyer's letter.]

Winsome: Here. I'll read the important parts.

Henry: Don't do that.

Winsome: Signed and sealed twelve years ago, the same year she disappeared.

Henry: Oh god.

Winsome: Yes, oh god.

[Henry gets more flummoxed.]

Winsome: Mr. Henry Prey of Provincetown, Massachusetts, greetings. Pursuant to documents filed in Boston Superior Court on August 8, 1880, committed to my confidence that same day, I, Ebenezer Alder, 811, Massachusetts Bar Association, National Register, etc. etc., ... blah blah..., [Henry puts hand to forehead as if with a

headache] I hereby direct you to release all properties, funds, chattel, etc. ...blah blah... from the estate of Winona Eldritch Prey, of Provincetown, Mass., to her daughter Winsome Morgana Prey, also of Provincetown, Mass., etc. forthwith without stint, circumvention etc., she being the Rightful Heir of her mother's estate, you as Executor, I as Prosecutor, Winsome as Recipient in toto, we expect your *nollo contendere* in this matter immediately. Should you wish to contest, bring your resource to Barnstable Municipal Court one month from receipt of this instrument, signed Ebenezer Alder, Esq.

Henry: Nooo, don't do this, take it away, I did it all for you, you're all I have.

Winsome: You don't own me. I've no more to say to you or your squalid family. Ah, here he is now.

[When Randolph appears, Winsome vacates her chair with obvious disgust, Clam goes back to full slouch mode, pockets telescope, Winsome moves far stage right, upstaging Clam. Randolph and Henry negotiate, Randolph helps himself to Henry's tankard. As they argue the door quietly closes. Curtain in window carefully drawn closed.]

Randolph: So. She means to disown you. Told you that would happen. Surprised it took her so long.

Henry: (Slightly drunk, maudlin) But I love her.

Randolph: Just like her mother.

Henry: Loved her too. Both the same.

Randolph: But they don't love you. Nona was fucking some other breeches. She liked them young. [Clam visibly tightens.]

Henry: But I love her.

Randolph: Stop blubbering. We stand to lose everything. Pay attention.

Henry: What's to do?

Randolph: Overboard. Deep six. Get Wrecker to do it.

Henry: Shh. Not so loud.

Randolph: What, him? He's the town idiot. Drooler. He cain't do nuthin'.

[Clam starts moving imperceptibly into position very slowly, so he can jump up.

Henry: So just like before?

Randolph: Yup. Both of 'em. Splat splash. Winnie winnie. No loose ends. Win-win.

Henry: You'll make the arrangements?

Randolph: I'll need cash on the table.

Henry: I don't have it. Not now...

Randolph: Then when? Time's running short.

Henry: When?

Randolph: Now.

Henry: No. I love her.

Randolph: Well then, there's another way.

Henry: ?

Randolph: I'll marry her and we can both have her.

Henry: But Claire...

Randolph: Anchor and chain. Not your problem. Or business.

Henry: Winsome is mine.

Randolph: We will make accommodations. I'll be taking a big risk. You'll do the same.

Henry: Not Winnie. No. Not again.

Randolph: Your Winnies are done with you. Give me a chance to even up.

Henry: But Claire.

Randolph: Okay. She can live. I'll keep Winnie as a parlour cocksucker. [Clam and Henry both flinch visibly] Bet she's good at that. Look, I'll whip her down on her knees. Claire can watch. Maybe she'll learn something. Damn little spy.

Henry: ...

Randolph: What's it gonna be? Glubglub or holy pious matrimony?

[Henry reaches a moment of clarity, closes ledgers very ! deliberately, puts the valise on the table, and lifts the flap.]

Henry: These books are closed.

[He pulls out a pistol with his left hand. Randolph reveals a derringer with his left hand. Clam begins imperceptibly to get to his feet. Randolph kicks over the table, shoots twice. Henry collapses to the right. Randolph grabs Winsome with his right hand to drag her off. Clam springs erect and knifes him.]

[running feet crunching gravel, Conch enters]

Co: Oh, good job.

[examines Henry]. He's done for.

[kneels over Randy] And this one's just leaving.

[to Clam and Winsome] You two. Go away. Disappear. I'll clean this up.

[Winsome takes off her pearls, throws them on Henry's body. Clam puts his boson's whistle round her neck. She accepts with a nod. They turn to face the lighthouse, backs ! to the audience.]

[As curtain closes, we hear a flock of wings taking off. Then one hecklegull leaving.]

[Finis]

# The Key

**[All stage directions from audience POV]**

**(Character motivations in parentheses)**

### **Characters in order of appearance**

Claire Sacristan – 64, teaches English to local kids in a Cuban fishing village; sometimes their surrogate mother, keeper of the keys for the Eldritch family, Winona's best friend since childhood, Wilfred's mom in Winona's absence, likewise raised Winsome earlier, loyalty driven to the extreme edge, a truly good woman with some clairvoyant ability.

Wilfrid "Wil" Eldritch – age 17, son of Winona Eldritch by Abel (captain of her boat *Medusa*), truth-sense, surprisingly erudite, an old soul, he'll grow up in a hurry, inherits half of the Eldritch estate in Provincetown, Mass.

Winsome "Winnie" Morgana Eldritch – Wilfrid's older sister, Winona's daughter probably by Henry Prey of Provincetown, now deceased, loves Clam, Abel's youngest brother.

Winona "Win / Mamanona" Eldritch – Wilfred's mother by Abel, Winsome's mother by (probably) Henry Prey, owns the schooner *Medusa*, de facto ship's whore these last 14 years, now at 68 she's lost her allure. Forced to land she'll find that all her wealth can't secure her future; indeed, it proves her undoing.

