

AWAY FROM THE SUN

by
Carly Bryann Young

Justonthehorizon@yahoo.com
808-895-3528

SETTING

Countryside, Argyle Mansion, early 1700's

CHARACTERS

ARADIA ARGYLE - pale dark-haired 14 year-old with aversion to sunlight.

BRISHEN ARGYLE - Aradia's father, a brooding and handsome man

PRUDENCE - Brishen's new wife, a well-to-do and pious woman

FARLEY FINN - the mentally challenged son of the Finns

NORA FINN - Farley's mother, caretaker of the Argyle Mansion

GILBERT FINN - groundskeeper, Farley's father, Nora's husband.

ANGELINA - Aradia's mother.

MARIETTA - Angelina's friend, sister of Torrance.

TORRANCE - Marietta's brother.

COACHMAN*

BUTLER*

PRIEST*

MOB (4 actors at least)

*can be played by the same actor

"Away from the Sun"

ACT I, SCENE ONE

EXT. ARGYLE MANSION - NIGHT

OVER BLACK:

The sound of thundering hooves.

Lights come up on an old mansion, a decrepit study of light and dark in the moonlight, a relic of a past life. A carriage has stopped in front of the gate, which is wide open.

Gaping at it, the COACHMAN drinks from a WHISKEY FLASK. ARADIA ARGYLE, a pale, dark-haired 14 year-old with a large veiled floppy hat and gloves, steps out of the carriage.

ARADIA

(calls out to the coachman)

The gate is open.

COACHMAN

(startles, chokes)

I can see that.

Aradia reaches into her purse to pull out some coins. She offers them to the Coachman.

ARADIA

For your trouble.

COACHMAN

You listen here, I don't need no cursed reward for helpin' you disappear - believe you me, that's reward enough! Now git!

The spotlight dims on the carriage - we hear the sound of the driver whipping the horses into action, and the carriage taking off. Aradia goes through the gates, and stops at a headstone that reads 'ANGELINA ARGYLE'.

ARADIA

I'm here Mother. Tell me what troubles you. I'll wait all night, if I must.

(silence. An owl hoots)

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Mother, please speak to me...tell me I'm not alone...

FARLEY FINN, a large man in scruffy work clothes enters behind her, raising a GARDEN RAKE to strike. Aradia hears his footsteps, and turns around, smiling --

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Mother?!

Aradia sees him, and screams. He screams, drops the rake, and tries to run but trips and falls heavily. Aradia picks up the rake, looking between it and the whimpering man.

Aradia moves toward him, still holding the rake. He scuttles away on all fours.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Wait!

FARLEY

No, no no no no....

ARADIA

Who are you?

Aradia bends down and grabs his shoulder. He cries out, curling into a ball and squeezing his eyes shut.

FARLEY

Don't...DON'T KILL ME!!

ARADIA

Why ever would I kill you?

(sets down the rake)

There, is that better?

He slowly unwinds his arms and struggles to stand up.

MAN

Not...her?

ARADIA

'Her' who?

FARLEY

I thought you was the ghost!

ARADIA

I thought you were my mother!

The man looks down at himself, and chuckles. Aradia smiles.

The man scoops her up in his arms, startling her, humming a lullaby and swaying with her back and forth, like rocking a baby. Aradia laughs. He lets go before clumsily falling to the ground. He roughly sticks out his hand.

FARLEY

Farley. That's my name.

Aradia takes it.

ARADIA

Aradia Argyle. Pleased to make your acquaintance. Farley, did you say something about a ghost?

Farley's smile falls. He nods, gravely.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Why, that's wonderful!

FARLEY

(aghast)

Why?

ARADIA

I told you, she's my mother. That's why I came here, because I want to speak with her.

FARLEY

I would not do that. Nuh-uh.

ARADIA

Why not?

FARLEY

Sh-she screams. All the time.

ARADIA

Screams...she must be in terrible pain....

FARLEY

Pain? No, angry! She throws bottles at my head, gives me pain!

(rubs head, remembering)

Couldn't sleep, she was so loud.

ARADIA

I'm sorry. I shall try to soothe her, so that you won't be kept awake at night.

A rooster CROWS, making Aradia gasp with alarm - the orange glow of the sunrise turns night into dawn.

FARLEY

Uh oh. I'm not supposed to be out.

Aradia grabs his arm before he can leave.

ARADIA

Neither am I! Farley, would you kindly invite me in?!

FARLEY

My mother is in there.
(thinks)
And father. Maybe.

Aradia covers her neck and her face with her arms, ducking behind Farley so that he blocks out the sunlight.

ARADIA

That's lovely! I would love to meet your parents!

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT I, SCENE TWO**INT. BRISHEN'S TOWNHOUSE**

A BUTLER stands at attention next to a COAT-RACK (note: this scene can be kept minimal, and run while the background is set for Scene 3)

BRISHEN ARGYLE, an attractive businessman, enters with his prim-and-proper wife, PRUDENCE. They are still dressed in finery from an evening out. The Butler takes his coat and her fur-trimmed cloak.

PRUDENCE

What a wondrous night! Wouldn't you agree, darling?

BRISHEN

(nods)

Truly.

The butler hands Brishen an ENVELOPE.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

What is this?

BUTLER

The young mistress instructed I give this to you when you returned.

Prudence grabs the envelope, opens it.

PRUDENCE

Nothing she has to say can be so pressing, that it cannot wait until morning...

Prudence quickly skims the letter, and opens her mouth, aghast. She hands it to Brishen, fuming. Brishen reads.

A spotlight appears on another part of the stage, illuminating Aradia.

ARADIA

(V.O.)

Dearest Father, you are probably wondering where I have gone to - I apologize for the lack of proper warning, but I'm afraid that I would not have had the courage otherwise. Hopefully this note will be sufficient explanation.

It is painfully clear to me that my presence in your household has become unduly burdensome, and I have decided that the best course of action is to relieve you of it.

Brishen tears his gaze away from the letter, and casts his gaze around.

BRISHEN

Aradia?!

PRUDENCE

Brishen, the neighbors! You'll wake half the town with that unseemly shouting!

BRISHEN

(to Butler)

Fetch my daughter and bring her here!

BUTLER

Apologies, Mr. Argyle - I do not know where she is. None has seen her, but then, that is her habit during daylight.

Brishen grabs him by the collar.

BRISHEN

You incompetent fool! I shall dock your wages until she is found!

PRUDENCE

(putting a hand on his
shoulder)

Brishen dear, there's no need for that. If you keep reading, and see the awful insinuations, you will see that perhaps the child's flight is for the best.

A beat, as Brishen looks at her. He continues reading.

ARADIA

(V.O.)

You have chosen to marry a woman who believes there to be a blight upon my very soul, which must be cleansed by the harshest of methods, and for as long as it takes for me to regain my moral and spiritual purity in her eyes.

I speak of this not to complain or to accuse Prudence of wrongdoing. She is, I trust, honestly trying to save me from certain damnation.

She believes that subjecting me to torment will save me from worse in Hell, by way of convincing me to renounce the Dark Arts. But her initial assumption is wrong: I have never and will never practice the Dark Arts, nor would I ever serve the Evil One who is master of such things.

However, I will confess to one peculiar thing: I believe that Mother's restless spirit has been trying to contact me from beyond.

The wind seems to WHISPER in a plaintive female voice, but so soft that the words cannot be discerned.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Prudence believes it to be a devil's ruse, or a sign that my own evil predilections are hereditary. But this presence is not dark, nor does it try to coerce me. In fact, it has not asked anything of me whatsoever.