Edwin "Eddy / Ed" Eldritch – early 20s, a contractor by trade, stone mason by preference. He wears OshKosh overalls, he's been dismantling the fireplace foundation (massif) of the Provincetown Maitland ruin, much ruffled, sweaty, he looks like he's been rolling in it.

Luciole "Sparky" Valencia – Edwin's wife, six months pregnant, black hair, Spanish extraction, she wears black with orange and red/yellow embroidery. She's been at the library researching the house. She just got a sonogram done.

Emma – Yewanda of the Yoruba, now a ghost 130 years old, she haunts the burned-out shell of the Maitland Provincetown house until her office is retired.

# Act 1

Setting and time: 1898. The back patio of a hacienda on a hillside in the east end of Cuba, looking down on a small harbor. To stage right a brick arch leading into the house, no windows, but planter boxes with red geraniums, some large clay pots with palms and bougainvillea, flowers. Stage left behind a low retaining wall is a slope planted with gardenia, flowering brush, ornamentals, etc. Lengthwise to the wall is a wrought-iron table, three chairs, backs to the wall facing the patio, and two more chairs facing the hillside. A path meanders downslope to the harbor, just visible is a dismasted schooner drawn up on the beach and some sheds etc. The boat is being plundered for salvage.

It's about noon. Inside, Claire is winding up the morning's English lesson with a group of local Cuban kids.

[Curtain up.]

Cl: Casa – house.

Kids: House.

Cl: Mi casa – my house.

K: My house.

Cl: Su casa – your house.

K: Your house.

Cl: Casa grande – big house.

K: Big house.

Cl: Hacienda – estate.

K: Estate.

Cl: Hacienda, sometimes called a plantation. Hacienda: estate or ....

K: Plantation.

Cl: Si. Paolo?

K: Estate and plantation are different?

Cl: Both haciendas with gardens. Big house. Fancy.

K: Fancy?

Cl: Fancy, muy bueno.

Cl: Now we count. Then lunch. Ready? Uno – one, dos – two , tres – three, quarto – four; and cinco – five. Now you.

K: One, two, three, four, five.

Cl: Very good, and backwards?

K: Five, four (with gusto), three, two, one (cheers).

Cl: Excellent. Mañana, eh? Now, lunch. Arroz carbonara. Vamos!

[Sounds of kids leaving, chatter, front door slam, Claire and Wilfrid enter onto patio, Wilfrid takes the two chairs near the archway, turns them to face the arch, they sit close.]

Wil: Auntie Claire, when's Mamanona coming back?

Cl: When your sister Winsome gets here. I don't see how your mother can avoid it.

Wil: (He nods agreement.) It's gonna be bad, huh?

Cl: Could be.

Wil: [Nods.]

Cl: I want you to be friendly with your sister. It may be the only time you two meet, so pay attention.

Wil: [Nods.] When something happens only once...

Cl: It could be really important. [Both grin in agreement.]

Wil: That one resonates down some pretty weird corridors.

Cl: So I've said. I'm glad you remember it now.

Wil: [Points to distant boat.] How come Mamanona is spending so much time on that rotten old hulk?

Cl: She spent a huge chunk of her life on it. Almost 18 years. You were born aboard. Without the *Medusa*, she and you would probably not be here now. It's home for her and Abel. I think she's having trouble letting it go. Wil, your mother is 68. She must know that it's over. The *Medusa* is infested with shipworm. I doubt Abel will refit her.

Wil: Paolo says the salvage should be worth something.

Cl: Oh, surely. A lot to the local fishermen. They'll be mining that shed for years.

[Front door knocker off stage right]

Cl: This could be Winsome. You're about to get an earful. [While Claire answers the door, Wil moves his chair into a niche next to a potted palm. He considers the arrangement of chairs carefully, takes Claire's chair to another niche and fades into the background. Nods in acceptance of the inevitable.]

[Offstage Claire and Winsome greet each other with obvious affection.]

Cl: Winnie! Welcome to the hinterlands.

Winsome: Hola! That's all the Spanish I know.

Cl: The WC is over there...

Winsome: No thanks.

Cl: Can I offer you...?

Winsome: No. Let's get right to it. [As they are coming through the arch.] Where is she?

Cl: Where's Clam?

Winsome: Oh, he went right down to the harbor. He saw the boat and thought his brother would be there. Probably confabulating with Abel about all sorts of felonies and sexploits. Clam's been working with Scotland Yard as a private investigator.

Cl: So London suits you?

Winsome: Very well. I'm content. [Winsome surveys the scene, immediately appropriates the middle chair at the table, lays a slim attaché case on the table, Claire takes the downstage chair, they small-talk.]

Cl: How was your trip?

Winsome: Comfortable, uneventful, from Le Havre to Liverpool, direct to Havana. Then three days in a rattletrap. Your man was really helpful, he had all his dummies in a row.

Cl: What's it like in Havana?

Winsome: Bellicose men strutting about in snazzy uniforms. Bugles, saber flourish, pompous jerkalong. The Americans moored a battleship smack in the middle of Havana harbor. The consequences are obvious. That's why we came overland. Seemed safer. I doubt you've in any danger out here. [Wil nods agreement.]

Cl: True enough. The people like us. We're affable. They trust me with their kids. Once a week we feed them. It's been very good here. I feel that I'm home. I've assimilated into the house and made it my own. [Wil nods head in agreement.]

Winsome: Where's my mother?

Cl: Saying goodbye to the *Medusa*. She'll know that you're here when Clam arrives. She'll be along. Has to. [Wil nods yes.] [Winsome finally notices him.]

Winsome: Ah ha, you must be Wilfred? [Wil nods, doesn't get up. They view each other suspiciously. Claire doesn't interfere, lets them work it out.]

[A pause]

Winsome: [To Wilfrid] Do you talk?

Wil: Very well. (Sneers.) Harvard.

Winsome: Uh huh. What's the matter?

Wil: You're pushing a bow wave of ill will. It's palpable. Your very arrival here means trouble.

Winsome: That's between me and my—our—mother.

Wil: [Nods yes.] True enough. [Glances at Claire, who nods encouragement.]

Winsome: It's business [taps the attaché case], taxes...

Wil: Not true.

Winsome: (Realizes she's on equal terms, but misspeaks) You think you're pretty smart, huh?

Wil: At least as smart as you.

Winsome: Granted.

Wil: Magnanimous of you.

Winsome: Sorry, Claire is a good teacher.

Wil: (Thaws a little.) The library here is excellent. Euripides to Von Clauswitz. Ha!

Winsome: Von...?

Wil: Musashi, Basho, Life of Rasputin, Richard the Third, Das Nibelungenlied, Kierkegaard, Freud, and Torquemada.

Winsome: Okay, I capitulate.

Wil: No need, we're siblings after all. Better that we be friends.

Winsome: Agreed. Let's do that and ignore untenable options. Agreed and agreed. You carry the Eldritch well.

Wil: [Nods.] [Claire relaxes visibly, heaves a sigh of relief.] And thank you, all the gods.

Winsome: (Grins) Let's dare the labyrinth.

Wil: (Grins) Let's dare the Minotaur.

Cl: [Looks down the path] Right on cue. [Winona comes up, slightly harried; Wil, as a solicitous son, places the extra chair in the center patio facing the table, about 5 feet out from it. Winona sinks into it gratefully, they exchange smiles. Wil moves back to his chair, regards his mother, thinks better of it, nods, shrugs, then sits next to his sister. He has cast his lot with her. The triumvirate is convened. The inquest is about to commence.]

[Winona, oblivious, natters on. They eventually stare her down.]

Winona: Abel says the *Medusa* is in far worse shape than he thought. The stern post is rotten. We'd probably have lost the rudder in the next blow. He's stripping out the brass. Her sails are still good, bowsprit's okay. He wants to keep the wheel and set it up next to the fireplace. [Claire straightens, narrows her gaze.] [Wil nudges Winsome]. [Winsome opens the attaché case, lays a document on the table, Wil reads it, nods that he understands its implications, Winona continues blithely.]

Winona: And of course he keeps the sextant and chronometers. I want some of the maps framed, hung in the bedroom. [Claire slips her left hand under her chin, gazes pensively, Wil does the same with his right hand.] Oh, and the Caribbean maps, in fact all the Maitland stuff should go into the library. We'll have to collect what's in the Provincetown house... if there's anything left... [Wil shakes his head] ... Maybe my mother's piano... not a lot... For one last visit ... [finally takes notice] What? ... What is it?

Cl: Win.

Winsome: Mother.

[Winona slumps into the chair, breathes out, once, twice,]

Winona: All right, all wrong, whatever it is, out with it.

Winsome: Just so, exactly as you say. [Both Claire and Wilfrid sit upright.]

Winsome: There's a huge piece missing from my life. From when you disappeared to when I went off to Harvard. Eight years. Eight years of not knowing. I have a right to know. Why did you abandon me?

Winona: Oh that.

Winsome: (Peremptory.) Yes. That. Now.

[Winsome takes another document from the attaché case, lays it on the first, Wilfrid reads it with interest, nods agreement, then shakes head, grimaces, in anticipation. Claire remains watchful, pensive.]

Winona: [Avoids Winsome's eyes, to Wilfred] I had no choice. [Wilfrid casts his eyes to the right, as if verifying a specimen.]

Winona: (Somewhat startled by his stand-offishness) No. No choice. I was pregnant. Two... three months.

Cl: You said you'd missed two periods.

Winona: Well, maybe three.

Wilfrid: Five.

Winona: Knocked up, gravid, happy now?

Winsome: So what?

Winona: It—him there—wasn't Henry's child. And Henry, damn him, Henry knew.

Winsome: Whose child is Wilfrid? [Winona keeps her eyes on Wilfrid, hoping for a reprieve.]

Cl: She doesn't know. Probably not Abel. I can count.

Winsome: Let that pass for the moment. [To Winona] So what?

Winona: Henry's prestige would have suffered. Landed gentry, bank trustee, preacher to the fold. He'd not suffer me in my, my...

Winsome: Iniquity?

Cl: Nymphomania.

Winona: Abel believed in me.

Wilfrid: Untruth. Who?

Winsome: Who then?

Claire: Winnie, she doesn't know. Could be any of a number of men, sailors all, or I'd have found out.

Winsome: So. Then what?

Winona: I, I fled to Boston seeking an ab ab...

Cl: Abortion. (Wilfrid sits bolt upright.) At Harvard you were going to bribe them with quite a bundle of cash.

Winona: I set up a trust fund with them to assure my daughter ...an endowment ... a scholarship ... to assure her education (still averts her eyes from Winsome).

Winsome: But something went awry, is that it?

Winona: Yes. They reneged. They cheated me.

Winsome: They were astute enough to contractualize the endowment, knowing that you wouldn't, couldn't prosecute them for committing a heinous crime on your behalf. [To Wilfrid] That's why you're alive, kid. And why my—our—documentation is in order. [Winona seems to ignore the attaché case, still watches Wilfrid. Wil narrows his eyes, sets his jaw.]

Winona: Well, it's out. What was I to do? I bought a cargo of fine bone china, insured it, paid up the attorney in advance.

Cl: Ebenezer.

Winona: I did everything right.

Winsome: (Snorts) Go on.

Winona: Well, then we were loaded waiting for dawn. I got a telegram. Hand delivered. From Constable Conch in Provincetown. I remember it clear as day. He said, he wrote, "*Don't come home. H and R have hired a wrecker to deep six you.*" I don't know how Conch knew.