I have refrained from consulting you about it, as you have always been unwilling to speak of her.

Brishen looks disturbed, and crumples the letter.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I sincerely hope you find some measure of happiness with your new wife. Regrettably, it is not a future in which I can take part.

Your loving daughter forever and always, Aradia Argyle.

The spotlight on Aradia goes out. Brishen snaps his fingers at the Butler, and the Butler helps him into his coat.

BRISHEN

I know where she is. Make ready my horse so that I may leave immediately. I hope to return before dawn.

Prudence shoves past the Butler, to restrain Brishen's arm.

PRUDENCE

Brishen, this is nonsense! She's only pulling this stunt to gain your attention!

BRISHEN

She succeeded.

He pulls out of her grasp and exits.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE TWO

ACT 1, SCENE THREE

INT. ARGYLE MANSION

Lights up. We are now in the vast, spooky, cobweb-filled Argyle Mansion interior. There is a little door to the cellar, at the front of a staircase leading to a small landing and a sunlit window on the 2nd story. On the wall near the window is a painting, covered by a sheet of cobwebs.

On the other end is a table, with a feather duster resting on top, and surrounded by 3 chairs. A haggard older woman, NORA FINN, dries off a dish with a rag, harder than necessary.

GILBERT FINN, her husband, stumbles in, giggling to himself. He pulls out a chair, tries to sit down, misses. He cackles, muttering, and pulls himself up using the table edge.

MAN'S VOICE

Wotz...fer breakfast...?

Startled, Nora drops the dish on the floor. It shatters.

NORA

Look wot you made me do!

GILBERT

I didn't make you do nothin', clumsy woman...

NORA

Clumsy, am I? I've been workin' myself to the bone, with you out all night doing God-knows-wot out somewheres, and the first thing I hear from you is 'wot's fer breakfast?!' How'd the food fit in, with so much liquor in your gut?

GILBERT

You be careful now...I've half a mind to leave someday, without warning, an' not look back....

NORA

I'm the one who'll be leaving, you lazy lout! You can't buckle your trousers without my help-

GILBERT

Its the un-bucklin' ye never do...

NORA

I haven't the time nor the energy for that! If you can find somebody who'd be willing, be my guest.

Gilbert pulls a lacy handkerchief out of his pocket.

GILBERT

A'right.

NORA

Where'd you get that?

GILBERT

Wot's it look like? It's a lady's handkerchief.

Nora grabs it away, looking at it.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

You might not want ta touch it.

Nora drops it disgusted, looks at him with tears.

NORA

Have you stooped so low to have gone a-whoring?!

Gilbert stands up. Nora slaps him.

GILBERT

Oh now...getting physical, are we? I should make you angry more often!

He pulls her in close, she struggles and hisses like a cat. They then notice Farley has wandered in, staring at them. They separate.

NORA

Shameful, acting like that in front of our son!

(to Farley)

Pay no mind to your father.

GILBERT

He doesn't anyway...doesn't understand a damn thing of wot's goin' on...

Aradia peeks out from behind Farley, looking nervous, and the Finns both gasp.

ARADIA

...Hello.

GILBERT

Who're you? How long ye been there?

NORA

Look what you've done now, Gilbert! Farley's kidnapped some poor girl!

(turns and glares)

Your grabby fingers, giving him wrong ideas!

ARADIA

Oh no ma'am, Farley was simply showing me in. I am Aradia Argyle.

Nora and Gilbert exchange looks.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

I was wondering if I could impose on your hospitality for a while?

Nora puts a hand on her hip, and sighs.

NORA

Why don't you go on home, girl?

Aradia looks away.

ARADIA

I no longer have a home, not anymore. I'm an independent woman now.

Gilbert snorts.

NORA

A runaway, eh? We've no time to take in strays.

ARADIA

Please, I won't be any trouble! I can help, in any way you see fit!

NORA

(waves the rag at her)

Be off with you now! Shoo!

GILBERT

Hey now Nora, don't be so hasty.

(hiccups)

You're always complainin' about havin' no help round the house. An' now you've got a wee lass!

NORA

She's an Argyle, and a skinny pale thing to boot. Putting her to work would be wrong, an' the death of her.

ARADIA

No ma'am! Going *back* would be my death!

(takes Nora's hands)

Please, you don't understand. If I return, I will be subjected to horrible torment. I have a condition which confuses my stepmother - she believes I am cursed, or being punished by God.

Nora fingers a CROSS around her neck.
She looks at Farley.

NORA

Yes. People believe such things.

(looks to Aradia)

If you think the abuse here is preferable to what you'd receive there, by all means stay.

She grabs the duster off the table, and hands it to Aradia.

NORA (CONT'D)

Holler if you change your mind.

Aradia smiles gratefully, and walks with Farley upstairs.

ARADIA

Oh my. Looks like it hasn't had a proper cleaning since I lived here years ago.

(yawns, rubs her eyes)

I hope I shall stay awake.

FARLEY

It's not bedtime.

ARADIA

For you and most other people. I sleep during the day. When I can...when I'm allowed to.

She notices sunlight streaming into the room from the window.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Farley, would you close the drapes please?

Farley does. Aradia takes off her gloves, rolls up her sleeves and dusts the walls.

She comes to the painting, wipes the sheet of cobweb away from it, to reveal the image of a beautiful woman with mischievous eyes and vibrant red hair.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Mother...

She hears the female whisper again...meanwhile, Farley grins, and throws open the drapes.

FARLEY

Rise and shine!

Aradia puts up her arm to shield herself, and cries out. She stumbles out of the light, cradling her arm.

Farley's smile falls, confused and worried.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Farley looks closer, and sees her arm.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

Your arm! It's red!

Aradia presses her arm against her chest.

ARADIA

My skin doesn't like sunlight. It *burns*, Farley.

Farley looks like he's about to cry.

FARLEY

I'm sorry...

She hears something: a female voice, whimpering and sobbing. Farley stiffens.

ARADIA

You heard that too?

(Farley nods)

My mother...she must be upset about my arm...

He gasps, closes the window drape.

FARLEY

No more sun!

ARADIA

Oh, I didn't mean that - she wouldn't be upset at you! Come, I'll go tell her it's alright!

FARLEY

No no no *no*...

Aradia follows the sound to the little cellar door.

ARADIA

It's getting louder.

FARLEY

Don't go in there!

ARADIA

Don't be silly, Farley. There's nothing to be afraid of.

Aradia takes the candle, opens the door, and goes inside. Farley hesitates, wringing his hands with indecision.

FARLEY

W-Wait!

He overcomes his fear enough to go in after her.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE THREE

ACT I, SCENE FOUR**INT. WINE CELLAR**

The stage is dimly lit with blue, the construct turned so that the stairs are facing the audience, with racks of old wine bottles in the forefront.

Aradia, at the top of the cellar stairs, holds her candle aloft - it is the only bright light in the room.

Farley follows her, his first step on the stairs causing a loud creak. He yelps in fear.

FARLEY

The ghost!

ARADIA

No, Farley, I'm afraid that was you.

FARLEY

Oh.

ARADIA

I do wish you would relax a little.

She carefully makes her way down the creaky stairs, past the wine racks, following the sound of sobs.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Mother? Mother, are you there? Give me a signal if you can hear me.