Cl: I told him.

Wilfrid: True.

Winona: But I believed him.

Winsome: True. Even at eight I knew that you and Mr. Prey, Daddy dear, were on poor speaking terms. In fact, he'd started abusing you.

Winona: [Finally looks at Winsome.] How did you know that?

Winsome: (Without a shred of kindness) Your bedroom and mine shared a common chimney. I kept quiet and heard everything. The slaps and the blow to your belly.

Cl: That's when you made plans, collected cash, duped me with the china-buying trip. I knew, too. I'm really sorry I was so loyally obtuse. [To Winsome] I dared not tell you.

Winsome: Because brother Randy was capable of murder.

Cl: Yes, that he was. A scoundrel of the worst stripe. I always winnowed the truth from him though. He'd wax expansive after sex and brag about his exploits. [To Winona] Emma was right, even sex for the wrong reasons can smooth relations.

Wilfrid: (Quizzically) Emma?

Cl: Later for that.

Winsome: [To Winona] So you were warned. What happened then?

Winona: We could have stayed in Boston. Sold the boat and disappeared. We actually put it to a vote. It was unanimous. Abel and the crew were in it for me.

Cl: They shared you.

Wilfrid: [Nods yes.]

Winona: Yes. My men. All of them. (Proudly) We never quarrelled. No jealousies.

Winsome: Mother, just spare us the lurid details. Then what?

Winona: We ran with the wind. I felt immensely free. Out there we made the rules to suit our convenience. Abel found a small shipyard at Reykjavík willing to refit the *Medusa* without record. Shortened the mast, raked it back, we weren't in a hurry for the crossings, added a foot of freeboard, new paint, new name, several new names later. And then we were truly vagabond. On the high seas, sometimes on monstrous waves (waxes almost ecstatic), cut south mid-Atlantic, rounded well off the Cape and didn't see sail, steam or land till Subic Bay. Wilfrid at Manila, sold the china in Tasmania. (Smugly) Porcelain makes more money than plain old china, did you know that? A year later, here, I bought this place with the proceeds of our tradings, went out seven more times, leaving you, Claire, to hold the fort, and the rest you know. Apparently. [To Winsome] Is that all, mistress attorney, what's in there? [Points to the attaché case.]

Winsome: Right. I've brought some documents for you to sign. I've been paying the taxes on the Provincetown house and land. I want your quit claim to make it easier for Wilfrid to inherit his share of the Eldritch estate. And a power of attorney for Claire till he reaches his majority. [Shuffles several sheets, brings forth the pen.]

Winona: I'm not signing anything.

Winsome: Mother, you don't grasp your precarious legal position.

Winona: Suck on that pen and choke on it.

Claire: Last chance.

Wilfrid: Mother ... Mamanona ... Look. Listen. Learn.

Winona: You too, eh Brutus?

Winsome: [Takes the sheaf and enumerates] Photograph of the deed to this house, signed by you, witnessed by your agent, dated two years after your supposed death. Receipt for the gold certificates, enumerated, that you used to pay for it, likewise dated.

Winona: How, where did you get them?

Winsome: Matter of public record. Clam is very a good investigator. One hundred dollars goes a long way out here.

Winona: (Dour) Who cares?

Winsome: Lloyd's of London cares. They paid Henry's claim. So did your life insurance policy. They'll proceed against you if anyone, I say anyone, this includes your crew, turns against you. They'll prosecute and vigorously. All we need to do is point.

Winona: Henry's bastard child.

Winsome: Confused?

Winona: No.

Winsome: Vengeance will get you nothing.

Wilfrid: [Nods yes.]

Cl: [Nods yes.]

Winona: I will not be hectored or lectured to in my own house!

Winsome: [Drops two more documents on the stack] Quit claim one, and two, one backdated today, and the other current.

Winona: Forgeries!

Winsome: Yes. Ebenezer says you dare not contest. If you do, both Claire and Abel are liable as accessories to fraud.

Winona: I'll deny it.

Winsome: Clam is talking to Abel right now. He knows. You're cooked. Lastly, Claire's power of attorney. A very good forgery signed, sealed, filed in Barnstable municipal court. Iron-clad. The embossed seal cost me dearly. There's more [indicates attaché case]. [To Claire] Fear not, you'll be rid of her. [Points at Winona.] [To Wilfrid] Nice meeting you. [Gathers her dossier.]

Winona: Rot in hell.

Winsome: (Sweetly) See you in court. [Leaves unhurried, whistling the mother's song.] [Stunned silence, door slams.] [Claire and Wilfrid snap out of it simultaneously.]

Cl: Win, we mean you no harm. We don't begrudge you this house.

Wilfrid: [Nods vigorously.]

Winona: [Bares her teeth] Collusion!

Cl: Look, I'll vacate. All we wanted was your written assurance that you won't co-opt the Provincetown house.

Winona: Sssss. (Hisses like a snake.)

[Claire recoils in horror, this is her epiphany when she knows that it's over between the two of them.]

Cl: [Con conversationally to Wilfrid] I believe Mrs. Prey [indicates Winona] has adopted the attributes of the gorgon Medusa. Her self-image has slipped into a fantasy realm. And I predict that the boat's figurehead will be mounted on a pedestal at the front door. I'll not live in such a viper's nest. Nor will I compete with her for her gang.

Wilfrid: [Nods slowly] [From here on they ignore Winona.]

Cl: While still a little girl, Mrs. Prey's father was a seafarer. From her point of view he suddenly disappeared, stayed away, abandoned her, for months at a time, and then just

as suddenly reappeared into her life bearing gifts and good times. This happened repeatedly during her formative years.

Wilfrid: I recognize the pattern.