A light flashes behind one of the wine racks, glittering off the bottles eerily. She draws closer, and looks behind one of the racks:

A spotlight comes up on a woman, MARIETTA, sitting in a chair facing the backdrop. She's hugging her knees, rocking back and forth, sobbing.

MARIETTA

Gone, gone! Everyone is gone...it was me, careless fool! The girl...the poor small child...what have I done?

Mother?

ARADIA

The woman stands - she's pale, and doesn't have red hair like in the picture. It's dark and wild, standing on end, a noose around her neck, which is twisted to the side.

Aradia backs up, nervous... Marietta whirls around, with wide, crazy eyes. She straightens her head, with the disgusting sound of bones popping into place. She lets out a piercing SCREAM!

The wine bottles shatter. Farley pulls Aradia down, shielding her from the glass.

We leave now? *Please?*

FARLEY

Most certainly!

ARADIA

She wobbles to her feet, and runs for the door. She reaches the steps, but realizes Farley isn't with her. She turns:

Farley?!

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Farley is staring at the ghost, who is walking steadily toward him. He is paralyzed with fear. Aradia makes her way back to him. The ghost reaches and picks up a wine bottle, raising it over her head.

BRISHEN...!!!

MARIETTA

The ghost brings it arcing downward, but Aradia rushes in front of Farley and catches her wrist! Aradia and the ghost exchange looks. The ghost catches a hold of Aradia's arm - Aradia struggles, but the ghost is too strong. The ghost looks at the arm, and trembles.

MARIETTA (CONT'D)

Burns...the poor child, she burns in sunlight!

She raises a trembling hand to Aradia's face.

MARIETTA (CONT'D)

Why do the innocent become the accursed?! Why must they pay for our sins?!

The ghost cries.

ARADIA

Do not hurt my friend! I know not what grieves you-

The ghost grabs her by either side of her face.

MARIETTA

Why did you come back?! Can't you see? It's different now! MY EYES ARE OPEN!!

The ghost releases Aradia, and runs to the chair. The ghost stands up on the chair. The end of her noose rises in the air, growing taut.

ARADIA

No! Wait!

Farley, regaining his courage, grabs Aradia and pulls her away toward the stairs.

MARIETTA

*Its the least I can do... God forgive me...
(chokes back a sob)
...And forgive him.*

She jumps off the chair.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE FOUR

ACT 1, SCENE FIVE**INT. ARGYLE MANSION - DAY**

Nora rolls some dough with a pin, as
Gilbert holds his head.

NORA

Ain't you supposed to be the *groundskeeper*?

GILBERT

That I am. A groundskeeper with a splittin' headache...do
keep that shrill voice down, will ye?

NORA

(leans in closer)

The grounds are *outside*.

Gilbert grins at her chest.

GILBERT

Plenty of rollin' landscape in here.

Nora bonks him on the head with the
rolling pin.

NORA

There! How's that for yer head, eh?

GILBERT

Have you no pity at all?! I've an empty belly and a fevered
brain!

NORA

If you hadn't been carousin' last night and fillin yeseff
with drink, your head wouldn't trouble you and you'd have had
a proper meal to boot. Now git, you old fool.

Gilbert gets up from the table with as
much fuss as possible, and staggers
over to the door. As he gets there,
there's a knocking sound. Gilbert peers
past the curtains.

GILBERT

Gentleman at the door. Very well dressed one, at that.

NORA

Compared to you, or everyone else?

GILBERT

Are you going to answer, or let the man languish?

Nora glares at Gilbert.

BRISHEN

(O.S.)

HELLO? Is there anyone there?

Gilbert puts his hands in his pockets and stares at the ceiling. Nora sighs, exasperated. She pushes Gilbert aside and opens the door.

NORA

Hello, what can I do for you?

Brishen walks in past her.

BRISHEN

Where is Aradia?

GILBERT

Well, I say sir! Just stride right in and make yerself at home, like you own the place!

BRISHEN

As a matter of fact, I *do* own the place. I also happen to own the *child* that I'm sure arrived here, sometime this morning.

NORA

You're Mr. Argyle? I beg your pardon, sir.

BRISHEN

No need. The night's ride has left me bereft of both sleep and manners. Until I return with my daughter, I do not expect my disposition to improve. Where is she?

NORA

I'm sorry for your troubles, Mr. Argyle. But I'm afraid...
(exchanges looks with Gilbert)
...There is no child here, save for our son Farley.

GILBERT

Who's not a child, but might as well be.

BRISHEN

(peers at them)

I do not remember any of you.

GILBERT

Ah, that's because we've never met.

BRISHEN

And where, pray tell, are the ones I entrusted with the keeping of this estate?

GILBERT

Ran off. Me brother's not the most dependable of relations.

NORA

I reckon most of your parents' brood are equal in that sense.

(to Brishen)

But this one wasn't just lazy, he was a liar too. Or possibly mad. Before he left, he was raving some fiddle-faddle about the house being haunted.

A SCREAM. The cellar door flies open -
Aradia and Farley tumble out, panting.
Her dress is splattered with red wine.

NORA (CONT'D)

What on God's good *Earth*...?

BRISHEN

Aradia?!

ARADIA

Father!

GILBERT

Ee gads! The lass is right covered in blood!

(to Farley)

What the blazes did ye do, boy?!

ARADIA

It's only wine, I assure you. I'm quite alright.

Brishen glares at Nora and Gilbert.

BRISHEN

'No child here' indeed!

He rushes and grabs Aradia by the arm.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Neither you or your lying cohorts will be alright, when I finish with the lot of you!

Aradia cries out.

ARADIA

Stop! My arm is burned!

Brishen lets go, and Aradia opens the door to the cellar. Brishen grabs the door.

BRISHEN

Where do yo think you're going?

ARADIA

There is a woman down there, and I think she's dead.

GILBERT

Oy, another mad one...

BRISHEN

You will not delay me from my goal, for which I've ridden all night. We're going home - you will apologize to Prudence for your wretched behavior, and we will never speak of this hereafter.

ARADIA

I will not! I am staying here until I find mother!

BRISHEN

Aradia, enough of these fantasies! Your mother is dead!

ARADIA

And now so is a woman in the cellar! She hung herself. She said your name when she attacked Farley. What does it mean?!

BRISHEN

Enough! You've wearied me beyond patience, and it ends now!

Brishen grabs her other arm, and pulls her toward the door.

ARADIA

No, father! The sun! YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME!

Brishen throws his cloak over Aradia's head.

BRISHEN

You'll survive until we reach the carriage.

Farley rushes at him with a yell, and Brishen shoves him aside.

NORA

Now wait just a minute, sir!!!

Brishen stops short, backing up: two grotesque figures walk slowly toward him: ANGELINA, a red-haired woman in a white dress with a wound dripping blood from her temple down one side of her face, and TORRANCE, a dark-haired man with a bloody wound soaking his white shirt.

BRISHEN
No...get back!

GILBERT
What is it now?

FARLEY
G-Ghosts!

BRISHEN
Get away from me, agents of hell!!

Angelina and Torrance laugh. It echoes through the house.

ANGELINA
Hell? We are not from hell. But that is where we will take you...

ARADIA
(pulls off cloak)
Who is that?!
(gasp)
Mother?!

BRISHEN
No! I am leaving with my daughter!

ANGELINA
SHE IS NOT YOUR DAUGHTER, AND YOU WILL NOT TAKE HER FROM US!

Brishen drags Aradia to the door, but it SLAMS shut of its own accord. Brishen pulls at the handle, to no avail.