Cl: It's amazing how history repeats itself in the Eldritch family. Fear of abandonment plays a crucial card. I can't explain why.

Wilfrid: I'll be careful not to do that.

Cl: And so Mrs. Prey learned to expect pleasure from men. Sexually this can lead to nymphomania. Mrs. Prey became a predator. She collected men. Bent them to her will. With the enticement of money. Lots of it. She did the abandonment/gratification dance many times. Maybe forty.

Wilfrid: Fifty.

Cl: This path is hard trodden.

Wilfrid: But?

Cl: Oh, sex is wonderful but it doesn't last. Vigor wanes, men and women wander. In life, change is a constant. I've been packed and ready to go for a year. I hoped ...

Wilfrid: Me too.

Cl: I'll leave you one last private moment with her. It has to be your choice.

[Claire smiles at him, leaves by the arch. She avoids Winona like the proverbial plague.]

[Wilfrid regards Winona for about fifteen seconds, gets up, stands beside her, spreads his left palm before her face.]

Wilfrid: I would have been dead at five months. [He then quietly follows Claire. Winona seems to shrink into herself. All colored lights fade, turn to gray, then to black, her head slumps forward. Curtain.]

## Act 2

[Emma's kitchen, the Maitland house, 1898, early March, same basic set as in *The Cradle*, with minor cosmetic differences.]

[Lights up, curtain up, Claire and Wilfrid come through the bedroom door, stage left.]

Cl: I doubt that you'd want to sleep in that bed, some pretty strange emotional changes happened in there.

Wilfrid: I smell complete disarray—happy, sad, terror, boredom—freakish.

Cl: After it became evident that your grandma was going blind, Captain Maitland brought in a piano. She did eventually learn to play it. Self-taught. But the sewing machine was too much for her. Emma did most of that. It brought them together. They must have talked at length. Friendships develop around such devices.

Wilfrid: Did you...?

Cl: I rarely entered. I found the room weirdly confining—and I'm not claustrophobic. Your mother, too, felt, well, at an odd sort. And she was born in there.

Wilfrid: [Indicates kitchen.] This seems much friendlier.

Cl: Sure. We spent a lot of our childhood growing up in here. It's exactly as I remember it—except the dust. Apparently the Prey brothers didn't break in after I closed up the house. [They sit at the table, Claire in Emma's usual chair.]

Wilfrid: This is it, huh? Let's hear it. I can smell it coming.

Cl: Not surprising. Where to begin... [In the bedroom, someone runs a finger over the strings.]

Wilfrid: So the place is haunted? I could live with that.

Cl: Winnifred and Emma were friends. I think they are still here.

Wilfrid: Charming.

Cl: They mean you no harm. Just looking for closure.

Wilfrid: Maybe we can do that?

Cl: Let's talk. This one counts. [Wilfrid bends his head forward in a slow formal bow of recognition, straightens up, raises his left hand palm out, fingers splayed, as an antenna, then lays both hands supine on the table.]

Cl: If... when... a soul incarnates, like the biblical holy ghost, she agrees to continuity. So?

Wilfrid: [Nods agreement.]

Cl: That is what a mother wants, continuity of her lineage, the well-being of her children. Her own life is necessary but runs second in the race to eternity. Okay so far? [Wilfrid nods assent.]

Cl: Your grandmother Winnifred managed this despite very serious physical and mental odds. Blindness, the shakes, and her husband's wayward attitude towards women. I was here when news came of his death. It was the final blow and her tower collapsed. She is free of it now and I wish her well. [A piano glissando upscale.]

Wilfrid: Then it is well with her?

Cl: It is well. She has carried herself with dignity. And hence Winona and you. The lineage is secure in the Eldritch.

Wilfrid: Where?

Cl: In the churchyard as per her wish. ...

Wilfrid: But?

Cl: (Sighs) Not so with Emma. Her situation was much more extreme and convoluted.

Wilfrid: [Nods.] Explain.

Cl: Emma, your mother's de facto mom, was black. Back then, as is still true today despite Mr. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, black skin is the stigmata of a slave. Emma came here wearing a chain. Roger Maitland owned her, brought her here to defray Winnifred's frailty. Emma raised Winona and me as her own. She had no children of her own. We are they. While your grandma and Winona, now Mrs. Prey to me, were mothers, it is Emma who embodies motherhood. Again and over again.

Wilfrid: [Nods he understands.]

Cl: In the scope of time, Emma takes the ascendancy, she dances in the dark forever. Without her we cannot be. So?

Wilfrid: Eve.

Cl: If you like. Most civilized people maintain similar myths. In the face of trauma, women and children first.

Wilfrid: Sure... but?

Cl: Emma was also a sorceress, a priestess of her craft, the emissary of her tribe. I know this because she passed her knowledge to me right here at this table some 50 years ago, maybe more, it seems so long. The apostolic succession is intact.

Wilfrid: [Straightens back.] Me?

Cl: I have no other. You may refuse it.

Wilfrid: More.

Cl: [Points] Observe the cupboard.

Wilfrid: And the bags, bottles, bunches. I am unfathomed.

Cl: Such herbal lore takes time. I know someone who can teach you that part of it.

Wilfrid: So then.

Cl: Indeed there is more. I was not here, not present to observe, and celebrate her passage. Emma was strong of will and sound of body and mind when she died. Not here in the house. Outside in the garden.

Wilfrid: She chose the spot.

Cl: So I believe. It is the ancient of ways. I suspect she paid a visit to Atropa Hackett.

Wilfrid: Who's that?

Cl: Her father was a ship's surgeon. He specialized in obscure poisons.

Wilfrid: Ah.

Cl: I've no proof, but it would be...

Wilfrid: Fitting. Interesting.

Cl: Careful!

Wilfrid: Why?