ARADIA
It won't open!

Angelina and Torrance laugh again, receding until they disappear.

ARADIA (CONT'D)
No, wait! Mother!

Gilbert and Nora rush over and help Brishen with the door, but it still won't open. Brishen, Gilbert and Nora sink against it, exhausted.

GILBERT
Well now, that's strange...

Aradia turns to Brishen.

ARADIA

Why did Mother say that I was not your daughter?

BRISHEN

That...was not your mother. That was a fiend from somewhere beyond - one of your summonings, no doubt.

ARADIA

Summonings?! What poisonous lies has Prudence been filling your head with? I recognize those words - they are hers, not yours!

BRISHEN

I think it is *you* who have ever worked to poison me against *her*, Aradia. Prudence is a pious woman who speaks only the truth, and she knows more of these matters than I do. If you were not so hateful-

ARADIA

Hateful?! I defend myself from the threat of an exorcism, and you accuse me of being hateful?!

BRISHEN

If she is mistaken, you should have nothing to fear.

ARADIA

Father! Do you know what danger I could be in, were she to tell anyone what she believes?!

BRISHEN

You would do well to seek her counsel. I can give you no answers.

ARADIA

And yet I demand them, Father! Who was that man who appeared with my mother?

BRISHEN

I do not know!

ARADIA

I DO NOT BELIEVE YOU!

Brishen strikes her hard across the face. The lights flicker, and an angry snarl echoes through the house. Brishen stops, looking conflicted.

As he does, Farley tackles Brishen. Gilbert and Nora pull Farley away.

Aradia runs upstairs, and throws herself down in front of the painting of her mother.

Brishen exits (opposite the door).
Gilbert turns to Nora, soothing a very upset Farley.

GILBERT

Blimey, what was all that about?

NORA

I dunno. But somethin's very wrong ...I canna tell who, or what, is the cause of it...

GILBERT

Well, we'd better find out soon. Lunacy is contagious.

The sound of knocking at the door.

NORA

Blast, we've no way of answering it. Maybe you should check the other doors about the house.

GILBERT

Aye. Be back shortly.

NORA

Tch! No ye won't - the minute you show them the way in, you'll be off to the town to drink away your worries!

GILBERT

You've got that right. At least you haven't taken leave of your senses.

Gilbert trudges off. Another insistent knock at the door. Farley runs over to it.

NORA

Don't bother Farley, it won't open.

Farley opens the door, and in comes Prudence.

PRUDENCE

Well, that's better! I was afraid I was going to be left to wait outside, in the chill air, forever.

The door closes. Nora tries the door.
It won't open.

Prudence throws her hat and cloak onto Farley.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

Is no one going to welcome me, or acknowledge me at all?

Nora curses under her breath, giving up on the handle.

NORA

Blast...

(notices Prudence)

Pardon?

Exasperated, Prudence puts her hands on her hips.

PRUDENCE

I am Prudence Argyle. I am looking for my husband, where is he?

NORA

I haven't the foggiest.

PRUDENCE

What do you mean? Isn't he here?

NORA

Oh yes. But he saw somethin' odd while trying to take the child, then he went off somewhere in the house to be alone. I dunno where.

PRUDENCE

How like that accursed little witch, to afflict him with visions in order to get her own way! Where is she?

Gilbert returns.

NORA

You're back...?

GILBERT

Nora. The doors don't work. Not a one.

NORA

How could that be?

PRUDENCE

You! Where is my husband and the child?

GILBERT

Who's she, an' how the blazes did she get in?!

PRUDENCE

I say! Who are you to talk so crudely in a lady's presence, and act as though she is not even standing before you?!

Aradia sobs upstairs. Prudence immediately picks up her skirts and rushes up.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

Aradia!!

Aradia gasps, recognizing the voice, and stands up.

ARADIA

Prudence?! Why are you here?

PRUDENCE

Your father insisted we come to retrieve you. I told him that if you wanted to be gone from us so badly, we should leave you to it, but he's a stubborn man. Now, come with me and we shall find him.

ARADIA

No! I will not go anywhere with you, ever!

Aradia tries to go down the stairs past Prudence, but Prudence grabs her arm. Aradia cries out.

PRUDENCE

Honestly! You're too old to make such a horrid fuss!

ARADIA

My arm is burned, can't you see?!

Prudence doesn't let go.

PRUDENCE

It's your fault you know. If you would only renounce your ties to the dark powers, you wouldn't have such trouble with something as good and natural as sunlight. I could assist you with your redemption, if you would but ask-

Aradia stomps on her toes, forcing her to let go. Aradia runs down the stairs to avoid retaliation.

ARADIA

You're a cruel, spiteful person who sees evil everywhere she looks - whether it is there or not!

Aradia runs through the open wine cellar door. Prudence follows, but she stops at the door.

PRUDENCE

I am NOT following you in there, Aradia! You'll have to come out sometime!

(almost closes door)

And keep away from those spirits!

She slams the door angrily, picks up her skirts, and rushes offstage to find Brishen.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE FIVE

ACT I, SCENE SIX**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Construct is turned around so its back faces the audience. A bed and a vanity dresser is set against the 'wall'.

Brishen is on the bed's edge, holding his head miserably. On either side of him are the two ghosts, Angelina and Torrance.

ANGELINA

How does it feel to see me once again, my DARLING?

BRISHEN

Please...please go away...

TORRANCE

This is what you wanted. You won.

BRISHEN

I won nothing! I lost all of you!

ANGELINA

(growls)

How sweet. Even sweeter would be the sound of your death...I wonder if I am strong enough to do it...

Torrance puts a warning hand on Angelina's.

ANGELINA (CONT'D)

But torment will have to suffice.

BRISHEN

Is there nothing I can do to appease you?

TORRANCE

...Tell her.

Prudence glides into the room.

BRISHEN

No!

Prudence stops short.

PRUDENCE

No? No what, dear?

Angelina leans in close to Brishen's ear.

ANGELINA

(sing-songy)

Care-ful...she will think you're cra-zy...

BRISHEN

Nothing. I awoke from a nightmare as you came in.

Prudence relaxes, and sits at the dresser.

PRUDENCE

I don't wonder, considering the stress you've been under.

TORRANCE

Who is that woman?

ANGELINA

Brishen's new bride...

PRUDENCE

Now, since it seems we must stay in this house until this matter is resolved, I believe it's time to discuss the child.

TORRANCE

I do not like her face.

ANGELINA

Neither do I...

Angelina and Torrance move toward Prudence, who is letting her hair down from its tight pins into two braids.

ANGELINA (CONT'D)

She has not been very nice to our daughter...

Brishen stands up, afraid.

BRISHEN

Yes, I agree we should talk. In the morning.

PRUDENCE

Nonsense. We don't need the little heathen to put her two cents in and get you riled up. This is a matter for adults to decide.

Angelina plays with the ends of Prudence's braids, looking at Brishen menacingly.

BRISHEN

Do not say that about Aradia!

PRUDENCE

See? I've barely begun speaking about her, and already your temper is getting the best of you-

Angelina reaches around her, each hand grabbing opposite braids, pulls back hard, choking Prudence. Brishen lunges at Angelina, but he goes right through her. Angelina laughs.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

Brish-BRISHEN!!

(chokes, gasps)

H-elp!

Brishen grabs Prudence off the chair, tugging at the braids. But Angelina is too strong. Torrance kicks him off, and presses his foot on Brishen's chest, keeping him down.