Cl: People fear such as Atropa. What they fear they sometimes destroy.

Wilfrid: Aunt Claire? What *is* slavery really?

Cl: That's the right question. We cannot truly know except if we experience it. The implications are profound. It means betrayal by one you trust most. Emma's uncle sold her. For a cookpot. It means that you're ripped away from home, land, family. All that you know so intimately vanishes. You own nothing. You become no better than a cow. You're taken far away without hope of rescue or return. You are forced to work at menial jobs that no one else wants to do. You are ignored except to be ordered about at the whim of someone else, strangers, insane people. Forced under duress, grisly, bloody duress. And though you want to kill yourself, you can't. Even your thoughts are not completely your own because, though you hate, you dare not let on that you hate.

Wilfrid: That's...

Cl: Hideous?

Wilfrid: I was thinking far worse.

Cl: Human slavery undermines what we hold most precious. Freedom of speech, privacy of home, the chance to be happy, to be a citizen of the realm.

Wilfrid: It's not a chorus of happy slave women in the *Iphigenia*...

Cl: No, Euripides was wrong. So was Sophocles. Times have not changed very much. Only civilized people enslave their own kind.

Wilfrid: That's crazy.

Cl: Welcome to the adult world.

Wilfrid: If I live here need I fear Emma?

Cl: She's still here, true. And though she bore no love for white skins, I doubt that she begrudges you this house. Better to ask what's to be done with...

Wilfrid: Ah. The money.

Cl: Yes. She loved Roger Maitland out of dire necessity, but she reviled him for amassing a fortune by auctioning off her kinsfolk.

Wilfrid: And yet she rose above that, I see, I see.

Cl: Emma wound up with the keys. To all the doors. I have them. [Claire lays a large ring of skeleton keys on the table.] They're yours. If you want them.

Wilfrid: I doubt that I'll ever need them. And I see...

Cl: ... That there's one missing?

Wilfrid: I can see that there's one missing... [Claire nods encouragement.]

Cl: Where is the lock it goes with?

Wilfrid: I can't see where the lock is.

Cl: Too bad. I of course tried all the keys and found their corresponding locks. But the lock for the little one eluded me. I hoped that you...

Wilfrid: Sorry. Where is the key?

Cl: When Emma died, I couldn't get the undertaker to come. Nor could I hire a gravedigger. And the church refused her. This may yet be to the good. Wyrd happens according to its own rules.

Wilfrid: Describe what did happen.

Cl: Emma lay supine in the garden. I wrapped her in the finest linen cloth from our shop. Then I rolled her in the kitchen rug to protect her while Conch, he was still our constable then, while we dug her grave. When he'd left, I dragged her over, unrolled the rug, and then, and then, I don't know what made me do this, I opened the shroud and put the key, that little brass key with the light all around it, I put it in her hand. Then I, I, I got into the grave myself, pulled her in, laid her out, cried a while and then I climbed out and pushed in the dirt with my hands, on my knees. Conch, bless him, had the stone cut in Boston. We set it, someone toppled it, probably Henry, but he couldn't desecrate it. He dared not confound the sacristan.

Wilfrid: I see that. I can see him. I can see the key. I can't see where it fits. It must have been important.

Cl: Observe. Emma disbursed Roger Maitland's wealth in his absence. To run the house, buy groceries, see to his horse and his wife.

Wilfrid: (Snide): Nice.

Cl: So it was. Emma kept the keys I hold in the armorium. I once did the arithmetic of how much wealth she accumulated on his behalf. I've seen the bank accounts. There seems to be a sizeable, perhaps the better half, missing. I doubt that Henry or Randy had access to it. Your mother would have prevented that. He probably didn't know that it existed. Exists still.

Wilfrid: Where? Oh, here.

Cl: Almost certainly. Don't search for it, Wil. It won't do us any good. Besides, we have enough.

Wilfrid: Agreed.

Cl: Life with Conch will be good. I mean to marry him.

Wilfrid: (Slow smile.) True.

Cl: Then that is agreed? You will accept the cup?

Wilfrid: Yes. Agreed. And yet... [Emma's cupboard door pops open.] There's something, some otherly thing.

Cl: Quite. We should see to that. Here, help me move the table. I trust this table. [She removes the lantern, sets it on the hearth, they move the table to center stage, she takes a rag from the sink, gingerly picks the hand of glory with its five fingertip candles from its niche without touching it and sets it on the table.]

Cl: We should burn that rag just like I burned the rug. I thought it would be improper to use the rug after rolling Emma in it. [They stand at the table facing the audience.]

Wilfrid: (Curiously) Is it dangerous? And what the hell is this?

Cl: The hand of glory. Note the orange wax. Orange for ambition, red for vigor, yellow for thought. It's the only artifact of certain African origin. I've destroyed all her other implements. Poppets, cradle, bowl, nails and pins. But I had trouble with this thing [she points at the hand.] So I left it locked up. This key, here, opens the cupboard.

Wilfrid: (Snorts) Evidently it's a trick lock.

Cl: Maybe. You have to light it [she points to the hand] to make it work.

Wilfrid: (Doubtfully) What does it do?

Cl: Carry messages, open doors, see inside hidden places, generally do your bidding.

Wilfrid: Well, geez Aunt Claire, that's useful. What's the problem? [Cue subsonic generator.]

Cl: It's not wise to use another magician's tools. You don't know the method that made it nor the charge incubated in it. Be especially wary of tools infused with body parts or anointed with blood or cum. Make your own tools. Cookbook magic either doesn't work or goes astray.

Wilfrid: You mean there's a real human hand in there?

Cl: Of the man who sold her to your grandpa.

Wilfrid: Is it dangerous?

Cl: Maybe. I don't trust relics.

Wilfrid: This is monstrous. Black sorcery. Physical and mental slavery.

Cl: Perhaps spiritual as well. Emma used it to protect your mother. Your grandma helped her.

Wilfrid: Two witches. Phew.

Cl: Not necessarily bad. But I've always thought there are multiple solutions to problems. Note the keys. They open locks as well.

Wilfrid: What's the difference?

Cl: Whoever holds a key attends the door by rights. The hand works by subterfuge. Consider it a lock pick. If your intent is not honorable, then you yourself are at hazard.

Wilfrid: Hung by your own petard.

Cl: (Smiles) Well said. Will Shakespeare is proud of you.

Wilfrid: Your advice?

Cl: Toss it in the fire.

Wilfrid: Is that what you did with the rest of it?

Cl: In separate individual consecrated fires. The bowl I smashed, all the non-burnable debris went into the ocean. What now?

Wilfrid: I'm with you on this one. I won't use it. It's not mine to use. Nor will I continue another's servitude.

Cl: And the keys?

Wilfrid: I can't see them in my hand.

Cl: Alas, I had hoped for a more definitive denouement. I don't feel good about this.

Wilfrid: Then what's to do?

Cl: (Shrugs) I don't know. It's dark in here.

Wilfrid: When you destroyed the rest, were there any bad results?

Cl: None that I could tell. But sometimes this stuff lingers. And time is long.

Wilfrid: All right then. We decide as one—the two of us—yes to burn or *no* for not to. On three?

Cl: Yes, on three.

Cl and Wilfrid: One ... two ... three... Yes!

Cl: So it is. I'm relieved.

Wilfrid: I'm not. (Emphatically) Let's get to it. [Claire turns, peers into the fireplace, withdraws.]

Cl: (With satisfaction): I laid this fire 16 years ago. It's as dry as bone in there.

Wilfrid: Oh crap.

Cl: Don't lose your resolve now. [She lights the fire with a match, it catches right away, orange and red glow from the opening, crackle]

Wilfrid: [Backs away] Crap, crap. [Claire takes the rag, wraps the hand, throws it into the fire.]

Wilfrid: I feel really bad. All my hair is standing up.

Cl: Mine too.

Wilfrid: We've just made a very serious blunder. Damn. [Wilfrid rushes forward, jams the cookpot into the opening.]

Wilfrid: [Screams] Don't come in here! Go! Up the chimney.

[Claire stands indecisively, Wilfrid grabs her by the arm, pushes her to the door stage right.]

Wilfrid: Run! Claire! Run!

[They leave heads down amid maniac panic.] [Three strobe flashes, lightning stroke, buzz-splatt, thunder.] [Scrim down, back-lit projection of flames engulf the stage, crackling noises, piano crash.]

[Curtain down.] [Subsonic off.]

# Epilogue

Setting: The fire-gutted remains of the Maitland house basement, stone steps leading down into it stage left. Dry-laid flat slabs form the sides and back, center stage is what's left of the fireplace foundation massif, beyond is a sloping old garden gone to weed, brush and forest. Way back center stage, so we can just see it, is a briar-entangled gravestone.

Summer 2000, a century hence.

[Curtain up.]

[Edwin Eldritch enters from stage right, pushing a wheelbarrow, pries stones from the massif, hammer, pry bar, gloves, dumps them into the barrow, it's hard work. Offstage left a car door slams, Luciole enters from stage left carrying a picnic cooler, calls out excitedly.]

Luciole: Eddy!

Eddy: Break time. [He takes one final swipe at the stonework, it echoes hollow.] (Surprised) Huh? [Re-examines the slab.] Could be... if you please, god. Drops his tools, lays gloves on the steps.] Any luck?

[They sit on the steps with the cooler in front, between them, as a makeshift table.]

L: Not at first. And then I struck pay dirt. [She opens the cooler, beer, a sub that they split, while they eat they talk.] I got nowhere, lots of Emmas, but the wrong dates.

E: (With gusto) Ham and cheese?

L: Capacole and provolone. I found Winnifred Maitland, she's in the churchyard right over there [points vaguely]. Almost certainly one of our Maitlands. Napkin? Nothing in the register except, get this, she's an Eldritch.

E: No Emma Eldritches?

L: Nope, deadend (they laugh).

E: So, then?

L: I gave up searching through the CLAMs catalogue. Then I noticed an old guy reading *The Banner* at a table with a free chair. Nothing ventured, eh? I sat across from him. He slid the sections that he had read towards me.

E: Ha! Friendly?

L: Yep. (Self-satisfied to a T, big grin) So we got to talking. George by name, kinda the unofficial historian round here.

E: Excellent. Did you bring milk for yourself?

L: Quart. I told him about Emma. When he heard the dates, he said she's, she's probably a slave, the reverends being snotty about such like, that she's probably not a Maitland or Eldritch at all. Then, Ed, he got this faraway look.

E: Snotty reverends, I kinda like that.

L: And then, my love, he opened up. I learned more in five minutes than in all of May. Dropped a bunch of names. I wrote 'em down. [Takes out a folded piece of paper and reads.] Conch Sheldrake, a local constable back then, I found his notebooks. A Winsome Eldritch of Scotland Yard and your own grandpa Wilfrid.

E: Any hardcopy?

L: Another beer, I'll split it with you. Yep and yeps. A Claire Sacristan who used to live next door, her autobiography no less. It's in the Eastham stacks so I flew right down there and gave it a quick onceover. Other names popped out, also in Conch's bookie—Prey—apparently unsavoury, a boat named the *Medusa*, still on the Lloyd's register, went down with all hands. They paid off.

E: Unfortunate, no?

L: Not according to Claire, who married Conch. Here's the best part, there's an addendum pasted into her very nicely bound book by... ?

E: Dunno. Don't leave me hanging.