BRISHEN

NO!! LEAVE HER ALONE!!

Aradia rushes into the room. The ghosts let go of Brishen and Prudence.

ARADIA

Father?! What is it?

BRISHEN

Where have you been?!

ARADIA

I was in the cellar - that woman was still there, but moving about! I thought her alive - but then she hung herself again as I watched. Father, I think she is a ghost--

PRUDENCE

YOU! You sent a poltergeist to kill me, you evil little witch!

ARADIA

I am not a witch!

TORRANCE

No, you are not...

Aradia notices the ghost, and gasps.

TORRANCE (CONT'D)

Tell her, Brishen...

BRISHEN

Tell her yourself if you want her to know!

ARADIA

Tell me what?!

ANGELINA

We want it to come from you, Brishen...I hope the words burn...

TORRANCE

Or we will start again with Prudence...the next time it will be my turn, and I am not so gentle as Angelina...

BRISHEN

Fine! Alright, enough!
(to Aradia)

Come here.

Aradia hesitantly comes forward.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

What I am about to tell you will be difficult for you to hear-

ANGELINA

(hisses)
Out with it...!

BRISHEN

(rises)
I had been away, on a business trip of great importance, for several days. You were but a small girl at the time.

The construct turns around as he speaks, set as in the main room of the mansion.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Before we wed, Angelina was accustomed to spending a great deal of time with her social circle, dancing, going to dinner parties, sparring with everyone who was foolish enough to argue with her.

Angelina sits down on the bottom of the stairs.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

When she moved into this house, she was too far removed from her friends. But one still visited her.

Marietta, clean, dressed nicely and without her ghostly pallor, steps through the window, and comes down to sit behind Angelina on the stairs.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Her name was Marietta Xadrian, and in short order, the two became inseparable companions.

Torrance sits down right next to Angelina, and they take each other's hands.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

So too did Marietta's brother, Torrence, and my wife. Soon Angelina found herself with child.

Brishen looks at Aradia.

ARADIA

...Me.

BRISHEN

Yes. You. A raven-haired girl with a condition that was known to run in the Xadrian bloodline. But I, fool that I was, suspected nothing. I loved my Angel, and could not believe ill of her.

Marietta springs up the stairs, and stands at the window, watching, fanning herself. Angelina and Torrance embrace.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

I never saw her with Torrance. He was always gone by the time I arrived home. I would only see Marietta and Angelina, chattering away about some womanly trifle over tea. Marietta was in on their secret, and she helped them keep it by standing watch at the window while they...

(beat. Clears throat)

But one day, I arrived early.

Marietta slumps against the wall, and her fanning stops.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Marietta had fallen asleep at her post. I came in, and there was no time for Torrance to flee.

Brishen turns to Angelina and Torrance, all of them playing their roles in the memory.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

...Angelina? Torrance...?

Marietta gasps awake, and rushes downstairs.

MARIETTA

Mr. Argyle, you're back!

BRISHEN

What is the meaning of this?!

MARIETTA

Oh, well...you see, Torrance accompanied me here, and...

BRISHEN

That is not what it looks like to me!

ANGELINA

Marietta, don't. Its too late.

Marietta looks panicked. She grabs Torrance's arm.

MARIETTA

Let's go.

TORRANCE

No.

BRISHEN

Follow your sister's advice! Slink off like the mongrel you are, your tail between your legs!

TORRANCE

I have no shame for what I have done. It was necessary. For her happiness, and for my own.

BRISHEN

At the cost of mine, is that it?! Damn you both to hell!

ANGELINA

We never meant to hurt you!

Brishen grabs her by the shoulders.

BRISHEN

I loved you! Do you understand?! I wed you not for any physical pleasure or convenience, but for love! And yet you betray me!

ANGELINA

Brishen...I...I'm sorry...

BRISHEN
(shakes her violently)

You're sorry?!

Torrance draws his sword, and puts
Brishen on point.

TORRANCE
Enough! Turn your anger toward me if you will, but leave her
be!

Brishen lets go of Angelina, and draws
his sword.

As you wish.

BRISHEN

Stop! This is madness!

MARIETTA

It's too late - the blades fly, ringing
against each other with a terrible
clamor. Torrance is faster, Brishen is
stronger. Marietta and Angelina watch,
clutching each other.

Torrance lures Brishen to the stairs,
and then kicks him down. Wheezing,
Brishen crawls onto the bottom of the
stairs. Torrance points his sword at
Brishen's throat.

Yield.

TORRANCE

No.

BRISHEN

Brishen knocks his sword foible aside,
and lunges forward with animal
ferocity, plunging his sword through
Torrance. Marietta screams. Angelina
just stares, horrified.

Torrance slumps against Brishen's
shoulder, choking.

TORRANCE
Forgive me...take care...of my daughter...

BRISHEN

Y-Your...

Brishen pushes Torrance off, and Torrance falls lifeless to the balcony. Brishen stands there, stunned, unable to process what has just happened.

Angelina breaks away from the hysterical Marietta, and runs to Torrance. Seeing her cradling Torrance's body kindles Brishen's rage once more. He grabs her and jerks her up.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

You dare shed tears for him?

Angelina doesn't respond, just weeps harder.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

You whore!

Brishen throws her aside - she stumbles back, and falls through the unlatched window.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Angelina!! NO!!

Brishen reaches out to her, but she's gone. Her scream lasts until it is cut short by a sickening thud.

Marietta runs upstairs. Brishen is panting.

MARIETTA

What did you do?! You *killed* her! You monster, you killed her!!

BRISHEN

I...

Marietta flees away, down the stairs, and enters the cellar.

BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Oh god...oh god...Angel...

Brishen weeps, listening to Marietta's sobs and cries. Suddenly, there is a sound, like a piece of furniture falling. And then silence. Brishen turns.

...Marietta?
BRISHEN (CONT'D)

Brishen runs down the stairs, and opens the cellar door.

God forgive me...
BRISHEN (CONT'D)

The lights dim briefly, the construct turns back to the bedroom. Lights back up - Brishen looks at his daughter.

ARADIA
So that's it then. I am not your daughter...

BRISHEN
No. But you are the last piece I have of your mother.

ARADIA
Who you murdered. No wonder you have had such little care for me, all these years! How could you show affection for the child of your unfaithful wife and her lover, both of whom you killed!

Brishen reaches for Aradia, but she draws back.

ARADIA (CONT'D)
Get away from me!

BRISHEN
Aradia-

ARADIA
You are evil! I hate the very sight of you!
(to Prudence)
It seems you have found the unclean soul that needs saving! I will stay with my natural family - take your monster and go!

Aradia runs out, crying, with her ghost parents following.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE SIX & ACT I, INTERMISSION

ACT II, SCENE ONE**EXT. ARGYLE MANSION - NIGHT**

The backdrop has changed to the outside of the Argyle Mansion. Angelina's ghost stands beside her headstone, while Marietta and Torrance are seated on 2 dirt-covered sackcloth bags with a shovel laid across them. Aradia enters, bringing a PRIEST, Bible in hand, with her.

PRIEST

I'm still not entirely sure what it is you are attempting to do, my child-

ARADIA

There are spirits here that are not at rest. Something...something happened to them that was not right, and now they linger in this house.

PRIEST

Ah. So, you want me to help them pass on?

ARADIA

Yes, exactly. I wasn't sure at first that I wanted them to go, but I realized the selfishness in that.