L: Grandpa Wilfred. We've found the motherlode. There's enough there to keep me busy for months.

E: By Geoge.

L: Oh, he said come over any time to look at old photographs. [Eddy cocks his head to the right, gazes pensively at the chimney foundation.]

L: What?

Eddy: I'd almost given up hauling my ass out of this hole. I was even thinking of digging up that grave. [Emma's ghost rises up behind the stone, walks to the basement, stands

there while they continue talking. They don't see her as she offers encouragement via gesture and body language.]

L: I won't let you do that.

E: I thought not. [Emma smiles, nods slowly.]

L: But...?

E: Just as you drove in I hit a hollow spot.

L: How's it going?

E: Really hard mud. Probably portland.

L: Do you think...?

E: Don't get your hopes up. Cavities in crappy masonry happen. It may just be an old ash dump. [He gets up and walks to the chimney, picks up his hammer. Emma nods and points to the spot.]

E: Here. Listen. [He strikes the face, it goes "thoomp".] But I can't pry these slabs out manually. Maybe with a demolition hammer. I'll bring the generator. [Emma smiles knowingly, shakes no.]

L: No, I don't think so. Not necessary. [She stands beside him.] We're lucky together.

Eddy: [Big nod of affirmation.]

L: Here and here [places his hands], push up. [Something goes "click".] And then like so, push in at the top and bottom. [The slab pushes in.] and now to the left. [They grunt without success.] Crap, could I be wrong?

E: [Shakes his head vigorously.] Not if you've got this far. Let me pry into this little unassuming cleft [inserts pry bar, the stone slides reluctantly to the left, revealing a deep cavity.]

L: Careful!

E: Booby-trapped?

Emma: (Peacefully) No.

L: No. Don't. Not yet.

E: What? There's a coffer in there.

L: This will change our lives.

E: Ah. But not us.

L: Promise?

E: I am with thee before god.

L: And I with thee.

Emma: [Crosses arms over breasts.]

E: Now?

L: Yes, now.

E: [Reaches in.] Heavy. No handholds. [Looks lower.] Um, it is on wheels.

Emma: [Makes a pulling gesture, fingers up as claws.]

L: Here and here. Feel the grooves.

E: [Hauls the coffer forward.] Hmm. Locked. I'd prefer not destroy such a nice brass-bound chest.

L: Wait.

Emma: [Tosses the key, it lands at their feet.]

E: That figures. Whoever you are, we thank you.

[Eddy inserts the key.]

L: Careful again. [They each stand to the side. Emma nods agreement.]

E: [Turns key.] Roight.

L: [They both raise the lid. The lid opens on oiled hinges, they peer inside.]

E: Holy shit. [He reaches in, pulls out a coin, reads.] George the Third. A gold sovereign. Many. [L. hangs back.]

E: Red pearls, glittery stuff, we're ... what's the matter? [He reaches in, grabs a handful, lets them cascade back.] Here. [Hands her one.] Believe. [She backpedals, both Emma and L clench the fists of their left hands.]

E: What's with you? We're rich. Don't you want to spend it?

L: Oh, we'll spend it all right. On what?

E: On anything. Everything.

[Emma shakes “no” real slow.]

L: Ed. Eddy. You promised. [He takes a long look at her.]

E: Yes, I did. [pause] [He looks at the chest, then at her, and back to the chest, takes a deep breath.]

E: If it were a choice between that and you, I'd choose you. [Both women relax.]  
What do you want to spend it on?

L: Close it up for a while. It's not so simple. [Emma folds her hands over her belly, fingers locked.] [He pushes the chest back, slides the port shut, it falls into place with a thud.] [They sit on the steps as before. Emma waits expectantly.]

L: There's something you've not told me?

L: It's your grandpa Wilfrid's pasted-in addendum. Captain Maitland was a slaver. Behold, gold and red pearls.

E: Yes, extremely rare today, worth a lot. They're really big.

L: Red. Scarlet red?

E: Oh yeah, blood red, scarlet fire... ohhh ... damn.

L: Red pearls. Surely not by accident. [Emma nods.]

E: You think it's tainted? Evil?

L: Not of and by itself. It's how that wealth is used.

E: Build. I'll rebuild this house. Better than before. I'll live in it with you, raise kids, fill it with life. [Slaps his own face.] Sparky, I'm sorry. I'm an idiot. What did they say at the clinic? [Emma raises her head, looks into the audience.]

L: It's a little girl. A daughter. The first of three, I think. [Emma nods happily, three times.]

E: As we agreed?

L: Wanda. Wanda Eldritch.

E: So mote it be.

L: House is fine, house is good. [Big grin on Emma.]

E: We'll have to be careful. You said so twice, I heard that.

L: Great wealth is perilous. People kill for that. Nor can we convert it into cash out here. Everyone would know.

E: Agreed. Secrecy. Trips to museums, numismatologists, banks, auctions, proxy ownership, no taxes on it.

L: That's right. All of them and none of that.

E: (Very seriously) Sparky, how do you expiate blood money?

L: Slowly. Fund the soup kitchen, play St. Nicolas, endow the libraries, give some to the needy, quietly pay some rent, pay for a walk-in clinic, everyone's welcome. There's enough for all that, huh?

E: Surely. We shall not want.

L: The cramps are leaving my belly. The child grows. [Emma releases her fingers, kisses both her hands three times, blows the kisses towards them. He puts his hand around L's shoulder as Emma turns [cue music Elgar's "Lark Ascending"], Emma dances to the back, glides with arms outspread, disappears through a hidden door into the forest. A meadow lark sings.]

[Curtain.]

# Post Scriptum

## ***The Blackbird Trilogy***

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Klaus J. Gerken, Chief Editor at:  
[kgerken@rogers.com](mailto:kgerken@rogers.com)**