ANGELINA

My dear girl, it isn't selfish...we love you...

ARADIA

They deserve peace, and keeping them here has only kindled their anger toward the one who wronged them, the one they will not let leave.

TORRANCE

We can let him go now. Can't we, Angelina?

Angelina looks at the ground. Aradia goes to the body bags and points them out.

ARADIA

And I will need to procure 2 caskets.

PRIEST

(startles)

Gracious, child! What are those? Bodies?!

ARADIA

Yes. Of my father and my aunt. They were buried together, improperly, without funeral rites.

Marietta trembles, pulling at her hair.

MARIETTA

Torrance... I'm scared...oh do make her stop! She'll throw me into the fire, she'll make me burn, burn forever and ever...!

TORRANCE

(puts an arm around Marietta)

...Aradia?

ARADIA

(nods. To the priest:)

One of them was a suicide, can that sin be absolved?

PRIEST

Well, I believe I can intervene on her behalf. If she is truly haunting this house, it means her soul is in purgatory, and she is not able to continue on. I can help her get unstuck, as it were.

ARADIA

Excellent.

PRIEST

What of the other? How did he die?

ARADIA

...in an unfortunate manner.

(turns, places a hand on the bag)

I have spent all night trying to determine where they were buried, and then I dug them up myself.

PRIEST

(looks her up and down)

That's backbreaking work for a wee scrawny thing like you! And however did you find the correct spot?

ARADIA

(glances at the ghosts)

I had help. From those who should know best. I think I might have been overly industrious though, for I realize it will take some time to arrange a proper funeral, and I do not know what I should do with them in the meantime.

The priest crosses himself. Aradia turns around to face him, startling him again.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

Is there anything I can do to help?

PRIEST

N-No. I shall begin.

The priest opens his Bible. Aradia takes it, to hold it for him. The priest places his hands together nervously, and rattles off verses in Latin. The wind picks up. Marietta is freaking out.

ANGELINA

Aradia, don't do this...you will undo everything we have sought to make right...

ARADIA

I shall be fine, Mother.

PRIEST

There is no reason for you to speak! Do be quiet!

ARADIA

Sorry.

The priest sighs, but just as he continues on, a rooster crows, and the sun begins its ascent. Aradia gasps, and drops the Bible.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

I am too late!

PRIEST

What are you talking about? What is going on?

ARADIA

I am so sorry, I was so tired I have erred in judgment! I must go, I hope we can continue this at a later time!

Aradia runs off into the house, leaving the priest in complete puzzlement. He throws up his hands, and bends over to pick up his Bible - if he weren't a priest, he'd probably be swearing right now. The ghosts converge on him.

TORRANCE

...You can leave now.

PRIEST

Aye, that's what I'm -

The priest looks around - he can't see the ghosts right behind him. He holds out his Bible in one hand and his cross in the other, for protection.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Evil spirits, be gone! Get thee behind me!

TORRANCE

...We already are.

ANGELINA

Torrance, hush!

PRIEST

Something is very wrong here. Those bodies...that girl, hair black as pitch, her skin unnatural pale, and from the sun's light she fled! I must inquire inside the house, and see if I cannot shed light on this foul mystery!

ANGELINA

(folds arms, sighs)

Wonderful, Torrance. Simply wonderful.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT II, SCENE TWO**INT. ARGYLE MANSION - DAY**

Prudence sits at the table with the Finns, rocking back and forth, her hands patting down her hair to reassure herself that it is still there, and not going to attack. Nora ties a handkerchief around Farley's neck, and Prudence flinches.

GILBERT

Wot's the matter? You look right spooked.

PRUDENCE

I am. Something has happened that I cannot explain, all I know is...

Aradia runs in, and Prudence shrieks and jumps up.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

You've come back! What have you been doing?! Conjuring? Sorcery?

Prudence grabs at Aradia. Aradia yelps, ducking, and rushes past her into the cellar.

PRUDENCE (CONT'D)

Come back here, you evil little wretch!!

NORA

Miss! Wot in heaven's name are you doing?!

PRUDENCE

(whirls on her)

Its her! The imp, the demon child! She has it in for me, and she won't stop until I'm dead!

NORA

(puts hands on her hips)

Wot's the fuss? There ain't nothing wrong with that girl.

PRUDENCE

Nothing wrong...indeed...

Prudence chuckles, darkly.

GILBERT

Nora, yer steppin' outta yer place.

NORA

Mayhap, but I won't stand by while a grown woman raves at a little girl.

GILBERT

I think we ought to hear the lady's side of the story.

NORA

And I think you could stand by yer wife, for a change!

PRUDENCE

Her skin, it burns in sunlight...

NORA

So does anybody's, if yer out long enough.

PRUDENCE

Not like hers...it burns within seconds, with barely more than a reflection of light required! That girl is an abomination, an eyesore before God!

NORA

Now you listen 'ere. When I gave birth to that boy there, they said he was somethin' unnatural, that his problems with understandin things that come easy to normal folk was because we'd sinned, and were being punished.

Farley stabs his steak, and lifts the whole slab of meat into his mouth. Nora sighs and goes to cut it for him.

GILBERT

Well, I happen to believe it.

NORA

Hush, you!

PRUDENCE

She's a witch! And though shalt not suffer a witch to live!

Nora slams the table.

NORA

Had you read the Bible you quote from proper, you'd eat those words! Bad things happen to good folk, and there ain't always a fix - such it was with Job, who suffered in order to be tested!

PRUDENCE

Stop spewing your lowly ignorance, I cannot bear it!
(prays)

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven...

NORA

Ignorant though I be, I don't think you understand yer own prayer.

PRUDENCE

Do I not?!

NORA

It don't mean that we should expect things to be the same as Heaven - til our Lord returns and creates Heaven on Earth, there's gonna be a difference 'tween the two: in Heaven nothing goes wrong, while here most everything does. It is how we deal with sufferin' that proves our soul's worth to God.

A knock at the door. Nora looks at Gilbert, who of course folds his arms and stubbornly slumps down in his chair. Nora goes to answer it, and in comes the trembling priest.

PRIEST

Excuse me, who has authority in this house?

Prudence rushes over to him.

PRUDENCE

Oh bless you for coming! Divine providence has come to my aide! I am Prudence Argyle, the mistress of this house.

Thunder rolls. The lights flicker, startling both Prudence and the priest.

PRIEST

Where is the pale, strange little girl child?

PRUDENCE

In the wine cellar. Its where she communes with her pet demonic spirits, I dare not go in there.

PRIEST

Indeed! Well, that explains a lot - she entered my church in the middle of the night, and led me here. She'd dug up bodies from the yard-

PRUDENCE

Bodies?! Oh Heaven preserve us! You are lucky you were not killed!

PRIEST

You believe she would've harmed me?

PRUDENCE

Without a doubt! She's been communicating with her dead mother -she might have cut your throat and used your blood in her heathen ritual, to raise her mother from the dead!

The priest fingers his throat.

PRIEST

I see, I came not a moment too soon then! You poor child, I see you are much wearied by your battle with this young witch!

NORA

Beg yer pardon, but ain't you jumping to a lot of conclusions here?

GILBERT

Nora, you got a man of the cloth sayin' she's a witch. I think we'd best listen to 'im.

PRUDENCE

She is! She bewitched my husband Brishen, causing the deaths of her whore mother and her cuckold father! That is, if what Brishen said was true, and was not induced by her Satanic puppetry - after all, he was speaking to people not there, and acting most strange! For I thought her mother died of shock, due to the sight of her child covered in blisters - after exposure to the sun's rays!

PRIEST

Is that why she fled the morning light! It burns her flesh?

PRUDENCE

Yes! And that is not all!

(sobs)

She tried to kill me! She commanded her familiar spirits to strangle me, with my own hair!

PRIEST

(pats her on the back)

There there, it will be alright...I will leave-

PRUDENCE

NO!

PRIEST

-and be back with reinforcements, in order to conduct a trial.

NORA

Trial?! Now wait just a moment, I've heard of these so-called 'trials', and there ain't no one I've heard of who's survived one!

PRIEST

That is because a suspected witch is not put to trial lightly, without evidence and solid testimony. I assure you, if the girl is innocent, you need not fear for her.

(to Prudence)

You are not alone in this fight, my child - God will protect you in the short time until I return with an army of the faithful.

PRUDENCE

Thank you, Father!

The priest exits. Nora looks between Gilbert and Prudence.

NORA

Are you both mad?! Do you not realize wot you've done?! You've sentenced that girl to death!

Gilbert stands up.

GILBERT

You heard the man! If she's innocent or guilty, at least the matter will be settled. Can't deny a lot of strange things've been happening, and I want to know the cause - and if there's a witch, I'd rather she not be in this house!

NORA

Yer a fool! A horrible, heartless old fool! You don't do a lick of work, or care anything for me and Farley!

GILBERT

(stands)

And no wonder! Yer nothing but a old nag, and Farley is a useless idiot!

NORA

Don't speak of your son like that! You've no right!

GILBERT

I've a right to speak the truth! No lies have ever come out of my mouth, woman!

NORA

No, just the nasty excuses of a bitter old man! I'd rather share a house with a witch than a scoundrel like you!

Nora runs to the other side of the stage, where a spotlight comes up on Brishen, pacing and smoking a pipe.

NORA (CONT'D)

Sir! Sir, its urgent I speak with you! I beg your pardon for disturbing you-

BRISHEN

You are not capable of disturbing me further.

NORA

I wouldn't be so sure - your wife, the lady Prudence, has brought terrible charges against Aradia.

BRISHEN

I know. She believe her a witch. She refuses to believe that I am the sinner, and she must hold someone else to blame...

NORA

She's acted upon it, sir - she told a priest, and he believes she is right. He's going right now, to gather up a mob and put Aradia to trial!

BRISHEN

(looks up)

What? My daughter, put to trial for witchcraft?! That is preposterous!

NORA

They will not think so. With her condition and the strange goings-on surrounding her, she does not stand a chance.

BRISHEN

What will they do?

NORA

First they'll torture her, til they're satisfied with the verdict they've already decided, which is guilty. Then they'll dispatch her, by hanging or burning at the stake.

BRISHEN

My god...

(paces)

What can I do?! Nothing I say will help her cause...

NORA

Why not take her and go, somewhere far away and safe?

BRISHEN

I cannot do that. The ghosts will not let me leave with Aradia. I wish it were otherwise.

NORA

...Well, there may be no way to prove her innocence. But there is a way to save her from death, at the very least.

BRISHEN

Yes? How?!

NORA

If she confesses to witchcraft, and repents, it is more likely that they will spare her.

BRISHEN

She tells the truth, she dies. She tells a damned lie, and lives.

(harsh laugh)

What madness is that! To kill the innocent, and spare the guilty! But it is a wise plan, and I can think of no better. Come, let us give instruction to Aradia.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE TWO

ACT II, SCENE THREE**INT. CELLAR**

Aradia sits on the cellar floor hugging her knees, Angelina and Torrance on either side. Marietta is limply swinging from her noose. Brishen and Nora enter, down the cellar stairs.

BRISHEN

Aradia!

ARADIA

Leave me alone!

NORA

Girl, you're in a mighty big heap of trouble. You need to listen to your father.

ARADIA

I know - I am charged with witchcraft. I am likely to die. It does not matter.

BRISHEN

Does not matter! Of course it matters!

ARADIA

No, it doesn't. I have not been allowed to live my life fully, due to my condition, your neglect, and Prudence's schemes. Perhaps I shall be happier amongst my family.

Brishen glares at the ghost parents.

BRISHEN

And I suppose the two of you are well pleased! Did you fill her head with this nonsense?!

TORRANCE

We have tried to convince her to run. We would rather see her live, than to have her share in our cursed existence.

ANGELINA

Yet, she already lives a cursed existence. At least we shall make up for lost time...

BRISHEN

You always were selfish, Angelina!

(to Aradia)

Listen to me. You do not have to die. You can confess that you are a witch-

ARADIA

(looks at him)

Confess?! To what?! I am no witch!

Aradia rises, takes the fallen chair from under hanging Marietta, sets it upright and sits down. Brishen approaches hesitantly, disturbed by the macabre body swinging back and forth near her.

BRISHEN

Aradia, I know that. But they will spare you only if they think you have repented the sin they believe you have committed.

ARADIA

I am as much a liar as I am a witch.

BRISHEN

Aradia, someday you will learn that a lie is sometimes required of us, in order to do good, or in order to survive!

ARADIA

You aren't listening, *Mr. Argyle*, I do not care to survive. I will stay as a ghost until my family is freed from their purgatory, at which point we will all go to the gates of St. Peter, without my soul stained by deceit. I will not have him ask me why, in my moment of weakness, I forsake God and betrayed my soul!

BRISHEN

(to the ghosts)

Don't just stare there dumb! Please, convince her!

ARADIA

The decision is mine. I've made it.

BRISHEN

No. You are a child still. And whether my blood flows in your veins or not, I am your father!

Aradia stands up, facing him coldly.

ARADIA

There was once a time, when I was very small, when I remember you looking at me - *really* looking at me - and smiling. You were so tall, so serious, but when you smiled it was with warmth, and love. A father's love. I have spent every waking hour since Mother's death, trying to get that smile back.

Aradia turns away, emotion choking her voice.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

First I believed your grief was all consuming. After enough time had passed, I thought perhaps you were ashamed of my condition.

(faces him again)

But no matter how obedient, dutiful, or pleasant of manner I tried to make myself, nothing made a difference.

BRISHEN

That had nothing to do with you-

ARADIA

Yes, you told me! I remind you of everything that went wrong, all that you thought was yours, but was not.

Aradia lifts up a lock of her dark hair, regards it bitterly.

ARADIA (CONT'D)

I am proof of a wife's adultery. No wonder you could not bear the sight of me, and passed me off on Prudence at the soonest opportunity! For I am but a ghost from your past!

BRISHEN

Aradia, I have wronged you - I admit that freely! But answer me this: if I did not love you, why would I be trying to save you now?

ARADIA

Because my parents won't let you leave.

BRISHEN

(to the ghosts)

Let me take her!

ANGELINA & TORRANCE

NO!!

Marietta's eyes snap open - she hisses and claws at Brishen, freaking him out.

MARIETTA

Geeet oooooouut!!!

BRISHEN

You do not intimidate me! I have seen more frightening parlor tricks than what you three have managed!

As if to illustrate his point, Marietta swings uselessly from her noose, unable to get close to Brishen.

Suddenly, a sound, from far away but getting closer and louder. Chanting:
'Kill the witch, kill the witch.'

NORA

They're here. It's too late...

BRISHEN

(to the ghosts)

Let me go out and talk to them!

Angelina and Torrance exchange glances.

TORRANCE

I cannot see how it would hurt.

ANGELINA

(to Brishen)

I hope they string you up.

BRISHEN

Yes, then my soul can stay in this house, and we may haunt each other til kingdom come - the devil himself could not devise a better torment.

(to Aradia)

Should you come to your senses, run to the abandoned farmhouse by the lake. I will meet you there.

Brishen runs up the stairs.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE THREE

ACT II, SCENE FOUR**EXT. ARGYLE MANSION - DAY**

Brishen goes to the front gate, where the mob of chanting townspeople are gathered. Most of them are wielding farm tools, and led by the priest, who carries a torch. Prudence is there, unlocking the gate. Brishen grabs her hand away.

BRISHEN

Prudence! What do you think you are doing?!

PRUDENCE

They have come to save us from her, Brishen! We shall be free!

BRISHEN

That vulnerable young girl in there is my daughter! You would have her killed because of your mad fancies?

PRUDENCE

Oh my darling, you do not know what you say! You are bewitched, you poor thing!

BRISHEN

No, I have never been more clear, of mind or of heart! Go back inside!

(to the mob)

My wife is not of sound mind! Go home and leave us be!

PRIEST

Stand aside, my son! You cannot protect the girl, justice must be done!

BRISHEN

There *is* no justice to be done! My daughter is innocent, not only of witchcraft but of any other sin - I'll wager her soul is more pure than any of yours!

Boos from the mob.

PRIEST

I hope you are bewitched, sir, else you shall not be forgiven!

Prudence breaks away from Brishen, and throws open the gate. The mob push through, and surround Brishen.

Brishen throws punches at them, and they retaliate.

PRUDENCE

No, stop! Do not hurt him! It is the girl! The witch is the one we must destroy, not him! Leave my husband alone!

One of the villagers grabs the torch from the priest, and throws it at the house.

PRIEST

No! What are you doing, there are innocent souls in that house!

The flames spread, engulfing the mansion.

BRISHEN

Aradia!!

Brishen goes back inside the mansion.

PRUDENCE

No! Brishen, no!

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE FOUR

ACT II, SCENE FIVE**INT. ARGYLE MANSION**

Brishen coughs, as smoke and flames fill the interior. The three ghosts are there.

BRISHEN

Aradia!! Where are you?!!

TORRANCE

She's gone. She ran to the farmhouse.

ANGELINA

We told the boy to flee and find his father, and they are safe on the moors. His mother is in the stables, rescuing the horses. You should take one of them and find Aradia, before the villagers do.

BRISHEN

Thank you.

ANGELINA

Take care of her, Brishen.

BRISHEN

What will become of you?

ANGELINA

Our souls are bound to this house. When it is gone, we will pass on.

BRISHEN

(to Marietta)

Nobody blames you for what happened. No God that I would believe in would condemn you further.

ANGELINA

Yes yes, we all forgive each other - actually, that misguided priest already took care of that, his prayers helped absolve us before his exorcism was cut short. Now go, there isn't much time.

Brishen nods, and runs to the other side of the stage. Prudence enters the same way he did, coughing.

PRUDENCE

Brishen?! Brishen!!

TORRANCE

Get out of here, crazy woman!

Prudence startles, hearing him, but still cannot see him.

PRUDENCE

I feel your evil presence! If you have my husband, let him go!

ANGELINA

Its no use, Torrance.

The orange light becomes brighter and brighter. Prudence screams.

MARIETTA

Ring around the rosy...a pocket full of posies...ashes, ashes...

Fiery timbers fall down on top of Prudence, cutting her scream short.

BLACKOUT.

MARIETTA

We all fall down...

END OF SCENE FIVE

ACT II, SCENE SIX**EXT. MOORS - DAWN**

Aradia runs onto the stage, out of breath. She stops for a moment, and looks up: the dark night sky is giving way to the first rays of dawn's light. The backdrop grows steadily more vibrant pink.

Afraid, Aradia picks up her skirts and runs again, but she stumbles, and falls to the earth. The backdrop becomes orange, then yellow.

Aradia sobs, curling up into a ball, trying to cover herself with her arms. The sun grows brighter, and brighter...and Aradia's cries get louder.

Brishen runs over, and throws his cloak around her, shielding her from the intensifying sun with his own body, embracing his daughter.

ARADIA

F-Father!

Brishen breaks into a smile.

BRISHEN

I never thought I would hear you call me Father again.

ARADIA

And I never thought I'd see you smile at me again.

Brishen hugs her tight.

BRISHEN

Aradia...I hope you can forgive me.

ARADIA

I already have, Father.

Brishen picks Aradia up, and carries her offstage. Gilbert enters next, sobbing and weeping loudly - Farley follows him, wringing his hands.

FARLEY

...Father?

GILBERT

She's gone! My poor Nora! All that's left of her is ash, mixed in somewhere in that godforsaken pile! I shoulda been there! I shoulda protected her, steada drowning meself in drink!

(hiccups between sobs)

Now I'll never see her again!

FARLEY

Mother...mother is...dead?

GILBERT

Yes, my boy...

He wipes his nose, pats Farley with the same hand.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Its just you and me now. Yer all I got left of ole' Nora, and I've got to take care a'you. Take care of us both. I'll find me a job, and mayhap I'll find some work for you...

(looks him up and down)

Really, now that I'm lookin' at ya, I think you've got some potential.

Farley notices Nora enter.

FARLEY

Mother?!

GILBERT

Sorry my boy, but from now on I'll have to do!

Gilbert embraces Farley, and Farley smiles. So does Nora.

NORA

Well I'll be!

Gilbert startles, and turns to see her.

GILBERT

Nora...?

NORA

(hands on hips)

Yes. Who did you expect?

Gilbert runs and hugs her.

NORA (CONT'D)

Heavens! Wot's gotten into you all of a sudden?!

GILBERT

Yer alive!

NORA

Of course I'm alive! My goodness, you don't know where I am for an hour and you think I'm dead. Do you know how often I'd mourn your passing if I did the same?

FARLEY

Where's the girl?

GILBERT

Oh yes! A fine question my boy, where is the girl and her father?

NORA

They're fine - more fine than they have been in years, and much better than the lump of coal Prudence has become. He took one of the horses, and rode off with his daughter.

GILBERT

That's good to hear! Rode off into the sunset, did they?

NORA

Of course not, you old fool!

GILBERT

Ah. Yeah, it is morning ain't it...

NORA

Not only that, but I'm sure they're riding the opposite direction entirely: away from the sun!

Brief blackout. A spotlight comes up on Prudence as she enters. She is covered in ash and soot, coughing, trying in vain to brush off her dress.

The mob villagers are coming from the other side, walking together.

Prudence notices them, and looks relieved.

PRUDENCE

Oh there you are! Please, you must help me-

MOB VILLAGER 1

Well, I guess the witch burned.

PRUDENCE

(walks up to them)

I do not think so. I didn't find her in the house. Come, we must find her-

The mob villagers walk right past her, on either side, without looking at her. Prudence freezes, astonished.

MOB VILLAGER 2

Still, I'll never set foot anywhere near the place again.

MOB VILLAGER 3

That's for sure. Even that poor tormented woman didn't make it out alive...

Prudence listens, unable to believe what she's hearing.

MOB VILLAGER 4

May her soul rest in peace...

The mob exits. Prudence slowly turns toward the audience, horrified. She lifts her trembling hands, burying them in her hair, and SCREAMS.

BLACKOUT.

THE END